

# **The Impact of Mysticism on Socio-Economic Life**

Habib ur Rahman\*

## **Abstract**

*Mysticism has been practiced in almost all the religions. It is achieved through different means and methods depending on the mind set and belief of the person pursuing this objective. It has been helpful in the process of reforming the self of the person engaged in seeking the Enlightenment. To understand the concept of mysticism and ,the process through which the objective is achieved, the categories of the mystics and the socio-economic impact of this particular practice needs to be thoroughly investigated .Hence this research is undertaken to find out as to what would be the effect on life and living of the people engaged in the process and those who may come into interaction with the mystics.*

**Keywords:** Mysticism, Spiritualism, Socio-Economics

## **Research Methodology**

The process of research will be carried out with the help of the people found involved in the practice. Data will be collected through studying the published material, responses collected through a simple questionnaire and personal observation by visiting the location where this practice is being carried out.

## **The Concept of Mysticism**

The concept of Mysticism has been derived from the Greek word “Mystiko” which stands for communion with God as a result of certain practices intended to facilitate the access.

In Hinduism it is “Moksha” or Satori” which connotes a state of inner connection with God.

In Christianity it is called Theosis and explains a state of complete isolation from worldly affairs for establishing union with God. Mystical traditions are differently interpreted by each religion like in Judaism it is practiced as Kabbalah for intensive interpretation of Torah. In Judaism mainstream practices focus on Meditation. Here, too, the premise is that of attaining the stage of envisioning the Reality, the Truth aiming at connection with God. Although the ultimate destination in each

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\* Dr. Habib ur Rahman, Chairman, Department of Management Sciences, Sarhad University, Peshawar

path of such practices has been the divine consciousness for union with God and that is the spiritual satisfaction yet the nature and kinds of practices has been different due to differences in the religious traditions. Mystic believes in communication with Allah and each mystic adopts or adapts to his own path of success.

Mysticism is normally considered to be the advanced stage of theosophy which denotes a religious system of thought that tries to know God by means of Meditation and Prayer. If we take this explanation for granted then the mysticism is an effort of finding the means to have communication with God through spiritual praxis.

In Islamic terminology mysticism stands for “Tasawwuf” or Tazkia-e-Nafs which denotes a phenomenon where an individual relinquishes worldly affairs and focuses on finding out the “Reality” leading to the pleasure of Allah. It is, in fact, purification of soul, purging of animal passions, instincts and emotions so as to become God intoxicated man. Thus in Islam Mysticism is a state of human being wherein one dives deep into the sea of holy secrets searching the means to please Allah for the purpose of spiritual self-satisfaction. It can be defined as “Heart Prayer” which separates soul from the worldly affairs and diverts it to Allah alone.

Mysticism has, sometime, been considered synonymous with Occultism which is not correct because in Mysticism object is holy secrets being searched for where as in Occultism the concentration is always on human being for the purpose of bringing him into one’s control through magic power. Mysticism is, no doubt, a state of human being wherein he/she prefers heavenly success to the comforts of life and is achieved only with utmost abstinence and endeavor for securing maximum pleasure of Allah through continuous concentration, prayer and meditation. Prior to the achievement of the objective mystics take pain to sacrifice the worldly happiness and keep lost in the process. These concerted efforts are, in fact, the ladder toward success. The mystic through this struggle purifies his conscience, reforms his/her conduct so as to put in line with the commandment of Allah

Pir Zulfikar in his work on “Mysticism” defining mystic writes “Mystic is a person who has since purified his conduct, is thoughtful enough, with soul Allah searching, abstinent of worldly affairs and negates self esteem.”<sup>1</sup> Thus mysticism is both a mental and physical state of a human being wherein he/she exclusively devotes to activities which ultimately lead to achieve utmost pleasure of Allah. It is in fact abnegation of the ego and identifies with the ultimate truth – God.

### Approaches

To reach destination the devotee defers worldly interest and concentrates on the Prayers, Meditation, Contemplation and Commitment.

Every mystic is concerned with the search for the real. This Endeavour ultimately enables him/her to find out the path leading to goal i.e. soul purification. Total submission to Allah asking for guidance to the path leading to absolute consciousness of the reality where the mind gets automatically illuminated. It is a common practice of mystics in every religion. The mode of praying differs from mystic to mystic depending upon the current traditions and guidance from the spiritual mentors.

Mysticism of the Upanishad focuses on Yoga. The Yoga concentration is different from ordinary concentration. In Yoga mind becomes fixed on a particular object during this period all other feelings are for the time being ignored and one thing i.e. the Truth the "Reality" is sought through deep diving into the ocean of spiritual thought.

Mysticism is commonly viewed to be a part of religion because mostly the religious people forego worldly happiness and strive hard to find reality for the sole pleasure of God.

Every person adopts his or her way to achieve the objective. Therefore, every mystic experiences the mysticism in a different way. It was because of this very theory that W. T. Stace, a renowned philosopher, during his study of Catholic, Protestant, Ancient Hindu, and American Mystical exposures observed that the mystics usually have unifying vision of the one, apprehension of the one as the essence of life, feeling of satisfaction, joy and bliss and true Sense of Reality.<sup>2</sup>

It is commonly believed that mysticism is a religious practice and is usually exercised by the people more inclined towards religion. However, the practice varies with the mind set. Those who believe in Monistic theory differ in observing the religious duty from those who follow Theism. The Monistic thought aims at seeking the unity and identity of God because they believe in the Oneness of God whereas the Theistic believe in mere unity with God.

Here emphasis is being laid on Theistic Mysticism, union with God. This concept although prevailing in Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism but in practice differs from each other. In the teaching of Islam Monistic isolation has been prerequisite for soul purification.

Numerous Qur'anic verses emphasize upon the exercise of Taqwa i.e. purification of soul. This objective is achieved by restraining oneself from the acts prohibited and also complying with the tenants of Islam for performing the duties enjoined upon Muslims for the betterment of the mankind. More stress has been laid on the refraining

from the forbidden. This is because of the reasons that Islam is religion for the welfare of the whole of humanity and compliance of its commandments ensures peace and tranquility by mutually looking after the interest of each other. Nevertheless Muslims more inclined towards religious achievements put in extra efforts to seek the pleasure of Allah through more access to reality.

However, urge for reality is subjected to approved practices. Unlike other religious teaching of Islam does not allow Monasticism. As revealed in Qur'an "But monasticism they invented –we ordained it not for them-only seeking Allah's pleasure and they observed it not with right observance."<sup>3</sup>

Mysticism from the Islamic perspective has its own significance because of the nature and modus operandi employed in the process of meditation. In Muslim Ummah all out efforts are exerted on night Prayers and Zikr when the soul is free and mind can be concentrated with least deviation and distraction. This is in addition to the normal prayer and compliance with commandments.

### **Process**

Evelyn Underhill describes this process in five stages of which the following three have significance<sup>4</sup>

1. The process commences with the stage of "Awakening". It is normally autonomous but sometimes induced or resulting out of the "Demonstration Effect". People inclined to religion strive hard to seek the pleasure of Allah and realize the need of attaining the divine reality.
2. Once it is felt that absolute reality results from soul purification the second stage of "Purgation" harnesses the mind to abdicate from the acts forbidden.
3. Abandoning rather abstaining from evil deeds and following the path to truth determines the direction to destination. This is infact the stage of "Illumination". At this stage the human will takes a turn. Heaven and new earth are envisioned.

Personal whims and desires are pushed to subconscious mind. It is here that Gnosis establishes roots in the human psyche of which the person becomes conscious. The goal, the objective is communion of soul with Allah. This can be experienced as vision, dreams or revelation and Miracles, The exposure of Miracles and messages coming down from heaven have been characterized as Prophethood.

Christian mysticism seeks this unity of soul while in the body through perpetual prayer and intensive asceticism (purification)

contemplation and meditation to achieve resurrection of the Christ self/nature in this life.

Mysticism is, no doubt, a type of worship which helps the mystics in seeking reality and eventually achieves Gnosis but in majority cases it has been observed that once the person achieves the goal he/she turns to adopt monasticism and separates himself/herself from the rest of the people. So much so that the followers are rarely able to converse. This technique is purposely employed to impress the public at large. This is then the point where superstitious instinct of the destitute is exploited with a pretext to cure diseases hitherto could not be treated by most sophisticated machinery and highly scientific medication.

There is another class of people who claim to be mystic having spent years in seclusion and silence. They pretend that isolation is sufficient for meditation and the process definitely leads to attain the status of mystic. This class of mystic subsequently station themselves on monastery and generally succeeds in gathering around them a host of addicts. Their group is gradually enlarged with joining of social parasites from the adjacent areas. This phenomenon has been the root cause of promoting and spreading the addict culture and unfortunately cancerising a major part of the society. Such class of people have no religious objective. They least bother about Qur'anic commandment and Islamic traditions. Cropping up of such a class is, in fact, the outcome of lack of interest in living on gotten gear. They shun hard work. Lethargy and slackness has taken away the enthusiasm. Mere living on others loaf and killing appetite has adversely been affecting the over all productivity. Members of this class are gradually dissociated and left to live at the mercy of nature. Apart from other aspects this particular practice has resulted in a very negative impact on socio-economic life of other people.

A sample research was conducted to asses the attitude of the individuals concerning mysticism. Summarized answers are detailed below for further analysis and drawing inferences thereof.

No. of Persons (conspicuous mystics) interviewed	KPK	Punjab	Sindh	FATA	Total
	60	45	30	30	165

S. No.	Nature of Question asked	No. of Answers	Response
01	What were the	A.90	To please Allah and attain the

	reasons for pursuing mysticism?	B.30 C.45	happiness of life hereafter. To escape the worldly worries. It is safe and peaceful life. Not responded appropriately
02	What method you adopted to achieve your objective?	A.90 B.42 C.33	It is as simple as waking up in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> part of night. Worship with devotion and keep on praying Allah who ultimately guides and the soul is purified. Kept on the company of Pir sahib, he alone can emancipate. Need not doing any thing except serving monk/ Pir. No appropriate response received
03	How much time does it require to achieve goal?	A.90 B.51 C.24	Time not specified depends upon the level of commitment and sanctity of cause. Sincere devotion with sole objective of Allah's pleasure facilitates mind's illumination. Monk/ Pir rarely allows the followers to exercise powers. It always depends upon the life span of the Guru Pir. well one can arrange his own seating but outside the vicinity of the Guru Pir. No response/Refused
04	Do you think that the status you enjoyed is that of a mystic and have been bestowed	A.90	No, Never No body knows that the worship offered has been accepted. This all is an effort to save the soul from evils & that is all.

	upon you by the blessing of God/Allah?	B.49  C.26	Is there any thing suspicious? Day and night gathering of followers and visitors of all ranks & rates. Is it all meaningless? people foresee some good and are, therefore, inclined to encircle the tribune of the monk No appropriate response
05	Is mysticism a goal achieved forever	A.90  B.43  C.32.	No. Not at all. It is continuous effort. Living life in accordance with the commandments of Allah and teaching of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The Monk/ Baba Pir direct to establish seat at a particular location we mystic have nothing to object. People's faith however, sometimes causes a change in the style. After all People's will is determinant of their status. No appropriate response
06	Do you agree that mysticism and economic activities can be carried out together?	A.90	Islam does not favor monasticism rather disallows. More and more productive economic activities are infact the importunity of Islam so that maximum can be used for the support of desolate, destitute and indigents not to survive but enable to live honorably. Refraining from and preventing evils and preaching for good is infact the religious duty.

		B.50	World has been abandoned. Let worldly people dig & dive. Pir, Faqirs are not supposed to Plough & Pile.
		C.25	No response
07	What should be the most effective way of achieving mysticism?	A.90	Abstain from what has been forbidden. Comply with what has been ordained by Allah. In worship one submits to Allah who alone guides him to the right direction.
		B.40	Those who have already surrendered to his Murshid/monk needs not to worry Baba is responsible.
		C.25	Appropriate response received
08	Is exposing oneself to be pious not hypocrisy?	A.90	One must be optimistic. God knows the inners. It is Allah to forgive or take into account pray for all.
		B.60	It is the people's will. Why should other be worried?
09	How is it instrumental to motivate people for practicing mysticism	A.90	Autonomous urge is natural. However, mystics have been very effective through acting as role model.
		B.51	Besides providing narcotics, musical sittings, dancing & Qawalies are the techniques which attract more & more people to become followers of the monks.



		C.24	Appropriate response not received
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The above information reveals that those in category “B” and “C” have not been practicing religion regularly in accordance with the teaching of Quran and Sunnah and are leading life at the mercy of their Pirs. Almost all the inhabitants are generally devoid of religious knowledge and are resultantly depending on the advices of their Murshids. Thus instead of seeking “Reality’ and “Enlightenment” they are sent to the lowest ebb of darkness.

### **Socio-Economic Impact**

Unlike other philosophies Islamic teachings guide every follower to attain the status of a mystic. None of the moral, social or legal principles have been allowed to be violated. Peace for all and sharing fruits of economic activities has been ordained to ensure a just society. Neither sin and immorality nor crimes have been connived at. This state of mind set leads human activities to be carried out in the greater interest of general public and results only out of the compliance of Quranic ordinances. Driving force behind this behavior is communion with Allah the factor which helps in understanding the spiritual reality. In Islamic teaching, isolation and seclusion is not the route leading to Mysticism. It is the “Good Conduct Elevate Mankind to its Zenith” Let the people judge ones usefulness for the humanity. Social parasites add nothing to Socio–Economic welfare rather promote a class of non productive, lethargic, and disgusted elements. Such people normally gather around shrines and monasteries in the disguise of mystics and establish permanent inhabitation which is then surrounded by their disciples. During the research process it transpired that this type of mystics;

- i). Abandon social life and confine themselves to specific premises.
- ii). Their family members have normally been found striving for two ends meat and are often constrained to take a dole of begging in their hands
- iii). They generally guise themselves into the garb of a superior personality who can recommend any one to Allah for blessing and grace. Many of the weak believers fall prey and are deprived of their assets in the false hope of becoming millionaire over night.
- iv). In order to influence their own disciples and also men of superstitious mind they many a time seek expertise in the art of

- hypnotism and succeed in convincing of their miraculous art of exorcising persons of feeble belief.
- v). With a view to pleasing the mystic/monk the disciples also dissociate themselves from the rest of the community and keep company with their so called mentor. The family life and relationship with the community is adversely affected.
  - vi). Instead of acting as mentor, the monk/mystic makes all out efforts to convince the disciples of their miracle grace in anticipation of consecration.

Every true Muslim is a mystic because he/she continues putting in efforts in accordance with the teaching of Quran which eventually leads to and ends in achieving the “Reality” a Communion with Allah. Without exposing themselves to the world around the true mystics have taken upon themselves to reform the society rather heal the socio religious evils of the whole mankind but operating within their own jurisdiction.

- i. They guide people and lead them achieve the ‘Reality’ through not escaping evils but preventing forces which cause the society to suffer.
- ii. They act as model for the rest of the members of the society and thereby reform them both socially and economically.
- iii. Refrain from acts forbidden and ensure the society a peaceful life.
- iv. They lead doldrums and enable them to confirm their belief in the monotheism.
- v. Comply with the Quranic injunctions  
“O Ye believe spend of the good things which ye have earned and of that we bring forth from the earth for you and seek not the bad( with intent) to spend thereof (in charity) which ye would not take it for yourselves save with disdain and know that Allah is Absolute Owner of Praise”<sup>5</sup>
- vi. Prefer spiritual success over worldly achievement and therefore all socio-economic activities are subjected to religious approval. Only legitimate and fair dealing make the basis of financial transactions.
- vii. Moral values dominate socio-economic life .Corollary their dealings are immune from fraud, coercion and embezzlement.

It is suggested that;

For the development of manpower lying alongside monasteries and aging unutilized is unfortunately adding to the miseries of the rest of the population because of its demonstration effect. To improve upon the attitude and behavior of this class of people a specially designed educational program along with a skill development scheme be devised so that this important segment of our human resources which is hitherto being rusted due to non deployment in the productive ventures can be brought into the mainstream. At the very outset it may create problem to pull them out of the existing environment. Therefore taking into confidence their Murshid /Pir will be more advisable.

At the very outset they may be exposed to light sort of training in handicrafts and public dealing business activities. It will help them accommodate themselves to the changed situation. There after putting them to light duties of the same skill jobs will facilitate them in adaptation.

In order to motivate the existing so called disciples shun their purposeless sitting and join the productive efforts of the active population, the families of these monks and disciples have their own role to play. Consecutive counseling of the family members to create a soft corner and tend to be inclined towards this neglected part of the society will definitely help them. Once the family members start embracing them it will motivate them to join their families again as productive members. Simultaneously constant counseling of the disciples as well as those of Pirs is of much significance for reforming this particular class of people. However, this is not an easy task to be tackled and needs immense importance to be attached. The mentors will have to intermingle with them so as they begin to think that the mentor is their friend. Only this way he will be able to persuade them depart from the existing way of living and adopt the true religious mode or accessing "Reality" alongside legitimate productive efforts.

Needless to emphasize that poverty is the worst type of curse befallen on most of the people who are sometime beguiled by the free living and loaf. Therefore, poverty alleviation must be given top priority. Besides normal development schemes autonomous investment in the small projects for the specific benefit of these people will help in creating job opportunities and income generation. This will promote an optimistic atmosphere and eventually induce the people to live on their gotten gear. Let the philanthropists also play their role in molding the society into a true Islamic frame.

Therefore provision of employment opportunities will turn these defunct members of the society into productive factors of the development process. Thus employment as instrument of poverty

alleviation can be used for the long term change in the life of the people who are making monasteries, shrines and solitary inhabitation as their resort.

In conclusion, it may be emphasized that mysticism or Sufism stands divided into two categories, that is, true mysticism; and false mysticism. True mysticism constitutes the very essence of Islam. It stands for purging of satanic temptations and animal passions from human nature. Purpose is to purify the heart for the remembrance of God & to cultivate in oneself a sense of Taqwa – a sense of accountability (for one's conduct) before God Almighty. This kind of mysticism allows man to participate in the thickets of life & doesn't condemn him to seclusion/isolation from the social order.

False mysticism, on the other hand, thrives on the superstitious elements of human nature & is exploitative in nature. It leads to monasticism on society. This form of mystics at best ties up a man to a grave or a living individual without any spiritual worth or value. Our contention is that this latter form of mysticism needs immediate attention and reformation.

### End Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Zulfīqar Ahmad, Taṣawwuf wa-al-sulūk, 3rd edition. (Maktaba Alfaqir, Faisalabad, 2009)

<sup>2</sup> The Mystica Mythical-Folk, Occult Encyclopedia, <http://www.themystica.org/mystica/articles/m/mysticism.html> (retrieved on 23rd December, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Marmaduke Pickthall. The Holy Quran (translation) Surah Alhadeed, Verse. 27

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Underhill. Mysticism: A Study of the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness. (Oneworld 1999)

<sup>5</sup> Marmaduke Pickthall, The Holy Quran (translation) Surah al-Baqarah verse No. 267