Mysticism in Romantic Poetry

(Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats)

Dr Manjula Batra
Associate Professor & Head Department of English GGDSD College, Palwal
MDU, Rohtak.

Introduction:
Mysticism in poetry is an intriguing concept for those on quest for a higher reality. It can be broadly defined as the existence of something beyond human comprehension or physical reality." According to Caroline Spurgeon --a scholar contemporary with T.S. Eliot, “Mysticism is a term so irresponsibly applied in English that it has become the firstduty of those who use it to explain what they mean by it." Mysticism is not really a coherent philosophy of life or a doctrine, but more a temper of mind. A mystical experience, according to Bertrand Russel, involves insight, a sense of unity and the unreality of time and space, and a belief that evil is mere an appearance. The word *Mysticism*refers to a divine experience of union with the Universal Self, where an individual transcends his gross physicality, becoming one with the supreme deity (or deities, depending on the poet’s belief system).

Keywords: Mysticism,Transcendentalism, Inspiration, God, Nature, Insight, Truth, Pantheism, Creation, Frenzy, Hallucinations, Emotions, Tranquility
DOI Number: 10.48047/nq.2021.19.11.NQ21253 NeuroQuantology 2021; 19(11): 501-506

Mysticism is an awareness of the presence of God, or the withdrawal of His presence. It is not necessarily—certainly not always -- a pleasant, or happy, or joyous experience. Great mystics like Dame Julian of Norwich endured what seemed to be the limits of pain, yet still knew that ‘all shall be well’. The experience can be sudden, dramatic, and revelatory. It has the effect of knowledge. It is also pervasive of one’s whole experience, entering intimately into the texture of living itself, as Emily Bronte might say, like wine through water, so as to alter the whole colour of one’s mind. Sorrow ceases to be sorrow, and joy is not merely joy. Experience henceforward is endued with a ‘through-shine’ quality.It links up with what both Wordsworth and Coleridge would call ‘Infinite’, the cosmic euphoria. Therefore, poet mysticis a seer, a figure divinely inspired, a wise visionary as he becomes one with God. Andpoetry? A treasury of wisdom. A poem is an ‘inspired work of art’, so to speak.

“Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history”, so says Plato; it is the language of SELF (soul): “This above all, to thine own self be true…”, as sang Shakespeare, the greatest poet ever. Poetry addresses itself not to the abstract reason but to the soul, the sensibility and image-making faculty. “For a poet is an airy thing, winged and holy, and he is not able to make poetry until he becomes inspired and goes out of his mind and his intellect is no longer in him.” Says Plato, the great Greek Philosopher. Aristotle says that it is like music or dancing, a divine art of gods. We are reminded of Lord Shiva’s *Tandav*dance when we read Aristotle’s words: “In rhythms and melodies we have the most realistic imitations of anger and mildness

as well as of courage, temperance and their opposites."Poetry is a rhythmic representation of the deeper elements of human nature through language.

That the poet works at the level of *Creation* is not a new dictum. It is propounded in Sanskrit Literature of Vedic India and *Poetics*of Aristotle that the poets and the men of spiritual powers work at the level of God.

क़विरमनीषी परिभु: स्वयम्भु: (*Kavir Manishi Paribhu Swayambhu*)

So sing the Vedic scholars, which implies that the pleasure one enjoys from good poetry is equivalent to the frenzied ecstasy of a sage or seer when in communion with God. This is what has been proved by ***Rasa*** theory in Sanskrit literature:

रसो: वैस: (*Raso Vai Sah*)

Rasas are created by *bhavas,* the states of mind.God Himself is *Rasa*. One cannot enjoy a poem in the absence of *Rasa* or the *quintessence* that is the vital element of a creation. Great literature is created out of, also evoking in turn, *Bhava*or *Rasa.* William Wordsworth defines poetry as "The spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "emotions recollected in tranquility"in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. *Bhava* or emotion is the source poetry springs out of. A poem overflows out of the deepest recesses of human heart. The bhava of unflinching faith in Divine powers translates as mysticism in poetry.

Mysticism is characterised by religious ecstasies, alterations in the conscious state of an individual where awareness of the external environment is lessened while "spiritual", or internal awareness is exalted and intensified. In these types of thralls, it is said that people experience auditory and visual hallucinations, considered forms of extra-sensory perceptions by those who have encountered mystical experiences.Saint Valmiki became a mystic when he composed the *Ramayana* in the metre of the words uttered spontaneously by him in divine frenzy. As he was walking along the riverbank, he saw in a near-by tree two loving Krauncha birds sporting and singing in joy of life and love. Suddenly the male bird fell down, hit by a hunter's arrow. The female bird, seeing her lover rolling on the ground, lamented in a piteous fashion. Valmiki was so furious and stirred by passion, as he saw the bird die and heard the screams of the female, that a curse burst out instantly. From *Shoka* comes *Shloka*--from Karunaor compassionate grief comes poetry. When he recalled the words of his curse, he marvelled at the rhythm of his words. He realised that his pity had taken the shape of a beautiful shloka. And the *Ramayana* was composed in the same beautiful metre. It is said that the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer danced in a mystic frenzy when he read the *Bhagavad Gita*, calling it "the most beneficial study in the whole wide world". Lord Krishna beautifully explicates deeper implication of mystic knowledge and wisdom in the *Gita*: "Knowledge that arises from within as a consequence of spiritual practice or Sadhna, is called wisdom. On realisation of this knowledge, nothing further will remain to be known." The Bible reiterates: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy one is insight."

Mysticism in Blake (A mystical English poet,painter, engraver, and a visionary who lived during the late-18th and early-19th centuries):

Blake had this imaginative power to come into direct relation with the unseen world, so he is called a mystic. Naturally, both his

poetry and his drawings did not record the life about him but showed his intense desire to escape from the commonplace of daily life. He always preferred his visions to reality.His biographer said that Blake wrote "for children and angels; himself 'a divine child,' whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth." From early childhood, Blake spoke of having visions--- at four he saw God "put his head to the window"; around age nine, while walking through the countryside, he saw a tree filled with angels.

I saw a dream! What can it mean?
And that I was a maiden Queen
Guarded by an Angel mild:
Witless woe was never beguiled!

To a mystic, nothing in the world is trivial, nothing is unimportant, common or unclean. It is this feeling that Blake has crystallised in the lines:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And a Heaven in a wildflower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

A true mystic, then, in the full sense of the term, is one who *knows* there is unity under diversity at the centre of all existence. True mysticism is an experience and a life.

Blake used symbolism and mythology of his own invention. His wife often complained about his mystic trances: 'I have very little of Mr Blake's company. He is always in Paradise.' Through his poetry, Blake questioned every accepted value of his age. His mystic poetry, especially his masterpieces "Songs of Innocence and Experience" and "The marriage of Hell and Heaven" radically anticipate the great change in the form and content of poetry that culminated in Romantic revival. Like all the great Romantics, he emphasised the role of divine vision in poetry:

One power alone makes a poet: imagination, the divine vision…Where Mercy, Love, and Pity dwell their God is dwelling too.'

"The Divine Image*"* by William Blake

Blake's major poems involve religious mysticism. The first and foremost poem of " Songs of Innocence", published in 1789 is "introduction":

On a cloud I saw a child,
And he is laughing said to me.
Pipe a song about a lamb…

The child becomes an archetype of Jesus Christ, as is evident from his two major poems, "The Lamb" from "Innocence" and "The Tyger" from "Experience". In fact, his best-known book is "Songs of Experience" (1794) in which his mood of brightness and cheerfulness is replaced by a "sense of gloom and mystery" because he was baffled by the power of evil and the existence of sin in the world. This deeply disturbing mystical idea he expressed in many poems, but its most powerful expression is found in " Tyger! Tyger! Burning Bright":

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

These two poems are contradictory as they depict two contrary states of the Lord: mild and naïve nature of God contrasting with his harsh, ferocious, destructive form. God made both the tiger and the lamb: both elements are in every being. But how to reconcile this fact with the concept of the supreme goodness of God? That is the question. Blake's answer--Mercy, Pity, Peace and Love.These virtues embody both God and Man. That's

why"The Little Black Boy" creates a mystic world of love for the deprived black child. So do "The Little Boy Lost", "The Little Boy Found" and many other poems.

Blake has also read, understood and made use of the philosophy of the ***Bhagavad Gita***. S. Foster Damon was the earliest Blake critic who pointed out that, "Blake is even in accord with Eastern mysticism; Urthona is Dharma; Urizen, Karma; while both Tharmas and Luvah are included in Maya."[1] The disturbance in the hierarchical order of the scheme of the fourfold, results in the disintegration of the being of Albion the Primal Man in *Vala, Or The Four Zoas* (one of the uncompleted prophetic books by Blake---1797-1804):

…One dread morn of gory blood
The manhood was divided, for the gentle passions,
Making way
Thro' the infinite labyrinths of the heart and thro'
The nostrils issuing
In odorous stupefaction, stood before the Eyes of Man
A female bright. (V111: 278- 82)

Blake's personified psychic faculties have all 'emanated' from the body of the Primal Man. Lord Krishna declares the world to be an 'emanation' of his supreme will. Blake's apocalyptic vision (to see Man in God and God in Man) of Man as Imagination also cones from the *Gita*, as Northrop Frye remarks: "…Blake was the first of European Idealists able to link his own tradition of thought with the *Bhagavadgita.*"[2]

Mysticism in William Wordsworth:

Blake's singsong, mythical, prophetic mysticism grew in Wordsworth's hands, emerging as an intriguing world of storytelling. Wordsworth seeks to embed his vision in his actual environment, the world of natural feelings and familiar situations. Wordsworth 's wisdom is profound for he knows all about the subject he is dealing with. As John F. Danby remarks:

In this field the person must enter into relation in order to 'know' all. (The most intimate sense of 'know', we might remember here, is the biblical one.) The lover knows the beloved more fully than the spectator can. And the more one's wholeness as person enters into the transaction of knowing, the more complete the knowledge…In experience it is the person knowing who grows. Experience is centripetal.[3]

"Wordsworth has been widely venerated for his witness to this special 'mystical' experience. Many have taken him on trust as a poet because of it." John F. Danby later reiterates.[10]A high priest of Nature who called himself 'a worshipper of Nature' in his *TinternAbbey*Wordsworth experienced 'nature mysticism'. "Sweet is the lore which Nature brings; / Our meddling intellect", he believed. In the midst of what he would call 'natural objects', he created poetry that he defined as 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge' in his *Preface To Lyrical Ballads*. Such eulogy of poetry makes us agree with Arnold, who describes poetry in his essay on Wordsworth: "Poetry is *at bottom* a *criticism* of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful *application* of *ideas* to life, ---to the question: How to live."[4][Italicsmine] That's why "Wordsworth belongs to history", commented T S Eliot.[5]

Wordsworth's poetic life began on the banks of the Dervent in Cockermouth, when he was a babe in arms. He writes in *The Prelude: Book 1: Childhood and School-time:*

Was it for this [that is---to fail to make me a poet]
Was it for this,
That one the fairest of all rivers loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song?

As a schoolboy, in Hawk shed School, he was encouraged by his masters in the writing of English verse, for which he showed a natural talent. His ears began to open to the charm--
Of words in tuneful order, found them sweet
For their own sakes, ---a passion and a power---
Wordsworth admits that as a boy who had been intimate with living Nature, 'a wanderer among the fields and woods', he was not only stirred to ecstasy by glittering verse, but he received enduring touches of deep joy from the great Nature that exists in works of mighty poets:
Visionary Power
Attends upon the motions of the winds
Embodied in the mystery of words.

"In plain prose, he began to delight in the craft of verse, and also to feel in great poetry, and especially…in Shakespeare and Milton, a visionary power like that which came to him from the stirring life of Nature", observes Helen.[6]

No poet ever had happier schooldays. Out of school there were no restrictions on the hours he kept: he was skating by the light of stars, snaring woodcocks at the dead of night, watching the sunrise after a long ramble. Throughout life he was an inveterate walker by night. His sister Dorothy's journal tells: 'starlight walks and winter winds are his delight'. In "The Tables Turned",he asks his friend to leave his books and come out into the open since he can learn more from the spring woods:

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can.

These lines echo Shakespeare's eulogy of Nature as a teacher in his brilliant comedy *As You Like It*:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.
(Act 2: Scene 1)
According to the French philosopher Rousseau, whose novel *Emily*became the foundation of Wordsworth's *Lucy*Poems, a child allowed to develop his own natural curiosity and intuition is bound to shape into a better man than a child brought up in the artificial atmosphere of a city's educational institutions. De Quincey was right when he said:
"Wordsworth had his passion for Nature fixed in his blood; it was a necessity of his being, like that of the mulberry leaf to the silkworm, and through his commerce with Nature did he live and breathe. Hence it was from the *truth* of his love that his knowledge grew."[7]

Wordsworth's attitude to Nature, his objections to over-stylised poetic diction, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects for poetry brought a revolution, ushering in a new age of poetry. He brought a completely new definition of poetry, which for him, is 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' taking its origin from 'emotion recollected in tranquility'. It is not physical pleasure that Wordsworth finds in Nature; he believes that Nature nourishes the spiritual and emotional side of man also; "the inner life of Nature, the life that

speaks to man's own deeper feelings…"[8] Wordsworth's mother comforts her children in "An Evening Walk" by encouraging them to look at a shooting star, or to play with glow-worms. Helen observes: "The image of the child, his hand lit up in the darkness by the glow-worm, is for Wordsworth the centre of the scene, not the dying mother and her feelings for her children."[9]The call of high mountains, the sudden sight of daffodils by the lake, the sloping pastures, the deep and gloomy wood, all these uplift him from the mere plane of an ordinary world of physical delight to a higher plane where he receives Nature's moral and mystical messages.

Nutting indicates the growth of Wordsworth's mind from 'a poetic paganism to a philosophic pantheism'. The description of the bower, redolent with beauty and ease, brings to mind Spenser's 'Bower of Bliss':

…the hazels rose.
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
A virgin scene!...
Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves
The violets of five seasons re-appear
And fade, unseen by any human eye;
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on
For ever; and I saw the sparkling foam,
And—with my cheek on one of those green stones
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep---
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay
Tribute to ease;

And then the poem describes how the boy suddenly erupts into a wanton act of destruction; the boyish joy in merciless ravage is rendered forcefully:

Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with crash
And merciless ravage: and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being…

How Wordsworth spiritualises Nature and endows the commonplace with the colour of imagination is revealed beautifully. The sharp pangs of guilty conscience, a sense of responsibility and pain in the concluding lines indicate the poet's mystical relationship with Nature:

I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky—

So, Wordsworth warns his sister Dorothy:

Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
Touch--- for there is a spirit in woods.

Similarly, the bird snaring and the stolen boat episodes in *The Prelude* or *Growth of a Poet's Mind*, like the experience of *The Nutting*, reveal how the poet's mind had grown up:

Fair seed-time had my soul, and I grew up
Foster'd alike by beauty and by fear:

The Prelude(a posthumous work, but much revised throughout the poet's life)gives us the most authentic record of Wordsworth's inner life, out of which his poetry grew, his early intense delight in

Nature and his relationship with her, revealing how Wordsworth received the best part of his education from Nature.

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows
Like harmony in music; there is a dark
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles
Discordant elements…
…..in making up
The calm existence that is mine when I
Am worthy of myself!

It is the full intense life which he lived through his senses as a child that turned him into a great mystical poet.

Nature has been acting as sort of glorified parent or schoolmistress. The poet gives 'thanks to the means which Nature deigned to employ'--- the discipline of fear and joy. "One of the things that must immediately be faced, in approaching *The Prelude*, is the question of Wordsworth's mysticism: the cult of the Child, and Nature, and through these of the Infinite", pertinently observes John F. Danby. [10]

Growth is the central preoccupation for Wordsworth. His wife was right to subtitle *The Prelude—Growth of a Poet's Mind*.What is it to 'grow'? It is an existential question, nay, a mystical question. To find out what growing is, we must ourselves be growing. John F. Danby explains: "Growth is not automatic. It depends on a capacity to respond, on membership of what Wordsworth called an 'active universe'.It is a function of intelligence and sensitivity, of the perception…of 'similitude in dissimilitude'…Growth is not a passive matter…Growth is venturing into worlds not realised, the round ocean, and the living air, and the heart of man. Its end is an awareness of the terms on which men variously exist--- a knowledge of all the natures. It is presided over by Fear and Beauty, the two ministries. It is stretched between hope and despair, the past and the future, what Wordsworth himself thought of as 'the two wings' of the purposive being."[11]

The significant thing in Wordsworth is his recognition of the vast potential that is wrapt up in a child ("*trailing clouds of glory do we come"*), his equally keen knowledge of what age takes away, his awareness of the continuity between the two regions of child and man, and of the need—for growth's sake—not to disjoin the two. "He is concerned to trace the connection and affinity between the two. The genius is the man who has kept alive in himself all that also propelled the child into experience. The Child, for Wordsworth, is the parent principle of fresh responsiveness and growth."[12]

Wordsworth's cosmic euphoria is revealed in *The Prelude* (notably the Simplon Pass Experience of 1790 (6: 621-640) or the equally memorable one in Snowdonia (xiv, 35-130; in all reports there are those surprises and closeness of definition that carry their own conviction): 'I made no vows but vows were then made for me…' 'Strength came where weakness was not known to be…' 'comfort seemed to touch a heart that had not been disconsolate'. Wordsworth scanned the extremes of Being in these lines, the essence of the poet mystic that he was.

Mysticism in Coleridge:

Coleridge was a contemporary and friend of Wordsworth.It was the genius of Wordsworth that first revealed Coleridge to himself and awakened his dormant creative energies. Primarily known as a poet of the 'Supernatural', where do we find mysticism in Coleridge? Is there an interaction with divine powers?

James Lewis Huss observes in " Mysticism at Sea: The Mystery of the Ancient Mariner":

"The first generation of Romantic poets---the Williams, Blake and Wordsworth, and …Samuel Taylor Coleridge--- bestowed upon the world a peerless canon of meter and verse and … a salient brand of mystical philosophy permeates their florid imagery and figures of speech." Coleridge shared with Wordsworth a sense of the beauty of the outward things, but still more delicate, more subtle; he saw the world with a keener, more radiant vision. Profoundly akin and strikingly different, both share many parallels in their lives as Romantic poets as well as their personal lives. Coleridge loved to compose in walking over uneven ground while Wordsworth always wrote walking up and down a straight gravel path. Coleridge loved broken surfaces, picturesque interruptions—may-thorn amid yew, purple island amid bright sea. Wordsworth found the marvels in the familiar, the normal. Whereas Coleridge was peculiarly fascinated by the "interruptions" of the spiritual world. However, both explored the unexplored, the mystical, the transcendental. Both were influenced deeply by Milton, a mystic in his own right as one witnesses in his grand epic *Paradise Lost.* F. R. Leavis observes: "One effect of the achievement of Coleridge and Wordsworth was to remove the eighteenth century from between their contemporaries and Milton, each in his own distinctive way."[13] He goes on to state emphatically: "Is it extravagant to see in Coleridge's 'young-eyed Loves' a reminiscent of [Milton's] 'meek-eyed Peace,' and to note in confirmation that his [Coleridge's] 'enamour'd rustic' echoes Milton's 'amorous cloud'?"[14]

*The Rime of the Ancient mariner*is a mystical text, designed, whether consciously or unconsciously, to guide its reader to a higher state of consciousness, a state that mystics call enlightenment. *The Rime*is an allegory of a vision, a dream, hallucination into consciousness by the unconscious mind, drawing it toward enlightenment, the two minds symbolised by the Wedding Guest and the Ancient Mariner, respectively. " There was a ship", the Mariner merely informs the Wedding Guest and then begins his tale. He departs upon his adventures until his ship is blown south by a storm, all the way south to the icy waters of the Antarctic , where the ship is then stuck. The turning point comes when the Ancient Mariner kills an auspicious albatross and frees his frozen boat. No reason is given for the act of killing. No one seems to know whether this act is a sin or not. What follows is a series of unfortunate events. The Mariner does overcome these obstacles, albeit through no effort of his own. He makes no decisions, initiates no action except for the killing of the bird. He is, in this way, more like the epic heroes of the earlier *Iliad*,where the characters do not "sit down and think out what to do…the gods take the place of consciousness" and makes their decisions for them(Jaynes 72).The Mariner too is manipulated by the gods(a couple of apparitions and a Polar Spirit). But he does not act upon the instructions of his supernatural interlopers. He is merely drawn through the narrative, as the ship is drawn through the sea by the spirits beneath the water. He has no volition and makes no decision. Even in the most significant event of the poem, the blessing of the water-snakes in Part 1V, the Mariner is unaware of his own action. As he navigates the mystical seas in search of transcendence, he finds himself in utter helpless and solitude:

Alone, alone, all alone,
Alone, alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

Maurice Bowra remarks: "This is the true anguish of a man who feels himself deserted both by God and man and faced with the emptiness of his guilty and tormented soul."[15]

Coleridge's second masterpiece *Kubla Khan,* according to Humphry House, is a poem about the act of creation, about the "ecstasy in imaginative fulfilment".[16] Herethe mystical aspect is given almost wholly by landscape. The 'coherent incoherence' of this dream experience makes it the most perfect of all such records:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover

It is in "Wireless"(at p.235 of *Traffics and Discoveries*, Macmillan ed) that Kipling wrote: "Remember that in all the millions permitted there are no more than five—five little lines—of which one can say: 'These are the pure Magic. These are the clear vision. The rest is only poetry."[17]

The manuscript of 1810 announces in Coleridge's own hand that the poem was composed in a sort of reverie. By 1816, in the subtitle to the first printed version, the poem is bafflingly described as 'A vision in dream' and the Preface claims it was composed in a 'profound sleep of three hours.' Notwithstanding its "patchwork brilliance", the pivot of all interpretations is in the lines:

Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! Those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,

What a brilliant statement of the mystic potentialities of poetry! Coleridge assumes the role of a creator or procreator. He desires that if he could revive within him theAbyssinian damsel's "symphony and song", then he would become Lord of creation that is *Brahma*and would build the spiritual dome in air that is poetry(compare"ditties of no tune" by Keats). This dome is superior, a more abiding paradise with convex heat and concave ice. The miracle consists of the holding together of two different elements according to Coleridge's own theory of the 'reconciliation of the opposites', as it actually floats upon the sacred river: the poetic imagination itself which is a source of genuine creativity. If Kubla Khan, being a great king with temporal power and material resources could order a sunny dome with caves of ice to be built('a miracle of rare device')then the poet, recognising in him the potentials of a creator, becomes the Lord of creation. Those who heard his song should see his visionary creation, for that is the mystical power of poetry. People will look at him with holy dread:

And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Now this is an apt description of a mystic and a poet. This 'Paradise', an emblem of the sacred relationship between art and nature, is the vision of the ideal human life as the poetic imagination can create it. It is because of such a 'Creation' of the poet in his frenzy that he deserves the ritual

dread or awe, as deserves Valmiki for creating the *Ramayana* in a mystic frenzy.

Mysticism in Keats (1795-1821):

John Keats, the youngest of the Romantic Poets, is "less of a nature mystic, and more a 'human nature mystic'; a writer who endeavoured to 'know thyself', as the entrance to the Delphic Oracle once instructed", says Trevor Greenfield. He further reiterates: "Keats lived and loved with a passion, but also battled the black dog of depression throughout his life. If one were to identify an overarching theme in his work, it would probably be his quest for self-knowledge. For anyone on a spiritual path for any length of time, this theme cannot fail to resonate."

Though Keats died when he was just 25 years old, he left behind a substantial body of work, considering he died so young. T. S. Eliot remarks about him, eulogising and giving him the greatest tribute: " Keats seems to me also a great poet…The Odes—especially perhaps the *Ode to Psyche* – are enough for his reputation. But I am not so much concerned with the degree of his greatness as with its kind…it seems to me to be much more the kind of Shakespeare."[18]

Keats is known for the supernatural elements in his poetry but, as Moore notes, the term "mysticism" has become a popular label for "anything nebulous, esoteric, occult, or supernatural." However, 'mysticism', in Keats, implies having a spiritual meaning or reality that is not obvious to the intelligence. It also includes, as in Keats, a profound study of the soul so to speak, even if brought into play through the supernatural elements. Middleton Murray tells us about his *Keats and Shakespeare*: "It is no part of the purpose of this book to appreciate Keats's poems …[but] to elucidate the deep and natural movement of the poet's soul which underlies them."[p. 129][19]He, like Eliot, goes on to compare Keats with Shakespeare: "He was twenty three; and at the moment…he was writing day after day the *Odes*, to Psyche, to the Nightingale, on a Grecian Urn, on Melancholy---poems comparable to nothing in English literature save the works of Shakespeare's maturity."[p. 143][20] Murray intends to be an inward biographer of the soul, taking his cue, perhaps, from Keats's famous remark that Shakespeare's life was a continual allegory, with his works the comment upon it. Thus, in both the cases, the man and his works are essentially the same, his poetry the expression of his deepest nature. Keats himself confessed in 1817 to Charles Browne: ". . . at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed enormously---I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."

Keats' concept of 'Negative Capability' implies mystic intuition and uncertainty beyond reason and knowledge. He expressed it through the uncanny use of sensuous imagery. That's why Louis MacNeice calls him a "Sensuous Mystic". The entire experience of the knight in his "La Belle Dame Sans Mercy" seems like a mystical dream.

"Ode to a Nightingale" starts with a state of mind caught in an inner journey, exploring the mystic question whether our normal waking state is not a kind of dream, less real than the visionary world the poet fleetingly encounters:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of Hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk…

The ode opens with a pained heart longing for oblivion. Lethe is the river of forgetfulness, sleep and death, that flows into the darkness of Hades. Such profound despair, emptiness and surrender. No hope of redemption, it seems. But one who is acquainted with Rumi might think otherwise:

The unsuspecting child first wipes the tablet
And then writes the letters on it.
God turns the heart into blood and desperate tears;
Then writes the spiritual mysteries on it.
[Mathnawi 11, 1826-27]

Peter Kingsley describes in his book *The Dark Places of Wisdom* how 'Initiates' into the Greek mysteries would lie down in a cave or specially constructed place for incubation. They would do this to receive divine guidance; the initiate needed to be a kind of blank slate with no hopes or preconceptions and therefore fully receptive to whatever the Divine might bring. Lord Krishna teaches this surrender to Arjuna in the *Gita*.

After having described his surrendered state, suddenly Keats is addressing a shadowy, mysterious presence:

'*Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,*
But being too happy in thine happiness,

That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and of shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

The nightingale, a 'light-winged Dryad', (woodnymph) sings of summer, yet paradoxically, resides in the darkness of 'shadows numberless', enigmatically singing in the dark because its joy is in some way too intense. The nightingale is a recurring image in In Sufi poetry. For Rumi, the nightingale seems to represent the one who has transcended bitterness and who has been welcomed into intimacy with the sweetheart that is God:

When the heart has seen the sweetheart,
How can it remain bitter?
When a nightingale has seen the rose,
How can it keep from singing?
[Mathnawi Vl, 2639]

Rumi also urges us to 'search the darkness', for in it we will not only find the fountain of life but also the source of light.

Though we sleep and rest in the dark,
Doesn't the dark contain the water of life?
Be refreshed in the darkness.
Doesn't a moment of silence?
Restore beauty to the voice?
Opposites manifest through opposites:
In the black core of the heart
God created the eternal light of love.
(Mathnawi 1, 3861-65)

Keats then mentions a thirst that he seems to associate with the bird and longs for an intoxicating drink that will allow him to join the nightingale in its ecstasy:

O, for a draught of vintage! That hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country-green…
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen

Of course, the wine of spiritual intoxication is an image central to Sufi poetry. Rumi and Omar Khayyam are replete with it. Having compared the immortal state of the nightingale in the next stanza, Keats contrasts its permanent state to the pitiful decay of everything in the material world:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

Lord Krishna in the *Gita* teaches that the disillusionment with the sensual world and realisation of the futility of purely earthly pleasures is an important step to the spiritual path. Gautam Buddha's life proved the same, as illustrated in the poem "Buddha's First Glimpse of the World". Such is the belief of Rumi and other Sufi saints too.The allied theme of mutability and death ('And leave the world unseen') too is a mystical subject, as witnessed in "The Excursion"too:
While man grows old and withers and decays
And countless generations of mankind
Depart and leave no vestige where they trod.
(iv. 760)
In "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "To Autumn" Keats is evolving as a 'sensuous mystic'. Compton Rickett finds "symphony of sound" in the highly evocative and sensuous imagery of "Ode to Autumn":
Where are the songs of Spring?Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, --
…Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge crickets sing; and now with treble soft

While Keats is considered to be fluent in the language of hermetic traditions, his only declared religious feelings were towards poetry, beauty and love. So, he writes in "Ode on a Grecian Urn":
Beauty is truth, truth beauty, --- that is all
Ye know on earth, and all Ye need to know

Keats is celebrating the power of poetry, art and imagination to make permanent what is transitory in nature.By implication, what the imagination seizes as 'Beauty' must be 'Truth'. There are unlimited possibilities of perfection in imagination. ***Satyam, Shivam, Sundram***--- so sing the Hindu Vedas. Shiva is truth and beauty, one that leads to joy or ecstasy. Supreme Lord Krishna too, according to Hindu scriptures, gives expression to His *Ananda* (joy) through music and dance, flute-playing and *Raas Leela*. To see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth. "A thing of beauty is a joy forever" Keats says in "Endymion". Truth and Joy characterise the beauty and permanence of Art. And poetry is the greatest art.

Additionally ,in a letter to Fanny Brawne in October 1819, towards the end of his short life, Keats wrote:
I have been astonished that men could die martyrs for religion—I have shudder'd at it--- I shudder no more—I could be martyred for my Religion—love is my religion—I could die for that--- I could die for you.My creed is love and you are its only tenet.

Keats is talking about ideal spiritual love. "Things as they ought to be", suggested by Aristotle, is the "unrealised ideal" an artist of poetry may place before him. As Caroline Spurgeon concludes in her landmark article:
"…all things about us are but forms or manifestations of one divine life, and that these phenomena are fleeting and impermanent, although the spirit which informs them is immortal and endures. In other words, it leads to the belief that "the ideal is the only Real."

That's what John Keats sings of--- "happy melodist, unwearied/ Forever piping songs forever new/ More happy love. . ." in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" after singing beautifully ---

Heard Melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is--- infinite, Aristotle asserts. And Keats purged the doors of his perception, as laid bare in his sublime poetry.

Conclusion:

Thus, various poets of Romantic mysticism have contributed fresh aspects of Truth as they perceived it. Wordsworth gained his revelation of Divinity through Nature and Nature alone, whereas, to Blake "Nature was a hindrance" and imagination the only reality. But all agree that unity underlies diversity. Therefore, mysticism is an attitude of mind founded upon an intuitive or experienced conviction of unity, of oneness in all things. From this source springs all mystical thought, and the mystic, of whatever epoch or country, would say in the words of Krishna—

There is true knowledge. Learn thou it is this:
To see one changeless Life in all the Lives,
And in the Separate, One Inseparable.
The Bhagavad Gita, Book 18

A mystic's vision is intuitive. So, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats felt the presence of a Divine reality behind and within the ordinary world of sense perception: Nature, Art, Poetry and so on. Theysaw an essential identity of 'Being' between Man, Nature and God as for them God and the supreme soul animating all things are one. Transcendentalism, therefore, is closely connected with mysticism.

Notes and References

1. Damon S Foster, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (London, 1969), p.145.
2. Fry Northrop, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947),p. 173.
3. Danby John F. *Wordsworth* : *The Prelude and Other Poems,* Studies in English Literature , University of Sussex, Edward Arnold (Publishers)

Ltd., 41 Maddox Street, London, 1963, P. 9.
4. Ibid., P.44.
5. Ward Thomas Humphry Ed., *The English Poets,Selections*, *Chaucer to Donne*(1980), Ulna Press, 2012., Hansebooks, 2017.
6. Darbishire Helen *The Poet Wordsworth;* The Clark Lectures: Trinity College, Cambridge, 1949; Oxford University Press, Ely House, London, 1950; P.3.
7. Ibid., P12.
8. Ibid., P13.
9. Darbishire Helen *The Poet Wordsworth;* The Clark Lectures: Trinity College, Cambridge, 1949; Oxford University Press, Ely House, London, 1950; P.21.
10. Danby John F. *Wordsworth* : *The Prelude and Other Poems,* Studies in English Literature , University of Sussex, Edward Arnold (Publishers) Ltd., 41 Maddox Street, London; 1963, P. 19
11. Ibid., P12.
12. Ibid., P. 39.
13. Leavis, F. R. : *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*, PENGUIN BOOKS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CHATTO AND WINDUS, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1936, p.121.
14. Ibid., P.124.
15. Bowra, Maurice, *The Romantic Imagination* , Oxford University Press, 1999.
16. House, Humphry : "Interpreting Coleridge", Review in *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures;* New Statesman, 1157.(9th May, 1953):554.
17. Ridley, M.R. Late Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, Hon. L.H.D. Bowdoin College,U.S.A: *KEATS' CRAFTSMANSHIP: A STUDY IN POETIC DEVELOPMENT*, Methuen, London, 1964, p. 227.
18. Bate, Walter Jackson, ed., *Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, Inc.,Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1964, P. 11.
19. Leavis, F. R., *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry*, PENGUIN BOOKS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CHATTO AND WINDUS, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1936, p.199.
20. Ibid., P.200.