

Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya Publication Series : 2

WORDSWORTH AS A POETIC MYSTIC
A CRITICAL STUDY

AMRITA PARESH PATEL



KADI SARVA VISHWAVIDYALAYA

GANDHINAGAR

About the book

In the book *Wordsworth as a Poetic Mystic: A Critical Study*, Amrita Paresh Patel has endeavoured to select, analyze and study those passages from Wordsworth's long and short poems in which Wordsworth's treatment of mystical experience has been reflected. This study has led the author to make clear the traits of mystical experience in general and then to find how Wordsworth's poetry exhibits these features in particular. As such, the book touches upon the multidisciplinary area of humanities, particularly English literature and philosophy.

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Wordsworth As A Poetic Mystic : A Critical Study
By Amrita Paresh Patel.

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Foreword

Sarva Vidyalaya Kelavani Mandal established in 2007 Kadi Sarva Vishwa vidyalaya, University of its own with the Herculean efforts of late Chairman Shri Maneklal M. Patel with the motto '**Education is True Service**'.

Kadi Sarva Vishwa Vidyalaya today has 14 departments and 16 constituent colleges ranging from Engineering, Polytechnic, Nursing, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Science, Commerce, Humanities, Management and Computer Studies. We aim at providing all facilities of higher education to students coming from urban and rural areas. The purpose of establishing Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya is to promote research activities of utmost quality in higher education. The University has its own "Research Development Cell" that provides financial help to the researchers in pursuing research projects of social importance and current relevance. The University also has a Publication Cell that publishes books.

Publication of this book *Wordsworth as a Poetic Mystic : A Critical Study* by Amrita Paresch Patel, Principal, Uma Arts and Nathiba Commerce Mahila College, Gandhinagar will help the young research scholars and faculties in enriching their knowledge in the areas of humanities particularly, English Literature and Philosophy.

It is a matter of pride and pleasure for us that the PREFACE of this book is written by Shri Mohanlal Patel, Former Principal, Sarva Vidyalaya, Kadi and President, Kadva Patidar Kelavani Uttejak Mandal, Kadi. Shri Mohanlal Patel, apart from being a leading Gujarati litterateur, has written books of history and biographies. To this day there are 65 books to his credit. For Sarva Vidyalaya Kelavani Mandal, he has written three extremely valuable books namely (1) Pragnadeep Chhaganbha (1987) (2) Dhruvtarak Sri Maneklal Patel (2013) (3) Sarva Vidyalaya Kelavani Mandal, Kadi ane Gandhinagar ane Kadva Patidar Kelavani Uttejak Mandal, Kadi – Sankshipt Itihas (2015)

Less known aspects of his personality is that he is a scholar of English literature. He has penned four books in English too. Amrita Patel, knowing this, requested him to write the preface for her book. She finds herself blessed by getting the erudite preface of her book written by Shri Mohanlal Patel. The Preface will introduce the readers about the content of this book in detail.

I wish Amrita Patel all the best for her work.

Place : Gandhinagar

Date : 8th February, 2019

Shri Vallabhbhai M. Patel

President

Kadi Sarva Vishwa Vidyalaya, Gandhinagar

Chariman,

Sarva Vidyalaya Kelavani Mandal,

Kadi and Gandhinagar



INTRODUCTION

Generally Wordsworth is acquainted with our readers as an eminent poet of lyrical ballads, odes and sonnets. All touchingly simple, but overflowing with powerful emotions. Regarding simplicity in his style, he, in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (a joint endeavour with Coleridge) has said 'The principal object then proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by them...'

With regard to poetic diction Wordsworth has said, 'There neither is nor be essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition'. It is well said that in this very simplicity lies Wordsworth's distinction.

He has strictly maintained his belief of simplicity in his poems of lyrical ballads, odes and sonnets, but in composition of poems with mystical experiences his belief of simplicity goes out of his control. It becomes nearly impossible for him to describe his mystical experience in the language of daily usage. This can well be judged from his following lines:

'.....I have learned

To look on nature, not in as the hour of
Thoughtless youth; but hearing often times
The still sad music of humanity
Not harsh, no grunting though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the 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'

Keeping the above lines in mind one can say that while writing about mystical experiences there is no go for simplicity for Wordsworth. His simple style is naturally converted into difficult one.

It is well said about Wordsworth that many times he had a vision of reality that was unique and extraordinary. Even as he saw or came into contact with an ordinary object, his imagination and intuitive power helped him to bridge the gulf between the ordinary and extraordinary phenomena of the world. Accordingly a simple thing was turned into a difficult one. Through this study, Amrita tries to reveal how Wordsworth's love for Nature leads him to have elevating mystical experiences of serious import.

As it is necessary to know Wordsworth a poet dealing with mystical experiences, the reader must be in know of the concept of mysticism. Keeping this in view, Amrita has left no stone unturned to make the said concept very clear. Beginning with the denotation of the said concept with a word in Greek mythology, and then mentioning about some rites and rituals to be performed by mystics laden with certain 'Do's' and 'Don'ts', Amrita, taking some views of certain thinkers and critics has come to some connotations of the present day. In other words we can say that Amrita has provided key to mysticism for readers and has made Wordsworth easy to understand.

Referring to the reason how Wordsworth becomes difficult poet, Amrita quotes Caroline with these words: 'Mysticism is the most salient feature of Wordsworth's poetry, for he was one who saw, whose inward eye was focused to visions scarce dreamt by men. It is because of the strangeness and unfamiliarity of his vision that he is a difficult poet to understand...'

Referring to comparison between Wordsworth and Browning as difficult poets Caroline Spurgeon says, 'People talk of the difficulty of Browning, but he is easy reading compared with a great deal of Wordsworth...'

I am afraid to say that Caroline Spurgeon is not thoroughly right in her belief regarding Browning's style. The following lines of

Browning's poem in which he has paid tribute to John Keats will go against Caroline's belief

Hobbs hints blue
 Nobbs prints blue
 Both gorge
 What porridge had John Keats?

Sometimes Browning is so much obscure that it becomes very difficult to follow him. The above lines are as such. In these lines there is a complex analogy among fishermen, the producers of Murex (a kind of colour of very high value yielding purple dye), traders, who grab great profit due to low-price deal with fishermen, poetry-pirates, who earn much material gain through imitation of Keats's poetry and John Keats who is deprived of gain of real right.

Here it is needless to say that Keats's poetry is compared with murex colour.

In this study Amrita states her objective thus: "The chief interest here lies in looking at mysticism as a form of experience and as a type of consciousness and not in any kind of theory given by any practical thinker". Moreover she says, "This study of mystical experience in Wordsworth's poetry is of necessity, highly selective, I have tried to select, analyze and study well-known passages from Wordsworth's long and short poems which have been known for the treatment of mystical experience in them. I have also included a consideration of lines which reveal mystical glimpses on the part of the poet."

Amrita has tabulated these experiences into three categories viz (1) Pure mystical experiences (2) Semi mystical experiences and (3) Mystical glimpses. All the categories comprise of age group of children, adolescence and adulthood. They are selected from *Tintern Abbey*, *The Prelude*, *The Excursion*, *The Recluse*, lyrical ballads, odes and sonnets.

According to Amrita's belief, the character like 'The Wanderer' serves as suitable personae for articulating the poet's own state of mind and consciousness.

Amrita has drawn some modes of pure mystical experiences of

Wordsworth from some passages of his major poems. Some of them are a feeling of transcendence from ordinary life, loss of bodily awareness of existence when something was revealed in mind, experience that helps to find a kind of unity even in things ordinarily opposed or incompatible in the world. Ordinarily these experiences are not easy to communicate in ordinary language. Wordsworth himself says about his condition in these words: 'I only remember that it was a thing divine. All that took place within me came and went as in a moment'.

According to Amrita *Tintern Abbey* lines reveal almost all the major features of a mystical experience like transcended experience of joy and harmony, timelessness and communion with the Universal Spirit. Describing the plight of semi-mystical experience Amrita has said, "To speak of a semi-mystical experience in detail we might say that during the moments of such an experience, a mystic would transcend the limitations of sense and perceive something that lies beyond the ken of human intelligence or mind, but soon after that he would return to reality and speak of that which he experienced for a few moments. Such an experience might be described as a borderland experience."

In this book three episodes from *The Prelude* are selected to make the concept of semi-mystical experience clear. They are wood-cock capturing, plundering of raven nest and stealing of boat.

At the first instance as the boy does not lose the awareness of his physical existence, the semi-ness of the mystical experience is clear. The modes of the experiences subsequently followed are very unusual in man's life. Therefore, these modes become features of mysticism. During the episode of wood-cock capturing the boy feels somebody chasing him silently among the solitary hills-low breathing following him-and sounds of undistinguishable motion steps pursuing him. In the episode of plundering the raven nest the boy hears voice in the midst of nature. Everything around him is changed, he hears a voice from the loud dry wind, the sky appears unusual and the motion of the clouds becomes uneven. In the boat- stealing episode the boy saw the mountains. A huge cliff up reared its head. It rose up high to reach among the

stars, and like a living thing chased him...

As the boy did not forget his physical existence, he had to undergo many painful modes of mind after the semi-mystical experiences.

With regard to this state of mind after semi-mystic experience, Wordsworth himself says, "After I had seen that spectacle, for many days my brain worked with a dim and undermined sense of unknown modes of being in my thoughts there was a darkness, call it solitude or blank desertion, no familiar shapes of heavenly objects, images of trees, of sea or sky, no colours of green trees; but huge and mighty forms that do not live like living men moved slowly through my mind by day and were the trouble of my dreams."

Though painful plight of mind, these semi-mystical experiences have yielded to joy, calmness and many other pleasant modes of mind. The well known lyrical poem, *To the Cuckoo* is one of the best poems having semi-mystical experience of Wordsworth. At the time while Wordsworth was lying restlessly on the grass, he heard the voice (cry) of some cuckoo. The bird was unseen. Only the cry of it brought for the poet the remembrances of hours of his childhood during which he had experienced extra-ordinary joy, calm and transcendence. According to Wordsworth the bird brought him 'a tale of visionary hours.' Only a moment's event had converted the poet's restlessness into the effect of powerful joy and calm. The poem *To my sister* has inspired Wordsworth to say, 'One moment now may give us more than years of toiling reason.'

Here hardly it becomes necessary to say that during these semi-mystical experiences the physical existence of the persons concerned was not forgotten.

In chapter 4, Amrita has tried to explain the flashes of mystical glimpses with great care. Here the experiences are simply glimpses of the ultimate truth which Wordsworth calls them as 'a presence'. During such an experience for a moment or two a person gets a vision of something higher and more sublime than what one feels or sees in day-to-day life and is made aware of the working of a higher power or

'presence' in the universe. Wordsworth believed that when he grew and recollected those moments, that recollection itself provided strength to his mind and imagination. And they also helped him together faith in the greatness of the human spirit.

Sometimes a borderline experience in childhood transcends and captures the imagination of adulthood and becomes the cause of experience in mystical glimpses.

We can see these glimpses experienced by Wordsworth at the time of repeated visit to Tintern Abbey. The place always gave him an experience of quietness, peace and seclusion. The natural surrounding gave an opportunity to perceive a unity in different elements of nature. He saw a harmony between the earth and the sky. Opposites are thus reconciled.

Glimpses of mystical experience in Wordsworth's personal life become an important phase of poetry. This phase becomes important and much effective because it is the product of Wordsworth's personal feeling. This phase becomes loud in his short lyrical poems. They are appreciated as best emotional poems.

Lucy poems, I wondered lonely as a cloud, Night Place, Ode on Westminster Bridge, The Solitary Reaper, Ode on intimations of immortality are wonderful poems of experiences of mystical glimpses.

[With all her scholarship in English literature Amrita Paresh Patel is known as an eminent educationist. She has bent towards philosophy and spirituality. In preparing this book she has rendered great service to the fields of literature, philosophy and mysticism. This book contributes to motivate the young research scholars for in depth study in these areas of scholarship. While reading this valuable script with gratitude, I was becoming sure of the fact that 'Leader is not Lost' in the vast realm of English literature.]

Ahmadabad
25-4-2017

- Mohanlal Patel

PREFACE

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) is a well known poet who has contributed in changing the course of literary trend in England from Neo-Classicism to Romanticism. He is generally known as a nature poet who has portrayed vividly in his poems, various incidents that might have taken place in ordinary lives of people, in the background of nature in the simple language.

He found new joy in the common place things in Nature and in the Human Mind and this was his mission to find and to communicate.

Wordsworth's approach to Nature, his concepts of the impact of Nature on Human Mind and soul as expressed in his different poems have been discussed and interpreted in varied ways by numerous scholars and critics from the time Wordsworth started publishing his poems. ✓

But an in-depth study of Wordsworth's poetry bears the testimony that behind the narration of natural objects and incidents of routine human life his purpose was to display the subtle effects of nature on man which can lead him to be in close contact with the Universal Spirit, Unnamed Presence of God. In many poems he delineates his experiences of vision of reality which do not fall within the limits of normal experiences of men. Such experiences may be called unique. It seems, often, with the aid of his intuitive power he could bridge the gulf between the ordinary and extra ordinary phenomena of the world. This has led many scholars to suggest that there is a markedly mystical strain in his poetry.

The purpose of this book is to show this perspective which can be helpful to young researchers in interpreting Wordsworth's poetry in the current era of multidisciplinary studies as it includes the study of literature as well as philosophy and mysticism. ✓

Wordsworth's poetry requires a thorough critical analysis in order to have a practical approach to it. All relevant lines and stanzas of selected poems of Wordsworth are critically analyzed for readers to

develop better understanding of this aspect of his poetic contribution. For this reason, I am grateful to Dr. P.K.Thaker for motivating me to undergo this study in detail.

I am thankful to Shri Mohanlal Patel, President, Kadva Patidar Kelavani Uttejak Mandal, Kadi and also one of the foremost Gujarati writers for consenting to write the PREFACE of this book. At the age of 91 years, bearing with his severe eye trouble, he stuck to his word and has written a scholarly PREFACE to this book. Very graciously, with his extensive experience of more than six decades of creative and critical writing, he has judiciously and prudently mapped the work in a few pages to initiate the readers to the main course of the work. I know no words to express my gratefulness to this entire selfless gesture of Shri Mohanlal Patel Saheb.

At this point, I take an opportunity to express my gratitude to Sri Vallabhbhai M. Patel, President, Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya and Chairman, Sarva Vidyalaya Kelavani Mandal, Kadi and Gandhinagar for publishing this book. I hope I may have worked to fulfill his expectations.

I am also thankful to Manibhai Prajapati, Director, Publication Cell, Kadi Sarva Vishwavidyalaya for providing valuable suggestions as and when they are needed during the entire procedure of publication of this book.

- Amrita Paresh Patel

CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
2.	Pure Mystical Experiences	13
3.	Semi Mystical Experiences	27
4.	Mystical Glimpses	49
5.	Conclusion	68
	Bibliography	80



I worshipp'd then among the depths of things
As my soul bade me: could I then take part
In aught but admiration, or be pleased
With any thing but humbleness and love;
I felt, and nothing else; I did not judge,
I never thought of judging, with the gift
Of all this glory fill'd and satisfied.

Wordsworth (*Prelude*, XI. 232 – 40)

Chapter : 1

INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth is acclaimed as one of the greatest and the most original of English poets. He is frequently compared with Shakespeare and Milton, and still his eminence is thought to be entirely distinct and peculiar to himself. Once Coleridge told Richard Sharp,

Wordsworth is a poet, a most original poet. He no more resembles Milton than Milton resembles Shakespeare – no more resembles Shakespeare than Shakespeare resembles Milton. He is himself and, I dare affirm that, he will hereafter be admitted as the first and greatest philosophical poet, the only man who has effected a complete and constant synthesis of thought and feeling and combined them with poetic forms, with the music of pleasurable passion, and with Imagination or the modifying power in that highest sense of the word, in which I have ventured to oppose it to Fancy.

(Quoted in W.J.Harvey and Richard Gravil, eds 38-39)

Matthew Arnold affirms the proper position of Wordsworth in the history of English poetry. According to him Wordsworth's achievement in poetry is comparable to that of Shakespeare or Milton. Arnold finds in his poems qualities of enduring freshness which give them a distinction of their own. (78-80)

According to S.R.Swaminathan, among the English poets of Romantic Movement, "Wordsworth occupies the position of a venerable bard; he is unique in the depth of his contemplative experience, his anxiety *concerning the human condition and its complexities of birth, death and suffering.*" (Web)

Jeffrey Side, in his study on Wordsworth, which he did in 2006, finds that Wordsworth's poetry is still a continuing influence. He thinks

that "... Wordsworth's aesthetic, and his beliefs about the subject-object relationship, as substantially empiricist. However, it is not claimed that Wordsworth is consistently empiricist in the way that a philosopher might aspire to be: indeed, there is a place to be found within this argument for the recognition of his transcendentalism."(9-10)

A question that may arise is: What is there in Wordsworth's poetry which sets him off from his predecessors and his contemporaries? Unlike others, he wrote poems on incidents that might have taken place in ordinary lives of people, and in his poems he used simple language of conversation. One may say that in this very simplicity lies Wordsworth's distinction. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he wrote,

The principal object, then, proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect, and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature, chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. (Thomas Hutchinson ed. 734)

His constant exploration into the thoughts and feelings of people led him to a concept of the universe which could not be formed by simple reasoning. Lascelles Abercrombie believes that in his poems, "he is inviting us to share with him the grandeur of his experience, the experience of a mind that has learned, by feeling and imagination and reason all combined, to live in the unity of infinite existence, in the creation (as he says) which the world and mind blend to accomplish." (115)

In many of his poems, he has successfully explored states of his own mind from childhood to adulthood. In the Preface to *The Excursion*, for example, he speaks of

“... the mind of Man – / My haunt, and the main region of my song.” (PW 590 : 40-41)

As a result, many thinkers and critics look upon Wordsworth as a poet of rare psychological interest and insights. But his constant search into his own mind also led him to a contemplation of such states of consciousness as were highly peculiar, if not extraordinary. The following well-known Fenwick note tells us how he himself must have passed through such experiences:

Nothing was more difficult for me in childhood than to admit the notion of death as a state applicable to my own being ... it was not so much from the source of animal vivacity that my difficulty came as from a sense of the indomitableness of the spirit within me. I used to brood over the stories of Enoch and Elijah, and almost to persuade myself that, whatever might become of others, I should be translated in something of the same way into heaven. (JonathanWordsworth 97)

Besides his interest in exploring his own mind, Wordsworth was also interested in studying the minds and experiences of others, especially those that were exceptional in range, character and intensity. According to him, everybody as a human being , had a potentiality to have unusual experiences. It was due to this faith in the power of the human mind that we find in his poems frequent references to and recapitulations of experiences which do not fall within the bounds of normal experiences of men. Such experiences have been characterized by some critics as mystical.

Many times Wordsworth had a vision of reality that was unique and extraordinary. Even as he saw, or came into contact with, an ordinary object, his esamplastic imagination and intuitive power helped him to bridge the gulf between the ordinary and extraordinary phenomena of the world. As a result, scholars have sometimes suggested that there is a markedly mystical strain in his poetry. Patrick Grant, for example, writes that “Wordsworth took ‘primary imagination’ as his theme: that is, the primordial, creative contact of human mind and nature. But in

the very act of thus thematising 'primary imagination', Wordsworth's poetry makes clear the gulf that can exist between capturing such experience in words and following out its consequences theologically, as the mystics advise". (32)

Caroline Spurgeon, in her book *Mysticism in English Literature* has tried to examine "the chief English writers – men of letters and poets – whose inmost principle is rooted in mysticism, or whose work is on the whole so permeated by mystical thought." (12) She defines mysticism as "a temper rather than a doctrine, an atmosphere rather than a system of philosophy." (2)

According to her,

The true mystic... in the full sense of the term, is one who knows there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence, and he knows it by the most perfect of all tests for the person concerned, because he has felt it. True mysticism ...is an experience and life. It is an experimental science.... As distinguished ...from the mystical thinker or philosopher, the practical mystic has direct knowledge of a truth which for him is absolute.... Among English writers and poets the only two who fulfill this strict definition of a mystic are Wordsworth and Blake. (11)

Further, commenting on Wordsworth as a mystic, she writes,

Mysticism is the most salient feature of Wordsworth's poetry, for he was one who saw, whose inward eye was focused to visions scarce dreamt of by men. It is because of the strangeness and unfamiliarity of his vision that he is a difficult poet to understand, and the key to the understanding of him is a mystic one. People talk of the difficulty of Browning, but he is easy reading compared with a great deal of Wordsworth.... Wordsworth was not only a poet, he was also a seer, a mystic and a practical psychologist, with an amazingly subtle mind, and an unusual capacity for feeling.... It was not the beauty

of Nature which brought him joy and peace, but the life in Nature. He himself had caught a vision of that life, he knew it and felt it, and it transformed the whole existence for him.
(59-60)

Writing about the religious poetry in English literature, Helen Gardner comments, "To define religious poetry as poetry that treats of revelation and of man's response to revelation does not equate religious poetry with Christian poetry; but the great majority of English religious poems on this definition will be found to be Christian poems in some sense." (135)

She feels that during the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, "Religious poetry becomes the poetry of personal faith, personal discovery and personal doubt. Religious experience finds sublime expression in many passages of Wordsworth's *The Prelude*." (162)

Wordsworth's poetry, therefore, could provide an excellent field for an exploration of the mystical experience as expressed in poetry. However, before proceeding to study and analyze Wordsworth's poems from this angle, we may try to understand the nature of mystical experience as such.

The word 'mysticism' has been used to refer to the ecstatic experiences of the sages. At other times, it is thought to refer to experiences that are vague, sentimental or without a base in either facts or logic. Sometimes the word is also associated with certain types of psychological states occurring during sick physical conditions. So, we may say that while for some it means a trans conditional state which one finds in a contemplative thinker, the word is also used to speak about occultism or spiritualism or magic. So, first of all, it is essential to explain precisely what we mean by the term 'mysticism' in the present study.

The origin of the word 'mystic' lies in the Greek 'Mystery Religions'. The mystic was one who had been initiated into 'mysteries',

he had the 'secret' and he was called a 'mystes'. Through initiating ceremonies he used to get a secret wisdom about Divine things and he was forbidden to speak about it. The meaning of the Greek word 'mysterion' (mystery), is to shut the lips or eyes. Then, as time passed, the word came to have an extended meaning which carries with it several connotations.

Within the limited scope of the present study, some of the stages may be considered as they are described by John Ferguson, in the evolution of the concept of 'mysticism' and the experience it embodies, which should enable us to define the main focus for examining mystical experience as a universal phenomenon in general, and Wordsworth's mystical experience in particular. (126)

Dionysius the Areopagite's mystical theology influenced Christian thinkers of the Medieval Age in their use of the word. Dionysius and other writers of his age used the term 'theologia mystica', to talk of a kind of insight and knowledge about God. Medieval scholars approached mysticism from the theological point of view. John Ferguson quotes Thomas Aquinas, according to whom mysticism means "the knowledge of God through experience." (Ferguson 126)

Goethe, as quoted by Ferguson, describes mysticism as "the scholastic of the heart, the dialectic of the feelings." (126)

In this context, John Ferguson thinks that Victor Cousin's opinion is important, where he says, "Mysticism consists in substituting direct inspiration for indirect, ecstasy for reason, rapture for philosophy." (126)

Both these writers have given importance to feeling rather than to rationality in characterizing mystic experiences.

In order to express their experiences exactly, the mystics often make use of symbols. Symbolism is one of the most commonly used devices in describing mystical experiences. Every aspect of 'Truth' apprehended by human intelligence must be a small part of a deeper Truth. By taking refuge in symbolism, mystics can catch a reflection of 'Truth' for which they do not have other means to talk about. In

this context, Miss Underhill writes:

All kinds of symbolic language come naturally to the articulate mystic, who is usually a literary artist as well; so naturally, that he sometimes forgets to explain that his utterance is but symbolic; a desperate attempt to translate the truth of that world into the beauty of this. It is here that mysticism joins hands with music and poetry.... Symbol ...the clothing which the spiritual borrows from the material plane – is a form of artistic expression. That is to say, it is not literal but suggestive: though the artist who uses it may sometimes lose sight of this distinction. (95)

According to Caroline Spurgeon, descriptions by the poets of mystical experiences are peculiarly valuable because “the essence of mysticism is to believe that everything we see and know is symbolic of something greater, mysticism is on one side the poetry of life. For poetry, also consists in finding resemblances, and universalizes the particular with which it deals.” (12)

A poet is different from a philosopher because his poem touches us more profoundly than the direct lesson of an essay on morality, written by a philosopher, who appeals to our reason, while the poet moves our feelings. Bradley, while commenting upon Wordsworth as a mystic, notes that Wordsworth is not a philosopher as described by Dean Church because if it were so, he should have become a philosopher rather than a poet. (129)

In this sense, Wordsworth's expressions of mystical experiences may be especially considered valuable and interesting.

So far as the present work is concerned, the chief interest lies in looking at mysticism as a form of experience and as a type of consciousness, and not in any kind of theory given by any particular thinker. Essentially speaking the mystics are not concerned with rites and rituals of a particular sect of religion, nor are they concerned with particular philosophical doctrines of any institutional religion. The mystics are true to their own experiences, which sublimate their consciousness

and give them rapture, which is caused by their contact with the ultimate Reality. Mystical experience is religious in the broad sense of the word. The experiences of devotees of any institutional religion can be mystical and valid. At the same time, persons who cannot be labelled as devotees of this type of institutional religion can also have such experiences. As Evelyn Underhill puts it, "No deeply religious man is without a touch of mysticism; and no mystic can be other than religious, in the psychological if not in the theological sense of the word." (84).

However, the mystics' religion is a religion of consciousness. The mystics' vision becomes more comprehensive; and through their experiences they find aspects of truth which are not yet apprehended by the rational intellect. Their insights have the appearance of 'something given', a sort of revelation coming from something outside of one's self. Hence it is that the mystics often find it hard to put into proper words their experiences. Nevertheless, they are always certain about the authenticity of their experiences. Despite the obvious difficulty of putting into language of everyday life their peculiar mystical experiences, the mystics in different countries and different ages have often tried to articulate them. And their utterances have naturally taken different forms.

It may be relevant to note here that at the primary level of consciousness, the knowledge of something which is real is without form, and so it cannot be grasped rationally. To be intelligible in words and concepts, it must pass through mind. Mental attitudes of human beings are determined by their environment. So, as the clear and formless vision, seen at the primary level of awareness, passes through mind, it becomes distorted and coloured. For this reason, we find different schools of thought, theology and philosophy. This, naturally leads to certain apparent divergences in writings and utterances of the mystics, even though they talk about the same Universal Truth. However, the underlying unity and harmony in the accounts of these mystics can be easily seen when we note how, notwithstanding superficial differences, all these accounts reveal certain common characteristics, either of

consciousness or modes of perception :

1. The essence of mysticism lies in feeling; the mystics have a noetic quality. They can clearly see with the help of intuition aspects of Truth which are not revealed to the reasoning intellect. This insight gives them a sense of authority. William James dwells at length on this noetic quality of the mystical experience in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. (300)
2. During the mystical state, the mystics experience a kind of forgetfulness of their physical existence, a transcendence from the ordinary plane of living, and a sense of timelessness.
3. Related to this is the feeling of isolation of the soul from the rest of creation. In the sublime loneliness of a mystical experience, the soul is lost entirely in the contemplation of the One Universal Spirit. During this experience, the mystics come to know that the ego is not their true self. They undergo a feeling of inner transformation that takes them very close to that ultimate Truth which they aspire to know and experience. At a certain stage, they feel a merging of their individual selves into that Truth, which is described differently by various mystics.
4. Mystical experiences are accompanied by an intense feeling of joy, liberation, ecstasy together with tranquility, and a resolution of contraries. The seeming opposites and paradoxes of the wordly life are dissolved into a higher harmony, and unity, and one Divine life is felt to underlie all the diverse forms of mundane existence.
5. Mystical experiences cannot continue for a long time, but during whatever short time they last, the mystics remain in a state of extraordinarily intense and vivid awareness of the Reality behind all appearances.
6. Mystical experiences cannot be easily made intelligible to

those who do not have this kind of experience. For this reason, they often remain ineffable. The mystics have to resort to poetic modes of expression to talk about their experiences.

In the light of the characteristics of a typical mystical experience mentioned above, it would be easier for us to identify and study the descriptions of mystical states of mind that we find in Wordsworth's poetry. It is possible to divide the relevant passages into three broad groups according to the degree of completeness with which they deal with the mystical experience. In some of them, we find almost all the characteristics. Such passages can be described as expressions of pure mystical experiences, while in some others; there is a reference to a few of the characteristics. These experiences may be considered as semi-mystical. At other times, still, Wordsworth speaks of states of mind which we could denote as glimpses of a mystical kind. We shall study and analyze a selection of passages from Wordsworth's poetry which deal with these types of mystical experiences in three successive chapters of this dissertation.

This study of the mystical experience in Wordsworth's poetry is, of necessity, highly selective. I have tried to select, analyze and study well-known passages from Wordsworth's long and short poems which have been known for the treatment of the mystical experience in them. A consideration of lines which reveal mystical glimpses on the part of the poet, are also included here.

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Chapter : 2

PURE MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

In chapter-1 some of the salient features are identified which characterize a mystical experience in the light of the views expressed by well-known philosophers and thinkers. In this chapter a few passages from Wordsworth's major poems are studied which display a large number of these features, and which may, therefore, be accepted as expressions of pure mystical experience. We can also notice that it is chiefly the presence of such passages in Wordsworth's poems that has led thinkers to include Wordsworth in their scholarly studies of mysticism.

The very first passage we may note is, obviously, the celebrated description of an extraordinary experience by Wordsworth in *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour* :

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: - that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, -
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :

.....

..... And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the 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.

(PW 164 : 36-46, 93-102)

We find several phrases in these lines like 'the burthen of the mystery', 'this unintelligible world', 'a presence' and 'a sense sublime of something', which clearly show that Wordsworth is trying to describe that which is difficult to explain in exact logical terms, and that he is talking of an experience and a feeling which are not easy to communicate in ordinary language. If this experience is not easily accessible to intelligence, to logic, what is there that gives Wordsworth the basis to believe in that 'presence' or in 'an aspect more sublime'? It seems that it is the intuition of this sublimity or 'presence' that provides him the authority to believe in this experience, which, as he himself puts it in different terms, is not ordinary but transcendent. The use of phrases like 'gift of aspect more sublime', 'blessed mood', 'elevated thoughts', and 'a sense sublime' show that Wordsworth experienced a feeling of transcendence from ordinary life.

During the moments of this experience of 'the blessed mood', Wordsworth writes:

"... the breath of this corporeal frame / And even the motion
 of our human blood / Almost suspended." (PW.164 : 43-45)

These lines clearly indicate Wordsworth's forgetfulness of his physical existence. In continuation of the lines quoted above, he writes :

"... We are laid asleep / In body, and become a living soul."
 (PW 164 : 45-46)

It is as though a new world was opened up before the poet, 'something' was revealed to him when he had lost the awareness of his bodily existence.

Wordsworth experienced 'a presence' or 'a sense sublime' in every object of the earth. That experience of the presence gave him joy. He saw that 'presence', that 'sense sublime' 'interfused' everywhere. It was there in the setting sun or in the ocean, in the air or in the sky and also in the mind of man; it rolled through all objects of the universe. This experience, it appears, helped the poet to find a kind of unity even in the things ordinarily opposed or incompatible with the world.

Nigel Foxell has analyzed lines 36-48 of this poem in detail in his book, *Ten Poems Analysed*.

Commenting on these lines and particularly on the phrase 'that blessed mood', Nigel Foxell writes,

The vision, of which nature is both the source and the object, cannot be directly described; it is as if a man, led by Love, were to carry a burden from which he is released only when about to faint. He lies down and, as his body falls asleep, his mind rejoices in mystic communion with the universe.

Our becoming a bodiless spirit (lines 46-7) depends in the first instance on our receiving bodily sensations (lines 28-9). Wordsworth, in order to convince us of this paradox, links the two extremes as gradually as possible. Thus, the 'purer mind' of (lines 28-31) is home of the 'feelings' in (lines 31-6), and the human 'love' (line 36), which takes us unobtrusively from the moral to the spiritual plane, is linked with the 'affections' of (lines 36-50) which in their turn 'lead us on' to love the Wordsworthian equivalent of God. (133)

Nigel Foxell finds Christian echoes in lines 41-46 of this poem
He writes,

Wordsworth introduces the 'breath' motif (with which

motion is closely associated), to be repeated in (lines 53-8, 89-103 and 137-143). Cf. *The Prelude* I. lines 401-7.... In lines 44-7 Wordsworth seems to be recalling Genesis ii.7, where the connection between matter and mind is as close as in Hartley: 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.' Wordsworth's 'living soul' is in communion with 'the life of things'. ... Wordsworth says '*along the heart*' to suggest a coast, and 'corporeal frame' rather than 'body' because it is nearer to 'this frame of things' (*Prelude* XIV. 450); consequently 'breath' and 'the motion of our human blood' are the life-symbols of the microcosm, and equivalent to winds and the rotation of the Earth in the macrocosm. (134)

Nigel Foxell also tries to find a Christian explanation of Wordsworth's experience of 'a presence'. Commenting on lines 94-103, he writes that

... 'presence', as is clear from the three nouns in apposition to it ('sense', 'motion', 'spirit'), means the soul of the universe under its communicative aspect and corresponds to God the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father to the disciples of Jesus (John xiv. 26). Note that the 'presence' is 'felt' and 'disturbs'; it is therefore like a wind that blows on Wordsworth; cf. Acts ii. 2-4: 'And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' This mystic element also permeated the Genesis image in lines 42-50; cf. the Baptism Service: 'O merciful God, grant that the old Adam in this child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him. (135)

Ninian Smart quotes the following lines from *Tintern Abbey*:

The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the 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.

(PW.164 : 91-102)

He thinks that in these lines Wordsworth is “giving his experience something like a religious interpretation.” (667)

The foregoing comments clearly reveal the essentially religious character of the experience, described in the *Tintern Abbey* lines. Sectarian considerations apart, the lines celebrate an ineffable and transcendental mood of communion with the universal Spirit revealed to the poet’s mind in the presence of the natural elements.

According to Jonathan Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey* contains ...the grandest of all Wordsworth’s pantheist affirmations”, and he says that *Tintern Abbey* “remains an astonishing context in which to claim the ability to perceive and embody the presence of God. There is no doubt that, that is what Wordsworth is claiming, and that he takes the claim seriously. (24)

Jonathan Wordsworth also quotes lines 94-103 and observes,

Wordsworth is resting his continued love of the natural world firmly on the presence of the One Life,” and referring to lines 38-51 of this poem, he writes that here there is “the beautiful and compelling enactment of mystical experience the moment where if anywhere in his poetry Wordsworth carries us with him to the borders of vision, creating in his rhythms a sense of what it might be like to lose one’s bodily awareness, see into the life of things. (25)

Helen Darbishire thinks that *Tintern Abbey* "...will generally come at the point where man and nature meet, the point in Wordsworth's inner experience where poetry is born". She also quotes Wordsworth who said himself, "In poetry it is the imaginative only, viz. that which is conversant with, or turns upon, infinity, that powerfully affects me." (57-58)

Helen Darbishire speaks of three major strands as they are found in Wordsworth's thought. She writes,

These three strands in his thought seem to be, of many strands, the most important, and they are naturally interwoven in the form as well as the content of his greatest poetry: the vital significance of sense-experience, the assurance of the mind's intuition of the infinite, and a conviction of the inevitable, resistless movement in nature and man towards some unseen spiritual goal. (163)

This common, comprehensive urge for a final merging into the universal spirit, shared equally by man and nature, finds an eloquent expression in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. Hence it is that Happold is prompted to call Wordsworth a nature-mystic. In lines 96-102 of this poem, Happold feels, there is a "fresh vision of the phenomenal world." (92)

John Ferguson also selects lines 100-103 of *Tintern Abbey* as an instance that shows that "Wordsworth's mysticism has a strongly impersonal element." (Ferguson 211)

Moreover, lines 89-112 of this poem are also included in *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse*. This inclusion, it seems, shows the popularity of the poem as Wordsworth's expression of a mystical experience. (D.H.S.Nicholson 121)

Perhaps it is worth noting that as it so often happens with Wordsworth, the experience commemorated here in *Tintern Abbey* is a part of his recollection of earlier experiences; he is writing about a 'presence' which he 'has felt' on earlier occasions and which he now

recalls with a vivacity and clarity that almost makes it an experience in the present. It is this linking of the past and the present, and a little later on the poem, of the future which makes the experience deeply spiritual and enduring. In this context, Nigel Foxell's views are relevant. He writes, "*Tintern Abbey*, being an expression of faith and delight in universal harmony, never mentions one thing without linking it to another. Thus, the introductory section takes two separate points of *time* and links them to the same *place*." (128)

He writes,

Tintern Abbey is concerned with universals When Wordsworth returned to Tintern his eyes did not wander spontaneously or at random but were intent on recapturing the memories of his former visit ... This identification of past and present in the Wye creates an impression of stability in nature with which the changes in himself will be contrasted. (129)

Thus these *Tintern Abbey* lines articulate an experience which reveals almost all the major features of a mystical experience, like transcendence, ineffability, experience of joy and harmony, timelessness and communion with the Universal Spirit. ✓

An experience, closely comparable to this one, in its content, and at points, even in syntax, is described in the following passage from *The Prelude* :

I felt the sentiment of Being spread
O'er all that moves, and all that seemeth still,
O'er all, that, lost beyond the reach of thought
And human knowledge, to the human eye
Invisible, yet liveth to the heart,
O'er all that leaps, and runs, and shouts, and sings,
Or beats the gladsome air, o'er all that glides
Beneath the wave, yea, in the wave itself
And mighty depth of waters. Wonder not

If such my transports were; for in all things
 I saw one life, and felt that it was joy.
 One song they sang, and it was audible,
 Most audible then when the fleshly ear,
 O'ercome by grosser prelude of that strain,
 Forgot its functions, and slept undisturb'd.

(BK II : 420-34)

In these lines Wordsworth speaks of his experience when he was seventeen years of age. Wordsworth's use of the phrase, 'bliss ineffable' shows that, once again, he is speaking of an experience which is not easy to articulate in clear logical terms. The poet perceives harmony in discordance in the course of this experience. He feels "the sentiment of Being spread / O'er all that moves and all that seemeth still" (BK II : 420-21) and also in every object under the sun. This blissful perception of harmony or unity in contrasting elements gives him the ability to rise high or to transcend his ordinary existence. He uses the word 'transports' to show this feeling. This vision of one life in all the diverse elements of the earth gives him a highly elevated feeling for which he uses the words 'bliss' and 'joy'.

He also feels that all the objects, now unified, are singing a song which could well be heard when his physical sense of listening forgets its function. When he forgets his physical existence, it is easier for him to hear the song of unity sung by all unified objects. This idea can be linked with the one from *Tintern Abbey*, where he writes :

"...we are laid asleep /In body, and become a living soul."

(PW 164 : 45-46)

In short, this passage, too, carries several features of experience which parallel closely the description of a mystical experience. The poet's experience was ineffable and he found harmony in discordance. This vision of harmony gave him the feeling of transcendence from ordinary life, and of joy, and tranquillity. Wordsworth also seems to

have passed through the experience of the forgetfulness of physical existence for a while.

In the same poem, Wordsworth speaks of his daily routine during the mornings as a school boy. He used to go out earlier and wander for miles near a lake. At that time, once, he writes :

... among the hills I sate
 Alone, upon some jutting eminence
 At the first hour of morning, when the Vale
 Lay quiet in an utter solitude.
 How shall I trace the history, where seek
 The origin of what I then have felt?
 Oft in those moments such a holy calm
 Did overspread my soul, that I forgot
 That I had bodily eyes , and what I saw
 Appear'd like something in myself, a dream.

(BK II, 361-370)

The poet was alone in the midst of nature. The background was very quiet. The 'holy calm' of the world overpowered the poet's soul, and he almost lost the feeling of his physical existence. E. de Selincourt in his notes to the above lines, quotes Wordsworth's I.F. note to *Ode* : *Intimations of Immortality*,

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At that time I was afraid of such processes. In later period of life I have deplored, as we all have reason to do, a subjugation of an opposite character, and have rejoiced over the remembrances, as expressed in the lines "Obstinate questionings etc." To that dreamlike vividness and splendour

which invests objects of sight in childhood, everyone, I believe, if he would look back, could bear testimony. (255)

This note enables us to believe in the authenticity of Wordsworth's later descriptions of mystical experiences in his poems.

In the passage given above from *The Prelude*, too, Wordsworth says, when he forgot his physical existence, he saw something which was higher than the world of appearances; it was like a dream. Everything around him appeared to be that which was not likely to exist in ordinary circumstances. Things around him were dreamlike, unusual and perhaps, ideal. It was quite difficult for him to talk of this unique feeling to others. The difficulty of Wordsworth is expressed in lines that follow :

“ How shall I trace the history, where seek/ The origin
of what I then have felt ?” (BK II : 365-66)

It is worth noting that the theme of solitude and the symbolic use of solitary images and figures in Wordsworth's poetry have often aroused the interest of critics like Geoffrey Durrant. It is their isolation from the rest of mankind, that gives a touch of the sublime to many a Wordsworthian character. However, what is important is that when the same solitude is celebrated by the poet in moments of the deepest spiritual experience, it becomes an aspect of a mystical state of mind. It is Lascelles Abercrombie's belief that

“...to live self-conscious in a mystical experience of the Divine Being of the impersonal world, as transcendent as any mystic's experience of his personal god, is to live as unspeakably alone: and that, for many years, was Wordsworth's experience.”
(130)

It is of such solitariness that Wordsworth sings in the lines:

. among the hills I sate
Alone, upon some jutting eminence
At the first hour of morning, when the Vale
Lay quiet in an utter solitude.

(BK II : 361 – 64)

In BK VIII of *The Prelude*, 'Retrospect – Love of Nature Leading to Love of Mankind', Wordsworth says:

A weight of Ages did at once descend
 Upon my heart; no thought embodied, no
 Distinct remembrances; but weight and power,
 Power growing with the weight: alas ! I feel
 That I am trifling : 't was a moment's pause.
 All that took place within me, came and went
 As in a moment, and I only now
 Remember that it was a thing divine.

(BK VIII : 703-10)

The lines,

. 't was a moment's pause.
 All that took place withing me, came and went
 As in a moment,

(BK VIII : 707-9)

clearly indicate the short-lived nature of this experience: something took place within him, but he knew not what. He simply felt:

A weight of Ages did at once descend
 Upon my heart.

(BK VIII : 703-4)

This shows the ineffability of the experience. What he remembered afterwards was that the experience was a 'thing divine', that is, a transcendental experience.

The phrases, 'no thought embodied' and 'All that took place within me' enable us to think that the whole experience took place within his heart, and his reasoning mind was not active; it was an innermost kind of spiritual experience.

In his Preface to the 1814 edition of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth tells us that *The Excursion* was to be the second part of his long 'philosophic' poem, *The Recluse*. He informs us that the first and the

third parts of *The Recluse* were to "consist chiefly of meditations in the Author's own person; and that in the intermediate part ('The Excursion') the intervention of characters speaking is employed, and something of a dramatic form adopted." (Hutchinson 589)

Further he writes that his intention in this poem was to:

.. . . . describe the Mind and Man
 Contemplating; and who, and what he was-
 The transitory Being that beheld
 This Vision.

(PW 590 : 95-98)

The Excursion, like *The Prelude* could thus be considered to be more or less autobiographical, although Wordsworth has introduced other characters like the Wanderer and the Solitary in it. In one way or the other, these characters serve as suitable personae for articulating the poet's own states of mind and consciousness. For example, the experience from *The Excursion* discussed in the pages that follow is narrated in the third person mode, but it clearly reveals elements and traits closely similar to those which Wordsworth writes about more directly in the first person elsewhere.

In *The Excursion* BK I, 'The Wanderer', the poet speaks of the Wanderer's childhood. As a boy, he lived in the midst of nature. The sights of stars, woods, clouds, the ocean and the earth helped him in getting the experience of oneness in his own being and consciousness :

. Sound needed none,
 Nor any voice of joy, his spirit drank
 The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,
 All melted into him; they swallowed up
 His animal being; in them did he live
 And by them did he live; they were his life.
 In such access of mind, in such high hour
 Of visitation from the living God,
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.

No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;
 Rapt into still communion that transcends
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
 That made him; it was blessedness and love !

(PW 593 : BK I : 205-18)

Here Wordsworth speaks of the spirit of the Wanderer. The lines suggest that it is not an ordinary experience of the physical plane that the Wanderer is talking about. It is an exclusively spiritual experience he has within himself.

The Wanderer perceived unity in apparently discordant elements. His sensation (external experience), soul (inner being) and form melted into him. The external and the internal universes became one. All the three ate away his 'animal being', and made him utterly forgetful of his bodily existence.

This experience was transcendental, as it was 'such high hour / of visitation from the living God'. The narrator's mind, as it were, stopped working, and he was filled with joy as he was engaged in communion with God. That communion was full of quietude, and he came to know of his higher existence. He forgot his routine, during his communion with God, he also forgot to pray or praise, but afterwards he expressed his gratitude to God for enabling him to commune with Him. That experience gave him blessedness and love.

In the five passages from Wordsworth's major poems which we studied in this chapter, we could trace several of the features that characterize a pure mystical experience. May be such passages are rather few in number, but these passages bear witness to the fact that there were times when Wordsworth passed through states of mind to the pure consciousness of the Universal Spirit and unity with it, which have to be described as purely mystical. In the chapter that follows we shall look at a few more passages which narrate experiences of a semi-mystical kind.

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Chapter : 3

SEMI – MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

In Chapter – 2 we saw passages in which Wordsworth's expressions of pure mystical experiences are recorded. In this Chapter, we shall study those passages from Wordsworth's poetry in which his expressions of semi-mystical experiences are found. We may call an experience semi-mystical when only a few of the characteristics of a mystical experience can be noticed in its narration.

To speak of a semi-mystical experience in detail, we might say that during the moments of such an experience, a mystic would transcend the limitations of sense and perceive something that lies beyond the ken of human intelligence or mind, but soon after that he would return to reality and speak of that which he experienced for a few moments. Such an experience might be described as a borderland experience. Wordsworth often reaches the borderline of human reality, and experiences that which is beyond. Hence, he has been considered as more of a border-mystic by thinkers like Bradley and Jonathan Wordsworth.

Bradley says that "the 'mystic', 'visionary', 'sublime', aspect of Wordsworth's poetry must not be slighted." (129)

In Wordsworth's poetry, Bradley writes, "There is always traceable a certain hostility to 'sense'". Bradley obviously does not mean that hostility which is present in all poetic experience and of which Wordsworth was aware. Poets like Wordsworth, Bradley thinks, believe that "The regular action of the senses on their customary material produces A 'tyranny' over the soul." (130)

But according to Bradley, Wordsworth's experience, which particularly shows the mystic strain in his poetry, is of two different

kinds. During the first type, Wordsworth perceives beauty and joy of the universe, he shares that joy and beauty. They, in turn, help him in finding spirituality in this world. Bradley says,

But the hostility to sense is here no more than a hostility to mere sense : this 'spiritual' world is itself the sensible world more fully apprehended," in the other type of experience "there is always some feeling of definite contrast with the limited sensible world. The arresting feature or object is felt in some way *against* this background, or even as in some way a denial of it. Sometimes it is a visionary unearthly light resting on a scene or on some strange figure. Sometimes it is the feeling that the scene or figure belongs to the world of dream. Sometimes it is an intimation of boundlessness, contradicting or abolishing the fixed limits of our habitual view. Sometimes it is the obscure sense of 'unknown modes of being,' unlike the familiar modes. This kind of experience, further, comes often with a distinct shock, which may bewilder, confuse or trouble the mind. (130-31)

Bradley feels that the boundary between these modes of imagination remains wavering.

Jonathan Wordsworth quotes Wordsworth's descriptions of a 'sleeping horse' (in a MS of *The Prelude*), the 'Leech Gatherer' (*The Leech Gatherer*), 'London' (*Upon the Westminster Bridge*), and 'a butterfly' ('To a Butterfly'), and writes that all of these agents who bring for him spiritual purport

...are enviable not just for their peacefulness, but because in their extreme passivity they approach, or seem to approach, a boundary that is the entrance to another world. The analogy with Wordsworth himself is obvious. Clearly there is a sense in which the joy that awaits the butterfly among the trees is the same as the joy that enables the poet of *Tintern Abbey*, after being similarly 'laid asleep in body', to 'see into the life of things'. It is when his functions are 'silently sealed up', like those of the statue horse, that the poet is most aware of the song of the One Life :

. in all things
 I saw one life, and felt that it was joy;
 One song they sang and it was audible –
 Most audible then when the fleshly ear ...
 Forgot its functions and slept undisturbed. (4)

Keeping these ideas in mind, we may now note the examples from Wordsworth's poetry which may be considered as the utterances of his semi-mystical or borderland experiences. *The Prelude* is thought of as an autobiography of the poet's spiritual life. Many experiences, described in this poem, are personal. So, naturally, we might begin our study of this type of experience with examples from *The Prelude*.

The first two passages quoted below are taken from 'the Preamble', BK I, 'Introduction : Childhood and School Time'. In ll. 1-54 of this Book Wordsworth has recorded his feelings in September, 1795, when after the distraction of eight months' residence in London, he was about to enter upon a life of freedom, and was on his way from Bristol to Racedown, where he was to take up his abode with his sister Dorothy. He writes:

. I breathe again;
 Trances of thought and mountings of the mind
 Come fast upon me : it is shaken off,
 As by miraculous gift 'tis shaken off,
 That burthen of my own unnatural self,
 The heavy weight of many a weary day
 Not mine, and such as were not made for me.

(BK I : 19 – 25)

After months of suffocating stay in the hectic, artificial life in the industrialized society of London, Wordsworth was once again breathing the fresh invigorating air of the countryside, in the like of which he had spent his early boyhood. It was like going back to those

early enchanted time when 'heaven lay about him', and his days were filled with a visionary gleam, received from some unknown source.

These lines can be compared with the following lines from *Tintern Abbey*:

. that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened.

(PW 164 : 37 – 41)

After a few lines in this Book, Wordsworth says;

. this hour
Hath brought a gift that consecrates my joy;
For I, me thought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,
A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
O'er things which it had made, and is become
A tempest, a redundant energy
Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
That does not come unrecogniz'd, a storm,
Which, breaking up a long-continued frost
Brings with it vernal promises.

(BK I : 39 – 50)

Here he speaks of a spiritual sublimity and says that there was an energy in his own being, that responded to the breeze outside, which was blowing like 'the sweet breath of Heaven'. 'Creative breeze' is a symbol of creative energy of the soul. It worked as a redundant power and brought so many hopes for Wordsworth. Helen Darbishire writes that 'the air blowing from without passed within him and became a spiritual and creative energy.' (Darbishire 126)

During this experience, the poet felt joy, because he perceived a harmony between the outward world and his own inward life. This perception of harmony helped him in breaking off his passivity, and he was free and full of hopes. He was made aware of this freedom by the 'power' that came as the breeze. This experience, which essentially deals with the revival of his poetic impulse and power, could easily be looked upon as a semi-mystical experience, especially when we realize that it displays features of a mystical kind like a feeling of joy, liberation, and an awareness of a universal harmony.

A few passages from *The Prelude*, BK I are studied here which describe Wordsworth's childhood experiences. These experiences have drawn much attention of his readers because of the intensity of emotions they embody. In the first passage quoted below, Wordsworth speaks of an experience he has when he was nine. He shared the woodcocks which were 'the captive of another's toils' and afterwards he felt as if somebody was chasing him silently:

. when the deed was done
I heard among the solitary hills
Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
Of undistinguishable motion, steps
Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

(BK I : 328 – 32)

The experience took place in the silent background of nature. He was strangely aware of an unknown being chasing him for a kind of admonition over his moral lapse of pilfering someone else's catch. At a certain level, this could be considered as a psychological experience, a state of mind in which the boy was trying to overcome his sense of guilt. At the same time, the experience took him beyond the limits of ordinary existence into a spiritual realm. Commenting on this aspect, Jonathan Wordsworth writes, "The episode is building up to a climax in which intense but ordinary emotions will give place to the something more that above all he seeks and values." (43).

According to Jonathan Wordsworth, who quotes the relevant lines from *The Prelude*, Wordsworth himself has described this 'something' that he valued highly :

Sometimes strong desire
 Resistless overpowered me, and the bird
 Which was the captive of another's toils
 Became my prey; and when the deed was done
 I heard among the solitary hills
 Low breathings coming after me, and sounds
 Of undistinguishable motion, steps
 Almost as silent as the turf they trod.

(1799, i. 42 - 9)

Jonathan Wordsworth adds, "Among the solitary hills the child had approached that borderline of human experience at which sounds of undistinguishable motion can be heard and the supernatural apprehended." (44)

The experience could thus be said to acquire characteristics of a semi-mystical kind, such as, isolation from human society and holding in balance of opposites like 'sound' of motion and 'silent' steps.

Commenting on various connotations of the word 'motion' found in Wordsworth's poems, Helen Darbishire observes,

Wordsworth's use of the word 'motion' is worth watching. Physical movement was to him, as it is perhaps to every imaginative mind, stimulating in a high degree. In Nature he was alive to the perpetual energy of motion. The poet in *The Excursion* longs to surrender his body to the elements,

. . . and reckless of the storm
 Be as a presence and a motion, - one
 Among the many there.

Wordsworth seems to find in motion the very essence of life. God himself, the Divine principle in things, is motion. (127)

A similar experience of his childhood is narrated by Wordsworth in the same book of *The Prelude*. He tells us of his adventure of plundering the raven's nest and his hearing of a voice. Once again, he says, he was alone in the midst of nature. He felt that suddenly everything around him was changed. He heard a strange voice from the loud dry wind, the sky appeared unusual and the 'motion' of the clouds was also uneven:

. Oh ! at that time,
 While on the perilous ridge I hung alone,
 With what strange utterance did the loud dry wind
 Blow through my ears ! the sky seem'd not a sky
 Of earth, and with what motion mov'd the clouds :

 There is a dark
 Invisible workmanship that reconciles
 Discordant elements, and makes them move
 In one society.

(BK I : 346 – 50, 352 – 55)

In this passage, we can identify several characteristics of a mystical experience. The word 'alone' suggests the isolation of the boy from the rest of society. Wordsworth heard 'strange utterances' of the wind, and 'the sky seem'd not a sky / of earth' to him. These details show the ineffable nature of the experience. Moreover, his awareness of 'a dark / Invisible workmanship' enabled him to perceive a unity between the internal world and the external world. He found a harmony in discordant elements of the world.

In the boat-stealing episode, which follows, Wordsworth speaks with clarity and intensity of how such a correction took place and how his moral being was formed and developed under the benign and ever-active influence of some higher spiritual power.

As a boy, Wordsworth stole a boat which was moored at the edge of the lake and started rowing, but when he saw the mountains, it

seemed to him that a huge cliff up reared its head; it rose up between himself and the stars and like a living thing, chased him. The boy went back to the place where he had found the boat, and left it there. Recalling the experience, Wordsworth mentions how:

. after I had seen
 That spectacle, for many days, my brain
 Work'd with a dim and undertermin'd sense
 Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
 There was a darkness, call it solitude,
 Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
 Of hourly objects, images of trees,
 Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
 But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
 Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind
 By day and were the trouble of my dreams.

(BK I : 417 – 27)

In this passage Wordsworth tells us that during that unusual experience, he became dimly aware 'of / unknown modes of being', 'No familiar shapes' were there, but 'huge and mighty forms that do not live / like living men' passed through his mind. From this description it seems that it was an ineffable experience, during which he received a higher spiritual perception and an awareness of a supernatural power. This experience took place while he was cut off from the human society. The solitariness, we may assume, increased the intensity of the experience.

Critics often think of this passage as the description of a psychological experience. The cliff that reared its head was the result of his feeling of fear, caused by the guilt of stealing. However, commenting on these lines, Jonathan Wordsworth writes that

...in this last stage of the episode we stay within the mind of the child, within the brain that had 'worked' ... 'with a dim and undetermin'd sense / of unknown modes of being' ... 'this last magnificent phrase says very little: it is so vague,

so heavy with border negatives. And yet it is highly impressive because in it we respond to the urgency and appropriate unsuccess of a struggle to define the child's experience as it was felt at the time. No adult wisdom is offered, and none would be acceptable. Similarly, the 'huge and mighty forms' have an absolute rightness. The child, tortured by the slowness of their measured motion, is forced by their striding through his head to think of them in human terms; and yet mountains they remain. And so we get the vividly imaginative compromise, powerful above all in its inadequacy: 'that do not live / like living men'. (47-48)

Bradley thinks that in Wordsworth's description of the boat-stealing episode "There is something more than perplexity. There is apprehension, and we are approaching the sublime." (132).

According to Bradley, the sublime is "...a powerful reaction, a rush of self-expansion, or an uplifting, or a sense of being borne out of the self that was checked, or even of being carried away beyond all checks and limits." (52).

It may be necessary to note here that the experiences narrated in the three passages from *The Prelude*, relating to Wordsworth's childhood, are described as the 'spots of time' by Wordsworth himself in BK XI of The Prelude:

There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
A vivifying virtue, whence, depress'd
By false opinion and contentious thought,
Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repair'd
A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
That penetrates, enables us to mount

When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
 This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
 Among those passages of life in which
 We have had deepest feeling that the mind
 Is lord and master, and that outward sense
 Is but the obedient servant of her will.
 Such moments worthy of all gratitude,
 Are scatter'd everywhere, taking their date
 From our first childhood: in our childhood even
 Perhaps are most conspicuous.

(BK XI : 258-77)

Jonathan Bishop thinks that it is not proper to consider these 'spots' as mystical. He writes that in these experiences, "Wordsworth, far from finding himself rapt from the world, discovers a special importance in the details of common life. He does not feel, as the mystic traditionally does, an unqualified joy, nor are claims made of insight into a supernatural reality; the claims that are made are imaginative and emotional." (147)

However, as we have seen, both these features, viz. 'unqualified joy' and 'insight into a supernatural reality' occur time and again in these passages dealing with mystical or semi-mystical experiences. In fact, a number of other features which characterize a mystic's utterances mark Wordsworth's language also. What makes Wordsworth's descriptions of the mystical experiences or mystical glimpses in his poetry unique, is the fact that they are perceived and interpreted from the poetic point of view. Wordsworth was a poet first, a poet gifted with a mystic's intuitive power. Wordsworth, as we have noted, has sometimes been described as a border-mystic or a nature-mystic. However, it would be perhaps more accurate to describe him as a poetic mystic. But we might pursue this idea further in the concluding chapter.

In BK II of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth speaks of his experience at Windermere. He was rowing in a boat in a lake and he suddenly

felt an extraordinary tranquility together with an unusual pleasure:

. Oh! Then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.

(BK II : 176 – 80)

The background setting of this experience is marked by an all around stillness. The stillness of water influenced his mind and it became quiet. This quietude gave him pleasure and the beautiful sky, that is, the external world merged into his internal being, and he felt as if he was in a dream.

Once in solitary surroundings, Wordsworth kept his mind open to nature's finer influxes, and his heart communed with the minuter properties of objects. At that time, he experienced an elevated mood and he felt the presence of 'power'. He tried to listen to sounds of the ghostly language of the ancient earth and in such a mood, Wordsworth says:

. did I drink the visionary power.
I deem not profitless those fleeting moods
Of shadowy exultation: not for this,
That they are kindred to our purer mind
And intellectual life; but that the soul,
Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
Of possible sublimity, to which,
With growing faculties she doth aspire,
With faculties still growing, feeling still
That whatsoever point they gain, they still
Have something to pursue.

And not alone,

In grandeur and in tumult, but no less
 In tranquil scenes, that universal power
 And fitness in the latent qualities
 And essences of things, by which the mind
 Is mov'd by feelings of delight, to me
 Came strengthen'd with a superadded soul,
 A virtue not its own.

(BK II : 330 – 48)

Wordsworth writes that he drank 'the visionary power' from nature. This mood brought to him joy and power, which strengthened his mind. These moods, though fleeting, left a perennial impression on his consciousness, and provided him a permanent store of memories from which to refresh and regenerate his poetic spirit. Wordsworth relates these experiences to something higher than the workings of his own mind, and therefore we might say that they belong to a transcendental state of being. It is because of such intense experiences that Wordsworth came to believe that our human soul retains the dim memory of its latent sublimity:

. the soul,
 Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not, retains an obscure sense
 Of possible sublimity.

(BK II : 334-37)

He was delighted to find the unity in all objects. This experience also gave him strength because, apart from mere appearances, he came to know of the deeper truth of things around him. According to F.R. Leavis, "Wordsworth himself undoubtedly valued the 'visionary' element in his experience very highly". Leavis quotes lines 323-41 of this book of *The Prelude* and writes, "It would be difficult to suggest anything more elusive than this possibility which the soul glimpses in 'visionary' movements and,

Remembering how she felt, but what she felt
 Remembering not,
 Retains an obscure sense of.” (162-163)

Leavis suggests that Wordsworth had a feeling that he was pursuing something that might be described as spiritual and sublime.

In BK IV of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth speaks of one of the most climactic experiences of his life. It was his constant feeling that he was chosen to be a poet of great eminence by the higher powers of the universe. In the following passage he speaks of his experience, which helped him in sustaining this feeling:

My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
 Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
 Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
 A dedicated Spirit. On I walk'd
 In blessedness, which even yet remains.

(BK IV : 341-45)

Wordsworth seems to be saying that impressive moments come when least expected. He was given an unknown bond which made him a dedicated spirit, and which also filled him with blessings. Wordsworth is compelled to use a language which clarifies that his experience is not easy to describe. It gave him a feeling of joy, blessedness and satisfaction. Owing to the blessings of such higher powers, he could transcend the limits of his ordinary existence, and became a dedicated spirit capable of writing a poem of utmost importance. As is well-known, it was after this consecration that he began to write the ‘philosophical’ poem *The Recluse* of which *The Prelude* was to become the first part. We can compare this passage with the following passage from *The Recluse* :

I would stand clear, but yet to me I feel
 That an internal brightness is vouchsafed
 That must not die, that must not pass away.

(PW 335 : Ap. A, 674-76)

Wordsworth felt the stirring of a permanent brightness in his inner being. This 'internal brightness' was the source of his faith and confidence as a poet, which often assured him of the permanence of the spirit.

In BK IV itself of *The Prelude* Wordsworth writes of one more experience during one summer night, when he went outside for a walk:

Thus did I steal along that silent road,
 My body from the stillness drinking in
 A restoration like the calm of sleep,
 But sweeter far. Above, before, behind,
 Around me, all was peace and solitude,
 I look'd not round, nor did the solitude
 Speak to my eye; but it was heard and felt.
 O happy state! what beauteous pictures now
 Rose in harmonious imagery – they rose
 As from some distant region of my soul
 And came along like dreams.

(BK IV : 385-95)

The first three lines show that he felt quietude, his body became very quiet. This stillness, he says, was sweeter than sleep. Peace was there in the eternal world around him as well as in his own inner self. In the midst of such calmness, he saw with his mind's eye beauteous pictures with which he was not familiar in his day-to-day life; he also experienced harmony around him. This feeling of harmony in things around him made him aware of his soul which, he felt, was higher than his present being. He felt as he was in a dream, in a world that was different from this earth. This experience gave him happiness and joy. All these characteristics render the experience narrated in this passage, as one of the most singular semi-mystical experiences we have identified.

Now we may see a passage from *The Excursion*, a work that was to be the second part of his great poem, *The Recluse*. As we saw in chapter-2, in this poem Wordsworth introduces different characters and unlike *The Prelude*, frequently adopts the third person mode to describe

mystical experience. Speaking of the Wanderer's life as a boy, Wordsworth writes:

All things, responsive to the writing, there
Breathed immortality, revolving life,
And greatness still revolving; infinite:
There littleness was not; the least of things
Seemed infinite.

(PW 593 : BK I : 227-31)

The Wanderer experienced the underlying 'immortality', 'greatness' and infinity in all things. 'The least of things' seemed infinite to him, and he perceived 'life' in all things'. In *Tintern Abbey* also Wordsworth has expressed closely similar idea:

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

(PW 164 : 47-49)

All apparent paradoxes of the worldly life were resolved during this experience. This may be considered the Wanderer's experience of the sublime in ordinary objects. This sublimity and the vision of harmony, in their turn, helped the Wanderer to transcend the bounds of human experience.

As we know, the third part of *The Recluse* was not finished by Wordsworth, but a few fragments of it are available now. In these fragments also we find several lines or passages which may be called semi-mystical. We briefly examine a few of them below.

In one of these fragments, Wordsworth assumes the third person mode to describe a semi-mystical experience and writes :

there would he stand
In the still covert of some (? lonesome) rock,
Or gaze upon the moon until its light

Fell like a strain of music on his soul
And seem'd to sink into his very heart.

(PW 340 : Ap. B, II, i)

The boy was alone, there was stillness everywhere. This solitariness and peace helped him in experiencing the light of moon as a strain of music on his soul. This music sank into his heart. This shows that the boy could see the harmony that lies between the external world and his internal being. This passage can be compared with that of *The Prelude* described in BK II, in which the poet, while rowing, felt that the whole sky sank into his heart:

.. . . . Oh! Then the calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure, and the sky
Never before so beautiful, sank down
Into my heart, and held me like a dream.

(BK II : 176 – 80)

In another fragment of *The Recluse*, the poet describes streams, rocks, etc. and writes,

. The leaves stir not,
They all are steady as the cloudless sky;
How deep the Quiet: all is motionless,
As if the life of the vast world was hushed
Into a breathless dream.

(PW 343 : Ap. B, IV. ii)

He experienced quietness in the world around him. Once again, he describes the scene as a 'breathless dream', he felt that things around him were different from what he had found them in his everyday experience of the world. Such settings often help the mystic in getting higher and deeper revelations of truth or the Supreme Reality.

There is still another fragment where Wordsworth writes of his experience of quietness and the consequent feeling of harmony:

The clouds are standing still in the mid heavens;
 A perfect quietness is in the air;
 The ear hears not; and yet, I know not how,
 More than the other senses does it hold
 A manifest communion with the heart.

(PW 343 : Ap. B, IV. iv)

The expression, 'the ear hears/ not', shows that for a while he forgot his physical existence and yet, paradoxically, 'more than the other senses' his ear held a communion with the heart, that is, with his inner being. This communion may be described as a deeper spiritual experience. This state of being brought for him the feeling of tranquility and joy.

The following passage also describes a similar stillness of the solitary surroundings:

Oh 'tis a joy divine on summer days
 When not a breeze is stirring, not a cloud,
 To sit within some solitary wood,
 Far in some lonely wood, and hear no sound
 Which the heart does not make, or else so fit(s)
 To its own temper that in external things
 No longer seem internal difference
 All melts away, and things that are without
 Live in our minds as in their native home.

(PW 343 : Ap. B, IV. iii)

The phrase 'joy divine' used in this passage seems to suggest that Wordsworth experienced bliss while he was alone in a 'solitary' wood. His isolation from the rest of the society helped him to perceive a harmony in the external world and his own inner being, and things lived in his mind as if it was their 'native home'. All these features, viz. bliss, solitariness, harmony and resolution of opposites, prompt us to think of it as an experience of a semi-mystical kind.

In the celebrated lyric *To the Cuckoo*, Wordsworth hails the bird with the words: 'O blithe new comer!' and in the whole poem he sings of the bird's mysterious identity. While the poet is lying restless on the grass, this bird brings for him the remembrances of those visionary hours of his childhood, during which he had experienced extraordinary joy, calm and transcendence. He writes:

Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

(PW 145 : 11-12)

Notwithstanding this clear recollection at the time of the poet's listening as an adult to the cuckoo's voice, the bird remains strange and mysterious:

Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery.

(PW : 146: 14-16)

It is due to the pleasure derived from listening to the sweet voice of this 'blessed bird' that Wordsworth finds the whole earth transformed into an unsubstantial fairy land. At the end of this poem, he says:

O blessed Bird! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place;
That is fit home for Thee!

(PW 146 : 29-32)

When the poet hears the cuckoo's song in this ordinary world, he is transported to a 'visionary' world.

David Perkins believes that Wordsworth's imagination converts

...a sensory impression into a symbolism..... Hearing the cry of the cuckoo, the grown man thinks of the 'golden time' of childhood, when the voice of the unseen bird, ubiquitous and disembodied, suggested

a spiritual presence behind the common appearance of things. The sense of this could make the familiar world 'visionary' and lead the child on a quest. (186)

According to A.C. Bradley, the experience described in this poem, is a kind of mystical experience. He observes.

The sense of sight is baffled, and its tyranny broken. Only a cry is heard, which makes the listener look a thousand ways, so shifting is the direction from which it reaches him. It seems to come from a mere 'voice,' 'and invisible thing,' 'a mystery'. It brings to him 'a tale of visionary hours'; - hours of childhood, when he sought this invisible thing in vain, and the earth appeared to his bewildered but liberated fancy 'an unsubstantial fairy place.' And still, when he hears it, the great globe itself, we may say, fades like an unsubstantial pageant; or, to quote from *the Immortality Ode*, the 'shades of the prison house' melt into air. These words are much more solemn than the Cuckoo poem; but the experience is of the same type, and 'the visionary gleam' of *the Ode*, like the 'wandering voice' of the poem, is the expression through sense of something beyond sense. (131-132)

In this manner, Wordsworth, from his contact with the apparently ordinary objects of the universe often moved to a communion with something which was beyond this world of sense, which was higher than the objects of this earth. This movement helped him in getting mystical experience of varying degree. It is the fusion of the earthly and the visionary, of the time now and the time of the visible and the invisible, the experience of intense bliss, and the ultimate mystery surrounding the voice that take the experience described in 'To the Cuckoo' fairly close to what we have been calling a semi-mystical experience.

Wordsworth has written a short poem, 'To my Sister'. In this poem, he addresses his sister, and asks her to come out to 'feel the sun'. He writes :

My sister ! ('tis a wish of mine)

Now that our morning meal is done,

Make haste, your morning task resign;
Come forth and feel the sun.

(PW 378 : 9-12)

He adds:

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth:
- *It is the hour of feeling*
One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason.

(PW 378 : 21-26)

He also says:

And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls;
They shall be turned to love.

(PW 378 : 33-36)

Wordsworth, it seems, feels that the power of love is spread everywhere, which has united all objects, living and inanimate. He also asserts that an intuition received during such a moment of experience may give us something more than what we are likely to get after reasoning for years together. During this experience, Wordsworth has received an intuition of harmony which is the power of love.

In a large number of passages seen here from different poems Wordsworth speaks with intensity about personal experiences which on a careful scrutiny reveal a few characteristics of mystical kind. Wordsworth, both as a child and as an adult, experienced that which was beyond the reach merely of the human senses and intelligence. Wordsworth transcended human limitations for a while. Soon after which, as we saw, he would return to the plane of reality and speak of his altogether new experiences in a language marked by negatives

and paradoxes. Such experiences changed Wordsworth's perception of the world. Wordsworth's personality was moulded by such unknown powers which helped him in his aspiration towards greatness.

In some of the experiences discussed in this chapter, Wordsworth finds for his mental states an analogy of a dream. This reference to dream like states brings with it many connotations. The state of dream suggests the forgetfulness of physical existence, or quietening of senses. The world of dream remains different from this world of reality; often, it may be the world of ideals. Impossible incidents may become possible, and paradoxical elements of a wakeful experience may be resolved in dreams. Above all, objects, events and experiences that form part of a dream carry a vivacity, force and unmistakable brilliance, which, despite all their unreality in wakeful recollection, make them strangely real in the actual moments of dreaming. And it is precisely these attributes that Wordsworth seems to be trying to evoke by bringing in, in one way or another, the comparison of a dream while describing what we have called mystical experiences.

In chapter-2 of this book, it is observed that during extremely rare moments Wordsworth had experiences which may be called pure mystical experiences. In this chapter, it is observed that more frequently Wordsworth had experiences which may be described as semi-mystical. Apart from these two kinds, Wordsworth also received glimpses of a mystical nature at a number of times when his imagination was at work intensely on having a vivid perception of some singular object of nature. In the next Chapter, those lines from Wordsworth's poetry are analysed in which we may trace evidences of such mystical glimpses.

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Chapter : 4

MYSTICAL GLIMPSES

From this study of Wordsworth's poems in the last two chapters, it can be said that, at times, Wordsworth, as a poet could go beyond the borders of human perception, and experience a 'power' or a 'presence' that was outside the ken of ordinary human consciousness. Often in solitude, he experienced the workings of a spirit within himself and without. From his childhood, he had, with varying degrees of intensity, experiences, which may be called mystical. At several moments, as we saw in Chapter-3, Wordsworth had borderland experiences, in which he transcended human limitations, but soon returned to the human realm. At other times still, he simply had a glimpse of the ultimate truth, which he often refers to as 'a presence'. In this chapter, we shall deal with those passages from Wordsworth's poems in which he speaks of experiences that reveal such 'mystical glimpses'.

Any experience, in which one or two of the characteristics of a mystical kind are found, might be considered to belong to this category. During such experiences, for a moment or two, the poet got a vision of something higher and more sublime than what he felt or saw in day-to-day life, and he was made aware of the workings of a higher 'power' or 'presence' in the universe. Wordsworth went to the extent of asserting that when he grew and recollected those moments, that recollection itself provided strength to his mind and imagination. They also helped him to harbour faith in the greatness of the human spirit even in the midst of chaotic conditions of a war or the deafening din of life in a metropolis. As he writes :

There are in our existence spots of time,
Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
A vivifying Virtue, whence, depress'd
By false opinion and contentious thought,

Or aught of heavier or more deadly weight
In trivial occupations, and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
Are nourished and invisibly repair'd
A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
That penetrates, enables us to mount
When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen.
This efficacious spirit chiefly lurks
Among those passages of life in which
We have had deepest feeling that the mind
Is lord and master, and that outward sense
Is but the obedient servant of her will.
Such moments worthy of all gratitude,
Are scatter'd everywhere, taking their date
From our first childhood: in our childhood even
Perhaps are most conspicuous.

(BK XI : 258-77)

Commenting on the lines 288-99 as they occur in the 1799 version of *The Prelude*, Jonathan Wordsworth writes that

...the 'spots of time' have the power to strengthen and reassure because they stand in the poet's mind for the ability of the individual to transcend the limits of ordinary experience. As a child he himself had been a borderer, approached unknowingly the verge of the sublime: as an adult he derives from this early experience a strength that enables him consciously to aspire towards sublimity. (31)

At times, Wordsworth had direct mystical vision. Along with his descriptions of such direct visions, we may also consider those glimpses which he received through powerful but passing recollections of previous mystical experiences, such recollections revealed characteristics, such as, joy, peace, transcendence etc.

Tintern Abbey, as we saw, is considered to contain an explicit statement of Wordsworth's mystical experience. In this poem, he describes his visit to Tintern Abbey where he had been five years before. But as Wordsworth says, the place always gave him an experience of seclusion and quietness. He writes:

. Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

(PW 163: 4-8)

Peace and seclusion of the natural surrounding gave the poet an opportunity to perceive a unity in the different elements of nature. He saw a harmony between the earth and the sky. Opposites were reconciled. On the one hand, he saw 'steep and lofty cliffs', and on the other, those cliffs gave him thoughts of 'deep seclusion'; 'the landscape' was found connected with 'the sky' that was very much above it.

Recollecting his past experience, Wordsworth writes:

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again;
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years,

(PW 164 : 58-65)

In these lines, it seems, Wordsworth refers to his past experience which he has described in the same poem:

To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,

In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened: - that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on, -
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul.

(PW 164 : 36-46)

This recollection illumined his mind, and he derived joy. We may say, Wordsworth transcended the limits of time. The recollection of the pleasure of the past transcendental experience not only filled his heart with pleasure in the present, but also gave him a hope for the future joy. In this context Nigel Foxell has rightly commented that

“In *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth not only recollects his past emotions, but experiences present ones and anticipates future ones.” (136)

In BK. I of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth speaks of his childhood days and the animal pleasure which he received from nature. But he writes,

. even then I felt
 Gleams like the flashing of a shield.

(BK I : 613-14)

We could say, even in the midst of the most ordinary activities, Wordsworth received illumination regarding ‘something’ extraordinary, which was like ‘the flashing of a shield’.

In BK II ‘School Time’ the poet describes his horse-riding expedition in the company of his friends. During the journey, they reached St. Mary’s Abbey. Wordsworth narrates the experience in the following lines :

A holy Scene! along the smooth green turf
Our Horses grazed: to more than inland peace
Left by the sea wind passing overhead
(Though wind of roughest temper) trees and towers
May in that valley oftentimes be seen,
Both silent and both motionless alike;
Such is the shelter that is there, and such
The safeguard for repose and quietness.

(BK II : 114-21)

These lines narrate the poet's experience of quietude in the midst of nature. He describes the peace that was there in the air, the trees and the woods. The reader seems to get a clear suggestion of some unnamed presence or power at work. Most probably, through the juxtaposition of the motionless and the moving, the towers and the trees or through the attribution of stillness to elements that are habitually in motion, like 'sea wind', and the use of the word 'silent', Wordsworth clearly indicates the possibility of noise or sound that is unrealized. It is through such oppositions held in a balance that a distinct awareness of a spirit that is not seen but felt is often conveyed in Wordsworth's poetry.

In BK VI ‘Cambridge and the Alps’, Wordsworth tells us how everything he saw or heard or felt remained nothing but a stream, which mingled with another luminous stream:

Finally whate'er
I saw, or heard, or felt, was but a stream
That flow'd into a kindred stream, a gale
That help'd me forwards, did administer
To grandeur and to tenderness, to the one
Directly, but to tender thoughts by means
Less often instantaneous in effect;
Conducted me to these along a path
Which in the main was more circuitous.

(BK VI : 672-80)

In these lines Wordsworth seems to refer to a universal power, which he felt, was there in each and every object. That power or energy was flowing like a stream everywhere. That power led him towards grandeur and tenderness in different ways. Wordsworth found the working of this universal power everywhere in all types of objects; he found harmony in all the different objects of the earth and that perception of oneness led him to an experience of spiritual greatness.

In BK. VII 'Residence in London' Wordsworth speaks of a glimpse which he received 'After the hour of sunset';

. But I heard,
 After the hour of sunset yester even,
 Sitting within doors betwixt light and dark,
 A voice that stirr'd me

 A delight,
 At this unthought of greeting, unawares
 Smote me.

(BK VII : 20-23, 31-33)

The temporal setting of the experience described in these lines, clearly places it on the borderland, 'betwixt light and dark', a moment of conjunction between two clearly marked opposites. The use of phrases and words like 'unthought of' or 'unawares' shows that the experience was sudden and mysterious. During this sudden experience of 'a voice' Wordsworth felt as if the power of delight struck him. This paradoxical feeling shows the intensity with which he was overpowered by a delight, and he was filled with hopes of better future.

In the same Book Wordsworth writes of suggestions of the unseen which he received through most ordinary experiences. Speaking of one such suggestion, he writes :

. having cought,
 In summer, through the fractur'd wall, a glimpse
 Of daylight, at the thought of where I was
 I gladden'd more than if I had beheld
 Before me some bright cavern of Romance,
 Or than we do, when on our beds we lie
 At night, in warmth, when rains are beating hard.

(BK VII : 481-87)

Wordsworth was delighted to see a glimpse of light which reached him from a fractured wall, and filled him with an onrush of joy. This glimpse of a light, which to unobservant eyes or insensitive minds, might have appeared to be but one of the myriads of ordinary scenes one comes across in life, acquires a peculiar strangeness for Wordsworth chiefly because it brought him a sudden feeling of joy, greater than when an extraordinary spectacle is thrown open before the mind's eye in the reading of Romance. It is his peculiar gift of imagination that enabled him to have this peculiar glimpse.

In BK X 'Residence in France and French Revolution', Wordsworth writes:

Without me and within, as I advanced,
 All that I saw, or felt, or communed with
 Was gentleness and peace.

(BK X : 516-18)

He experienced a kind of harmony between the external and the internal worlds. Whatever he saw or felt, or with whatever he communed, was full of peace. He experienced a bond of unity in everything, and this sense of oneness gave him the feeling of ineffable peace.

In *The Excursion* too, we come across a number of passages and lines which give us some ideas about his own mystical glimpses through the medium of other dramatic personae. In BK IV, for example, the Sage was talking with his friends about the soul of man, and suddenly

he realized that silence itself was speaking eloquently about the deepest trusts of man's spiritual life:

He paused, as if unwilling to proceed,
Through consciousness that silence in such place
Was best, the most affecting eloquence.

(PW 630 : BK IV : 413-15)

Here we can notice that the poet found harmony in opposites as he felt silence speaking eloquently of 'spiritual life'. In the following lines, the old man told the paster of an altogether different world that he had found around human beings, where all opposites were dissolved:

There lies
Around us a domain where you have long
Watched both the outward course and inner heart.

(PW 649 : BK V : 634-36)

Once again, we are told of the unity of the inner and the outer lives. Here the old man speaks of a vision in which a kind of harmony was perceived even in discordance.

In BK IX of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth describes the setting of the sun one evening:

Innumerable multitude of forms
Scattered through half the circle of the sky;
And giving back, and shedding each on each,
With prodigal communion, the bright hues
Which from the unapparent fount of glory
They had imbibed, and ceased not to receive.
That which the heavens displayed, the liquid deep
Repeated; but with unity sublime:
While from the grassy mountain's open side
We gazed, in silence hushed, with eyes intent
On the refulgent spectacle, diffused
Through earth, sky, water, and all visible space.

(PW 696 : BK IX : 601-12)

In this passage, Wordsworth speaks all the three mighty elements, the earth, the sky and the ocean which symbolize infinity. He felt that multitudes of forms seen in the sky with their bright hues, held communion among themselves, with other elements of nature and also with humanity. This unity or harmony, which he found thus at three levels as a result of the 'prodigal communion', was sublime. Wordsworth's reference to forms and hues coming from 'the unapparent fount of glory' suggests that the experience was ineffable. The passage, as a whole, unfolds the poet's mystical glimpses during moments of spiritual communion with nature.

In the fragments of *The Recluse* also there are a few passages in which Wordsworth speaks of his experiences that contain mystical glimpses. In the first part of the first finished book of *The Recluse*, 'Home at Grasmere', Wordsworth describes the experience of a school boy on a 'golden summer holiday' :

Alone and devious from afar he came;
And, with a sudden influx overpowered
At sight of this seclusion, he forgot
His haste.

(PW 313 : Ap. A, 6-9)

The boy felt a presence or a force in the silence of nature which 'overpowered' him. This 'sudden influx' made him forget his habitual haste as a boy.

Wordsworth, in this part, describes a place in the following manner:

For rest of body, perfect was the Spot,
All that luxurious nature could desire,
But stirring to the Spirit, who could gaze
And not feel motions there?

(PW 313 : Ap. A, 22-25)

Once again a harmony is seen in the opposites. On the one hand, he says that the spot was fit for physical rest because it was 'soft and green', but on the other hand, he says, there were motions in the natural surroundings which could stir the soul of the boy.

The poet experienced a kind of sensation in the solitary background of nature, in the midst of hills and fields, green mountains, flocks and herds. He writes :

'Tis, but I cannot name it, 'tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
A blended holiness of earth and sky,
Something that makes this individual Spot,
This small abiding-place of many Men,
A termination, and a last retreat,
A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
A Whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself; and happy in itself,
Perfect Contentment, unity entire.

(PW 318 : Ap.A, 142-51)

It was difficult for him to describe this sensation; the words 'I cannot name it' show that the experience was ineffable for him. This reference to 'majesty' and 'blended holiness' that covered the earth and the sky suggests that it was something solemn and sublime which made him aware of a 'unity entire' in the world.

Now a few passages from his shorter lyrical poems can be studied to see how frequently Wordsworth writes about experiences which may be looked upon as glimpses of the mystical reality.

In the poem, *To My Sister*, the poet speaks of his experience on a March day during which he received blessings from the atmosphere :

There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

(PW 378 : 5-8)

Wordsworth received a blessing and found that joy was spread in each and every object. We may say that Wordsworth experienced the presence of a benevolent power in all objects of the world.

The lyric, *I wandered lonely as a cloud* is apparently a poem regarding the daffodils, but it is more about the poet's mood that undergoes a marked change after he has an encounter with the golden flowers. The poet while moving aimlessly suddenly saw a host of daffodils. He compared them to the innumerable stars. The fluttering of the flowers in the wind was felt to be a form of dancing. In fact in this poem, the poet, in this imaginative vision, finds the flowers to be more joyous and excited than even the waves of the lake. All these comparisons serve as a kind of a link connecting different elements in nature that stretch from the flowers on the margin of the lake to the stars in the 'Milky way'.

The poet found himself to be in joyous company of these flowers. Formerly, he was alone and aimless but his poetic imagination helped him to find the precious company of flowers in nature. What is more, the experience turns out to be the source of perennial joy for him, since, as he puts it in the last stanza.

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the Bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

(PW 149 : 19-24)

It was his 'inward eye' that helped the poet to get time and again the past pleasure. Thus we find the past and the present connected in the poet's experience. As the recollected vision comes to him often he could hope to have it in future also. Moreover, while lying upon his couch, the poet feels the presence of these flowers, which once were beside the lake. Looking at the poem from this point of view, we might say, Wordsworth seems to transcend the limits of time and place. Thus the poem is replete with mystical glimpses accompanied by an excess of joy, transcendence of the limits of time and space and perception of a universal harmony.

The Lucy poems are among the most personal and powerful lyrics of Wordsworth. They have been studied and analyzed from various angles. In terms of their imaginative value, the poems remain unique little masterpieces of poetic art. They also provide a few samples of what can be called mystical glimpses on the part of Wordsworth. A *slumber did my spirit seal*, for example, has only two stanzas, but the utterance contains clear hints of the poet's awareness verging on the mystical.

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

(PW 149 : 1-8)

The first line of this poem suggests the quietude of feeling while the phrase 'no human fears', suggests an experience of transcendence from the ordinary world. Lucy appeared to him as an immortal thing. But in the second stanza he tells us that she is no more on the earth,

and she has become a part of the larger pattern of existence on the universe. As Elizabeth Drew puts it, "The poem tells of a passionate human love and an irreparable loss, but at the same time, it exists on an entirely different level of consciousness from the actual emotion of that love and loss." (105-106)

Lascelles Abercrombie observes that in this poem, Wordsworth with nicety and depth commits "...the strangest experience, the most remote from ordinary life, to perfectly ordinary words". (96)

Even in an early short poem of notable distinction like *A Night Piece* we notice words, images and expressions that clearly suggest a mystical vision at work. The poet narrates the experience of a traveller during a night. The poem speaks of the traveller's response to a scene in nature. During a part of the journey, the traveller treats the scene as uninteresting, and moves on in a pensive mood. The sky is spread over with one continuous cloud; the moon also appears to be dull as the cloud has veiled it. But suddenly, the thoughtful traveler gets startled by a gleam of light breaking out from the 'one continuous cloud':

At length a pleasant instantaneous gleam
Startles the pensive traveller while he treads
His lonesome path
(PW 146 : 8-10)

Moreover, he writes :

At length the Vision closes; and the mind,
Not undisturbed by the delight it feels,
Which slowly settles into peaceful calm,
Is left to muse upon the solemn scene.
(PW 146 : 23-26)

The unexpected 'gleam' startles the traveller. While he looks up,

he finds the clear moon and bright stars. The cloud is seen to have shifted away from the moon and all the darkness is removed. This astonishing experience vanishes, but it continues to disturb his mind because of the delight it brought with it. This vision has brought for the narrator bliss as well as a 'peaceful calm'. The poem thus serves to provide an early example of a mystical glimpse in Wordsworth's poetry.

Wordsworth regarded the sonnet as a suitable form for expressing his personal thoughts and emotions. In his sonnets, one can find his responses to places, events, books, etc. In the well-known sonnet *Composed Upon Westminster Bridge* Wordsworth records the arousing of his imagination by the sight of London, which wears 'the beauty of the morning'. The city, in its extraordinary beauty, brightness and peace, opposes its own usual, ugly and noisy atmosphere. In the sestet, the poet writes:

Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendor, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will;
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still !

(PW 214 : 9-14)

Wordsworth's repeated use of 'never' suggests that this experience is unusual and ineffable. It fills him with a deep awareness of beauty and peace in the atmosphere. The phrases, 'Houses asleep' and 'that mighty heart' of the city which 'is lying asleep'; suggest that Wordsworth could perceive life even in inert things. The sonnet, as a whole, reveals Wordsworth's experience of an extraordinary beauty permeating all the visible objects, and thereby fusing in one harmonious vision the elements of nature and aspects of life in a metropolis. The entire scene is suffused with strange enlivening light. There is, in fact, an animation of the inanimate and an unusual quietening of the living. The sonnet could

be considered as a fine example of mystical glimpses of Wordsworth that elevated his ordinary experiences to an extraordinary realm of significance and value.

It is a little difficult to approach the *Ode on intimations of Immortality* in terms of the classification of the mystical experience given here. This poem hardly fits into any of the three divisions, as it is written in the form of a series of recollections from his childhood. At the same time, it does not seem proper to exclude the *Ode* from this study of the mystical experience in Wordsworth's poetry, as Wordsworth himself described it as the 'poem on the Immortality of the Soul' (Darbishire 64)

In asserting the soul's immortality, Wordsworth founded his belief on the notion of pre-existence. In the context of this belief of Wordsworth, Jonathan Wordsworth writes,

As a poet he wished to evoke his overwhelming sense of loss-lost vision, lost creativity – and he wished too, though this presumably was unconscious to comfort himself with the border implication that if we come 'trailing clouds of glory ... 'From God who is our home', then we can presently go back to 'that imperial palace whence [we] come.' (*Intimations*, 64-5, 84). (90)

In this poem, we find an explicit statement about the immortality of the human soul which affirms the Platonic belief of pre-natal existence :

But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home:
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy;
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy
 But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,

And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.

(PW 460 : 64-76)

The word 'Heaven' carries with it connotations like those of delight, tranquility ecstasy, and immortality. A child experiences this bliss of heaven naturally and spontaneously; it is not easy for an adult to get such a glimpse of light of his past existence. Wordsworth, it seems, thinks that a child, as he gets the vision of his previous existence, is the 'best philosopher' and 'Mighty Prophet', and 'Seer blest', Wordsworth has sometimes been criticized for eulogizing the child in such hyperbolic terms. For instance, Coleridge has found fault with him for attributing to the child such exceptional powers. According to him, it was a case of 'mental bombast'. But as Jonathan Wordsworth suggests, we should take note of the 'imaginative validity' of the statements made in this poem. (92)

Helen Darbishire writes,

Wordsworth clung stubbornly to his earlier intuitions. He had invincible belief in life and growth; he knew that all that truly lives is continuous, subject to change and development, but not to dislocation and discontinuity. The spiritual life of the child had its source, he thought, behind birth, and its goal beyond death. Immortality, that unearthly light that broods over the child, a 'Master o'er a slave', is for the child a truth – a truth which we are toiling all our lives to find, lost in the gloomy obsession of mortality, 'in darkness lost, the darkness of the grave'.(69-70)

Wordsworth feels that there are sparks of this early Divinity in all of us, he says,

O joy! That in our embers
 Is something that doth live,

That nature yet remembers
 What was so fugitive!

 Not for these I raise
 The song of thanks and praise;
 But for those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings;
 Blank misgivings of a Creature
 Moving about in worlds not realised,
 High instincts before which our mortal Nature
 Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised.
 (PW 461 : 133-36, 143-51)

Wordsworth is aware that in his being there harbours an immortal spirit which is source of joy, but how to convince his mortal sense of his immortality, and how to remain aware of his immortal spirit when he is also in touch with his sense is his problem. Helen Darbishire quotes 133-36 lines of this poem. In these lines, she writes, Wordsworth

...gives thanks and praise not for the simple creed of
 childhood, delight and liberty, but 'for those obstinate questionings
 of sense and outward things', for the feeling of the pure
 spirituality, the 'all-soulness' as he called it, that he had as a
 child". In this context she also quotes lines 152-56 of this poem
 and observes, "This light, this spiritual revelation, can to the
 end give us sight of that immortal sea that brought us hither.
 (70)

In the two passages quoted above from the *Ode* we can see that Wordsworth thinks that first of all a child recollects the experience of his early childhood during which he was receiving glimpses of light, and joy from his previous existence. But as he grows old, the frequency of such glimpses diminishes, and almost dies away in the end. In the

latter passage, he tries to say that even when the child grows old, he remembers that past joy, but finds it difficult to explain such a feeling to himself in his adult state of understanding. Though there is an implied sense of loss in this poem, we can find his expressions of joy, illumination and belief of immortality as evidence of mystical glimpses.

The passages discussed in this Chapter show that Wordsworth frequently received mystical glimpses either in the midst of natural surroundings or in his contact with human beings. At times, his powerful recollection of a past experience provided him with sudden mystical glimpses. For example, he was filled with pleasure, tranquility and illumination when he recollected his past experience in, as it is depicted in lines 58-65 of *Tintern Abbey*. In *The Prelude* also we find several examples in which he received visions of a mystical nature. One such vision is described in lines 613-14 of BK I . He found harmony in animate and inanimate objects of the universe, as it can be noticed in lines 114-21 of BK II of *The Prelude* . On other occasions, as it is seen in this chapter earlier he was also greeted by the voice of an unknown presence. In *The Excursion* and *The Recluse* the poet describes such visionary moments from the lives of the Wanderer and the Solitary or from his own life. Even his short lyrics like *To My Sister, I wandered lonely as a cloud*, and *A Night Piece* are studded with such glimpses and reveal one or two of the characteristics of a mystical kind like harmony, peace, delight, solitariness, transcendence and forgetfulness of physical existence.

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Chapter : 5

CONCLUSION

In the last three Chapters, those passages from Wordsworth's poems have been examined which might be said to have mystical elements in them. At times Wordsworth writes of experiences which come fairly close to an accurate recapturing of a purely mystical state of consciousness. More frequently, he speaks of experiences of a semi-mystical kind. Above all, glimpses of a mystical nature are to be found in a large number of his well-known poems. From our study, it could be said that passages of the first type are rather rare in his poetry. Far oftener he describes experiences which reveal a few mystical characteristics. This has perhaps led thinkers and critics like Jonathan Wordsworth to consider Wordsworth as a 'borderland' mystic who raises high from human reality and remains in touch with the Supreme Reality for a while, but soon returns to the human realm and speaks of his experience of the Reality through different kinds of human images and symbols.

Commenting on the mystical aspects of Wordsworth's poetry Bradley observes that "always, openly or covertly", Wordsworth received "the intimation of something illimitable, over-arching or breaking into the customary 'reality'. Its character varies; and so sometimes at its touch the soul, suddenly conscious to its own infinity, melts in rapture into that infinite being; while at other times the 'mortal nature' stands dumb, incapable of thought, or shrinking from some presence :

Not un-informed with Phantasy, and looks
That threaten the profane.

This feeling is so essential to many of Wordsworth's most characteristic poems that it may almost be called their soul; and failure to understand them frequently arises from obtuseness to

it. It appears in a mild and tender form, but quite openly, in the lines *To a Highland Girl*, where the child, and the rocks and trees and lake and road by her home, seem to the poet.

Like something fashioned in a dream.” (134)

Evenlyn Underhill has identified several stages through which mystics pass on their way to the union with the Divine. One of these stages is ‘The Illumination of the Self.’ She writes,

All pleasurable and exalted states of mystic consciousness in which the sense of I-hood persists, in which there is a loving and joyous relation between the absolute as object and the self as subject, fall under the head of illumination: which is really an enormous development of the intuitional life at high levels. All veritable and first-hand apprehensions of the Divine obtained by the use of symbols, as in the religious life; all phases of poetic inspiration, “glimpses of truth,” are activities of the illuminated mind.

During these phases of inspiration, as Miss Underhill observes, “there results that partial yet often overpowering apprehension of the infinite life immanent in all living things which some modern writers have dignified by the name of “nature-mysticism.” (282)

John Ferguson is one of these modern writers according to whom Wordsworth was “a secular or natural mystic.”(210)

Swaminathan writes,

Almost from boyhood Wordsworth was a very serious – minded person. The occupation of a poet was his chosen calling, and he brought to it a truly religious devotion. He lived among the mountains most of the time, and in his contemplation they became symbols of the permanence of the cosmos, or the most sublime expression or emanation of the divine spirit. (web)

Jeffrey Side, in his study on Wordsworth, which he did in 2006, finds that Wordsworth’s poetry is still a continuing influence. He thinks that

... Wordsworth’s aesthetic, and his beliefs about the

subject-object relationship, as substantially empiricist. However, it is not claimed that Wordsworth is consistently empiricist in the way that a philosopher might aspire to be: indeed, there is a place to be found within this argument for the recognition of his transcendentalism.(9-10)

Referring to the critics like F.R.Leavis, Irving Babbitt, George Bornstein Jeffrey Side notes that

When we come to examine the critical reaction to the Romantics in the wake of the acceptance of Modernism in the early twentieth century, we find that the majority of criticism is hostile to Wordsworth and many other romantic poets. (106-7)

The result of this was to create a false perception among Modernist writers and critics that there was a permanent fracture between Romanticism and Modernism. In reality, however, there was no such breach. Rather, there was a continuation of romantic descriptiveness through Symbolist poetry and into Modernist poetry. From Symbolist poetry, Imagism eventually emerged—Imagism being only a modification of Symbolism. (107-108)

Through his study Side notes that Ezra Pound had respect for Wordsworth's genius, imagism and for presentation of natural details. Emerson, I.A.Richards and Robert Frost too, held Wordsworth in high regards for his treatment of Nature.

According to Side, M. H. Abrams sees Wordsworth in transcendentalist terms. Side says,

With particular regard to Wordsworth, Wordsworth's statement that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings is viewed by Abrams as indicating that the locus of poetic inspiration is within, rather than without the poet. The result of this is that, the focus of attention is upon the relation of the elements of the work to his [the poet's] state of mind, and the suggestion, underlined by the word "spontaneous", is

that the dynamics of the overflow are inherent in the poet and, perhaps, not within his deliberate control.(130-131)

Side observes that the influence of Wordsworth on Seamus Heaney, the winner of Nobel Prize for literature in 1995, is well known. Side quotes Hugh Haughton who notes that

...the Lake Poet's texts haunt Heaney more radically than those of any other poet...It was very much as an Irish follower of Wordsworth that Heaney first presented himself as a poet-critic. In critical discussions such as "Feeling and Words" (1974) and "The Making of Music" (1978), Heaney not only re-created Wordsworth in his own image but forged a poetic image of himself out of Wordsworth. (146-147)

Side quotes from Heaney's introduction to *The Essential Wordsworth* (1988), in which

Heaney calls the Lake Poet's achievement 'the most securely founded in the canon of native English poetry' since Milton's. He declares him "an indispensable figure in the evolution of modern writing, a finder and keeper of the self-as-subject, a theorist and apologist whose Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) remains definitive." "Heaney is "not only an unreconstructed admirer of the English Romantic poet but an avowed heir to the Wordsworthian defence of poetry.(147)

Tanvir Dhaka thinks that,

William Wordsworth is an eminent mystic poet of the Romantic Age with an amazingly subtle mind and a deviant capacity for expressing personal beliefs and thoughts. Wordsworth was a true mystic. His mystical experiences are principally revealed in the context of his treatment of nature..... He aimed at attaining something higher and divine and leaving behind a record of his mystical experiences in nature and human life in his poetry. So his poetry is not simply an artistic encapsulation of lovely and tranquil aspects

of nature but also a comprehensive account of his mystical experiences. (web)

Dhaka continues,

Nature is the means through which a man can come into contact with god. Wordsworth maintains that a divine spirit pervades through all the objects of nature.....He finds the existence of god even in the mind of man. Wordsworth upholds that there is a pre-arranged harmony between the mind of man and the spirit in nature, which enables man to form a relationship or communication with nature. The relationship is materialised when the mind of man forms a kinship with the thoughts of nature. (web)

He concludes, "Wordsworth never looked at nature like the way we do. With great devotion and enthusiasm, he sought to read the profoundest meaning of human life in nature. In the way of doing so he forged himself as a great poet of nature with a true mystical vision" (*Wordsworth's Mysticism*) (web)

Caleb Williams notes,

Wordsworth produced a style of poetry which was psychologically persuasive and based on direct autobiographical experience. In his view poetry was a philosophical vehicle and meditative activity formed from 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' Above all it was a means of apprehending a natural landscape charged with divine significance. (web)

He further comments,

Above all in poems such as *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of consciousness becoming aware of itself, of man using contemplation of the natural world as a means of coming to grips with his cosmic insignificance. It is a poetry of transcendence, in which the individual soul touches Divinity by putting aside the petty

needs of ego and materialistic distractions- 'The fever of the world'. (web)

However, from a more strictly literary point of view, it might be nearer to the truth to say that Wordsworth was a poetic mystic. As a poet he was gifted with a unique imagination that enables him often to find in ordinary experience of something that was extraordinary. In this context, it might be interesting to look at three well-known descriptions of old persons which, though not dealing directly with experiences that could be called mystical, still treat of their subject matter in a style that carries mystical suggestions. In the description of a discharged soldier in BK IV of *The Prelude*, for example, there is a certain strangeness and almost unearthliness that Wordsworth discovers in his figure. The man produces such an impression on the poet probably because it was a moonlit night, or because he had 'a desolation' that seemed akin to solitude, or, in spite of being alive, he was completely still. This is what turns the soldier into a 'ghostly' figure. The blind London Beggar described in BK VII of the same poem seemed to the poet almost an inanimate object and not a living being. Through his extreme old age, the Beggar appeared to Wordsworth almost as an apparition from another world. The Leech Gatherer of *Resolution and Independence* also is described in terms that place him in the borderland between the living and the dead, 'not all alive, nor dead'. What made this old and infirm man particularly strange was his resolution to wander about 'the weary moors continually, alone and silently.

All the three descriptions provide good example of the way in which Wordsworth's imagination worked on the objects he perceived, whether in nature or in humanity. It transformed them into something strange, mysterious and symbolic. They become analogues of a deeper wisdom, or of a reality larger than themselves. This aspect of his creative imagination enabled Wordsworth to write about ordinary entities in nature like the lesser celandine, a butterfly, a linnet, or a cuckoo in a manner that reminds us of the language of revelation. It was this

characteristic which Coleridge seems to have in mind when, describing the 'plan of the

"Lyrical Ballads", in *Biographia Literaria*, he talks of Wordsworth proposing to himself, "as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural." (6)

We can say, Wordsworth's vivid imagination opened up for him ways of spiritual perception, and he could get glimpses of the Ultimate Truth with the help of his imagination.

At first glance, Wordsworth's poems appear to be very simple. In his poetry, we can say his style mostly remains tangible, his subjects are taken from everyday life, and he has described

"...them throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men". (Hutchinson 734)

Wordsworth is rightly considered as a nature poet. In fact, he has sometimes dealt with ordinary natural objects or phenomena in a language which has attracted adverse criticism. However, even as we appreciate Wordsworth's poems on objects and scenes of nature, it is necessary to bear in mind that his poems are never mere pictorial descriptions of nature. What characterizes them is the spiritualizing of these 'pictures', which Wordsworth almost always achieves through his faculty of what we have called spiritual glimpses.

In BK VI of *The Prelude*, for example, Wordsworth gives an account of his crossing of the Alps. On suddenly discovering that they had already crossed the Alps, Wordsworth experienced a glorious, transcendental onrush of energy within him, which deprived him for a while of his physical consciousness, and he received intimations of the invisible world:

Imagination! Lifting up itself
Before the eye and progress of my Song
Like an unfather'd vapour; here that Power

In all the might of its endowments, came
 Athwart me; I was lost as in a cloud,
 Halted, without a struggle to break through.
 And now recovering, to my Soul I say
 I recognise the glory, in such strength
 Of usurpation, in such visitings
 Of awful promise, when the light of sense
 Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
 The invisible world, doth Greatness make above,
 There harbours whether we be young or old.

(BK VI : 525-37)

In yet another passage, he goes to the extent of saying that it was only because he had that power of imagination that his mind was able to spread a domain of magnificence on all objects of nature which were before his eyes :

. A plastic power
 Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
 Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
 A local spirit of its own, at war
 With general tendency, but for the most
 Subservient strictly to the external things
 With which it communed. An auxiliar light
 Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
 Bestow'd new splendor, the melodious birds,
 The gentle breezes, fountains that ran on,
 Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obey'd
 A like dominion; and the midnight storm
 Grew darker in the presence of my eye.
 Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
 And hence my transport.

(BK II : 381-95)

It was this power of his imagination that turned Wordsworth's treatment of the simplest of the natural sights or the most ordinary of human beings into more than merely pictorial delineation, because with its help, he could perceive and express 'the life of things', and discover an order in all apparently discordant objects of the Universe. In his description of the Simplon Pass, he writes :

the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfetter'd clouds, and the region of the Heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
 Characters of the great Apocalypse,
 The types and symbols of Eternity,
 Of first and last, and midst, and without end.

(BK VI : 564-72)

Commenting on this passage, Jonathan Wordsworth writes that the

...final line is drawn from Milton, who applied it to God: 'Him first, him last, him midst, and without end' (PL v. 165). But Wordsworth does not apply it to God. He is not forecasting a Christian millennium, but evoking the apocalyptic quality of the human imagination. ... Wordsworth certainly felt the need to connect past, present, and future in one imaginative whole – the home of his poetry is with infinitude. (193-194)

To conclude with a quote from Bradley,

"However much Wordsworth was the poet of small and humble things, and the poet who saw his ideal realized, not in Utopia, but here and now before his eyes, he was,

quite as much, what some should call a mystic. He saw everything in the light of 'the visionary power.' He was, for himself,

The transitory Being that beheld

The Vision.

He apprehended all things, natural or human, as the expression of something which, while manifested in them, immeasurably transcends them, and nothing can be more intensely Wordsworthian than the poem and passages most marked by this visionary power and most directly issuing from this apprehension." (126-27)

Sri Aurobindo considers Wordsworth as one of the seer poets and comments,

But still one of the seer-poets he is, a seer of the calm spirit in Nature, the poet of man's large identity with her and serene liberating communion: it is on this side that he is admirable and unique. He has other strains too of great power. His chosen form of diction, often too bare and trivial in the beginning, too heavy afterwards, helps him at his best to a language and movement of unsurpassed poetic weight and gravity charged with imaginative insight, in which his thought and his ethical sense and spiritual sight meet in a fine harmony, as in his one great Ode, in some of his sonnets, in Ruth, even in Laodamia, in lines and passages which uplift and redeem much of his less satisfying work, while when the inner light shines wholly out, it admits him to the secret of the very self-revealing voice of Nature herself speaking through the human personality in some closest intimacy with her or else uttering the greatness of an impersonal sight and truth. He has transparencies in which the spirit gets free of the life-wave, the intelligence, the coloured veils of the imagination, and poetic speech and rhythm become hints of the eternal movements and the eternal stabilities, voices of the depths, rare moments of speech direct from our hidden immortality. (web)

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The Text Consulted

All quotations from Wordsworth's poetry, except those from *The Prelude* and *The Recluse* are from *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (abbreviated PN), edited by Thomas Hutchinson (a new edition revised by Ernest de Selincourt), and first published in 1904, reprinted by Oxford University Press in 1961. References identify first the page and then the lines in Arabic numerals and in the case of *The Excursion*. Book numbers in Roman numerals precede the line numbers. All quotations from *The Prelude* are from *The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind*, edited by Ernest de Selincourt, first published in 1933, reprinted by Oxford University Press in 1961. The text of 1805 is consulted for references. References identify first the relevant Book in Roman numerals and then the lines in Arabic numerals. All quotations from *The Recluse* are from *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* (abbreviated PW) edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire, in five volumes, Clarendon Press, 1949. References identify the page in Arabic numerals, then Appendix and then the lines, wherever given, in Arabic numerals.

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