

MYSTICISM OF JOY AND LAUGHTER:  
A TRADITIONALIST CRITIQUE OF OSHO

Dr. Mohammad Maruf Shah

## ABSTRACT

Osho's primary emphasis falls on the affirmation of life and its celebration. He focuses on the *ananda* aspect of the Reality. As he says: so let your blissfulness be the only criterion. If something is making you blissful, it is bound to be real- because from the unreal you can't get blissfulness. This paper attempts a critical appraisal from the traditionalist perspective of Rajneesh. This paper argues that he ignores certain other dimensions of mystical path and even risks hedonization of mysticism. Reducing mysticism to the art of pursuing bliss implies renouncing grand theological and metaphysical claims that all religions have made including the apparently non-metaphysical religions. Aestheticization of life is his fundamental message. Aesthetic orientation is the defining orientation of his mysticism. Life is a song to be sung, a dance to be danced; and only those who can sing and dance and rejoice can know what life is. He hates the old religions which spoke in terms of do's and don'ts and replaces traditional commandments with what he calls "a few requests." Osho seeks to turn life into a festival of lights and he is not bothered to see the seamy side of the world. He doesn't find the world evil or full of suffering. He is extreme antithesis of Buddha and Schopenhauer when he comes to praise the beauties and the charm of the world.

The great popularity of certain libertine mystics in recent times is attributable, among other things, to their tailoring of traditional teachings so as to suit modern sensibility. Modern mind, for good or worse, is, generally speaking, unable to relive the past and is in need of quite a new, easy going, more worldly type of, mystical discipline. He wishes to mould religion in his own humanized image. He trusts concrete living experience more than abstractions. He worships himself and his images and desires more than he worships God. He is more interested in himself than in God. Anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism are the important ingredients of modern humanist outlook. After Nietzsche it has become increasingly difficult to defend old ascetic sort of spirituality. Body has come to possess important place again. Nietzsche's influential critique of Christianity that emphasized soul and marginalized body and that was too otherworldly has been informing modern thought and literature. Modernism and Postmodernism have valorized the body. Existentialist orientation of much of modern literature and philosophy has also championed the hitherto ignored body. Soul-body dualism has been subject to a host of influential critiques. Disappearance of traditional contemplative space in modernity has also led to reassertion of Dionysian element in (post)modern thought. Modern man has become increasingly deaf to traditional language. Secularist orientation that largely colours modern sensibility discourages traditional otherworldly ascetic interpretation of religion. The Osho phenomenon is made understandable in this context.

### **Bliss as Key Motif of Osho's Mystical Philosophy**

Osho, amongst the most famous (or notorious) mystics and mystical philosophers of the twentieth century with worldwide following is quite a category in himself. He is indeed a phenomenon, a unique synthesis of traditional mystical thought and (post) modern thought. He is one of the most interesting products of clash of ideas and sensibilities that fashion modern man. He has asserted that his most original contribution to mysticism is the sense of laughter. Presently we examine this claim and its supposed originality and its possible repercussions.

Osho has himself expressed his fundamental role as a mystic when he suggested to his personal dentist Swami Devgeet the name of his biography as “Bhagwan, Messiah of Life, Love and Laughter To the question what is religion he has simple and straight forward answer. “Religion is the art of singing life. Religion is music; religion is dance”.<sup>1</sup> And to the question what is God he replies by quoting the saying “God is juice” – *raso vai sab*”.<sup>2</sup> What is life for and what is the object of religion? To this question Osho’s answer is from the same perspective.

Religion is the search for ultimate bliss and all the joys of the universe. The small happinesses are to be turned into the steps of the temple. It is wrong idea that you will attain to the state of *sat-chit-anand* by dropping the joys of this world because how can someone who is not even ready to receive the ecstasies of this world gather courage to receive godliness.<sup>3</sup>

Osho’s primary emphasis falls on the affirmation of life and its celebration. He focuses on the *ananda* aspect of the Reality which the mystic comes to appropriate. To quote his words from the discourses given to Rajnesh International University: “So let your blissfulness be the only criterion. If something is making you blissful, it is bound to be real- because from the unreal you can’t get blissfulness. And if your blissfulness goes on growing, then you are on the right path”.<sup>4</sup> He is fond of quoting such verses as the following from the mystic poets:

My heart is the springtime of paradise,  
Sampling the fragrance of blossoming  
Goraknath, one of his favourite mystics, is quoted in his collection of discourses *Die O! Yogi Die*  
Laughing, playing, making merry,  
Neither lust nor anger remains,  
Laughing, playing, singing a song,  
Keeping consciousness well centred.<sup>5</sup>

Again quotes him:

There is nothing else except words of love.  
This world is a garden path.<sup>6</sup>

Aestheticization of life is his fundamental message. Life is an art of joy and bliss according to him. Aesthetic orientation is the defining orientation of his mysticism. “Life is a song to be sung, a dance to be danced; and only those who can sing and dance and rejoice can know what life is”.<sup>7</sup> He hates the old religions which spoke in terms of do’s and don’ts and replaces traditional commandments with what he calls “a few requests.” And the fundamental request that he distills from the “crazy” Jesus is the request for enjoying life. “Jesus says again and again to his disciples,

‘Rejoice! Rejoice! I say unto you, rejoice! I say again, rejoice!’<sup>8</sup> But he thinks that this commandment has been forgotten or it has not been heard; the disciples have not understood yet”.<sup>9</sup> He replaces the old idea of renunciation and *sanyas* with his new brand that makes *sanyas* a carnival, a festival, a club. “My *sanyas* is nothing but rejoicing; it is not renunciation but rejoicing.”<sup>10</sup> If he has any metaphysics it may be called the metaphysics of joy and love.

### **The World is Beautiful**

For Osho religion consists in faith in existence, in the goodness of existence. Gratitude as a key religious attitude figures prominently in his discourses. To be religious is to be grateful to existence for the gift of life. Mystical perception reveals the goodness of the ground of existence. God is what is and it can’t be evil which is at root an anthropomorphic notion. He in fact transcends dualistic categories of good and evil in characterizing God or Existence. However existence in itself can’t be but good. This point is excellently made by Schuon also. Evil is attributable to the desires and evaluations of mind. To quote Osho:

God is the guarantee of goodness. God means the good. The good is the substratum of existence, so evil is not possible. Evil is impossible. We must have misrepresented; we must have brought our own ideas, concepts, doctrines; we must have created our own stupid private notions of how things should be. Things simply *are*. There is no *should* in existence. The idea of should is brought by man – and once you bring the idea of should, existence is divided into two: good and bad... only that which is, is; nothing else. Reality is as it is; don’t bring the should, otherwise the condemnation comes.<sup>11</sup>

He further explicates what it means to be grateful:

Life is god’s grace, and so is death. Love is god’s grace, and so is all that ever happens, good and bad too. One who understands this duality of existence is god’s grace. One who understands this is not only grateful for all that is good but is also grateful for all that appears bad; that is real gratefulness. To be grateful only for the happy moments is nothing of gratefulness, that is simple greed, cunningness, but it has nothing to do with gratefulness.<sup>12</sup>

Osho seeks to turn life into a festival of lights and he is not bothered to see the seamy side of the world. He doesn’t find the world evil or full of suffering. He is extreme antithesis of Buddha and Schopenhauer when he comes to praise the beauties and the charm of the world. None of the uses of the world is stale.

God is found only in the heart of one who is utterly in praise of existence because it is so incredibly beautiful, so utterly valuable. We have not earned it, we are not worthy of it. To be is a gift. Life is a gift,

love is a gift, and all that is, is a sheer gift from god. All that we can do is to praise him.<sup>13</sup>

This very praising and rejoicing in it is what constitutes prayer “That very praising is enough, because that praise becomes prayer-prayer is nothing else. Prayer is the heart in tremendous rejoicing, thankfulness, saying the existence is good.<sup>14</sup> According to him prayer is when one feels uplifted. When no future or past distracts a person he is in prayer. When “*this moment is all, this here, this moment*, is all in all, something opens up in the heart and a fragrance is released. Sometimes in words, sometimes in silence. Sometimes in meaningful words, and sometimes just like a child babbling. Sometimes it may become a song, or a dance.<sup>15</sup> Prayer, in his perspective is simply gratitude towards existence, an attitude of thanks giving, a celebration of benediction called life.

He conceives world as will to bliss, will to dance. Everything is seeking God, the God that is the juice, the *rasa*, of existence. The Spirit which is being actualized or realized is *Ananda*. The metaphysics of joy, the Spirit expressing itself in joy or the movement of Spirit itself is to be characterized as joy. Osho’s aesthetic metaphysics finds here a sublime expression

Life is a constant search to become a song, to become a dance, to become a celebration, a Christmas. Every form of life is searching to become a song of joy- birds, animals, trees. It is not only man who is in search of bliss; the whole existence is moving in millions of forms towards the same goal. The goal of all life is bliss. When one bursts forth into millions of songs, one has arrived. One has achieved the goal, one has become one with god.<sup>16</sup>

### **Cheerfulness as the Supreme Value**

Osho rewrites scriptures and commandments therein. In his revised Bible there are no commandments, no eschatology, no sin and no guilt. Whatever pleases is true, is truly beautiful. Joy or *Ananda* is the supreme truth, the fundamental value. His revised axiology is inspired by Epicurus and other pagans though he is smart enough to bring even Buddha to his side. Aesthetics and religion are wonderfully fused. He is modern Omar Khayyam (not the Khayyam of history but the Khayyam as understood by literalist Fitzgerald) “Whatsoever is cheerful is good. Whatsoever makes you cheerful is religious. Let cheerfulness be your only religion, the only law. Let there be no other law. Just enjoy and enjoy tremendously, totally. Meditation will come like a shadow. It is meditation coming; it is the sound of the footsteps of meditation coming to you.<sup>17</sup> Thus even meditation is a byproduct of the experience of joy, of celebration. One needs to do nothing but simply enjoy with gay

abandon. God will be revealed when we burn everything, every shred of ego in the fire of enjoyment. For him making merry is the chief end of life as God is the perfection of merriment. To live in the present moment and to enjoy it totally is the only commandment of this postmodern Buddha. There is no There and That, but only Here and Now. There is no tomorrow but only the present day. To be worried about future is a sign of inauthentic life as it is to live in time and to be a slave of mind and ego. *Carpe diem* is the philosophy of Osho. He argues for Khayyam's famous quatrain that is quoted by every Epicurean.

### **Decadence of Religion**

The authentic religion is the religion of joy. Osho elevates the principle to hitherto unprecedented heights. Osho connects decadence in religion with the loss of joy in religion. The revival of religion is restoring the lost spirit of joy. The singing dancing mystic is his favorite image. He is able to find the greatest flowering of joy in religion in its first origin. Prophets that initiated the earthly cycles of religion are seen as the repositories of the greatest joy.

Near the Buddha a sweet nectar was raining, but then came the Buddhist scholars and their kind and very quickly the wine bar was turned into a dismal temple, the dance was soon turned into rites and rituals, and soon the deep sighs that were arising in the hearts turned into formal prayers.<sup>18</sup>

### **Rejection of Asceticism**

Osho dismisses the idea that the joys of the world need to be shunned in the way of finding the Supreme Joy which is God. This idea has been shared by certain ascetic mystics. Osho turns to Tantrism for inspiration and the key tantric idea that the pleasure is moksha informs his whole oeuvre. Osho asserts that the greatest religious quality is a sense of humour and not truth, nor God, nor virtue. He wishes to make the earth "a carnival of joy, a festival of lights and if that happens a true sense of religiousness to the earth".<sup>19</sup>

Osho criticizes Schweitzer for creating a false notion that Eastern religions are life-denying. He takes the example of Kabir to refute him and asks more life-affirmation is not possible. He also elaborates: "Where else can you find a temple like Khajuraho, more life affirmative? Where can you find an occult science like Tantra. More life affirming? Where can you find such absolute yes?"<sup>20</sup> "Life is God – and there is no other God; and worship of life is worship-and there is no other worship".<sup>21</sup>

His mysticism of joy is reflected in the names he gave to his disciples. One disciple he named Ma Deva Kai, which means divine

rejoicing. Similarly the word 'anand' would figure in the name of many his disciples.

### **Dissolving the Metaphysical Questions**

Bliss is creative energy: it sings, it dances, it creates.<sup>22</sup> When there is no longer any pain, how can question born of this pain remain? They are finished by themselves.<sup>23</sup> Osho has emphasized the concept of negative divine and defined religion as an attempt that refuses demystification of existence. He argues that Life or existence is a mystery to be lived and not a logical puzzle or a metaphysical riddle to be solved. God is the name of the Mystery at the heart of everything. Nothing is really unknowable. God and thus everything created by Him is mysterious. Celebration of this mystery is religiousness. Osho argues that theologians haven't solved any problem and that rational metaphysics is impossible. Philosophy has not removed mystery either. So like Hafiz he argues that the only possible approach is to enjoy the moment.

### **An Appraisal of Osho's Hedonization of Mysticism**

He is interested in mysticism not for the sake of gnosis but bliss though, it must be granted, these are not easily separable aspects and only a gnostic could realize the bliss that God is. Osho is the most Epicurean of mystics. Omar Khayyam's reputation is not quite warranted as an Epicurean but Osho's is. And he isn't prepared to grant the traditional methods that first emphasize relinquishing of sensorial/bodily pleasures in order to be made perfect recipient of the Bliss that God is. However he does maintain a distinction between pleasure that is experienced by the body and joy and bliss that come as a result of meditation or silencing the mind. God is Intelligence and Knowledge and Good. But for Osho He is primarily Bliss. 'If we drop the idea of Bliss in Osho he is reduced to almost nothing,' as one of his critics has observed. If God were not Bliss he would hardly have any use for the term God. Osho has hailed his emphasis on affirmatory spirit of joy and dalliance as his unique contribution. But as we shall see, he has only echoed or borrowed from the great tradition of mystics for his ideas and whatever is laudable in him, apart from his bold irreverent but delightful and provocative style, is already there in the tradition of mysticism. His charges against mystics that they are mostly living joyless lives and he alone has pointed out the playful spirit of mysticism are unsound as we have already argued but will further develop the argument by considering the writings of traditional mystics that celebrate life with all its joys and see God as the fount of Joy Everlasting.



He has almost hedonized mysticism, though this is not without a certain warrant in traditional sources. His problem lies in foregrounding the aspect of bliss to the exclusion of its integral relationship with other equally important aspects such as truth and goodness. For him God is primarily Bliss and any experience that is perceived as joyful is the experience of divine. God is, in one mystic's sweet phrase, "the Great Sweetness." Richard Rolle saw mystic communion as the soul's participation in a supernal harmony—that sweet minstrelsy of God in which "thought into song is turned." For him contemplation is "joyful song of God's love taken in mind, with sweetness of angels' praise. This is jubilation that is the end of perfect prayer and high devotion in this life."<sup>24</sup> For Osho, to be a meditator is to be one with the orgasm of existence itself; it is to convert momentary sex to a cosmic sex. He defines religion as the science of joy, as development of orgasmic relationship to universe. For him man is a laughing animal and only the religion of laughter as distinguished from the religion of seriousness is to be accepted. He says: "If we can fill the whole earth with laughter, with dancing and singing – people singing and swinging! – if we can make the earth a carnival of joy, a festival of lights, we will have brought for the first time a true sense of religiousness to the earth"<sup>25</sup> Osho claims that laughter or sense of humour is his most distinctive contribution to mysticism. On this it might be remarked that he betrays his simplistic understanding of the psychology of humour vis-à-vis mystical discipline of the lower self. One of the important psychological theories of humour connects it with ego trip. We laugh when we see others in humiliating position rather than ourselves. It is the laceration of the ego of the other, a deflation of someone else's body that gives a sort of sadistic pleasure. Humour takes place in the symbolic order and is connected with the idea of desire. Osho uses it therapeutically but it is difficult to be convinced that it has the indeed the claimed therapeutic value and is indeed a preparation for meditation. It excites rather than sedates the self which mysticism sees as devil. Smile rather than laughter induced by non-veg. jokes has been the expression of innocent joy discernable in the life of prophets and saints. Humour, lewd humour, farcical humour, is more often than not sadistic and debases rather than uplifts. It is hardly compatible with the serenity of the spirit that Osho himself is interested in achieving.

In the lives of the great theopathic mystics we find, as Underhill notes, an amazing superabundant vitality, enhancement of man's small derivative life by the Absolute Life.<sup>26</sup> The history of mysticism testifies to the great vitality, the great fruitful lives of works, active

creative life of mystics. Osho simply distorts history when he presumes that mystics have generally been so far deniers of the world, morons with diminished life energy. The mystic is reborn into new, intense, vigorous, creative and veritable life, life of action even though contemplation itself is a sort of action. Quietist mysticism isn't the whole of mysticism. Prophetic mysticism has been primarily activist. The mystic is ideally the ruler of the world; the great mystic Plato has taught this. God who represents Life force itself works through the mystic, the latter having become a medium for the same. Ideally mysticism has sought the Reality "which seems from the human standpoint at once static and dynamic, transcendent and immanent, eternal and temporal: accepted both the absolute World of Pure Being and the unresting World of Becoming as integral parts of its vision of Truth, demanding on its side a dual response."<sup>27</sup> The mystic inwardly is just witnessing consciousness, far from the madding crowd, unidentified with samsaric becoming. But outwardly his career can be one of "superhuman industry." Transcending existence he dominates it being a son of God, a member of eternal order, sharing its substantial life as Underhill points out.<sup>28</sup> The twofold character of Godhead, described by Roysbroeck as "Tranquility according to His essence, activity according to His Nature: absolute repose, absolute fecundity" is reflected in the life of the mystic who has communed with the Absolute. "To be a mystic is simply to participate here and now in that real and eternal life; in the fullest, deepest sense which is possible for man. It is to share, as free and conscious agent – not as a servant, but a son – in the joyous travail of the Universe... He is the pioneer of Life on its age long voyage to the One: and shows us, in his attainment, the meaning and value of that life."<sup>29</sup> I again reproduce a lengthy quote from Underhill on the meaning of mysticism, which consists in glorification and celebration of life in all its beauty and splendour, to show that Osho's whole oeuvre is an explication of the same and thus he has nothing fundamentally new to contribute to perennial philosophy of mysticism which has always been essentially the same thing and which is the deeper import, the esoteric dimension, of all religion: "Its exultant declarations come to us in all great music; its magic in the life of all romance. Its law – the law of love – is the substance of the beautiful, the energizing cause of the heroic. All man's dreams and diagrams concerning a transcendent perfection near him yet intangible, a transcendent vitality to which he can attain – whether we call these objects of desire God, grace, being, spirit, beauty, "pure idea" – are but translations of his deeper self's intuition of its destiny; clumsy fragmentary hints at the all-inclusive, living Absolute which

that deeper self knows to be real.”<sup>30</sup> Mysticism is to know the beauty, the majesty, the divinity, the splendour, of the living World of Becoming. It is to participate in the “great life of the All.” It is attitude of gratitude to Life Principle (which traditions call as Spirit), acceptance of All or Totality or Existence and appropriating this Cosmic Will. Mysticism finds and celebrates the revelations of the Transcendent Life not in some remote plane of being, in metaphysical abstractions, in ecstatic states, but “in the normal acts of our diurnal experience, suddenly made significant to us. Not in the backwaters of existence, not amongst subtle arguments and occult doctrines, but in all those places where the direct and simple life of earth goes on”.<sup>31</sup> God is three pounds of flex or a cup of tea for the Zen mystics and in fact for all mystics who enjoy all things in God. Both philosophy (in the traditional civilizations such as ancient Greek to which Plato was a heir) and mysticism spring from the same source and lead to the same goal which is wonder at and contemplation of the immense grandeur, the mystery, the beauty of existence. (Both Plato and Aristotle traced the origin of philosophy to wonder and by philosophy they meant the “contemplation (*theoria*) of the manifested cosmic order, or of the truth and beauty of the divine principles (be they visible stars or invisible noetic archetypes)”.<sup>32</sup> Science too originates in wonder and ultimately it deepens our sense of mystery rather than demystifies as Einstein said (Osho takes a simplistic view of science, as of so many things). Even art or literature amounts to the same thing if it is understood with the formalists, as defamiliarization of the objects, representations of objects that give delight. For mystics the “story of man’s spirit ends in a garden: in a place of birth and fruitfulness, of beautiful and natural things. Divine Fecundity is its secret”.<sup>33</sup> For them the “winter is over: the time of the singing of birds is come. From the deeps of the dewy garden, Life- new, unquenchable, and ever lovely- comes to meet with them with the dawn”.<sup>34</sup>

Osho invents his own thesis, his own history while irresponsibly commenting on religions and traditional mystics. The mystic’s life is the life of love, love of service as the history bears witness. Everything beautiful in the history of civilizations is inspired by the same impulse that runs through the mystic.

Mysticism has always been a celebration of life as a carnival of joy though sometimes this dimension mightn’t be foregrounded. Reality, all mystics come to realize, is made of the substance of Joy. It is *anada*, bliss. In fact all earthly joys are a reflection of this heavenly Joy. That is why Dante, initiated into Reality as Paradise, sees the whole universe laugh with delight as it glorifies God and the awful

countenance of Perfect Love adorned with smiles. The souls of the great theologians dance to music and laughter in the Heaven of the Sun; the loving seraphs, in their ecstatic joy whirl about the Being of God. Love and joy are perceived as the final attributes of the Triune God. St. Francis illustrates quite eloquently with his life and works the fruits of contemplative life as playful rejoicing in Absolute. The mystic dwells high in heavens and thus with gods who are ever happy. They run, rejoice and make merry joining “the eager dance of the Universe about the One.” Osho in his celebration of dalliance, song and dance only echoes Patmore who said, “If we may credit certain hints in the lives of the saints, love raises the spirit above the sphere of reverence and worship into one of laughter and dalliance: a sphere in which the soul says:

Shall I, a gnat which dances in Thy ray  
Dare to be reverent.”<sup>35</sup>

Richard Rolle has also expressed in *The Fire of Love* this “spirit of dalliance” saying about the lover of God that “a heavenly privy inshed he feels, that no man can know but he that has received it, and in himself bears the electuary that anoints and makes happy all joyful lovers in Jesu; so that they cease not to hie in heavenly seats to sit, endlessly their Maker to enjoy.” That the state of burning love is “the state of Sweetness and Song” is eloquently demonstrated in the lives of dancing dervishes, the haunting music and great passion of Sufi songs. Music, life without which is a mistake as Nietzsche remarked, which expresses the joy peculiar to transcendary vision, is an elements of ritual worship in almost all religions. The mystic’s whole life is in a way a life of art; mysticism is aestheticization of life. Ananda Coomaraswamy has made the same point in his great works on traditional art. The music of the spheres, spoken about in traditional cosmologies, is all about the “secret child” of the Transcendent Order. The most delightful paintings and pieces of architecture with which traditional civilizations abound are derived from this spirit of beauty and dalliance that the Absolute which grounds their aesthetic expressions, is. Creative activity is a playful activity. The world is an expression of *liela* of God. God, and like Him the liberated soul, express themselves in play. The world is a work of art; God witnessing His beauty in the mirror of attributes. There could be no utilitarian end applicable to the work of God. His is an art for the pure joy of art. The Good essentially wants to be radiated by its very nature and for some end or purpose humanly conceived. Existence as such can’t be but purposeless, it only celebrates itself. One can’t ask what is the purpose of heaven or God – They are their own ends; Life only glorifies Life. This is the

meaning of the verses of scriptures where God glorifies himself or asks man to glorify His name or bless His prophets. Osho is right in celebrating purposelessness of life. He beautifully says that “rose is a rose is a rose.” What else it should be for? But he fails to see that this theme of cosmic play, purposeless play, pure joy of creation is granted by traditional religions and mysticism. Here again Osho can’t be original. He has only eloquently expressed the theme of divine play in his own delightful style. His beautiful interpretation of Krishna in his discourses is an expression of the same perennial theme. But credit must be given to him to foreground and emphasize in diverse ways the plane of being that dares not to be reverent but simply dance, dance and dance in the Divine Ray. He appropriates faithfully the dance of Shiva.

The mystic is indeed “a part of the great melody of the Divine.” To quote Underhill’s quote from Rolle again: “Sweetest forsooth is the rest which the spirit takes whilst sweet goodly sound comes down, in which it is delighted: and in most sweet song and playful the mind is ravished, to sing likings of love everlasting”.<sup>36</sup> The whole life of St. Francis was one long march to music through the world as Underhill notes.<sup>37</sup> To sing seemed to him a primary spiritual function. Underhill has referred to the romantic quality of the Unitive Life – its gaiety, freedom and joy. Many mystics have expressed themselves in verse. This is only because the superabundant joy that wells within them needs such a medium to express. I will not refer to the Sufis’ love songs which are well known but to the songs of Christian mystics whom Osho especially indicts for their asceticism. My examples are again from Underhill. Their denial of the world of scent and colour. St. John of the Cross wrote love songs to his Love. St. Rose of Lima sang depts with the birds. St. Teresa wrote rustic hymns and carols. In St. Catherine of Genoa, sang, in a spirit of childlike happiness, gay songs about her Love.

Osho finds eternity here and now, in living moment to moment, in dying to the past and being open and vulnerable to future, and experiencing life with fresh and innocent eyes. Just to live for a single moment with authenticity, totality, integrity, is to live in eternity. To quote him “A single moment of total experience is far bigger than the whole of eternity.”<sup>38</sup> He is a great pagan mystic, quite at home with modern paganism. He simply seeks a space “to dance, to sing, to celebrate”.<sup>39</sup> For him this whole existence is the Garden of Eden.<sup>40</sup> “This very body the Buddha. And this very place the lotus paradise”.<sup>41</sup> “There is no other buddhahood and there is no other lotus paradise”.<sup>42</sup> We have not been thrown out of the Garden, but miss it because we are not aware; we have fallen in a dream-like

trance state. The dream consists of one's desire to reach somewhere else.<sup>43</sup> Seeking for metaphysical abstractions, airy nothings, heavens out there is despised by him. He makes finding heaven look such an easy thing. He says: "Just sit silently and look around, sit silently and look within. You have never been anywhere else! *Aes Dhammo Sanantano* – this is the nature of things – you can't be anywhere else".<sup>44</sup> For him there is no ultimate goal; "there is no goal as such, hence there is no question of being an ultimate goal....There is nothing ultimate anywhere; the immediacy itself is the goal. Each step is the goal, each moment is the goal".<sup>45</sup> Referring approvingly to Zen he declares: "all is as it should be, nothing is missing. This very moment everything is perfect... This very moment is the only reality. Hence, in Zen there is no distinction between methods and goals, means and goals".<sup>46</sup>

Osho fails to understand the redemptive power of suffering and why suffering has been an important element in the lives of mystics. He sees no meaning for the Stigmata of Christ, and countless examples of suffering voluntarily undertaken by the Christian mystics in imitation of Christ. If we compare Osho's understanding of the issue with such mystics and mystical philosophers as Meister Eckhart and Simon Weil we see the limitations of him quite clearly. Suffering is the lasso of God that He uses to lacerate the ego so that He can make the body His dwelling place. Suffering is the swiftest horse that takes man to perfection as Nietzsche said. Hardly any victory in the world of spirit has been won without suffering. Mystics have clearly landed in the land of no sorrow but for this ego needs to be crucified and the best way, the tested way, for executing this crucifixion is the way that Christ demonstrated on the cross. Islamic tradition has also emphasized this role of suffering and uses the extent of suffering incurred by a person with patience as a measure of his spiritual station. Asceticism should be seen in this light. What appears to Osho as the anti-body attitude of traditional religions is justifiable in this light. There is nothing inconsistent between the Celestial Melodies and the Stigmata of Christ for St. Francis and this is true about other great authorities as well. The purgative way, the discipline of self purification, appropriates the function of suffering and in Osho there is hardly anything corresponding to purgative way as traditionally conceived.

Osho most often gives an impression that the end or fruit of mystical journey is simply joyful basking in the sunbeams. But according to traditional mystics we need to pass through the "night of the senses" in which he learns to distinguish the substance of Reality from the accidents under which it is perceived. The mystic's

way lies far beyond the horizons of existence, far deeper than the depths accessible to the senses. Only the greatest souls learn the lesson that the Ultimate isn't here or hereafter and can't be glimpsed in its full splendour here. The description of that great Object by the authorities differ from Osho's who seems to reduce it sometimes to just a vision of things, albeit a blissful vision. Of course the heightened and clarified perception of the phenomenal world is a characteristic of mystic experience. The self is often convinced that the last secret of the world is thereby laid bare to it. Though everything appears to man as it is, infinite as Blake puts it there is much more to mystical and metaphysical realization. Osho often identifies poetic and mystical experiences. Mystic experience has hardly a cognitive import of the sort traditional mysticism seems to grant. Poeticization and aestheticization of mystical experience has the danger of ignoring cognitive content of religion. Religions claim to discover truth and God is Reality or Truth. Metaphysics, the science of the Supraphenomenal and supraformal things, can't be built on mere poetic experience.

Reducing mysticism to the art of pursuing bliss implies renouncing grand theological and metaphysical claims that all religions have made including the apparently non-metaphysical religions. Belief in Nirvana is a knowledge claim. To assert the possibility of ending of sorrow is a metaphysical claim. Anyone who wants badly to pursue Bliss can find secular ways to do it as has been suggested by certain critics of mysticism. What is needed is the practice of "deconstruction of cognition and deconstruction of the self. The Bliss experience, conventionally sought in a religious context, is a real experience that seems to be available to anyone, at least in the form of rare, and possibly random, spontaneous experiences."

Now one might raise the following questions regarding this reduction of mysticism to the art of pursuing bliss.

- What difference is there between religious and secular contexts of pursuing bliss?
- What becomes of the elaborate metaphysics founded on the evidence of religious experience as revealing something about the objective structure of or about the Transcendent Order?

The fact is that in Osho's context there is hardly any difference between secular and religious arts of pursuing bliss. The old or conventional moral discipline that is supposed to be prerequisite of it is dispensable. Osho would have hardly any strong reason for not substituting certain suitably chosen mood altering drugs for the art of

meditation. Secular science can find (and in fact some progress has been made in this direction) other means of bringing mental activity to halt and stimulate bliss centre and make ashrams, including the ashram of Osho, redundant. The concept of mystical and metaphysical realization as discussed by traditional authorities on mysticism gives a different impression. The sages get the knowledge of objective order of the universe. They unlock the secret of existence and become the object of knowledge. The whole foundation of so many traditional sciences cultivated in Eastern civilizations is dependent on religious experience. Scriptures are more than the manuals of pursuing bliss. Traditional art, craft, science, religion and metaphysics are connected to the notion of religious experience. Osho hardly enlightens us regarding the higher modes of consciousness and higher realms of cognition and knowledge that mysticism makes available. What is the meaning of such statements of the Buddha that make him omniscient? The mystery of existence is Osho's appropriation of the negative divine but there occurs certain impoverishment in the traditional idea of the same. Osho's is, it appears sometimes, simply a mystification of the phenomena rather than providing us really knowledge or gnosis. Noumena are in phenomena or pure abstractions. Plato's archetypes which appear in most of traditional philosophies in one or the other guise, hardly seem to exist for him or mediate the process of manifestation/creation.

It is only when speaking of the Absolute and the last questions regarding existence that mysticism advocates non-knowing. And it should also be kept in mind that God is Knowledge. Whatever is real is knowable is the fundamental postulate of traditional metaphysics. Mysticism aims at appropriating omniscience of God. The mystics speak of unknowability of Godhead only because in itself it is undifferentiated and Infinite and no subject can stand outside it and construct an object out of it. Otherwise as it is a fundamental assertion that knowing and being are one in the metaphysical realization. So we can well say that nothing is unknowable and God is most certainly knowable, in fact the only object worthy of knowledge. God alone is in fact knowable. He is the only knower. Salvation consists in knowing although this although this is not a rational knowledge. It is ultimately in the name of knowledge or vision or realization or access to deepest secret of existence that mysticism critiques those who only know lower truths, *apara vidya*. The Intellect is a cognitive organ though a special one. It knows and knows immediately. Intellectual intuition is far more certain sensory intuition. Revelation too is knowledge, the Universal Intellect



receives it. Archangel Gabriel is metaphysically Universal Intellect. It is the perennialists who critique all kinds of agnosticisms (even Osho's borders on a sort of agnosticism, as remarked above) in the name of knowledge vouchsafed to heart. So Osho's presentation even though in fundamental agreement with traditional mysticism is irritatingly mystifying. It belittles science and speculative philosophy. To the sage is revealed the knowledge of Principles until he declares that nothing else is to be known. He appropriates divine omniscience. The sacred sciences, as discussed by such authorities as Guenon and Nasr, are built on the foundation of knowledge of these principles. The whole civilizations are built on these principles. Traditional art and architecture are concrete applications of these principles. Here emerges the strength of perennialist and the limitations of Oshoan approach. The mystic brings back the knowledge, the light from the otherworld and build such things as Taj and Mosque of Cordova. The design of great temples, the pyramids reveals knowledge of metaphysical principles. We just need to compare Coomaraswamy and Osho to see the fickle intelligence and fuzzy and shoddy thinking of the latter. Neoplatonism that has heavily impacted on medieval philosophy and theology isn't dualistic. Osho lauds the irrational, while as the perennialists foreground the suprarational and have heavily lashed on such advocates of irrational in religions as Kierkegaard and infrarational mistakenly called intuition in Bergson. Reason is never denied, only transcended. Reason's (and philosophy's) place is quite secure in Platonic-perennialist worldview. Perennialists have championed the cause of traditional philosophy which though distinct from modern Western rationalist philosophical tradition, is nonetheless philosophy – a philosophy that is ultimately tied to some sort of *moksha* ideal. From the perennialist viewpoint all traditional or ancient philosophies, not only the Indian philosophy, are tied to the *moksha*/ enlightenment/ gnosis idea.

It is also true that religions have traditionally usually demanded sacrifice of comforts and hard discipline, and have generally warned us regarding the dangers of sensory indulgence in the path to God. Osho seems to bypass these sacrifices and create an ashram out of a night club. It appears that the ends of the two – Osho and traditional mystics – can't but be different. The secular art of pursuing bliss also demands a sacrifice of comforts. The fruits of dynamic meditations are often nothing more than temporary peace. The utter poverty of the spirit which alone makes us good vehicles of grace is not avoidable. Sans religion, sans moral discipline, sans grace the kingdom of God is not available though its substitutes or rather

counterfeits are. As Sufis say the love of the world and the love of God can't be combined. Osho gives free reign to the desiring self which craves for sensory enjoyment and still thinks that one can thereby transcend self. The self which witnesses is not the self which desires. The lower self, the desiring self continues its downward course to hell. The fact that the witnessing self is in control is evidenced by the ebb of desiring self according to the traditional authorities. But Osho believes that one can make the best of both the worlds and that we are multitudes and can contain contradictions. Here we can refute his assertion by referring to his own statement that *vidya* drives away *avidya*, the appearance of light means the disappearance of darkness. The experiment of Rajneshpoorum failed. Osho's most trusted disciples betrayed him and some indulged in criminal activities. He has brought little enlightenment to the world though of course he has helped many to raise their level of consciousness. He performs the job of an iconoclast well; he is a great deconstructor. But he fails to do the job of reconstruction which is the *sine qua non* of religious vacation. We may not doubt his own enlightenment but we have every reason and right to judge his claim to be a guru, to be a sage of the order of Boddhidharma or Ramakrishna. There seems to be a consensus that Ramakrishna was a saint but there is a great disagreement over Osho's claims. Osho seems to be at best an eccentric Zen Master who could not find the "right" disciples. He may be good only for certain beginners in mysticism but to travel far with him into the wilderness and desert of the dark night of the soul is dangerous.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Osho, *The Perfect Master*, Vol.2, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1981, p. 10
  - <sup>2</sup> Osho, *Die O Yogi Die*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1953, p. 187
  - <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37
  - <sup>4</sup> Osho, *The Razor's Edge*, Neo-Sanyas International, n.d. p. 45
  - <sup>5</sup> Osho, *Die O Yogi Die*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1953, p. 173
  - <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184
  - <sup>7</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 72
  - <sup>8</sup> *Ibid*
  - <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*
  - <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73
  - <sup>11</sup> Osho, *The Perfect Master*, Vol.2, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1981, p. 10
  - <sup>12</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 60
  - <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71
  - <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71
  - <sup>15</sup> Osho, *The Perfect Master*, Vol.2, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1981, p. 48-9

- <sup>16</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 41
- <sup>17</sup> Osho, *Creativity*, St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 1999, p. 99
- <sup>18</sup> Osho, *Die O Yogi Die*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona. 1953, p. 188
- <sup>19</sup> Osho, *Showering Without Clouds*, Tao Publishing Pvt. Ltd., Poona, 1998, p. 180
- <sup>20</sup> Osho, *The Perfect Master*, Vol.2, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1981, p. 10
- <sup>21</sup> Osho, *From Chaos to Cosmos*, Diamond Pocket Books, Delhi, 2000, p. 4
- <sup>22</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 114
- <sup>23</sup> Osho, *Die O Yogi Die*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona, 1953, p. 83
- <sup>24</sup> Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism*, E.P. Dutton & Co. New York, 1961, p. 336
- <sup>25</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 180
- <sup>26</sup> Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism*, E.P. Dutton & Co. New York, 1961, p. 429
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 429
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 434
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 447
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 447
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 449-50
- <sup>32</sup> Uzdavinys, Algis, (Ed.), *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, Pentagon Press, 2005, p. xvii
- <sup>33</sup> Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism*, E.P. Dutton & Co. New York, 1961, p. 450
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 450-51
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 438
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 439
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 440
- <sup>38</sup> Osho, *Won't You Join the Dance*, Rajnesh Foundation, Poona., 2001, p. 72
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 72
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 53
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 53
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 53
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 54
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 54
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 56
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 56