

MYSTICAL STUDIES OVERCOMING EGOCENTRIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND TRANSFORMATION OF MAN AND SOCIETY

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Abstract: The object of the research in this article is a mystical phenomenon. The interest in the mystical phenomenon has been increasing in the conditions of the modern spiritual crisis in the face of national, religious, political, and other conflicts. One of the universal features of the mystical experience is a qualitative transformation of the mental life of a man. There are two direction vectors of mystical experience - psychological (introvertive) and social (extravertive). At the heart of the mystical experience is a gradual transition from egocentric consciousness to enlightening, which contributes to the transformation of the human person. Mystical practice can be considered as "transegocentric" ("the one who overcomes the Ego"). The consequence is to educate a mental sane self-actualized person. Mystical traditions offer four basic methods of mystical psychopractice of overcoming egocentric consciousness: disciplinary asceticism, psychosomatic exercises, meditative contemplation and love-trust to the Absolute. Egocentric consciousness acquires several massive social forms: national, racial, religious, social, and others. Mystical experience presupposes tolerant relation to the representatives of another culture, religious confession and nationality. It sets the limits of tolerance, which is caused by the need to limit the egocentric consciousness.

Keywords: Absolute, mystics, mystical tradition, enlightening consciousness, egocentric consciousness, immanent mystics, transcendental immanent (antinomical) mystics, psychopractice.

1. Introduction

The interest in the world religious experience at the current stage of development of civilization related with the spiritual crisis of society and the search of leaving it. Special attention is devoted to the experience of mystical studies, which were considered as the most mystery and innermost part of the religion at all times. In the early XX century American philosopher and psychologist W. James wrote in his book "The Variety of Religious Experiences": "We have to look for all the roots of religious life and its center in mystical states of consciousness" [1, p. 303]. Russian philosopher N. Berdyaev asserted that "if the word "mystics" comes from the word "mystery", the mystic must be recognized as the basis of religion and the source of creative movement in religion" [2, p. 233].

Despite many studies there is still no common definition of the concept "mystics", and the debate as for the possibility and necessity of mystical phenomenon research is going on. Its assessment is contrary in the works of representatives of materialistic and idealistic schools. There is also the necessity of terminological reconciliation of scientific studies of mystics. Russian orientalist E. Torchinov noted that the term "mystics" meant heteromorphic and heterogeneous phenomena but they had nothing in common except the name [3, Introduction: 3].

In the second half of the XX century the mystical phenomenon was investigated by the authors such as Ph. Almond, Tor Andrae, R. Ellwood, M. Eliade, F. Happold, A. Huxley, W. Stace, E. Torchinov, J. Trimmingham, W. Wainwright, E. Underhill, R. Zaehner and others.

The interest in the mystical phenomenon is increasing under the threat of a national, religious, political and

other conflicts when the world community safety is found very vulnerable. According to Y. Kimelev, this interest is motivated by the desire to find a "basic, essential unity of all religions". It is important "in the situation of perceivable religious pluralism, that is in the situation of evident global competition of many candidates to possess single religious truth" [4, p. 122]. All religions have ideological and value community. If we talk about the differences, they are good prerequisites for complementarity of all religions.

Nowadays comparative religious studies are research of mystical phenomenon. Its purpose is to identify universal and individual characteristics of the mystical traditions of the world.

Most researchers attribute two characteristics to the universal features of the mystical traditions of the world. In the first place there is mystic's desire to achieve the "unity" with the Absolute (ultimate) reality. For example R. Ellwood noted that mystical experience was always interpreted as "meeting with the ultimate Divine Reality" [5, p. 35]. W. Stace wrote that every mystic sought perception primordial entity, which he calls "the One" or "the Unity", and identified the mystical experience of "undifferentiated unity" [6, p. 62]. E. Torchinov suggested meaning transpersonal experiences of union or merger with Divinity by mystical phenomena, impersonal Absolute or other type of primordial entity. Also it can be experience of ontological "nothing" or "emptiness" [3, Introduction: 3].

Secondly, the feature of mystical experience is a qualitative transformation of the mystic's mental life. For example, W. James noted that the mystical consciousness was characterized by tendency toward optimism and monism, by transition from closed and narrow space to immensely

spacious mind, by transition from confusion to rest. As the result of mystical experience “the unlimited absorbs all limits” [1, p. 331]. Writer and researcher E. Underhill considers that “mysticism entails certain psychological experience”, which involves the restructuring of the whole person at a higher level for the sake of transcendental life” [7, p. 99-100].

However, when the researchers say about the results of mystical experience they do not reveal the main reason of mental life changes of adept practice. Only a few researchers pointed out that the transformation was related to overcoming egocentrism. For example, E. Underhill wrote: “The true mystic never seek his own” [7, p. 102]. N. Berdyaev emphasized that “the mystic is deeply individual and at the same time overcomes individualism as a sin”. The philosopher combined two features of mystical experience in one definition: “In the mystical experience a man always leaves his emotional closed world and comes to contact with the fundamental principle of spiritual life” [2, p. 234].

2. Materials and methods.

Mystics is regarded as a doctrine aimed at adept’s “unity” of mystical practice with Absolute reality, the result of which is a qualitative transformation of the mental life of a man. In various mystical traditions there are different definitions: holiness, enlightening, awakening, liberation. The mystics of “unity” with the Absolute is one of esotericism’s kind. In its turn “mystics” is a generic concept to such concepts as “mystical experience” (practice) and “mysticism” (theory). It can be the adept’s experience during contact with the Absolute, various psychopractices, analytical texts with commentaries and so forth. The result of their synthesis is the formation of a certain mystical tradition translating the mystical theory and practice from one generation to the next one [8, p. 20, 24-25].

The history of religious studies shows a huge variety of mystical traditions that were formed within two main types of mystics.

The immanent mystics is the mystics of “merger” with the Absolute by substance and leads to transformation of consciousness. This type of mystics is peculiar to the “religion of pure experience” that have lack for idea about supernatural Absolute: as impersonal Pure Consciousness (the direction of Hinduism); the One whole generating being from himself (Taoism); Emptiness which contains all the fullness of being (Mahayana Buddhism).

The transcendental immanent (antinomical) mystics is the mystics of “joining” with the Absolute by God’s grace and leads to transfiguration of personality. This type of mystics is peculiar to the “religions of Revelation”, which are based on the idea of monotheism and creationism, maintaining the different nature of God and the world. The abyss between the Creator and the creature stop existing only in the mystical act: the transcendent God becomes immanent to a man. “Joining” with the Absolute is antinomic (from the Greek – “a contradiction of the law by itself”) [8, p. 59-60].

A large variety of mystical traditions of the world is formed within two types of mystics depending on solution of the problem the correlation of ideal and material being in the mystical experience. Here are **monistic, dualistic,**

holistic and integrative mystic traditions. If monistic and dualistic (ascetical) traditions deny material origin, holistic and integrative traditions teach necessity of material and spiritual convergence.

According to mystical studies, a man belongs to two worlds simultaneously - ideal and phenomenal (material). Therefore a man is a complex creature, combining spiritual and material beginning, which is the cause of internal contradictions. Antagonism of matter and spirit can lead to serious violations of human mental health and necessary for self-improvement.

Psychologist A. Maslow described a man as “being willing”, which rarely reaches the state of full and complete satisfaction. If one need is satisfied, another one appears and attracts all human attention. Maslow developed hierarchy of human needs according to their priority: physiological, safety and protection, belonging and love, self-respect and self-actualization. To satisfy more or less the “basic” needs is the principle before a man can realize the need of satisfaction of higher needs [9, 3; 7].

The mystical study of Hindu Tantrism emphasizes that desire is the “primary driving force of the Universe”, that is why you should not reject from it. At first, they are based on an immeasurably huge number of electrochemical impulses: the more actively suppress them, the stronger they become. Secondly, the desire to contributes to the hormone secretion of glands of the endocrine system. Changing concentrations of these substances in the blood, caused by compression of desires, leads to chemical disturbances and diseases. Also Tantra emphasizes that there is a spiritual aspect of desire refusal. X. Djohari considers that ascetic practice of desire refusal comes to ironic contradiction: “to achieve a lack of desire, a person must have a very strong desire to get rid of desires” [10, p. 12-13]. Accordingly, the person’s desires and needs aren’t dangerous but the inability to realize them correctly is the main reason of all physical and mental diseases.

Man combines the spirit and matter, thereby he generates internal and external “I”, the two forms of consciousness – enlightening and egocentric. Egocentric consciousness is formed as a result of the identification of the material “I” with the external body of man and its needs. In various mystical studies egocentric consciousness was named differently – “samsara”, “ahankara”, “avidya”, “pride”, “nafs” and others. It’s focused on satisfaction of instincts and man’s material and sensual desires. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, egocentric consciousness provides “basic” needs: physiological, safety and protection. In the mystical study of Hindu Tantrism it’s the level of the lower three chakras.

The human Ego is able to generate numerous “affection” to the object, the subject, the phenomena of material existence. Desire (or need) becomes slavery, concentrating all the energy of human thoughts and feelings on a particular object of desire. However, the changeable nature of the material, depending on space and time, deprives a person of the object of his affection and causes suffering.

Affections can become very strong *passionate states*,

which are characterized by extremes of passivity (tamas) or activity (rajas). In the study of Yoga the concept of "tamas" is translated as "blackout" and "storm of passion". Passionate state are dangerous because they are not controlled

Sufi Kashani gave the following description of "nafs": "Nafs constantly and tirelessly indulge in lust and self-gratification, ever go beyond the moderation. It's insatiable and its greed is comparable to a butterfly, that lacks for candle's light; unaware of the danger that lies in the fire, it throws into the flames and burn in it". "Nafs is tired of items quickly". "In most cases the result of its activity does not correspond to the wishful effect. Even if nafs achieves what it wanted, it still would not be satisfied". Mystic comes to the conclusion that "any motives, concealing even the slightest hint of self-interest, or in any way binding a man to the world, is an indication of Nafs" [11, c. 16-18].

Pride was considered to be the most powerful and destroying passion of mystics. Ephrem the Syrian describes it as "unreasonable affection and passionate commitment to the body, flood and distraction of the mind with wit and ribaldry" [12, p. 235]. According to Kashani, "nafs always wants people to praise it". "Nafs wants to be feared in all situations, and to be feared in all situations, and to be got hopes upon its mercy as God require from those who devoted their lives to Him". According to sufi, "such position is equivalent to the claim to godhood and is a confrontation with Divine domination" [11, p. 17]. Among other passionate states such as gluttony, fornication, greed, sadness, depression, vanity must be taken into consideration.

Thus, egocentric consciousness is characterized by selfishness, lack of balance, fear, anxiety, dissatisfaction, lack of sense of proportion, cruelty, consumerism, and other negative psychological qualities. Unfortunately, the modern consumer society contributes of various forms of individual egocentric consciousness to the development.

That is why all mystics thought that main purpose of mystical practice was overcoming the dependence of consciousness on the lower "I". Sufi Jami said: "Man is happy if he managed to escape lower "I" (nafs) and who feels gentle influences of friendship [with God]. His heart is filled with beloved, so that there is no place for anything else". Sufi Al-Hallaj appealed to God: "Between You and me there is poor existence of "I", torturing me. Oh, be merciful and take away this "I" from space between us" [11, p. 113, 135].

The aim of this article is to analyze the features of mystical psychopractice of mental life transformation of the adept. The research methodology is comparative philosophical religious analysis. The main research method is comparative analytical. The general scientific methods of analysis, synthesis, generalization and individualization are used.

3. Results.

At the heart of the mystical experience is a gradual transition from egocentric consciousness to enlightening, which contributes to the transformation of the human person. There are two direction vectors of mystical experience - **psychological** (introvertive) and **social** (extravertive). The first is directed to the inner world of man, the second to the

outside world. The research of the psychological and social vectors of mystical studies makes it possible to find practical methods of transformation of a human being and of a society.

Mystical practice can be considered as "transegocentric" ("the one who overcomes the Ego"). Mystical studies form a complex transformation system of psychic life where all the levels of individual consciousness interact. This thesis is reflected in the study of the chakras (Buddhist and Hindu Tantrism), cinnabar fields (Chinese Taoism), Sefer (Jewish Kabbalah), "campes" and "states" (Muslim Sufism), asceticism and tacit prayer (Orthodox Hesychasm) and others.

Mystical traditions offer **four basic methods of mystical psychopractice of overcoming egocentric consciousness**. They are disciplinary asceticism, psychosomatic exercises, meditative contemplation and love-trust to the Absolute. Features of psychopractice always depend on the type of mystics. Features psychopractice always depend on the type of mystics.

The methods of disciplinary asceticism and psychosomatic exercises, intended for body and will of adherent are applied to the preparatory stage of mystical practice. Disciplinary asceticism takes a great importance in monistic and dualistic mystic traditions. Its basic forms are seclusion, celibacy, poverty, post, various types of silence, movement limitation, and psychological asceticism. Psychosomatic exercises play a considerable role in holistic and integration traditions. Static poses, special movements, exercises for the correct breathing, diets, dances, singing, sexual practice are referred to its basic forms.

Meditative contemplation and love-trust to the Absolute belong to the main stage of the mystic psychopractice. The method of **meditative contemplation of the Absolute** is basic in immanent mystics. Its aim is to release the mind from Ego's thoughts that prevent conscious life. A man under the influence of egocentric consciousness is absorbed in the thoughts "I'm the body", "I think", "I believe", "I want", "I act". Only contemplation or "pure awareness" is completely free of analyzing activity of the mind and intellect. A variety of different practices of contemplation has common features: relaxed state; observation of what is happening now with relaxed awareness; lack of judgment and estimates.

Meditation does not contradict activity. On the contrary, all mystics think that meditation can be anything: running, swimming, laughing, dancing, singing, sex, drawing, meal or work. Meditation is not business, it's existence, is not work, it's state of "witness" of his life. Awareness leads to the de-automatization of activities: human life becomes relaxed and harmonious. According to Ram Dass, life should be turned into a meditative act, *just be here and now* [13, p. 293, 316].

Meditative contemplation consists of the following stages: clearing, concentration, lower meditation, higher meditation. The lower meditation is related to the reflection and work with a conceptual mechanism, in turn the higher meditation masters the world of forms and ideas. The first method of higher meditation is *dhiana*, as the highest degree of focusing on an object with the aim of immersion

and further complete release from it. The second way to higher meditation is absolute attention (*satipatthana*), and penetration in essence of life (*vipassana*). Concentration and lower meditation are used in transcendental immanent mystics; all types of figurativeness are prohibited.

The basic method of transcendental immanent (antinomical) mystic psychopractice is a love-trust to the Absolute. Egocentric consciousness is able to give birth only to selfish, possessive love with many conditions. When lower "I" dominates, a man is too immersed in his needs and desires and not capable of love another. Mystic Osho Rajneesh said: "You use the other, calling it love. The main purpose may be sex or something else, but you, anyway, use another person ... Mutual using means your love. No wonder, it often turns out to be real hell". "Another's Ego interferes, and everyone wants to suppress other, to feel power over him" [14, p. 113, 114].

A. Maslow describe this love as "*deficient love*" (D-love), because it is based on the desire to get what a person lacks - self-esteem, sex, communication, money and so on. Lower love exists in a wide variety of sensual forms: love-eros, love-pragma, love-ludus, love-mania.

As a result of mystical practice is a gradual transformation of sensual love-eros in spiritual love-agape. According to A. Maslow its love is "*existential*" (E-love), as love to another existence. It's based on awareness of the value of a person without any desire to use him [9, 12]. A man sets free from selfish feelings and desires. The criterion of true love is absoluteness and deep satisfying of relationships. St. Bernard of Clairvaux said that "Love does not need the reasons and fruits of existence; it is fruit and pleasure by itself. I love because I love; I love because I can love" [15, p. 97].

Prayer is born only in love as trust and gratitude to the Absolute for the great gift of life. Prayer consists of such stages: confession, concentration, lower prayer, higher prayer. Lower prayer is pleading, because produced by fear; in its turn higher prayer overcomes all fears, disbelief and anxiety of Ego. Faith and hope are coming on their place. Once sufi Hasan al-Basri spoke: "If God is with you, what you can be afraid of, and if not with you, what you can expect?" [11, p. 120].

In transcendental immanent mystics distance between imperfect human personality and perfect Divine Personality is saved, but a synergist connection is established. In immanent mystics love-trust to the Absolute acquires next forms: 1. Worship to true "I", 2. Sympathy and services to all enlightened persons [16].

Mental qualities of enlightening person are love, faith, wisdom, awareness, moderation, contentment, gratitude, creativity.

Egocentric consciousness exists in several massive social forms: national, racial, religious, social, and others. It is expressed in intention of one group of people to dominate another, and contributes to serious conflicts, the aggravation of political life.

Extravertive vector of mystical studies is directed at overcoming egocentrism in all its forms. Most mystics thought that they were charged for active educational work

to change the moral state of society. They were convinced that they had to create a mystical unity of mankind on the basis of mutual respect, love and equality. For example, the immanent tradition of Mahayana Buddhism teaches that Buddha is a perpetual single waking Consciousness. It is the basis of samsara and nirvana that is called Dharma Body of Buddha (or Cosmic Body of Buddha). It is considered that all elements of life, all millions of beings are immanent to Absolute and exhibit the Dharma Body of Buddha (dharmakaya), carrying the potency of "enlightening". All living creatures are identical and most closely interrelated. Bodhisattva (from Sanskrit. "awakened creature") must perform the educational mission.

The aim of transcendental immanent (antinomical) mystical study of Christianity is to realize the ideal of mystical unity of mankind that lives "life in Christ", in the unity of the Body of Christ. Thus there occurs global unity: everyone connects with all mankind by his created nature, and also combines created and uncreated, human and divine.

The important consequence of mystical transformation of man and society is tolerant of all kinds: gender, age, interclass, ethnic, racial, social, and religious. Tolerance is the recognition and respect for other attitudes, beliefs, traditions, styles and practices of life (without internal agreement with them). However, there must exist certain limits of tolerance. Mystic Ram Dass stressed that "compassion allows people to be themselves, without presenting requirements to them. In one situation you can present requirements to them - when their actions limit the ability of other people to be free" [13, p. 300]. Under such conditions the limits of tolerance should exist as a real need for restrictions of egocentric consciousness and its arbitrariness.

4. Conclusion

The object of the research in this article is a mystical phenomenon. Mystics is able to assist in finding the universal source of all religions which is very meaningful in the situation of the global rivalry of great number of pretenders to get the truth. The interest in the mystical phenomenon has been increasing in the conditions of the modern spiritual crisis in the face of national, religious, political, and other conflicts.

One of the universal features of the mystical experience is a qualitative transformation of the mental life of a man. There are two direction vectors of mystical experience - psychological (introvertive) and social (extravertive). The first is directed to the inner world of man, the second to the outside world. The research of the psychological and social vectors of mystical studies makes it possible to find practical methods of transformation of a human being and of a society.

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Mystical traditions offer four basic methods of mystical psychopractice of overcoming egocentric consciousness. They are disciplinary asceticism, psychosomatic exercises, meditative contemplation and love-trust to the Absolute. Disciplinary asceticism deals with strong-willed sphere of a human being, psychosomatic exercises discipline body, love-trust prayer release from egoistic feelings and wishes, and meditative contemplation makes life deliberate. Mystical studies formed a complex transformation system of psychic life where all the levels of individual consciousness interact.

Egocentric consciousness acquires several massive social forms: national, racial, religious, social, and others. Mystical studies developed practical ways of improvement of the social life on basis of love, compassion and mutual respect. Mystical experience presupposes tolerant relation to the representatives of another culture, religious confession and nationality. It sets the limits of tolerance, which is caused by the need to limit the egocentric consciousness.

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