

Characteristics of Jaina Mysticism

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Mystical experience is *sui generis*. It is an integral experience which is a bonafide way of knowing the empirical and trans-empirical objects. It is the direct vision of the soul in its purest form. In Jaina mystical literature various expressions of mystical experience or mystical vision are invariably found. Words like 'Svasamaya', 'Suddhopayoga', 'Suddhabhāvas', 'Svarūpsattā', 'Niścayanaya', 'Antarātman', 'Paramātman', 'Tattvānubhava', 'Ahimsā', and so on are indicative of mystical expression in Jainism. In view of this the question whether mysticism is possible in Jainism seems to be insignificant.

Let us now turn to the marked characteristics of Jaina mysticism. In point of fact, mystical consciousness entails certain expressions, by virtue of which its presence may easily be recognized. In other words, these characteristics may serve as the criteria of Jaina mysticism. Though to recognize mystical states, is not as easy as may be thought. Jaina mystics have endeavoured to present some such characteristics as may give an idea of the presence of this mystical phenomenon. In view of its abstruseness there is every likelihood of its being misunderstood. Only those who are mystically-minded and are prone to mystical way of life can ascertain the presence of mystical experience. Stace rightly says that 'the impossibility of communicating mystical experience to one who has not had such an experience is like the impossibility of communicating the nature of colour to a man born blind. This is the reason why the spiritually seeing man, the mystic cannot communicate what he has experienced to the non-mystic'.¹ It may be said that these mystical experiences do not possess objectivity of gross type, but it does not mean that they are purely subjective in the narrow sense of the word. In fact, they are subjective, yet they are very much objective. Hence, in Jaina spiritual literature certain characteristics are invariably found. These characteristics consist of spiritual knowledge, spiritual joy, spiritual steadfastness, intuition, ineffability, activist attitude, moral elevation, freedom from fear, permanency and so on. We may say that these are the articulate expressions of mystical life.

(i) Spiritual Knowledge

First, self-knowledge or spiritual knowledge is a characterizing feature of transcendental life. 'Know thyself' is an often quoted maxim. Knowledge of the Ātman is the supreme knowledge. The *Samayasāra* pronounces that the self with spiritual knowledge knows his true nature, and he lacking in the knowledge, blinded by his own nescience is unable to perceive his true nature.² In other words, the self with spiritual knowledge, by contemplating upon the pure self, becomes himself pure. But the self which contemplates upon the impure nature of the self becomes himself impure.³ Moreover, knowledge is the self, there cannot be (any) knowledge apart from the self.⁴ The self who knows the true nature of reality becomes 'Jitamoha' or conqueror of delusion, who, by subjugating the delusion realises that the self is intrinsically of the nature of knowledge.⁵ Therefore, the realization of the self as the knower by nature leads towards the



eschewment of the sense of mineness.⁶ Further, it is pointed out that the soul is co-extensive with knowledge, knowledge is said to be co-extensive with the objects of knowledge, the object of knowledge comprises the physical and non-physical universe, therefore knowledge is omnipresent.⁷ The knower of the self becomes an omniscient, and the omniscient neither accepts, nor abandons, nor transforms the external objectivity, he sees all round, and knows everything completely.⁸ Moreover, the knower of the self knows simultaneously the whole range of variegated objectivity possible in all places and present in three tenses.⁹ Hence, in the omniscient the knowledge reaches the very verge of objectivity, and the vision extends over the physical and super-physical universe.¹⁰ Thus, knowledge and spiritual life are not two different phenomena. Really they are inseparable.

(ii) Spiritual Joy

Secondly, spiritual knowledge is always accompanied with spiritual joy. The *Pravacanasāra* tells us that the self who has destroyed the knot of delusion (*Moha*), who has overthrown attachment and aversion and is indifferent to pleasure and pain attains eternal happiness.¹¹ This eternal happiness born of the self is super-sensuous, incomparable, infinite and indestructible.¹² Spiritual knowledge and happiness are one and the same thing. Therefore, spiritual knowledge, which is perfect and pure, which spreads over infinite things is called real happiness.¹³ It may be noted that happiness derived through sense-organs is dependent, amenable to disturbances, terminable, and is the cause of bondage.¹⁴ In fact, spiritual joy is beyond the reach of senses or it is super-sensuous happiness, which a mystic enjoys in the hours of transcendental experience.¹⁵ The *Jñānārṇava*, therefore beautifully expresses the same thing while pronouncing that in the state of spiritual joy the mystics have the eternal and everlasting bliss; and possessing an attitude of equanimity they really shed the Karmas.¹⁶ Hence, the great mystic, Yogindu sums up the whole matter when he tells us that the self-realizing personalities, who are detached from the sense of attachment and aversion, who are busy with introspection of the pure self, possess the serenity of mind and are really the happiest beings in this world.¹⁷

(iii) Spiritual Steadfastness :

Thirdly, spiritual steadfastness is also a feature of transcendental life. The aspirant is firmly established in the knowledge of the self. He does not speak while speaking, does not move while moving and does not see while seeing.¹⁸ Though empirically it seems to be a paradoxical statement its implications are solely mystical. The mystic is a unique being and transcendently he is free from volitional activity. And, therefore mystic's worldly activities are free from volitional attitude. His activity is only spiritual knowledge and in that knowledge of the self he is steadfast. Since he is beyond attachment and consequently is apprehending the nature of reality, all his doubts are resolved.¹⁹ Hence, speaking in the language of the mystic we may say that with the emergence of the Ātmik experience i. e., self-experience and steadfastness in it, the conquest over the senses, mind and passions, automatically becomes. The mystic is steadfast in his true nature.

(iv) Intuitive Insight :

Fourthly, intuitive insight is a characterizing mark of mystical experience. The intuitive insight is the '*Pratyakṣa Jñāna*' or direct and immediate apprehension of reality. This *Pratyakṣa* knowledge perceives (all) the non-concrete things alongwith the concrete and those that are beyond the scope of senses, those that are hidden and all others that are related to substances and also that are not.²⁰ Moreover, the mystic who possesses self-knowledge, directly visualizes all objects and their modifications, he does never comprehend them through sense-perception.²¹ To be more clear, we may say that nothing is indirect to him, who is himself omniscient and who is all-round rich in the qualities of all the organs of senses though himself beyond the senses.²² Hence the intuitive insight of self-knowledge is able to penetrate into the innermost core of phenomenal and noumenal realities.

The intuitive insight is also termed as Yogic perception. Haribhadra pronounces that



Yogic perception will take cognizance of even such things as are beyond the perception of non-Yogi.²³ Thus Yogic perception pierces through the veils of reality directly and immediately. Prof. Ranade rightly says that 'Mysticism denotes that attitude of mind which involves a direct, immediate, intuitive apprehension of God'.²⁴ In a similar vein, Montague points out that 'the theory that truth can be attained by a super-rational and super-sensuous faculty of intuition is mysticism'.²⁵ Thus, mystical experience involves the full operation of the intuitive faculty which subsums under it the operations of intellect, will and feeling and is not contradictory to them.²⁶ All things are visualized simultaneously and therefore, the *Siddhas* and *Arhats* are the masters of this intuitive insight.

(v) Ineffability :

Fifthly, the mystic experience or transcendental experience is ineffable, or it is inarticulate and unverifiable by empirical methodology. In other words, the spiritual things are beyond the categories of verifiability through the senses. The mystic while reflecting upon the nature of the self and solely concentrating on it, enjoys the ineffable experience of transcendental life.²⁷ Similarly, Plotinus tells us that 'the vision is a unique experience, it is not to be told, not to be written'.²⁸ William James rightly points out that 'the subject of it (mystic experience) immediately says that it defies expression, that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this that its quality must be directly experienced it cannot be imparted or transferred to others'.²⁹ Hence, mystic experience is essentially an ineffable experience. It is the experience par-excellence, which transcends the limitations of linguistic formulations. This experience has nothing to do with the out-spoken language, because the mystic experience is indescribable and unutterable through words. The immediacy of the experience is confronted with this inadequacy of reporting the spiritual matters to the others who are spiritually blind. The nature of this experience is supra-dialectical, supra-logical, supra-rational and supra-conceptual. Mr. W. T. Stace is perfectly right when he says that 'one of the best-known facts about mystics is that they feel that language is inadequate or even wholly useless as a means of communicating their experiences or their insights to others. They say that what they experience is unutterable or ineffable.' According to Plotinus 'the vision baffles telling'.³⁰ Moreover, the same author again points out that 'mystical experience, during the experience, is wholly unconceptualizable and therefore wholly unspeakable. This must be so. You cannot have a concept of anything within the undifferentiated unity because there are no separate items to be conceptualized'.³¹

(vi) Activistic Attitude :

Sixthly, activity is also a marked characteristic of transcendental life. Passivity is no more a good and likable thing for a mystic. Or, spiritual life is fully an active life. The quiet and contemplating spirit is active in spiritual matters. Therefore it has always been true that mystics are the sleepless ones. The *Yogi* or a mystic sleeps where worldly business is concerned and he has been always awake in the business of transcendental experience; and similarly, he who is awake in worldly matters sleeps in the business of the self.³² The pure self is endeavouring to remove the obstacles to mystical life. The joy unbounded, the knowledge infinite, the intuitive insight and the power everlasting are the results of most active life of a mystic. The lazy and lethargic person cannot attain such perfection in every aspect of life. Miss Underhill has rightly pointed out that 'true mysticism is active and practical, not passive and theoretical. It is an organic life process, a something which the whole self does; not something an opinion'.³³ We may say that spiritual perfection is an arduous task in the human life, how can it be pronounced as passive? Assiduity in spiritual pursuits is wholly indispensable. The mystic have not turned their backs from the betterment of the worldly people. They are ever-ready for the spiritual mission to which they are whole-heartedly devoted. Therefore, the mystic's heart is set upon the transcendental self on the one hand and on the other he is endeavouring for the overall upliftment of the society. The *Tirthamkaras* set the examples of this activistic attitude towards mystical life. Mr. William

James seems to be partially right when he characterizes the mystical life with passivity. Outwardly the mystics appear to us as passive beings, but for their own welfare and for the welfare of the people they are fully active. To be more clear, we may say that seeming inactivity is not an essential feature of spirituality; they are the most active beings trying hard for the betterment of the society.

(vii) Moral Elevation :

Seventhly, moral elevation is another distinguishing features of Jaina mysticism. Mystics are the upholders of all that is good and perfect, and simultaneously they are the upholders of moral and spiritual values. They follow a full-fledged moral life or we may say that they are practitioners as well as the educators of morality. They teach an eternal ethical code which is beyond the spatio-temporal limitations. We find in them a perfection of moral virtues. Supreme Forbearance (*Uttama Kṣamā*), Modesty (*Mārdava*), Straight-forwardness (*Ārjava*), Truthfulness (*Satya*), Purity (*Śauca*), Self-restraint (*Samyāma*), Austerity (*Tapā*), Renunciation (*Tyāga*), non-attachment (*Ākimṇya*), and Celibacy (*Brahmacarya*) are constitutive of mystics' moral life.³⁴ It is inconceivable that the mystic who has attained supremacy on account of the realization of perfect Ahimsā may in the least pursue an ignoble life of Himsā, a life of vice. He is no doubt, beyond the category of virtue and vice (*Puṇya* and *Pāpa*), good and evil (*Śubha* and *Aśubha*), psychical states; yet he may be pronounced to be the most virtuous soul in the world. Dr. Radhakrishnan sums up the whole matter while saying that the great sin is the sin of disbelief in the potential powers of the human soul. To know oneself and not to be untrue to it, is the essence of the good life.³⁵

(viii) Freedom from fear :

Eighthly, the transcendental life is free from fear. Mystical state is a free state. It is free from every type of foreign things other than the spirit. The *Samayasāra* tells us that the souls with right belief free themselves from doubt and therefore they are free from fear. The seven types of fears are not found in the mystic. Thus, fear relating to this life, fear relating to future life, fear of being without protection, fear of the disclosure of what is kept in secret, fear of pain, fear of accident, and fear of death are not seen in a mystic.³⁶ Hence, the mystical life is a life of fearlessness.

(ix) Holiness :

Ninthly, spirituality with intuitive insight, ineffability and moral elevation is also associated with holiness. The mystics belong not to an ordinary world but to the world of holiness. They are the perfect incarnation of holiness and sacredness. The mystics are the holy beings and are rejoicing the breath of holiness. Or, the holy mystics transcend the categories of good and evil, right and wrong etc. The emergence of holiness is a concomitant phenomenon in the mystic's sacred life. They radiate the rays of holiness to the other worldly beings.

(x) Permanency :

Tenthly, the transcendental experience is not a temporary phase in mystic's life. Rather it is a permanent state of transcendental self. Though, it is worthy to note, in the stages of spiritual development i. e., the *Guṇasthānas*, we come across the transient states of illumination, yet after the stages of *Sayogakevalin* and *Ayogakevalin* (to be dealt with later on) the self is in the state of permanent peace, joy and bliss. Thus this view 'that mystical states cannot be sustained for long,' has an half truth.³⁷ We may say that the self in the illuminative stage casually enjoys the spiritual bliss, but *Arhats* and the *Siddhas* are the inhabitants of the eternal and infinite spiritual world. Therefore, the essential characteristic of Jaina mysticism is permanency rather than transiency.

(xi) Social Characteristics :

Finally, the transcendental life is associated with some of the social characteristics.



Though it appears to be a paradox at a first glance, because mystic is a man of solitude, he adopts an introvertive and quietistic attitude to life. He observes silence and likes solitariness.³⁸ Then, how it may be possible to characterize him with social attributes ? The reply is : the *Tirthamkaras* set an example of doing an ample good to society. Mystic's heart is full of compassion and generosity for all the creatures of this universe. He is the most benevolent being of the world. It is said that the mystics evince a feeling of friendliness towards the living beings in general, that of joy (*i. e.*, of reverence) towards those who are superior to oneself in perfection, that of compassion towards those who are in a state of suffering and that of neutrality towards those who are incorrigible.³⁹ Śrī Śubhacandra proclaims that the mystical life is so much effective that even furious animals become modest and humble, the cruel tigers give up their cruelty and become free from the feeling of enmity. This change in feelings is as natural as the rain from the clouds which extinguishes the fire in the forest. In other words, the company of a mystic who possesses equanimity removes the ferocity from the hearts of the animals.⁴⁰ Moreover, the same idea is exquisitely expressed in the one verse by same author when he says that in the presence of a mystic the tigress loves the youngone of a deer, the cow caresses the youngone of a lion, the cat fondles the youngone of the swan and peahen plays with the youngone of the snake.⁴¹ Here we see that all types of enmity is brushed aside. In a similar vein, Haribhadra tells us that on account of spiritual life one finds oneself in possession of firmness, patience, faith, friendliness (for all beings), popularity (in the eyes of the worldly ones), intuitive awareness of the nature of things, contentment, forbearance, gentlemanly conduct, honour received from others, and the supreme bliss of calmness.⁴²

Notes and References

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| 1 | Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 283. | 2 | Samayasāra, 185 |
| 3 | Ibid. 186 | 4 | Pravacanasāra, I. 27 |
| 5 | Samayasāra, 32 | 6 | Pravacanasāra, II, 108 |
| 7 | Ibid, I. 23 | 8 | Ibid, I. 32 |
| 9 | Ibid, I. 15 | 10 | Ibid, I. 61 |
| 11 | Ibid, II, 103 | 12 | Ibid, I. 13 |
| 13 | Ibid, I. 59 | 14 | Ibid, I. 76 |
| 15 | Ibid, II. 106 | 16 | Jñānārṇava, 24, 18 |
| 17 | Paramātmaprakāśa. II, 43 | 18 | Iṣṭopadeśa, 41 |
| 19 | Pravacanasāra, I. 14, II. 105 | 20 | Pravacanasāra, I. 54 |
| 21 | Ibid, I. 21 | 22 | Pravacanasāra, I. 22 |
| 23 | Yogabindu, 50. p. 15 | 24 | Pathway to God in Hindi Literature, Preface, p. 2 |
| 25 | The Ways of Knowing, p. 54 | 26 | Pathway to God in Hindi Literature, Preface, pp. 3-4 |
| 27 | Tattvānuśāsana, 170, p. 156 | 28 | Plotinus in the Light of Vedanta (Thesis) p. 313 |
| 29 | Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 371 | 30 | Mysticism and Philosophy, p. 277 |
| 31 | Ibid p. 297 | 32 | Mokṣapāhūḍa, 31, Samādhiśataka, 78, p. 86; Paramātmaprakāśa II. 46 |
| 33 | Mysticism, p. 81 | 34 | Tattvārthasūtra, IX. 6 |
| 35 | Idealist View of Life, p. 118 | 36 | Samayasāra, 228 |
| 37 | Varieties of Religious Experience, p. 572 | 38 | Iṣṭopadeśa, 40 |
| 39 | Yogaśataka, 79, p. 88 | 40 | Jñānārṇava 24, 21-22 |
| 41 | Ibid, 24, 26, p. 239 | 42 | Yogabindu, 52-54, p. 16 |