

# **MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY NOVEL**

*By*

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## Certificate

We are satisfied that the thesis presented by Ms. Manjit Sethi is worthy of consideration for the award of degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, and is a record of the original bonafide research work carried out by her under our guidance and supervision, and that the results contained in it have not been submitted in part or full to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree/diploma. We certify that she has pursued the prescribed course of research.



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(Manjit Sethi)

ABSTRACT

The twentieth century fiction has come full circle. The haloed, larger than life heroes of yore have finally departed, leaving the stage to the much humbled stereotypes in the twentieth century. These protagonists are the ones who cannot hope to transform the world. They themselves survive with great difficulty. Some novels, however, have tried to break the vicious circle of contemporary existence by creating the mystical protagonists. This dissertation is a study of mystical experiences in some novels written by novelists who can be considered to be truly amphibian - at home in the mystical as well as the quotidian worlds.

Man, in the twentieth century, is in search of a wholeness, some sort of unity. He does not want to go back to a pastoral world or fantasize about a Utopia, and yet he seeks a oneness which is quite missing from the world he inhabits. It is in and through the labryinths of this world that he seeks the One. The Eternal City tantalises him, beckons him and yet the twentieth century protagonist stubbornly resists the ascetic, monistic way of the earlier mystics. Standing on the concrete highways, on busy cross - roads, dwarfed by high rise buildings, he looks up and finds the mystical city hovering, shimmering in the air above him. Strange mystical paths emanating from this world and from this self, in the here and now, begin opening not to Elsewhere but to the One.

The dissertation tries to explore the experiences in the novels which take man to a higher, transpersonal Unity. The novels in which they occur are firmly rooted in their worldly and literary contexts. The

protagonist authentically is engaged with the divisions, the alienation, the materialism which have diminished him. The experiences are not an escape and come to the intellectual protagonist who negotiates a trans-rational path towards evolution. He does not shirk the intellectual war but is not awed by his own mental sets either. Working his way in the world with awareness and energy the protagonist discovers a different way to function, to alter his reality. This activity initiates a virtuous way of experiencing. The study of such experiences is not to accumulate them like money, but share the proceeds of these Trans-Personal transactions.

The study spans over a century but it does not intend to survey the spiritual condition of these years. Instead the focus of the study is on the works of certain novelists - Doris Lessing, Virginia Woolf, Boris Pasternak, Aldous Huxley, Iris Murdoch and James Baldwin. Though the study's emphasis is on the novels, some novelists like Lessing and Woolf, come in for special attention, because their works span all stages of mystical experiences.

The first chapter consists of (a) motivational survey, (b) defining the mystical experience, (c) seeing mystical experiences in the twentieth century contexts, (d) study of the mystical experience vis a vis creativity, literature and the novel, (e) a survey of the existing literature on the subject and *raison de etre* for the present study, (f) an account of the mystical stages used to study mystical experiences, and (g) a statement of the hypothesis of the dissertation.

The second chapter deals with nascent mystical experiences which carry the possibility of awakening the protagonist to the mystical dimension of life. The third chapter concerns the more pressing

experiences of illumination. They are seen as very enriching and are associated with the integration of self. The fourth chapter explores how by self surrender mystical experiencing becomes a "way of life". The concluding chapter throws light on the mystical experiences in the novels from the point of view of the chakra psychology.

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