

**The Psychological Gnosticism of Mystic Experience:
 A Critical Evaluation of A Mystic (Al-Qush'ayri), A Psychologist
 (W. James) and A Philosopher (M. Iqbal)**

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Abstract

The central theme of Mysticism is to have knowledge of the “noummena” or the transcended Divine Realities while living in this phenomenal world. Because the conventional epistemological ways of knowledge are confined within the space and time dimensions thus they cannot comprehend the metaphysical or transcendent realities. But it is only Mystic Gnosis which can claim to have access to the “noummenal realities” on the bases of some meditative manners and esoteric absorptions through the mystic experience. Thus due to this gnostic and para sensory nature of mysticism, these questions take place: What would be the nature of this kind of experience? What would be its basic characteristics? What would be the psychological states that a mystic would experience? How these facts can be explained? Would it either be a result of personal endeavours or it would be just a granted

bleeding? Whether it would be religious or not? Could it be articulated to other beings? And so on. They are the questions which will be answered in this research.

Thus, the present article presents the views of two ancient Mystics along with the views of a psychologist and a philosopher. This will be revealed that how much importance occupied by mysticism in epistemology and how much vast and wide-ranging it is.

Keywords: Epistemology, Esotericism, Gnosis, Marifat-e-Illa'hih, Noetic, Orison, Psychological States

I. Introduction

It is evident that the phenomenon of mysticism can be found in the history of every religion which exists in the world. It is a mode of epistemology and a combination of some practices which cannot be limited into geographical circumferences. Moreover, it is not a legacy of any one nation but it is common heritage of all humanity and it occupies universal acceptance or criticism due to its esoteric mode as well. Its epistemology is above sensory perceptions and its language is coded in the form of metaphorical similes that make it far above than an ordinary language. Thus its comprehension requires especial mode of understanding and its understanding is possible only through esoteric gnosis on the basis of intuition.¹ This may be the consequence of long introspective meditations. Thus it may be demarcated as a psychological state, an esoteric as well as intuitive and emotive apprehension of spiritual reality.²

I.I This has at least two elementary domains, the premier one is theological province. Mysticism has faith in spiritual or celestial union of any mystic with the supreme being of God.³ It exerts to have direct interaction with the supreme Divine Reality.⁴ In the secondary domain which is philosophical, it is an introspective system and meditative set of practices. The objectives of these practices and contemplations are the attainment⁵ and realization of the *Ultimate Truth* on the foundations of intuition and meditative introspection. This aspired connection or spiritual union with the *Ultimate Reality* or *Absolute Truth* has generally been termed by Sufis as "Mystic Experience". This experience reveals intuitive gnosis and esoteric

epistemological truths type about the *Ultimate Realty* to the experiencing mystic. In this experiencing state, the subject feels such illuminative truths which can neither be retrieved through sense faculties nor through any rational or discursive argumentation nor due to any conceptual propositional thoughts.⁶

Epistemological aspect of Mysticism is such a system of gnosis which aims at to have contact with the *Supreme Reality*. Its practical and essential feature is a psychological mode of behavior which proclaimed that one can acquire knowledge about the *Reality* which is generally beyond the domain of conventional sense perception or conceptualization or reflective thought.⁷ Therefore, the epistemology of mysticism has numerous dimensions.

1.2 Diversity and Enormity of the field

The epistemological aspects of mystic experience and its magjical nature of absorbing the experiencing person⁸ participates in the spheres of psychology also. Its theoratical concepts are related to theology and philosophy; its objecteive falls into the discipline of meta-physics, its theory of knowledge is above natural sciences and sense experience and it is opposed to refulctive reasoning, rational and logical argumentation. Infact it participates in various disciplines of knowledge *i.e. psychology, epistemology, ontology, philosophy, parapsychology, religion, spirituality, asceticism, esotericism, existentialism.*

2. Mysticism versus Sufism

Generally these terms **Mysticism and Sufism** are used synonymously and in fact there is little variance between the two. But it is fact that the etymology and origin of the former is different from the latter.

2.1 Etymology of Mysticism

Due to the vastness of visions, abstractness of phenomena, multiplicity of experiences and variety of adherences, all these along-with some other elements made any attempt of defining the term Mysticism very deficient and perplexing. We may trace the **origin of the term *mysticism*** in Greek as *muein* means *closing* the lips and eyes lest the secret knowledge might be betrayed. But in Christianity (from the roots of Latin: *Cognition Dei Experimentalis*), this means the experiential knowledge about God and His manifestation with the purpose of mystical union (*unio mystica*) with Him through love along-

with knowledge. Through ages, it took the form of an emotion having religious sentiments and as an endeavor of finding *The One Behind*. The latter is known as the philosophy of pantheistic monism. It became the expression of spirituality in the East, while in the West it became *Philosophia Perennis* or the *eternal philosophy*.⁹ The closing the lips and the eyes (*myein*) which is the demonstration of the oath that the *mystes* would keep the secrets related to the inner working of religion.¹⁰

2.2 Etymology and Origin of the Term *Sufism*

The term Sufism has been derived from *safa* which means *being pure* or cleanliness. The other derivation is *Soof* which means *Wool*. Thus *Sufis* were the people who wore *woolen clothes*. The other source is *saff* which signifies such *people who sat in the rows*.¹¹ The Greek word *Sophie* which means *wisdom* has also been considered the derivation of Sufism because they were the wise persons and had wisdom. Likewise some people traced the term to the group of Greek philosopher the Sophists who were apt in knowledge and wisdom.

3. Perplexities in Defining The Vocabulary and States of Mysticism and Mystic Experience

The act of defining something is equals to put limits and assigning features and giving names to the focused things or field. This act of definition regarding material things is easy, such as we clearly name a thing as pen, glass, computer, mother, father, school, book *etc.* but defining celestial, immaterial, spiritual or abstract nouns is very difficult process *e.g.* there are some nouns relating to metaphysical questions such as: what is a *concept*, what is a *soul*, what is *ecstasy* or *pain etc.* to define them is a very difficult task because the refer to the things which cannot be hinted through physical references. In the likewise manner, the *states* of mysticism, the *levels* of mystic experience, the types of the state and their deference from the intoxicated ones, the meanings of the *stations* in the journey towards the Realty, they all are to great extent indefinable through the common mediums of communications.

Thus the task of discovering and defining the real meanings of the vocabulary and states of mysticism or mystical experiences is in itself a bewildering and challenging endeavor. Due to its abstract nature ranging from the genesis the word towards the vastness of its fields such as its ontological

dimensions and epistemological aspects, its biological chemistry along-with its range of the nature of experience or states related to psychology and parapsychology, the theological and atheistic approach of the concept of the Union, the esoteric mode, they all are perplexing.

4. Common Sense Definition

4.1 Mysticism is such a system of thought or a mode of behavior which proclaimed that one can acquire knowledge about the *Reality* which is generally beyond the domain of conventional sense perception or conceptualization and reflective thought.¹²

4.2. Mysticism is an umbrella term for all the teachings, concepts, contemplations and experiences which mark immanent transcendence in experience. The nature of this transcendence i.e. whether it was spontaneous or it was induced due to some technique or as it was the result of any drug. Either it was received regularly, physically or mentally or it is seen as strong affects temporarily. In any case, as if it was experienced as sensory phenomenon or psychosomatic adaptation. Thus, the quality and intensity of experience depends on all these conditions.¹³

4.3. Accordingly, the gist of a variety of definition is that *mysticism* arises due to the urge of being in communion with the Reality or it is outcome of the realization of being in contact with Higher Consciousness.¹⁴ Its sources of knowledge are beyond senses, far away from sense data and understanding, it is above inferential thinking. It is absorption of awareness of unitary conscious ness and oblivion everything else. It is a feeling of “I-Thou-ness”.

5. The Origin of Muslim Mysticism

The earliest traces of the Mysticism in Islam have been found in the lifetime of the early stage of Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). The Prophet’s meditations and appearance of the first revelation, later His return to home and His states are the evidences of the mystic experience. The Prophetic consciousness of the Holy Prophet (PUBH) had vivid, definite and powerful mystic experience and had been described in the Quran.¹⁵ Latter the *Ashab e Sufa* has been described as the mystics along-with many other individuals.

6. Ancient Sources of Mysticism

There are two oldest and well-known sources of Muslim Mysticism: 'Risala al-Qushayri'ya'¹⁶ and The 'Kashaf Al-Mah'joob'.¹⁷

6.1. Abu al-Qasim Al-Qush'ay'ri (B. 376H - D.465 H).

The *Risa'lah e Qush'ay'ria* is one of the oldest sources regarding Muslim mysticism. It is the encyclopedic work authored by the above said mystic. This work is known as '*Al-Risa'lah al-Qushayri'yya fi 'Ilm al-Tasaw'wuf*' precisely remembered as '*Risala al-Qushayri'ya*'. Its translation in English is available titled 'Epistle on Sufism'.¹⁸ This work describes the lives of the important mystics along-with their mystic expositions as well as it deciphers the latent meanings of the abundant terminology which the Sufis used to elaborate their experiences in teaching the epistemology of the mysticism.

6.2. Hazrat Daata Gunj Bakhsh Al-Hujwiri (B. 400 H and D.465 H)

The latter one among the oldest sources regarding Islamic mysticism is the Ka'shaf ul Mah'jub which means (Unveiling of the Veiled). It was written originally in Persian language by Sayed Ali bin Usman al-Hujwiri generally famous as Hazrat Daata Gunj Bakhsh. This book is considered a guide to mystic epistemology. Like Al-Qushayri, he divided the book into the parts relating to the lives of the mystics as well as the part relating to the terminology and vocabulary of the mysticism as a source of Divine knowledge, *Muarifat* and metaphysical *Gnosis*.

Worth mentioning fact is each of the above books had particular chapters regarding the vocabulary and terminology of the mysticism along-with the phraseology used by mystics very often. The description of the definitions of clandestine vocabulary, revealing the latent meanings and deciphering the secrets of the mystic epistemology as well as the characteristics of the states or experiences are like guide to the aspirers.

Moreover, here are being discussed two other important thinkers; the first is William James the other is Allama Muhammad Iqbal.

6.3. The Psychologist: William James (1842-1910)

He worked mainly as a philosopher but he greatly contributed in the field of psychology. He made many experiences regarding the nature and psychology of mystic experience. His researches exhibit the psychological states of mysticism as a field of knowledge and he highlighted the epistemological aspects of that experience. He in his inspiring work *The*

*Varieties of Religious Experience*¹⁹ describes various characteristics of mysticism which contribute to the epistemological and psychological domains of knowledge.

6.4. The Philosopher: Allama Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938).

Iqbal was a great thinker, philosopher and rationalist theologian. Religion and Mysticism occupied a great place in his thought. In his significant and influential work known as *The Reconstruction*,²⁰ he devoted two chapters relating to the nature of mysticism, its characteristics, its gnosis and epistemology and its roll in religious understanding. The second chapter is related to the test of this type of knowledge. Thus Iqbal considered mysticism as higher form of knowledge yet the mystic's experience is lower while the Prophet's experience is higher than the mystic because the Prophet has a mission to teach the humanity while a mystic's experience is subjective.

7. Religious and Atheistic Modes of Mystic Experience.

Mysticism has at least two major traditional modes: the first has religious temperament e.g. Jewish, Christian, Islamic colors while the second is expressive of non-theistic disposition such as Buddhism, Monk-ism, Ascetic-ism etc.²¹The religious mode of mysticism described it as a blessing from God and it is beyond the control of the mystic. In this state the mystic feels closeness to God. The non-theistic approach described it as controllable and induce-able by the mystic.²²

8. Nature of Mystic Experience

Mysticism is a universal phenomenon in the respect of the desire to have contact or union with consciousness of God or the experience of the truths of religion. Mystical Experience is considered the source of spiritual knowledge of the Reality and it is regarded as the epistemology of Sufism. This state is not particularly related to ascetics, monks or Sufis but almost every person even once in life, experience it to some extent.²³

8.1 The '*praxis*' and The '*gnosis*'

Mysticism is *praxis* and *gnosis*. The *praxis* (Latin root) means "action" and "activity". It means it is transforming an idea into action while the latter '*gnosis*' (Greek) means knowledge which is understandable only by the enlightened group.²⁴

8.2. The Ontological and Epistemological Dimensions of Mystic Gnosis.

In any of the above case, the central theme of mysticism is the *Union with the Ultimate Reality* and the foremost objective is Mystical Experience which is considered the source of mystical or metaphysical knowledge of the Reality. The former is ontological aspect while the latter is its epistemological dimension of mysticism.

9. Shared Themes of Mystic Experience among Various Disciplines of Knowledge

Regarding the common features of mystic experience, it has some common traits which are found in religion, theurgy, magic mudras, physical worships, prayers, metaphysics, parapsychology, psych-ism occultism and in science yet it is not easy to draw a line of demarcation among the fields. There are more generally shared themes of this experience such as: the sense of unification of the inner self with the God, realization of the objective truth, feeling of bliss and sense of sacred and holiness along-with the inexpressibility of the content.²⁵ The point to be considered clearly is that the acts of worship and prayers are little portions of mysticism as a way toward the union of the Divine or Reality but they are not themselves the essence of objectives.²⁶

10 Gradual Pre-requisite Stages of Mystic Experience

10.1 The objectives of having union with the sacred or the divine can be achieved through a way marked by the four stages e.g. *the Purgation, the Purification, the Illumination* and *the Unification*. The first demands getting off from human desires and cleanliness from any stigma or desires; the second stresses the purification of the will or objective; the third is illumination of mind, while the fourth is the stage of the union which means the union of will or identification of being with the divine.²⁷

10.2 Whereas, Evelyn Underhill, in the book *Mysticism*²⁸ defined five psychological states of mystic experience such as *Awakening* of the Self, *Purgation of the Self* that means getting rid of physical desired, *Illumination* means during mediation or contemplation an apprehension of the presence of the Divine (though it is not true union and many mystics do not go beyond this state yet some artists or highly creative persons may have this experience).

In the *Purification* level the subject surrenders the *Will, Personal Identity* and the *Self*. Then at the level of the *Union* the subject achieves the transcendent level of union with the reality.²⁹

II. Mystic Terminology Relating To Nature and Essence of Mystic Experience

Every discipline of knowledge has its particular system of terminology and methodology. Only the relating scholar knows the accurate meanings of the terminology. By using these ones the scientist conducts their research. The use of a particular method and specific terminology facilitate the scholar to understand the meanings without ambiguity but on the other hand it becomes very difficult for others who do not belong to that discipline. Same way the Mysticism has a particular treasure of terminology and especial kind of epistemology. The understanding of the epistemological proposition is very easy for the Sufis but for common persons it is difficult to decipher and decode the real meanings and to feel the mystic states in the manner the mystics feels themselves. They are; such as: the Qan'nay (contentment), *Tawakal*, submission to God's Will, *Waar'aa* (indifferent-ness to world), *Tuw'ba* (repentance), *Fa'naa* (Annihilation), *Muja'had'aa* (Striving), *Khal'waa* (Retreat), *Uz'laa* (seclusion), *Muraa' qabaa* (Awareness), *Du'aa* (Supplicatory Prayer), *Sam'aa* (Listening to music), *Ta'jalli* (Manifestation), *Mukaa'sha'faa* (unveiling), *Waa'rid* (Occurrence), *khal'wat* (Retreat), *Uzlat* (seclusion), *Muraa'qabaa* Awareness [of God], *Du'aa* (Supplicatory prayer), *Al-Mar'ifaa* (Divine Gnosis), etc.³⁰ Afterwards, a mystic would be blessed with *Wasal* or the *Al-Marifa bi-llah* (Divine gnosis) through mystic experience.

12. Imperatives States for Mystic Experience

According to both the mystics: Al-Qushayri as well as **Al-Hujwiri**, the pre-required conditions and circumstances are necessary steps for any mystics to have a mystic experience. These are as follow:

12.1 *The Maqam* (station)

This term signifies the psychological state which was to be granted by God to the server. This state or *Muqam* pre-requires certain conditions. After fulfilling theses condition, the mystic can hope to be granted that *Muqam* but

it is just God's blessing and it is not compulsory that the one will surely be placed at the *Muqam*³¹.

12.2 The Waqt (Time)

Time is ontological and psychological state. Qushayri, defines the term **waqt** (time) not as it is known to us as division of time in seconds, minutes or hours. Here *Time* means a *Mystical Moment*. Time means the state that is dominating the person or the state in which someone feels oneself. Moreover it stands for the *surrender* and having no free exercise of choices.³² Thus *Time* is a state in which a Sufi *surrenders* his own will and becomes under the command of other than one's own self.

12.3 The Wa'jad (ecstasy)

For Qushayri, in any mystic experience there is a state which is called *Wa'jad*. It is a kind of feeling that descends upon the heart of mystic without any intention and is called ecstasy. This feeling is regarded as the fruit of prayers.³³

12.4 The Fa'naa (Annihilation) and Ba'qaa (subsistence)

Fa'naa o *Ba'qaa* are customary term among Sufi disciplines. The former means absence of blameworthy qualities while the latter means persistence of whatever praiseworthy features. Any mystic is known by his spiritual and moral deeds.³⁴ When a mystic deserts such deeds which are denounced and condemned by the God, it is said that he has annihilated his passion. When he annihilated his desires it is regarded that he has annihilated the world. The annihilation from one's own characteristics and own-self and being in the state of submerged in the attributes and existence of God is considered as *Ba'qaa*.³⁵

12.5 Mujahida (Extroversive and Introversive)

One group of Sufis had the opinion that the experience is not a sudden occurrence to the subject. But in fact it had a long background phase of certain physical following of abstinence (*Mujahida*) and devotional spiritual and religious fervor.

For the mystics, this experience is outcome of spiritual training comprised of prayers, certain meditations, physical chastisement and *Mujahidah* along-with abandonment, disallowance and repudiation of worldly affairs.³⁶

As Al'taf Hussain Haa'li had made a distinction between the two kinds of poetry such as the *Aa'woord* and *Aa'mads* some poets He said ³⁷ -

claimed that a piece of poetry or a verse just descended upon them and they call it *Aamad*. But Hali said, behind every *Aa'mad* there is a long history of emotive thinking and hidden process of absorptions of feelings. Likewise any religious experience is not a sudden state. It implied a long background of physical exercises and the set of rituals called the stations *Manazil e Salook*. After these there is sudden state of experience coupled with psychological state and intuitions what Haa'li had named as *Aa'mad*.

12.6 *Mu'haa'zaraa* (Presence), *Mu'ka'shafa* (Unveiling) and *Mu'sha'hadaa* (Witnessing)

In mystic epistemology and psychology of mystic experience, these three features appear consecutively. Here a mystic finds oneself in the presence of God by the recollections. Then the step of *unveiling* takes place through the clear evidences of the presence of God. The third phase of *Mu'sha'hadaa* (Witnessing) occurs. The feature of this state is, a mystic feels oneself in the presence of the Absolute Realty and Absolute Truth. Thus there is not any shadow of doubt.³⁸

12.7 *Warid* (Occurrence)

This term is very frequent in mystic parlance. *Wa'rid* means occurrence of some praiseworthy thought which takes place in the heart of a mystic without one's invitation or deliberate struggle. The source of this occurrence is always from God's Knowledge. These occurrences are higher than the thoughts. These occurrences might be in the form of the states of joy, sadness, contractions, or expansion etc. These are the states of mystical experience.³⁹

12.8 *Ta'jalli* (self- manifestation) and *sat'r* (Concealment)

Ta'jalli is vital term in mystic epistemology and ontology. it means God's self- manifestation to the mystic. Common people remain in *Sat'r* or concealment but the chosen one witness God's manifestations.⁴⁰ When God manifests Himself to the devotee or through His manifestation on something, they will show submission to Him. Manifestation is always in submission. *Ta'jalli* is the great source of God's knowledge and a blessing for a mystic Sufi epistemology and mystic experience.

12.9 *Ma'rif e Illa'hi*

For the mystic experience, a mystic had to be gone through the above purifying exercises or meditation. After qualifying all these he would have

been blessed with *Al-Marifa bi-llah* (Divine gnosis) through mystic experience. This *Muarafat-e Ilahi*, is the *summon bonum* of mystic epistemology and peak of mystic experience.

13. *The Haa'l* (The Mystical Experience)

This term *Haa'l* may be considered equal to the English term *experience* (*mystic experience*). This is the epitome of all mystic states. Every Sufi aspires to have this experience because it is the way and source of mystic gnosis and the manner of Union with God. Various Sufis and thinkers made it the primary subject of their discussion regarding mystic theory of knowledge.

It is such a state; Qushayri said that can be descended to the heart of the mystic. It cannot be acquired by intention but it is just a blessing from God. This state may be like a feeling of happiness, joy, grief contraction, expansion, awe or passionate aspirations. All states are transitory and momentary and they are like flashes or lightning.⁴¹

It is reported that the Prophet PBUH was constantly advanced in these states. Whenever he advanced in that experience, He felt that the previous state was lower one and the new was loftier one and the previous one was a veil between the newer one. Such states became more and more intense.⁴²

According to al-Hujwiri, the state of *Haa'l* descends on a mystic when he is in *time*. Then, in the feeling of *time* and in the state of *Haa'l*, the mystic become *mustaqim* (steadfast) and did not remain a subject to change. He in a state of *Haa'l* became silent because *Haa'l* is annihilation of speech.⁴³ When the state of *Haa'l* entrenched the subject, it expelled and banished all feelings from the subject's heart.

William James in examining the mystic experience considered it a personal and private experience⁴⁴ and he admitted it as a form or a state of epistemological consciousness.

Allama Muhammad Iqbal in his opus magnum collection of seven lectures,⁴⁵ devoted the first and second lectures to the topics of religious and mystic knowledge. For him it is a dynamic source of divine knowledge⁴⁶ and transformative endeavor of the realization of the Ego. This experience play a vital role in strengthening the Ego and it is a way to have a relation with the Super-Ego or the Ultimate Realty that is God. He criticized those who regard

mysticism as escape from the life's dynamic endeavors. Instead he regarded it as the higher level of religious consciousness and gnostic (*Muarifat*) source of knowledge.

I4. Stages of the Authenticity of Knowledge

There are three following standers of testing various kinds of knowledge.

- a. *Ilm al-Ya'qin* (Certainty of *Ilml* or knowledge),
- b. *Ayn al-Ya'qin* (the essence of certainty)
- c. *Haqq al-Ya'qin* (the truth of certainty).⁴⁷

In mystic epistemology these terms have been frequently used.

They are designations and levels of knowledge. *Ilm al-Yaqin* is the level which marks any pieces of knowledge as certain as it provides proofs of its certainty with vivid evidences through direct witness. This level is associated to the people of intellect. This means the knowledge having no traces of doubt. The second *i.e.* *Ayn al-Yaqin* This third stages *i.e.* *Haqq al-Yaqin* is the level associated with the people related to the Divine Gnosis. This level has been called as the truth of certainty

Al-Hujwiri elaborated this hierarchy of mystic epistemology as: firstly, the knowledge relating to religious affairs and practices in the in the light of Divine commandments is the stage of *Ilm al-Yaqin*, this is the domain of theologians. Secondly, the knowledge about Naz'aa dying or departure from the *Here* to the *Hereafter* is *Ayn al-Yaqin*, it is the realm of Gnostics .Lastly one, *i.e.* *Haqq al-Yaqin* stands for the intuitive knowledge from God. this is the stage of the super elected or *khas al khas'een* people.⁴⁸

Allama Iqbal also mentioned the three epistemological stages of religious understanding *Thought, Reflection* and *Mu'rifat*.

I5. Psychological Happenings to the Mystic

I5.I William James described these common elements: .Ineffability, this type of state is like a feeling rather than intellectual. That is why they are difficulties in convey so the literature of mystic experience is full of symbolism and paradoxes. Noetic quality: this experience is like a state of illumination, insight, revelation or awareness of the sense of being with the unity and beyond the clutches of intellect. Transiency. This state is fleeting comprising a few seconds to a half of an hour. Passivity. Experiencing person

has the feeling to be subdued and dominated of the sense of grandeur. Mystical experiences commonly happened spontaneously. Generally it occurs when a person is alone and mentally in a state of relaxation. Certain elements such as dreams, music, sounds, daydreaming, art, sounds, nature of near death experiences triggered this state.⁴⁹

15.2 Allama Muhammad Iqbal was great intellectual of the sub-continent. In his opus magnum collection of seven lectures,⁵⁰ the first and second are about religious and mystic knowledge. For him it is not an escapist attitude but a dynamic source of divine knowledge⁵¹ and transformative endeavor of the realization of the Ego. This experience play a vital role in strengthening the Ego and it is a way to have a relation with the Super-Ego or the Ultimate Realty that is God. He criticized those who regard mysticism as escape from the life's dynamic endeavors. Instead he regarded it as the higher level of religious consciousness and gnostic (*Muarifat*) source of knowledge. He described vital features of the mystic experience *i.e. Immediacy, Un-analyzability, Intimacy, Incommunicability, Direct-ness etc.*

16. Gnostic happenings and Epistemological Impediments in Mystic Experience

Some salient characteristic which contribute to the epistemological aspects and psychological states which serves as sources of knowledge as well as some impediments in communication this secret knowledge are presented here. The analysis would reveal that to what extent it is possible to understate the mystical knowledge.

16.1. Ineffability

The feature called the Ineffability⁵² exhibits the fact of inexpressibility⁵³ or indescribability of something. But James designated it a peculiar meaning viz. he thought it a feeling in which the feature of express-ability state remained absent and it is not intellect state. For Qush'ayri, it is *wa'rood* and is kept as '*Hijab and Sir*'. When anyone in the stat of transcendence experiences it, the subject or the mystic becomes incompetent to convey the meanings to others. The contents and meanings which had been revealed to the mystic are like illuminating states. Only such persons can understand these states to some extent who had already something like those experiences. They too cannot covey the states to others. Due to these reasons, James

alleged these states as negative quality of mystic state of experience. Its etymology presents the evidence that it means secret⁵⁴ or concealed,⁵⁵ and its knowledge is not expressible. Thus epistemology according to James is incommunicable and has ineffability.

I6.2. Noetic Quality

This other quality⁵⁶ of this experience discloses some other aspects such as: the comprehensions of this esoteric and contemplative knowledge do not comprise on the sense data or perception of the physical organs nor it is whole of logical propositions and articulated judgments. Instead the comprehension and contents are like 'revelation' and 'illumination'. They are just 'illuminative insight' into the depths of the ocean of the Supreme Truth. Subsequently, such epistemology necessitate following characteristics: spontaneous-ness, suddenness, inarticulated-ness in common language, transiency, supra-senses, above the rational grasp *etc.* A state of being *illuminated* having a sense of suddenness and being inarticulated through conventional language and it remains *noetic*.

Al- Qush'ayri termed it as *Wa'rid*. This means occurrence of some praiseworthy thought in the heart from God's Knowledge without one's deliberate struggle. These occurrences or *wa'rid* are transcendent to the thoughts. Theses may be in the form of the states of joy, sadness, contractions, or expansion *etc.*⁵⁷ thus these form of illuminations have *Noetic* features.

Yet for James, these personal, individual and private mystic experiences⁵⁸ which he termed as states of high consciousness, they form a theory of knowledge and have epistemological features.

I6.3 *Un-analyzability:*

Iqbal defined the mystic experience is unanalyzable. When anyone have an experience of any material object, this experience is subject to a lot of different type of date e.g. Space-Time, three dimensions aspects, colours, tastes, comparison, combinations, relations *etc.* Thus common experience is 'piecemeal' aspect of 'Reality' and consequently it is analyzable. But in the mystic experience the mystic makes an experience of the total 'passage of Reality',⁵⁹ in which all aspect are merged and there remain no subject-object differentiation, dimension or other referential aspects so the mystic experience become unanalyzable.

I6.4 Clandestine Metaphorical Language

Yet the mystics claimed that this experience has not the feature of **express-ability** within the frame of **ordinary language** due to the reason that ordinary language has been based on sense data and physical references and conceptually reflective differentiations. But the way of expressing mystical experience is full of similes and metaphors.⁶⁰ Though, due to these facts the ordinary people are not capable to understand this metaphorical language. But only those who had already some experience of this type and they belonged to this realm, they might comprehend the coded meanings of that experience.

I6.5 *Incommunicability*.

Mystic states for Iqbal, are not thoughts but they are feelings.⁶¹ They are feelings due to experience about a unique, private, transcended Whole-Self. Consequently they are incommunicable. The reason is that the nature of our languages is limited to time-space and referential contents with subject-object boundaries. The languages cannot such type of feelings thus the contents of the mystic experiences are incommunicable. James thought that the union with the Ultimate Reality or the Divine Truth is possible through the medium of Intuition. It is instant and sudden feeling that has no sense depending contents. Therefore its main feature is its *incommunicableness*.⁶²

I6.6 Transiency and *Transitory*

Transiency and *Transitory*⁶³ are other aspects of this incommunicable consciousness and esoteric epistemology. This illuminative epistemology possesses temporal component. This means it can last for a few seconds or minutes. The duration cannot be prolonged or sustained willingly. When it faded away or diminished, the feelings cannot be reproduced or repeated perfectly. This sudden spontaneous illumination happens suddenly and disappears instantly yet it is felt and absorbed in its full intensity and richness by the mystic.

In it mystic feels sudden transcendence from the temporary consciousness and feels ineffable awareness which is marked by elevation from the physical limits and release from space and time boundaries.⁶⁴ For Qushayri, designated it as *Time*, it means the state that is overwhelming state in which the person *surrender* one's Will and power of choices.⁶⁵ And he feels the other state i.e. the *wa'jad* which would be descended upon the heart of the

person as an ecstasy without any intention. It is considered the fruit of prayers of mystic.⁶⁶ This is a kind of sudden transcendence.

Iqbal said that the mystic experience either that of mystics or the Prophets are not constant, they are states and feelings which after a due time fade away. These feelings or states left a sense of awe or authority on the person. After that the persons return to the normal levels of human states.⁶⁷

I6.7 *Immediacy*

Iqbal has opinion that though all experience are immediate and issues to interpretation likewise mystic experience but it is about the knowledge and information about God. It purely means we can know God not as a mathematical entity or like a hierarchy of concepts but as we know pother objects of the world.⁶⁸

I6.8 *Intimacy with the Super Ego.*

This experience for Iqbal, is a state of having intimacy with a transcended, momentary, all-encompassing, private and unique 'other Self'. But question is that how we can experience of such type of reality? We are aware of our own beings through the inner reflections and due to sense experience. We know other selves because others give responses to our senses signals then we infer the existence of other selves. Likewise we know another conscious Self that is God.⁶⁹ He said "call me and I will respond to your call" (Al-Quran. 40:60). Thus the knowledge of God is immediate and the mystic experience like other experiences is possible as well as it is an intimate relation with the Whole Reality.

I6.9 *Passivity*⁷⁰

James, with his analytical and critical approach presented the concept that in the state of this experience a mystics become captivated in a trans of exalted feelings and he becomes just a passive receiver of the illuminative insights. His own wills becomes mesmerized and his drives fall in abeyance or passivity. The feeling of awe and being subdued by some super power takes place. Being overwhelmed due to gnostic illumination, the mystic's consciousness and personality becomes just passive receiver.

This experience is marked by the *Mu'haa'zaraa* (Presence) of the transcendent *Ultimate Realty*, and from that *Mu'ka'shafa* (Unveiling) of the gnostic truths on the heart as illuminations and the presence of *Mu'sha'hadaa*

(Witnessing) the awe and grandeur of the Super Ego of Super reality the mystic's personality becomes passive receptive presence.

I6.I0 Voluntary meditations⁷¹

Voluntarily submission, meditations and contemplation are the primary states as trainings and initial phases for the receptivity of the illuminative gnosis of mystic experience. Though James had hinted it cursorily but it is worth mentioning point

According to some Sufis such experience is the result long background phase of certain physical exercise such as abstinence (*Mu'ja'hida*) and devotional spiritual and religious dedication. It is outcome of spiritual training comprised of *Mur'aq'ba*, (the surrender or submission of one's will), *various ceremonies for the purification of the soul*, prayers, meditations, chastisement and *Mu'ja'hi'dah* along-with abandonment of worldly affairs.⁷²

I6.II. After-effects⁷³

The spell of feeling as enchanted by the sudden illumination along-with the realization of the incapability of expressing the swift insight which had been received by the mystic in a state of passivity and overwhelmed with suspended will, these circumstances casts the impacts on the mystics as having an Alternative Personality, having the voice as Prophetic Speech, causing him to be able to Automatic Writing etc. Moreover, the reminiscence of that enchantment remains for long that causes in the form of modification in the inner life of the subject.

James as a result of psychological experiments, sites some descriptions of the subjects: one of them reported to have sudden feeling⁷⁴, Charles Kingsley⁷⁵ described some type of innate feelings, ... sense of being enclosed of ungraspable truths. He elaborated J. A. Symonds' account⁷⁶ that the feeling uncontrollably took custody of the subject's will and mind. He thought as if he had been immersed in the infinite presence of God."⁷⁷ Dr. Bucke's statement was that he felt as something came upon him like a feeling of exultation⁷⁸ similar to a sense of an immense joy-ness coupled with a knowledgeable illumination and that was indescribable. He came across of a sense that the universe was not the whole of dead matter components rather it was a kind of something living Presence.⁷⁹ James hinted that in India such insight has been termed as Yoga⁸⁰ which meant experimental union of the individual with the Divine.

16.12 *Orision*

The subsequent feature as James has termed it is *Orision*. It has also been named as *Meditation*⁸¹ by some mystics but Chambers dictionary had termed it as *Prayer*⁸² as well as a methodological elevation of a soul towards God. James had asserted this feature as well as Allama Iqbal has emphasized this aspect very forcefully. The latter taught: **prayer** is like an illumination or a light which could lead a man to one's actual path towards one's real destination. He had faith that there are many indicators which are proofs of the existence of a paranormal being or a supernatural existence. He regarded prayer as essential component of any intellectual pursuit for nature. Observations of science are very close to the modes of reality and they enhance our internal perceptions and visions regarding reality.⁸³ Iqbal viewed all types of knowledge as a form of a Prayer. He narrated that if anyone was studying and observing the phenomenon of nature scientifically, then the one according to him occupies the status which is equal to a mystic.

17. Conclusion

Mysticism and its experience is universal phenomena. Not only in Islam but it is a part of every religion. According to Hinduism, "Dhyana"⁸⁴ is the state of higher level of contemplation while the followers of Buddhism named it "Samadhi". This meditative and introspective scheme is composed of four levels such as: the first one exhibit the feature of concentration and focusing on one point without any desire. But it should not exclude the sense of judgment. The second level demanded the drop off the intellectual ability along-with the functions of intellect. But here the satisfied sense about the unity still remained. At the third level that mentioned sense of satisfaction disappears while the feeling of indifference takes place coupled with the memory and the sense of self-consciousness. At the last level, all the features get perfection and they achieve accomplishments.

Keeping in view the Muslim mysticism,⁸⁵ James claimed that since the earliest times it existed among the Persian peoples. He mentioned Al-Ghazal's point of view particularly regarding the aims of Sufism as the detachment of the heart from all that is not God, as well as the single job of any meditation about the Divine Being.⁸⁶

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