

**LANGUAGE, BIRTH AND DEATH IN MEISTER ECKHART:
A LITERARY-PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY IN APOPHASIS**

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Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart:

A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophasis

by

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Submitted

in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

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DECLARATION

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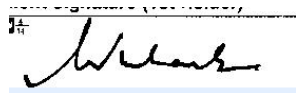
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THESIS CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “**Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart: A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophysis**” being submitted by **Jose Jacob** to Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy**, is a bona fide record of the research work done by him under my guidance and supervision. In my opinion, the thesis has fulfilled the requirements and has reached the requisite standard for the submission relating to the degree. The contents of this thesis, in full or in parts, have not been submitted to any other Institute or University for the award of any degree or diploma.

Date: 29 September, 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Milind', is written over a light blue horizontal line. To the left of the signature, there is a small, faint stamp or mark.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation titled “Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart: A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophasis” is an attempt to dwell on the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to understand the dynamics of birth and death in Eckhart’s preaching within the linguistic paradigm of apophasis. By exploring the interplay between language, birth and death in the Middle High German sermons of Eckhart, this study will revisit the vernacular moment that facilitated the birth of apophasis in a vernacular. The research is both literary and philosophical as every analysis and interpretation intersect and evolve within the parameters of literature and the principles of philosophy. Literary in this dissertation points to a radical poetics that is getting manifested in the vernacular sermons of Eckhart through paradoxes, hyperboles, contradictions and above all negation. Philosophical in this study points to the lucidity of thinking and the logic of eisegesis getting revealed in the Biblical and liturgical sermons of Eckhart in Middle High German for (un)knowing the ineffable. Thus, this dissertation will be a thorough examination of the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to find the parallel move happening in apophasis (linguistic regress) for semantic shift and rigour and in Birth and death (non-attachment) for releasement unto the One. The study contends that in Eckhart apophasis extends beyond the boundaries of language, that is saying and unsaying, to the ontological and existential structures of being, where birth, death and language make a simultaneous move towards a breakthrough in the mystical path within the dynamic of non-attachment. In apophasis meaning is generated through the sustained tension between the saying and unsaying or by negating a negation by another negation. This linguistic device is profusely used by Eckhart to teach the lessons of

eternal birth and death within the dynamics of non-attachment. In Eckhart, apophasis is both a critique of the scholastic cataphatic approach and also an act of making available a new path of (un)knowing the ineffable. Thus, this research concludes that Birth and death in Eckhart points to a parallel shedding in the self as there is a regress in apophasis. So, I argue that Eckhart's reliance on apophasis-an ongoing linguistic regress ushering in a new semantic force – in the teaching and the happening of eternal birth and death- allows a voice (*stimme*) to be heard in the middle (*Mittel*) of the saying and unsaying which is silence, where the (non)temporal event of breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) leads to the final releasement (*Gelassenheit*).

सारांश

मेस्टर एकहार्ट में भाषा, जन्म और मृत्यु: अपोफासिस में एक

साहित्यिक-दार्शनिक अध्ययन

यह शोध प्रबंध जिसका शीर्षक है “मेस्टर एकहार्ट में भाषा, जन्म और मृत्यु: अपोफासिस में एक साहित्यिक-दर्शनशास्त्रीय अध्ययन” का उद्देश्य एकहार्ट के देशज उपदेशों पर विचार करना है ताकि अपोफासिस की भाषिक रूपरेखा में एकहार्ट के उपदेशों में जन्म और मृत्यु की गतिशीलता को समझा जा सके। मेस्टर एकहार्ट के मध्य उच्च जर्मन उपदेशों में भाषा, जन्म और मृत्यु के अंतःक्रिया का अन्वेषण करते हुए यह अध्ययन उस देशज क्षण की पुनर्समीक्षा करेगा जिसने अपोफासिस के एक देशज रूप को जन्म दिया। यह शोध साहित्यिक और दार्शनिक दोनों है क्योंकि प्रत्येक विश्लेषण और व्याख्या साहित्य और दर्शनशास्त्र के सिद्धांतों के अंतर्गत आपस में मिलती और विकसित होती है।

इस शोध में साहित्यिक का तात्पर्य उस उग्र काव्यशास्त्र से है जो एकहार्ट के देशज उपदेशों में विरोधाभासों, अतिशयोक्तियों, अंतर्विरोधों और सबसे बढ़कर नकार के माध्यम से प्रकट हो रही है। दार्शनिक का तात्पर्य उस चिंतन की स्पष्टता और ईसाई बाइबिल और धार्मिक उपदेशों में ईसेजीसिस की तर्कशक्ति से है जो मध्य उच्च जर्मन में अज्ञेय को (अ)जानने के लिए प्रकट होती है। इस प्रकार, यह शोध प्रबंध मेस्टर एकहार्ट के देशज उपदेशों की गहन जांच होगी ताकि अपोफासिस (भाषिक प्रत्यावर्तन) में अर्थ-परिवर्तन और कठोरता तथा जन्म और मृत्यु (अनासक्ति) में एकत्व की ओर विमुक्ति के समानांतर आंदोलन को समझा जा सके।

यह अध्ययन मानता है कि एकहार्ट में अपोफासिस भाषा की सीमाओं से परे जाती है, अर्थात् कहना और न कहना, अस्तित्व की सत्ता और अस्तित्वगत संरचनाओं की ओर, जहाँ जन्म, मृत्यु और भाषा अनासक्ति की गतिशीलता में रहस्यमय पथ पर एक साथ एक की ओर अग्रसर होते हैं। अपोफासिस में अर्थ निरंतर तनाव से उत्पन्न होता है—कहने और न कहने के बीच या एक नकार को दूसरे नकार से

नकारने द्वारा। एकहार्ट इस भाषिक साधन का व्यापक उपयोग करते हैं ताकि अनासक्ति की गतिशीलता के भीतर शाश्वत जन्म और मृत्यु के पाठ पढ़ा सकें। एकहार्ट में अपोफासिस केवल स्कॉलास्टिक कैटाफैटिक दृष्टिकोण की आलोचना नहीं है, बल्कि अज्ञेय को (अ)जानने के लिए एक नए मार्ग को उपलब्ध कराने का कार्य भी है।

इस प्रकार, यह शोध निष्कर्ष निकालता है कि एकहार्ट में जन्म और मृत्यु आत्म में समानांतर त्याग की ओर संकेत करते हैं, जैसे अपोफासिस में एक प्रत्यावर्तन होता है। इसलिए, मेरा तर्क है कि एकहार्ट का अपोफासिस पर भरोसा—एक सतत भाषिक प्रत्यावर्तन जो नए अर्थबल को जन्म देता है—शाश्वत जन्म और मृत्यु की शिक्षा और घटना में, एक ऐसी आवाज़ (Stimme) को सुने जाने की अनुमति देता है जो कहने और न कहने के बीच (Mittel) मौन में गूंजती है, जहाँ की (अ)कालिक घटना अंतिम विमुक्ति की ओर ले जाती है।

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Introduction

Meister Eckhart (c.1260 – 1327) is one of the most profound and original thinkers of the medieval period who embellished the scholastic philosophy and theology with unique hermeneutics of the Bible and other classical texts and traditions. He was a member of the Order of Preachers popularly known as Dominicans and his integrity and scholarship led him to high positions in the order like Provincial, Vicar for the Dominican Master General, two terms as the Magister in the Dominican Chair in Paris and as leading theologian at Cologne, the center of Dominican learning. During his time, he was known as an efficient administrator, preacher and theologian and he is known today as a medieval philosopher, theologian and above all a mystic with contemporary relevance and challenging spirituality. His mystical path is a ‘wayless way’ in which all the ‘whys’ of life find answer and meaning in a dispensation of non-attachment. His works are available today both in Latin and German and both point to the erudition and reflective articulations on metaphysics, ontology, epistemology and many more. Eckhart remains a persuasive thinker and spiritual guide because of his unconditional commitment to non-attachment (*Abgeischeidenheit*) and a radical spirituality. Amber Griffioen’s comment “neither the contemporary philosophers who ignore him nor the new-age enthusiasts who adore him, adequately capture the complexity of the Meister, who was both a sophisticated and well-respected intellectual- a master of letters, learning, and language” (*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*) echoes the intensity of his teachings within a new pattern of thinking guided by a fundamental commitment to non-attachment. All Eckhart scholars agree on the linguistic dexterity of this thinker which is an inbuilt mechanism of his teaching. His vernacular sermons are sites of

linguistic experiment and philological marvel as they present to the reader the ‘homecoming’ of theology, philosophy and mysticism. The overarching presence of apophasis (via-negativa or negative theology) in these sermons not only makes his teaching style rare, but also reveals the union of teaching and practice where the linguistic regress of apophasis finds a parallel in the genuine spirit of renunciation in non-attachment. Apophasis, thus, in these sermons is the vehicle of a radical rhetoric persuading the listener to shun the impediments to releasement; and apophasis also is a radical poetics instructing the audience to embrace the nobility of humility and simplicity with a spirit of kenosis. The study would summarize the eventful life of Meister Eckhart in the boundless epiphany of wisdom as proclaimed in the Holy Bible as : “in every generation she (wisdom) passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Wis. 7:27). The study is a humble intellectual inquiry into the ‘whyless way’ of Eckhart, the friend of God and prophet, who spoke in time gazing at infinity, and instructed and showed the path of sanity and unity.

This dissertation titled “Language, Birth and Death in Meister Eckhart: A Literary-Philosophical Study in Apophasis” is an attempt to dwell on the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to understand the dynamics of birth and death in Eckhart’s preaching within the linguistic paradigm of apophasis. By exploring the interplay between language, birth and death in the Middle High German sermons of Eckhart, this study will revisit the vernacular moment that facilitated the birth of apophasis in a vernacular. The research is both literary and philosophical as every analysis and interpretation intersect and evolve within the parameters of literature and the principles of philosophy. ‘Literary’ in this dissertation points to a radical poetics that is manifested in the vernacular sermons of Eckhart through paradoxes,

hyperboles, contradictions and above all negation. ‘Philosophical’ in this study points to the lucidity of thinking and the logic of eisegesis getting revealed in the Biblical and liturgical sermons of Eckhart in Middle High German for (un)knowing the ineffable. Thus, this dissertation will be a thorough examination of the vernacular sermons of Meister Eckhart to find the parallel move happening in apophasis (linguistic regress) for semantic shift and rigour and in Birth and death (non-attachment) for releasement unto the One. The study contends that in Eckhart, apophasis extends beyond the boundaries of language, that is saying and unsaying, to the ontological and existential structures of being, where birth, death and language make a simultaneous move towards a breakthrough in the mystical path within the dynamic of non-attachment.

There was an added fervour to the research and studies on Eckhart’s writings, both Latin and Vernacular, after the publication of the first volume of the critical edition of Meister Eckhart’s German Works titled *Deutsche Werke* by Joseph Quint in 1936. Quint began this strenuous intellectual journey in 1930 and published the first volume in 1936 and continued the pursuit till his death in 1976 by then completing the publication of five volumes. After his death his friends and students edited six more volumes, mostly the critical edition of the Latin works of Eckhart. So, at present there are 11 volumes in Quint’s edition and these are given as primary work/s in the reference section. The impact of this critical edition was tremendous as it triggered serious studies and meaningful research on the works of Eckhart spanning from Medieval Philosophy, Vernacularity, Mystical Thinking, Comparative Religion and Mysticism, as well as Postmodern philosophy. This edition freed Eckhart’s writings from the confines of theology, philosophy and mysticism and led to a broader

spectrum which led to the popularity of his teachings beyond Germany and German language. The research has made an extensive study of the literature available in English mainly and at times looked into the works in other languages too.

The most outstanding studies in English on Meister Eckhart and his writings were from Bernard McGinn who wrote a couple of books on Eckhart foregrounding the mystical core of his teachings. His book *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (2001) places Eckhart's teachings within the medieval Christian mysticism and the book also points to the originality of his thinking and especially the notion of non-attachment (*Abgescheidenheit*). McGinn underlines the mystical experience proposed by Eckhart as something which transcends the limits of conceptual theology and philosophy. Another scholar who focuses on Eckhart's language is Frank Tobin and he in his *Meister Eckhart: Thought and Language* (1986) elaborates on the linguistic peculiarities of Eckhart's sermons and affirms that the complexity of the language is integral to the mystical discourse. Oliver Davies's book *Meister Eckhart : Mystical Theologian* (2011) presents Eckhart as a medieval Dominican theologian who skilfully integrates dogmatic theology into mystical spiritual experience. Kurt Flasch has undertaken extensive studies on Eckhart and his book *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* (2015) dwells on the philosophical legacy of Eckhart which is profoundly Neoplatonic and Aristotelian. The book demands the reader to see Eckhart not as a mystic alone, but as a scholastic philosopher as well.

Some important studies on Eckhart's apophatic theology have come from Vladimir Lossky, Michael Sells, Denys Turner and Amy Hollywood and all of them have made commendable contributions in understanding the apophatic depths of Eckhart. Lossky's book *Eckhart's Apophatic Theology* (2024) originally published in

1960 in French is an in-depth scholarly work exploring the multiple implications of Eckhart's preoccupation with the ineffable both as a theologian and as a mystic. Sells's book *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (1994) looks into the apophatic tradition which was prevalent in Christianity, Islam and Judaism and presents the apophatic approach as an act of 'unsaying' pointing to the ineffability and transcendence of the divine. Sell's emphasis on the literary and philosophical aspects of the apophasis is compelling as it allows to conceive apophasis beyond the confines of theology. *The Darkness of God* (1995) by Denys Turner is an attempt to unravel the deep philosophy that is embedded in the theological apophasis of Eckhart. Amy Hollywood's *The Soul as Virgin Wife* (1995) unravels the connection between gender, apophasis, and desire in medieval mysticism with special emphasis on the women mystics of the period. The book dedicates one chapter to understand the relationship between visionary imagination and apophasis and there is yet another chapter on language and ontology in Eckhart. The book is a very detailed and scholarly study of medieval mystics and their themes and style.

A detailed reading was done of the writings by Martin Heidegger, Reiner Schürmann, Jacques Derrida, Michel Henry, John D Caputo and Jean Luc-Marion to understand the various scholarly approaches to Eckhart's writings and especially the mystical project. All of these writers appear in the various chapters of this study to support the argument and sometimes the arguments in it go against their perspectives as the study tries to foreground its point of view. The literature review has shown me the available research gap to pursue a study on Eckhart and my hypothesis is based on the findings of the literature review. This study differs from the existing scholarship mainly on the following points. First of all, even if there are studies on the themes of

language, birth and death in Eckhart, none of them deal with these three in an inclusive manner, most of them are exclusive studies on any one of the three. Secondly, the scholarship on Eckhart's apophysis often end up by exploring the theological, mystical and the linguistic in it, there aren't any works pointing to the dynamics between apophatic (un)saying and the apophatic (non)act happening in birth and death in Eckhart. Thirdly there are many works dealing with the theology, philosophy and the mystical elements in Eckhart's teachings, but only a few of them integrate the literary, linguistic and philosophical aspects of his writings. Lastly, the existing Eckhart scholarship relies heavily on the Middle High German of Eckhart, but there are only a few serious studies on the vernacular dimension of his sermons. These four aspects are unique to this research and each chapter makes a detailed study of the various aspects of research leading to an integration of the literary and philosophical within the linguistic dynamic of apophysis and the mystical dynamic of non-attachment.

The study in its analysis of Eckhart's sermons and other works, refers to the original works in German and Latin edited by Joseph Quint, but as the study relies mostly on the translation, the sermon numbers cited and the page numbers given are from the popularly approved scholarly translation of Eckhart's works by Maurice O'C Walshe (2009). So, the sermon numbers in short quotations and block quotations follow the order in Maurice Walshe's translation titled *The Complete Mystical Works of Meister Eckhart*. And whenever there are quotations from the German works the quotations follow the number in Joseph Quint's edition.

The study differs from other Eckhart scholars in translating the Middle High German word *Abgescheidenheit*. All the scholars translate it into English as

‘detachment’, but this study translates it as ‘non-attachment’ in order to place and understand this seminal word within the inner logic of apophysis. The lexical register of *Abgescheidenheit* does not belong to the kataphatic order, instead it is of the apophatic order, so the fitting translation is not detachment, but non-attachment. Throughout the dissertation ‘non-attachment’ is used to denote the mystical act of renunciation. Detachment appears only in direct quotations from other writers. The study argues that non-attachment is not an act, rather a non-act as it is an invitation to relinquish and ‘let be’ (*lassen*). It is the absence of willing, knowing and having; a total negation of the creatureliness, temporality and multiplicity. As apophysis is (un)saying, the study upholds that *Abgescheidenheit* (non-attachment) is a (non)act as it negates the human faculties in order to embrace the Godhead. It is a (non)act as it is the path of ‘living without why’ or the ‘wayless way’ leading to ‘nothing’ (Niht).

In Meister Eckhart’s original works, neither Latin nor German, the readers will find the word releasement, but after the translation of Schürmann’s article (1973) and book (2001) into English, all Eckhart scholars use this word in their writings on Eckhart as if it is in his writings as in Heidegger’s. The study too uses it as the final moment of union. Within the mystical theology and apophatic (un)saying, the moment of union is a nontemporal event happening in a temporal order. The Indian philosophical and mystical tradition has an equivalent named ‘*Jivanmukta*’ referring to the one who is achieving liberation and union as he or she is alive. Such a person lives in time but he does not belong to the order of time. The liberation that one achieves after death is known as ‘*videhamukti*’. The study sees the union in Eckhart as happening when one is still alive in the temporal and terrestrial order, because Eckhart’s advice is for *vita activa* as a mystic in the world. In this dissertation, as it is

quite impossible to capture the three moments (*Abgescheidenheit* as non-attachment, *Durchbrechen* (breakthrough), and *Abgescheidenheit* as releasement) as simultaneous one moment and one event, the study follows a linear order. There are places in the dissertation where the three are shown as happening one after another and it shows again the limitation of the language and human comprehension. The moment/infinity of ‘let be’ is the moment of union where all the three happen as a single event of (non)act). So, in Eckhart all these are one and the same experience of cancelling and nullifying the impediments. The separation of these three in the dissertation is with full conviction that they are one in the dispensation of apophysis and union.

Eckhart as a member of the order of preachers (OP), popularly known as Dominicans, as St Dominic is the founder of this order, was trained well in the art of rhetoric and preaching. The Scholastic method of preparing the Biblical and liturgical homilies is known as *Ars Praedicandi* and Eckhart was an expert in it as visible in his Latin works. The study argues that in preaching the vernacular sermons Eckhart did not adhere strictly to any particular style of constructing sermons or any particular method of interpreting the Bible. In the classical Christian tradition of hermeneutics and exegesis there are four approaches, namely literal, allegorical (typological is a subset in it), tropological and anagogical. Augustine of Dacia (c. 1280) expresses it beautifully as follows: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia* (The letter teaches events; allegory, what you should believe; The moral, what you should do; anagogy, where you are heading). Eckhart complies to these modes in some sermons and in some instances, but his style is entirely different in the vernacular phase. The study would use the term ‘Eisegesis’ for the Bible interpretation of Meister Eckhart. In exegesis a preacher or interpreter is

drawing out the meaning from the text and its textuality and explain it in relation to the whole economy of salvation, while in eisegesis the preacher is leading the listener into the text and interprets it with due freedom to convey a specific idea or point of view. In Rhineland, Eckhart the *lebemeister* led the flock into the text to instruct them and to show them the path of perfection. In all the sermons this is visible, as he is picking up a single verse or a couple of words to convey the message to the gathering. Throughout the history of the Church, those who followed the eisegesis often fell into heretical teachings and many of them were victims of inquisition. Eckhart's eisegesis of the Bible was meant to teach the flock the path of 'living without why' within an apophatic (un)saying and (un)serving.

This dissertation has, besides the Introduction and Conclusion, four chapters exploring the various aspects of the study. The Introduction is a broad survey of Eckhart's life and writings and includes literature review and thesis statement. It also speaks about the methodology and the specific points of departure happening in the study from popular and established Eckhart scholarship. The first chapter titled "The Moment of the Vernacular as the Parousia of the αὐτόχθονός" is a sustained study on the Middle High German sermons of Eckhart by looking into the poetics, rhetoric and identity getting manifested in the vernacular linguistic space. The second chapter with the title "Apophasis as the (Un)serving of the Language and the (Un)utterance of a Dehiscent Self" explores the trajectory of apophasis and places Eckhart's use of apophasis not just as a linguistic tool, but as an existential dynamic operating within the peculiar mystical path centered around non-attachment. The third chapter titled "Simultaneity of Twin Births as the Breakthrough in Non-attachment" is an exclusive study on birth which is the central idea in Eckhart's vernacular sermons and

mysticism. The title of the fourth chapter “Death as Lassen of the Self and Language in the Vernacular Sermons of Meister Eckhart” itself is indicative of the nature of the study taking place in this part of the research. The conclusion states that the triple ideas that are central to this research, namely, language, birth and death point to apophasis as the *Stimme* (Voice) and silence as the *Mittel* (middle) of Death and Birth in Eckhart’s Vernacular Sermons within the dispensation of non-attachment.

The first chapter inhabits the vernacular space which is often insular, parochial and provincial to reach the vernacular moment that is liminal, post-classical and nascent in the history of any language. The study makes an open and free inquiry into the saving grace embedded in the non/t standard status of vernacularity with special emphasis to Middle High German used by Eckhart in his sermons. Revisiting Eckhart would show the way to make the disciplines grounded in the vernacular which Heidegger in the Memorial Lecture (*Discourse on Thinking*) calls ἀντόχθων (people of the soil/native people) and this rootedness, as Eckhart and Heidegger conceived, is possible only in a dispensation of *Gelassenheit*. This study by looking into the dynamics of language, birth and death would envisage such a thinking, because as Heidegger and Arendt assert the thoughtlessness awaits a cure only by inculcating a culture of thinking. In Strasbourg and Rhineland, Eckhart initiated such a thinking, in and through his vernacular sermons. It turned to be the lay (human) face of theology and philosophy which witnessed the ‘koinon’ embracing the extraordinary and the ineffable within a quotidian milieu (*vita activa*). This was, ultimately, making language hospitable to infinity and thereby tempering the ‘sting of death’ from angst to felicity as death along with language becomes the simultaneous site of breakthrough and releasement. In Eckhart, the apophatic turn was also a vernacular

turn, that is, the audacity to leave Latin, the language of theology and philosophy, and to preach and write in Middle High German which was in a nascent stage.

The vernacular era in Europe is marked by a “point at which the national tongues began to shake off their dependence on Latin and to develop forms of their own” (Auerbach, 1993, p. 332). Auerbach in his book *Literary Language and Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* affirms the role of Eckhart’s vernacular sermons and speculative mystical teachings in ‘founding the German language of the intellect’. This study focuses on Eckhart’s Middle High German sermons, because his apophatic style becomes mature in them, where they act as a ‘way out’ for the vernacular from the tutelage of Latin. Eckhart enriched the German language with many neologisms and a new syntax and semantics free from the rule bound Latin diction. When philosophy and theology made their presence (*parousia*) in the vernacular German, they became “at once familiar and mysterious, the antithesis between rhetoric and dialectic was smoothed away” (Auerbach, 1993, p.332). The growth of Rhineland mysticism and the role of women in religion and society became prominent because of the ‘spark’ that Eckhart ignited in and through his vernacular sermons to popularize both his mystical thought and the native language. Auerbach’s praise for Eckhart’s German is worth mentioning.

On the whole his sentences are lively, clear, penetrating and harmonious; they make his thought seem transparent even when we are not sure we understand it. It is not easy to say in a few words what force modelled his rhetoric... There is no opposition between the echoes of Augustine and the reminiscences of dialectical scholasticism in his German style. (Auerbach, 1993, p. 331)

The Greek word ‘κοινωνία’ means ‘communion’ and the root word is κοινός (*koinós*), which means: “common,” “shared,” or “belonging to all”. These two words are very important as we consider Eckhart as a philosopher and mystic, because by choosing the vernacular to convey his thought to the audience he is foregrounding the *koinos*. Schürmann’s observation about philosophers, “they promote the koinon to the level of normative instance capable of consoling the soul and consolidating the city” (2003, p. 9) thus becomes a tribute to Eckhart as he introduces the lay group to the new dispensation (Rhineland mysticism) and enriches the vernacular with rare vocabulary of the *Gelassenheit* as against evangelical poverty. The study uses the expression ‘language of communion’ to denote the vernacular for two reasons: first, because Eckhart’s writings are primarily mystical and the second reason as is evident in the title of this study which tries to yoke two seemingly disparate human faculties (birth and death) with the help of apophasis, which is a rhetorical device in language and an ongoing annihilation due to the ‘linguistic regress’ or negation embedded in it.

‘New wine in old wineskins’ may be a befitting expression to comprehend the confusions and controversies around Eckhart’s writings. He was trying to communicate an entirely new style of living to realize perfection and to attain communion and, as Schürmann (2001) points out, this ‘another form of thought’ could not be gauged by the existing criteria and as a result he came under the scanner of the official church amidst inter-order rivalry between Dominicans and Franciscans. He invented many neologisms to convey the ‘new’ in his teachings, but they could not pacify and convince the guardians of orthodoxy, because besides and beyond the neologisms, his tools (exegesis and preaching) were old and the languages he used were in extreme ends; Latin redundant with scholastic metaphysical thinking and

vocabulary, especially like that of Aquinas and his version of Aristotelianism whereas Middle High German was bereft of adequate vocabulary to convey his thoughts. The enquiry into the language of Eckhart, in this study, properly considered all these and tries to expose the originality of his teachings, especially in the vernacular sermons. It is argued that the originality in Eckhart in the vernacular sermons is a rare blend of language and thinking within a mystical framework where the philosopher/preacher encounters the contrary pulls from a dominating language which is potent enough to convey even the '*mysterium tremendum*' with ease, while the vernacular is so nascent as it is in want of words to communicate and to convey the meaning of the mystical experience. The relevance of neologisms like 'istic'/'istichheit' become evident here as it challenges the Aristotelian (Greek) and Thomistic (Latin) expressions which fail to convey his ideas that are deeply rooted in a Neoplatonic emanative scheme.

Eckhart's theory of language, being quintessentially biblical, is rooted in his meditation on the logos. In sermon 36, he says, "all words have their power from the first Word" (p. 213) and the centrality of logos is clearly explained in his commentary on the prologue of St John. The logos for him is both that of creation and also of the eternal birth. The difference between 'eternal Word' and 'our word' is that the former is 'conceived in the essential light' while the latter is 'conceived in fitful light' (90, p. 441) and thus the first one is perfect and infallible and the second is imperfect and fallible by nature. The dependency on or the participation of the human word in the divine logos in Eckhart's theory of language leads Oliver Davies to conclude that "[L]anguage, for Eckhart, is the creative word that speaks materially, culturally to human beings for whom meaning itself bears a Christological form" (2013, p. 36). The operations of the creative Word in the creative order as conceived by Eckhart in

and through human beings open the way to understand language and its voice in his writings.

The study in its analysis looked at the original language (Middle High German) to enter into the lexical register and thus to get to the roots of his thinking and focused on the various rhetorical devices used in the writings/preaching, namely, metaphors and paradoxes. His exegesis and preaching are attempts to explicate the dynamics of the logos both in historical and in the non-temporal order, so the study is an attempt to see how his language becomes a participation in the logos. With due attention on his neologisms and also the curious expressions like ‘*biwort*’ ‘*funkel in der sele*’ and ‘*abgrund*’ and many more and the metaphors of the Godhead and *abgrund* like ‘desert’ (wüste), ‘darkness’, ‘river’, ‘fount’, ‘bottom’ etc are perused with attention to understand its theological, philosophical and mystical significance. Bruce Milem sees the reason for Eckhart’s popularity and obscurity in his peculiar use of language and points to his unique stylistic devices like imagery, paradox and neologisms. Milem concludes the study by saying, “The brilliance of Eckhart’s language, the daring of his ideas, and the personal warmth of his manner make the study of his sermons a pleasure” (Milem, 2013, p.357). Eckhart’s method being both cataphatic and apophatic, the study focuses on those junctures and moments where the cataphasis gives way to the apophasis and how apophasis becomes intelligible to the reader within the ambit of eternal birth and non-attachment.

The second chapter “Apophasis as the (Un)Serving of the Language and the (Un)utterance of a Dehiscent Self” looks into the origin and history of apophasis and then analyses its valence in Eckhart’s vernacular sermons. Meister Eckhart in his sermon *Beati Pauperes Spiritu* says, “...But in my breaking-through (*Durchbrechen*),

where I stand free of my own will, of God's will, of all His works, and of God himself, then I am above all creatures and am neither God nor creature, but I am that which I was and shall remain for evermore" (87, p. 424). These words of the great German Dominican and mystical theologian and philosopher of Rhineland point to the ultimate possibility of the human person who follows the path of non-attachment (*Abgescheidenheit*) within a speculative/mystical dispensation leading to communion. Thus, in this ecology, the poor are wise and blessed because, they are the "one who wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing" (87, 420). This milieu of 'Nothing' (*nichts/niht*), evidently is the locus of apophatic discourse in Eckhart and in other writers, both mystical and secular. Because, it is here that the self makes a breakthrough, from something (*iht*) to nothing (*niht*) and is equipped to speak a language of negation. This study will not place apophasis (ἀπόφαση/unsaying or speaking away) and kataphasis (κατάφασις/ affirmation, saying, speaking with) in opposition, instead it will look into the intensity of the linguistic acts of 'saying' and 'unsaying' and see how the apophatic discourse with its ongoing linguistic regress harness a semantic force that opens up the possibility for a new (un)utterance.

Apophasis (ἀπόφασις) is often identified with that branch of speculative theology/philosophy which upholds the absolute transcendence and unknowability of God and the resultant impossibility of any affirmative articulation (Kataphasis κατάφασις) of the Divine (Carabine 1988, Kars 2013). It is associated with mysticism (Sells 1994, MacKendrick 2001, Radler 2010), Negative Theology (Franke 2006, Carabine 1995), and radical religious and secular approaches (Min 2006, Allen 2009, Franke 2013) of a given period. Apophasis as negation/unsaying traces its origin in the works of Philo of Alexandria (First Century BC) and to the writings of Plotinus

(3rd Century CE) the founder of Neoplatonism, and in its most developed form in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius, late 5th to early 6th Century CE). Again, it came into prominence in the middle ages, especially among Christian, Jewish, and Islamic scholars. The prominent names would be that of Maimonides, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart. The underlying unity among these writers is to be traced to the Henology of Neoplatonism and the resultant reliance on apophatic method. These mystical theologians were convinced that “[A]ny positive ascription is at best an allegory, and at worst, anthropomorphism or polytheism, which should be firmly rejected in favour of the absolutely transcendent God” (Kars, 2013, 268). William Franke traces the origin of apophasis in a given culture and says it “arises (or rather comes to self-consciousness) at an advanced stage in the development of rational reflection in any given culture, when the founding myths of that culture are called into question” (2014, 147). Given the condition of medieval Europe and Christianity and the emergence of ‘free spirit’ lay groups like Beguines and Beghards, we understand why the language of the leading scholars of the 14th century gives way to apophasis at a time when the existing scholastic philosophy was essentially cataphatic. By employing apophasis, Eckhart was trying to reconstruct the foundations of Christian theology and philosophy, which became almost redundant and the people were getting nauseated with the arid scholastic metaphysics bereft of warmth and consolation.

This dissemination of speculative mystical ideas through the vernacular allows not only a vernacular theology and philosophy, but also a ‘lexis’ of saying and unsaying. The study argues that Eckhart’s break from Latin is actually a breakthrough (*Durchbruch*), because it marks a radical moment in intellectual history. This is

radical because it is not just linguistic transition, instead it points to the transformation that has already happened in the speaker of the language. Reiner Schuermann names this personal transformation ‘dehiscence, because here the self goes beyond the realms of dissimilarity, similarity and identity by permitting a breakthrough. For him, dehiscence marks the highest intensity towards *Gelaztheit* and it is the realm of ‘living without why’. Eckhart says in the sermon “*Mulier, Venit Hora*”

All things that are in time have a ‘Why?’ Ask a man why he eats: ‘For strength.’ – ‘Why do you sleep?’ – ‘For the same reason.’ And so on with all things that are in time. But if you should ask a good man, ‘Why do you love God?’ – ‘I don’t know - for God’s sake.’ ‘Why do you love truth?’ – ‘For truth’s sake.’ - Why do you love righteousness?’ – ‘For righteousness’ sake.’ ‘Why do you live ? Indeed I don’t know - I like living!’ (11, p. 96)

The moment of dehiscence ushers in the dispensation of ‘living without why’ and Eckhart uses vernacular German words like ‘*erste begin*’, ‘*erste anefanc*’, ‘*erseekit*’ to denote the origin of dehiscence. This is similar to the Greek ‘*arche*’ and Eckhart uses the word ‘*ursprunc*’ (*ursprinc* in Middle High German which means effervescence/efflorescence) which literally means ‘primitive springing’ and according Schuerman, “for Eckhart *ursprunc* (*arche*) is not the beginning of being, rather it is nothingness and anarchy...The departure as well as the arrival of detachment is nothingness” (2001, p.116). This is a moment of return to the ‘*ursache*’ (primordial). As we examine the Vernacular phase in Eckhart’s life and thought, we come to realize that this move is intrinsically attached to his path towards non-attachment and final releasement. Thus, apophasis becomes the site of un(selving) of the language and the un(uttering) self becomes the site of dehiscence. This is the

moment and eternity of spontaneity and releasement, which points to the shift from ‘causal categories to cosmic spirituality’ and in other words from the ignorance of knowledge to the knowledge of ignorance. Schuermann captures this moment in Eckhart as follows:

In its preoriginary origin the will sets itself loose from any principle; it is anarchic. Nothing precedes it; therefore, it has nothing to obey except itself. Detachment, at this stage, ignores or suspends any reference to determinate being. Man is perfectly released. He exists himself as the preoriginary origin, he is the origin of the origin, and no one can lay restrictions upon his freedom, not even God. The order of commanding and obeying is reversed. (2001, p. 117)

Eckhart in this transition broke through the dictates of the Latin language and the Kataphatic formulations of the Scholastic Philosophy and Theology and made an ascent to the apophatic discourse in the Vernacular German where “God, man, and the world are no more, there is only the unspeakable intradivine “ebullience”, without a purpose and in which nothing lasts” (Schuermann, 1975, 146). And here, as the self is dehiscent, the language undergoes an unselfing which turns to be a genuine selving of the same with a new semantic force achieved by the apophatic unsaying.

This study captures the similar experiences in the enunciations of certain 20th century philosophers and theologians, especially in Heidegger, Derrida, Jean Luc Marion, and Immanuel Levinas. Many scholars consider the preoccupation with ‘negativity’ and the ‘unsayable’ as a critical turn in philosophy, literary theory, and in poetry. A close perusal of the 20th century literature would intimate to us the multifarious enunciations of negativity, in a way, allowing the unsayable to speak for

itself. Sanford Budwick and Wolfgang Iser in their book *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory* makes a close examination of the languages of the unsayable and point to the linguistic turn in this regard.

What allows the unsayable to speak is the undoing of the spoken through negativity... This voicing of the unsayable is necessarily multilingual, for there is no one language by which sayings of things can be undone. As the modes of the negativity are many, and the undoing of saying is manifold, so must the languages of the unsayable be diverse. (Budwick, 1989, p. xvii)

The presence of the apophatic discourse in the secular domain, which is outside the mystical sigetics and within the ontological and linguistic aporia, demand sustained examination and how far it can be related to Eckhartian project awaits profound research. Derrida himself is doubtful about delimiting the apophatic or the negative theology, because according to him, “in a less rigorous or less informed manner, then, negative theology has come to designate a certain typical attitude toward language, and within it, the act of definition or attribution, an attitude toward semantic or conceptual determination” (Derrida, 1989, p. 4). He presents Heidegger’s writing as a specimen for the modern apophatic practice in which the self makes a breakthrough and the language undergoes a transformation. “He [Heidegger] said, wrote, and allowed to be written exactly what he said he wanted to avoid. He was not there without leaving a trace of all these folds. He was not there without allowing a trace to appear, a trace that is, perhaps, no longer his own, but that remains as if his own” (Derrida, 1989, p. 60). Thus, we come to assume that apophasis is not confined to mysticism, rather it spills over to those utterances which try to either harness or unleash the utterances of the ineffable as unsayable.

This chapter, thus, by making a careful inquiry into the dynamic of the language and the intensity of the self in an apophatic discourse, concludes that every apophatic utterance happens at the threshold of unknowing/knowing and saying/unsaying, where not only the self, but also the language experiences a genuine ‘*lassen*’ (let be) in a dispensation of non-attachment (*Abgescheidenheit*) and releasement (*Gelassenheit*). Thus, the study argues that apophasis permits the *Parousia* (παρουσία) of the ineffable, both religious and secular, in the language as the (un)utterance springs from a dehiscent self.

The third chapter “Simultaneity of Twin Births as the Breakthrough in Non-attachment” makes thorough analysis of some vernacular sermons of Eckhart and presents the centrality of birth in his preaching and mystical spirituality and practice. Any attempt into the world of Eckhart can never ignore the idea of ‘birth’ in his writings which acts as the foundation of his teaching and mystical practices. All his exegetical works and sermons are invariably focused on the happening of this event in the soul of man. Thus, the effort to understand the ‘birth’ involves an inquiry into the soul too, not as a philosophical category or theological principle, but as the ‘*synteresis*’. The expression ‘*nasci denuo*’ (born again) (Jn 3:7) achieves a new theological, philosophical and mystical depth in Eckhart’s writings. He is delighted at the incarnation of the Word (Son) into the world, but considers it futile, if the same does not happen in the soul of man. Because the very purpose of incarnation in history according to him is, “that God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God” (29, p. 177) and this privileging of the spiritual birth over physical birth is a recurring idea in his sermons and in one place he says “it is more worth to God to be born spiritually of the individual virgin or good soul, than that he was physically born of

Mary” (53, p. 279). As a scholastic theologian, he elaborates on the soul in man and differentiates between its powers and essence meticulously, but his primary interest is not this cerebral practice of understanding the mystery of the soul, rather making the soul worthy for the birth to happen. The reader of Eckhart may sometimes wonder, if the sole function of the soul is to give birth to the Word spoken in silence by the father in the ground of the soul. He asserts, “the soul should give birth to nothing inside herself, if she wishes to be the child of God in whom God's Son shall be born - in her nothing else should be born” (68, p. 347). The voice of the jealous Yahweh of the Old Testament re-echoes here, who rescinds idolatry among the chosen race with the first commandment of the Decalogue. Thus, we feel, as a spiritual guide of the flock, Eckhart’s sole pursuit was to ensure the birth in the soul of the people around him. But, the teaching on this birth goes beyond simple tips or guidelines, as he considers this birth as inalienably existential not only to humans but to all creatures. He announces his conviction as follows: “All creatures have the capacity for birth. A creature without birth would not exist” (79, 395). And, this constitutes the beauty of his teachings that he instructs and guides the aspirants using a language that combines the apophatic act of renunciation and the urgency of the (mystical) union which is henological in design.

Eckhart in his vernacular sermons uses the expression *Ewigen Geburt* to denote the eternal birth happening in the *Abgrund* (primal ground) of the (human) soul. Maurice Walsh in his *A Concise German Etymological Dictionary* (1951) notes that the feminine noun *Geburt* in Middle High German is from the Old High German *giburt* that finds its root in the Sanskrit word *bhrtis* which means carrying and in the Old Irish word *breith* which means birth. Likewise, the word *Ewigen* referring to

eternity comes from the Latin root *aevum* and the Greek root *aeon*, both denoting ‘age’ or ‘lifetime’ marked by temporality. Joseph Wright in his *A Middle High German Primer* points out the semantic and morphological association of the noun *Geburt* with two other nouns *Gebe* (gift) and *Gebet* (prayer) as they share a common etymology. This demands a deeper analysis as it leads our thinking to the philosophy of gift in Heidegger and Derrida. However, *Geburt* invokes the idea of ‘gratuitous self-giving’ which makes it closer to the Eckhartian principle of non-attachment as an apophatic act. As Eckhart uses the words *Geburt* and *Ewic* in Middle High German, he points to an act of carrying and giving birth in a non-temporal order in time. In his writings, especially in the vernacular sermons, the birth always refers to ‘twin births’: “God may be born in the soul and the soul be born in God” (29, p. 177). His German sermons show the listeners a path to ‘birth in the soul’ and “the path of Meister Eckhart is the path of detachment” (Schürmann, 2001, p.33). This path consists of the initial condition of ‘*eigenschaft*’ (attachment/possession) and from this moves to ‘*abgescheidenheit*’ (Non-attachemt) which through a ‘*durchbruch* -’ (breakthrough) reaches ‘*gelassenheit*’ (releasement/serenity) where the soul is even free from the burden of the properties of God and becomes the true temple for the Word to be born and thus return to the ground and the One.

Eckhart repeatedly emphasises that God is One and as we understand the two aspects of God in his theology (God as relation in Trinity and creation and God as absolute as Godhead) we come to realize that the Godhead is the One and the soul seeks union through non-attachment is to this Godhead. Some of his articulation are: ‘He is thus one and simple’ (8, p. 81), ‘it is characteristic of God that He is one’ (34, p. 205), ‘I say that God is wholly one: He knows nothing but Himself alone’ (79,

p.395), ‘God knows nothing outside of Himself; His eye is always turned inward into Himself’ (13a, p. 104). But, in each of these affirmations (cataphasis), there is an ongoing negation taking place, which is basically the negation of multiplicity and materiality, because for him, God is ‘*ledic und vri*’ (unattached and free) from space, time and creatureliness. As each affirmation points to a negation, each negation points to the *grunt* (ground) of both God and soul which is the genuine henology in Eckhart. The ‘One’ is the point of arrival and return of all multiplicity and hence the cessation of all imperfections that each one is trying to overcome. He alerts the aspirants, “thus life can never be perfected till it returns to its productive source where life is one being that the soul receives when she dies right down to the ‘ground,’ that we may live in that life wherein life is one being” (82, p.405). All the ascetical practices and the consistent pursuit of ‘*abgescheidenheit*’ aiming at the ‘*durchbruch*’ for the ‘*geburt*’ is a passage or entry into the ineffable, because for Eckhart the “breaking-through guarantees to me that I and God are one” (87, p. 424) which is the mystical union. Thus, the ‘One’ is not only negation of multiplicity, it is also the end of activity as the relations disappear, properties vanish, and differences become obsolete by ushering in a ‘being as communion’. This is not a return to the prelapsarian existence, instead a return to what was before ‘ἀρχή’ where all is nothing. The ‘One’ as ‘nothing’ is the newness of Eckhartian henology, other than the differences he demarks from Neoplatonism (Woods, 1990) in his speculative mystical teachings.

Eckhart emphasises two things, as he teaches this birth to the audience and they are, the condition of the soul in which the birth takes place and the role of non-attachment in making this birth happen in the soul. Some of the prerequisites appear

in the form of ‘where’, ‘how’, and ‘when’ of this birth takes place in the soul. To the question ‘where’, he answers, “the very purest, loftiest, subtlest part that the soul” which is “free and void of all means and all images” (1, pp. 29-30). In another sermon, he explains this place in the soul as “the essence and ground of the soul” (2, p. 39) and this in “man is a desert and alien to himself and multiplicity” where he is blessed with “rejection, desolation, and estrangement from all creatures” (4, p. 57). His teachings may, at first, appear as simple and ordinary, but they soar high not just in their goal to be achieved, but rather in their radical outlook. Birth is, of course, ‘rest and celebration’ in Eckhart’s sermons, but not in the affective model, but in the speculative sense which demands simultaneously a lot of learning and unlearning, knowing and unknowing, affirmation and negation, where spiritual is rational and vice versa where faith and reason (*fides et ratio*) become the two wings of the intellectual/spiritual flight. For example, the following statement is not easy for an affective mystic to utter and understand in the union of love and ecstasy, but a speculative mystic comprehends it in the logic of non-attachment. “The Father bears His son in the inmost part of the soul, and bears you with his only-begotten Son, no less. If I am to be the Son, then I must be Son in the same essence as that in which he is Son, and not otherwise” (18, p. 134). Eckhartian scholars John Caputo (1978) and Richard Woods (2011) explain the mystery of twin births within the orthodoxy of the theology of incarnation thus:

For Eckhart, the analogous unity all human beings share with the son is not a unity of proper proportionality, but nevertheless proportional, or rather, infinitely disproportionate. Christ is the natural, Only-Begotten Son, and we are sons by adoption through grace. But for Eckhart there is only one Son,

and we are the same Son as the Son of God, Jesus Christ. (Woods, 2011, p. 103)

Thus, eternal birth is not an act of attachment or possession, rather, as Schuermann says, an act of ‘*gelassenheit*’ (releasement) where even the God unbecomes. This is why, non-attachment becomes central in the teachings on eternal birth.

The lessons on non-attachment can be understood in relation to the evangelical poverty that was rigorously practiced by the Dominican nuns and the members of the ‘free spirit’ communities, who were listeners to the sermons of Eckhart. But, to do that would be equal to missing its ‘truth’ and ‘spirit’, and thus overlook the apophatic embedded in it and to embrace the spiritual alone. The study holds this view, because in Eckhart’s teachings non-attachment is a pathway to ‘*Gelassenheit*’ (solitude/serenity/ infinite resignation) through a breakthrough. To confirm the argument, the study invokes the help of Schürmann and his explanation to ‘*Gelassenheit*’. He writes, “it [*Gelassenheit*] designates the attitude of a human who no longer regards objects and events according to their usefulness, but who accepts them in their autonomy” (Schürmann, 2001, pp. 15-16). This ‘*lassen*’ (letting be) and ‘restoring them to their primitive freedom’ is not the motive of evangelical poverty; it is something that is inalienable to *Abgescheidenheit* and the resultant *Gelassenheit*. To be precise, evangelical poverty is renouncing something to possess something nobler, while non-attachment is renouncing something for nothing (*Niht*)

For Eckhart, non-attachment is aimed at restoring the primal purity of the soul for he says, “she should be detached from all material things and work according to her primal purity” (85, p. 417) and this is the return to the ‘One’ where

all is 'simple and undivided'. The most solemn teaching on non-attachment is in the sermon on the first beatitude, where he proclaims, "a poor man is one who wants nothing, knows nothing, and has nothing" (87, p. 420) and it is "there the Father begets His Son and has such joy in the Word and is so fond of it, that He never ceases to utter the Word all the time, that is to say timelessly" (35, p. 208). Thus, the soul which is vigilant with non-attachment is the fertile land of birth and each of this birth is an event of 'born again' and all the births are simultaneous twin births, which means the moment Word/God is born in me, at the very moment I am born in God; or in other words God begets his son in me and at the same time I am born as his son in a nontemporal order. Schürmann, as he explains his idea of operative/energetic identity between God and soul explains the twin birth in this way: "the detached man brings forth the Son in the ground of God, and concomitantly God brings forth the Son in the ground of the mind [soul]" (2001, p. 73). Thus, the notion of non-attachment and the event of birth act as the central concepts that open the door to other related ideas in him. The study argues that the simultaneity of twin births becomes possible as the (human) soul perfects itself by the apophatic act of non-attachment and this turns to be a breakthrough as it challenges and cancels the impediments to eternal birth, namely temporality, corporeality and multiplicity.

The fourth chapter "Death as Lassen of the Self and Language in the Vernacular Sermons of Meister Eckhart" dwells on the idea of death in Eckhart within the mystical act of non-attachment. The discourse on death usually oscillates between the binary of life/death, non-real/real, annihilation/new life and many more with no certainty about the being/non-being of death. All the attempts to speak

about death metaphorically often make meaning as death has no subjective meaning. The ontological (what is (human) death?) and the epistemological (how do we know death?) approaches to death has given rise to various definitions of death like ‘irreversible cessation of biological function’, ‘ultimate loss of personhood’ and ‘point of no return’ etc. There are also attempts to understand death within the paradigm of hope in which eschatology and rebirth play a vital role, especially in a religious milieu. The exposition of the idea of death in Eckhart is challenging, as we are attuned to the multitude of solemn utterances on ‘θάνατος’ by the existential and contemporary philosophers with emphasis on the concept of finitude/mortality. Psychoanalysis deals with death within the order of libido in which death instinct is the destructive drive of desire. The uniqueness of the Eckhartian idea of death unfurls in a speculative mystical realm, in which death is not a ‘taking away’, rather a ‘letting be’ (*Lassen*), freeing one from the imperfections of temporality, spatiality and creatureliness.

The study follows two ways in understanding the idea of death in Eckhart, primarily by an in-depth textual analysis of Eckhart’s vernacular sermons by concentrating on the lexical register related to death and its related terminologies in them. And, secondly, the study compare and contrast his ideas on death with that of Martin Heidegger. Death in Eckhart’s teachings always coexists with the idea of birth/eternal birth, because infinity, not finitude, unites them in a continued contemplation of the ‘One’ in which there is no death, but the stillness of silence and the ataraxy of no(n)action. Within the overarching principle of non-attachment in Eckhart’s teachings, the study contends that, for him death is not the finality of

non-attachment, rather death also is an index of non-attachment to be freed from and ‘let death be’ for the eternal birth of the logos in the soul to happen.

Death in Eckhartian design falls within the larger project of non-attachment as something to be relinquished to free oneself (the soul) from the limitation of time, space and creatureliness. Three vernacular sermons of Eckhart, namely Sermons 16, 82 and 84, from *The Complete Works of Meister Eckhart* translated by Maurice O’C Walshe are taken for textual analysis as these three sermons directly deal with the topic of death. In sermon 16 (*Convalescens praecepit eis, ab Ierosolymis ne discenderent/ Do not leave Jerusalem*) death is presented within the profound mystical path of abandonment and ‘living without why’. Death is presented as an impediment blocking the breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) and an imperfection delaying releasement (*Gelassenheit*). Eckhart uses different expressions like ‘temporal’ (*zitlichen*), ‘corporeal’ (*liplich*), ‘material’ (*materie*) and ‘multiplicity’ (*menige*) to denote the condition of the men caught in the ‘malady of time’ (*zit der gebrestlichkeit*). All these Middle High German words are very important within the non-attachment pattern of Eckhart. For example, the word *Gebrestlichkeit* (*Gebrechenheit* is the modern word) comes from the root word ‘*Gebrechen*’ referring to ‘infirmity’, ‘lack’, ‘defect’, ‘ailment’ and so on. Death allows freedom from all these fetters which are because of the confining temporal order and creaturely status. Death is a ‘wayless way’ from this material condition to an order of “spirit [is] in unity (*einicheit*) and freedom (*vriheit*).

He presents death as felicity (of the soul) leading to beatific union. This is a desire fulfilled without desire (living without why). Death of the soul can happen in two ways. First, as God leaves the soul the soul ceases to be the desert and virgin,

because the soul is contaminated by desire and attachment. In sermon 84, he speaks about the abandon nature of the soul in divine proximity. "...just as God flows into the soul, so she flows back into God. And just as one may die of fright before the blow is struck, so too one may die of joy. Thus, the soul dies to herself before she steps into God" (84, 414-415). This is the moment of the breakthrough, where there is complete abandon, it is the experience of holding infinity into oneself in God/Godhead. This is the ecstatic union (in God and in soul simultaneously) as the soul becomes truly poor in spirit, free from all '*Eigenschaft*', flowing into *Abgescheidenheit* and releasement.

To find a common thread about the ideas of death in these three sermons of Eckhart, the only way is to place death within the theory and praxis of non-attachment, because the goal of non-attachment goes beyond theology to Henology. All the vernacular sermons of Eckhart can be seen as an interpretation and expansion of sermon 87, namely, "Beati Pauperis". His meditation on Matthew 5:3 is provocative, scandalous and blasphemous to a naïve believer, but for those who genuinely understand the spirit of "Blessed are the poor in spirit" it is promising and revelatory. Eckhart preaches with conviction, "for a poor man is one who wills nothing and desires nothing" (87, p. 421). He explains the reason for it as "while I yet stood in my first cause, there I had no God, and was my own cause, there I wanted nothing and desired nothing, for I was bare being and the knower of myself and the enjoyment of truth" (87, p.421). That is why he prays, "I pray to God to make me free of God, for my essential being is above God, taking God as the origin of creatures" (87, 424). This leads us to think about a deathless condition as I am my own cause (*sui generis*). "Therefore, I am unborn, and according to my unborn mode

I can never die". Thus, death in Eckhart is to be understood as a breakthrough, where "I am that which I was and shall remain for evermore" (87, p.424).

To conclude the textual analysis of the vernacular sermons of Eckhart on death by emphasising that death in his exegetical design (precisely eisegesis) is an exit from the chaos of multiplicity and difference to unity (*einicheit*) and freedom (*vriheit*). Eckhart in unequivocal terms makes it very clear that unity or oneness is not likeness and he abhors likeness as it involves image and mediation. In the Sermon '*Vidi Supra Montem Agnum Stantem*' (I saw a lamb standing on Mount Zion) he says, "[L]ike is bad and deceitful" (24, p. 160). He explains the difference between likeness and oneness (unity) by acknowledging the indebtedness to Avicenna (pagan master) in this way by placing unity at the peak of hierarchy. "Likeness is something that does not exist in God. There is oneness in the Godhead and in eternity, but likeness is not oneness. If I were one, I should not be like. In unity there is nothing alien: it gives me oneness in eternity, not likeness" (24, p. 160). Attaining this unity is equally the attainment of freedom as unity is attained by relinquishing all the attachments and impediments. Thus, the study would argue that death in Eckhart is an apophatic act, because in death there happens shedding of attachments as a linguistic regress happens in apophasis. Scholars like Denys Turner (1995) conceives non-attachment (detachment) in Eckhart as synonymous with apophasis, but he has not applied it neither to birth or death precisely. He affirms, "Detachment and interiority are, for Eckhart, not so much the names of experience as practices for the transformation of experience. Detachment, in short, is the ascetic practice of the apophatic" (Turner, 1995, p. 179). By presenting death as an act of non-attachment, this study would name death as an apophatic act as the self/soul in

death makes an unconditional shedding of the impediments and thereby transcends all limitations and attains true unity and freedom like a poor man (as explained in the sermon ‘Beati pauperis’) and the nobleman (as in ‘The Nobleman’) who is “one with One, one from One, one in One, and a single One eternally” (Walshe, 2009, p. 564).

The analysis of death in Heidegger’s philosophy makes it evident that in his hardcore philosophical works and later commentaries on poets too, he acknowledges the omnipresence of mortality, but at the same time there remains an intense sense of incomprehensibility surrounding death. The existential analytic in *Being and Time* (1927) of the Being does not have a conclusive philosophical point, rather it keeps open death as the possibility of Dasein in its temporality. He, neither in philosophical works nor in commentaries of the poems point to immortality or infinity or eternity as the possibility of death. But as David Farrell Krell (1986) holds, Heidegger in his philosophy allows let death be (*lassen*) within a dispensation of finitude. Krell comments on the vital issue embedded in Heidegger’s analysis of Dasein as follows: “the crucial problem of Heidegger's hermeneutics of Dasein, in which the disclosure of Dasein's primordial finitude is to be secured, is to let death be. Letting finitude come to light invokes the problem of letting-be as such” (1986, p. 155).

Thus, the study find a parallel between Eckhart and Heidegger in the idea of *lassen* (let be), but in Eckhart it is the *lassen* of the soul in death for eternal birth; whereas in Heidegger it is the *lassen* of the being in the conundrum of finitude and mortality. In Eckhart, death comes as a felicity, while in Heidegger death remains as a constant awareness in anxiety. The ‘let be’ of death in Eckhart leads the soul out

of the confines of creatureliness to a non-temporal order, but in Heidegger the 'let be' of death continues to be the intimations of mortality in a temporal order. The Eckhartian idea of death is redemptive and felicitous leading to union. The Heideggerian notion of death is inescapable, incomprehensible and a spectral presence.

The study would conclude this chapter by quoting Nikos Kazantzakis (1962) about St Francis of Assisi who for him is the model of the dutiful man in fulfilling the highest obligation: "the obligation to transubstantiate the matter which God entrusted to us, and turn it into spirit" (Prologue, p.7). Similar resonance is heard in the final lines of the Second Elegy in Rilke's (1923) *Duino Elegies*: "And we can no longer gaze/ after it now into pacifying image, or godlike/body, wherein it achieves a grander restraint" (p. 173). Death in Meister Eckhart is this transubstantiation/ this grander restraint (freedom/releasement) where the gross gives way to the subtle to *lassen* (to let or allow) to find its autonomy in the breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) for *Gelassenheit* in an apophatic order of non-attachment. This chapter ends by presenting the death scene of the greatest medieval saint -St Francis of Assisi- as portrayed by Nikos Kazantzakis in *God's Pauper*. "Poverty, Peace, Love"... His voice was muted and extremely frail, as though coming from far away- from the other shore. I held my breath, trying to hear more. There was nothing" (p 390). Death in Eckhart is the advent of this 'nothing' which is an entry into the fullness by letting the self be in its origin/source. This allows us to engage in an enquiry of the relationship between the apophatic language and the apophatic acts of birth and death in Meister Eckhart.

The conclusion of the dissertation as it summarises the findings of the preceding four chapters affirms that apophasis is the *Stimme* (Voice) and silence is the *Mittel* (middle) of Birth and Death in Eckhart's Vernacular Sermons, because this research began with the conviction that apophasis in Eckhart's vernacular sermons will open up a path to understand birth, death and language and their relation in a new voice. Apophasis is an ongoing 'non-attachment' (*Abgescheidenheit*) always open to the releasement (*Gelassenheit*) of knowledge in and of nothing (*Nichts*) within the confines of language, not by submitting to the dictates of gnosis, but by challenging and dismantling its scaffoldings with its unending negation in (un)knowing (no)thing (*Nicht*). In apophasis, meaning is generated through the sustained tension between the saying and unsaying or by negating a negation by another negation. This linguistic device is profusely used by Eckhart to teach the lessons of eternal birth and death within the dynamics of non-attachment. In Eckhart, apophasis is both a critique of the scholastic cataphatic approach and also an act of making available a new path of (un)knowing the ineffable.

The research on Meister Eckhart went beyond death and language, because the Vernacular sermons of Eckhart are preached within the dynamic of eternal birth and Non-attachment in an apophatic design. For the Rhineland mystics, the preaching of Eckhart was free from metaphysically constituted vocabulary and the logic of rational discourse and thus it opened a way towards experiencing the ineffable even in *vita activa* by making happen the eternal birth by virtue of non-attachment. The readings and writings on Eckhart were directed to the parallel move happening in eternal birth and death as the linguistic regress in apophasis. Thus, this

research concludes that Birth and death in Eckhart points to a parallel shedding in the self as there is a regress in apophasis. So, the argues that Eckhart's reliance on apophasis-an ongoing linguistic regress ushering in a new semantic force – in the teaching and the happening of eternal birth and death- allows a voice (*stimme*) to be heard in the middle (*Mittel*) of the saying and unsaying which is silence, where the (non)temporal event of breakthrough (*Durchbruch*) leads to the final releasement (*Gelassenheit*). The study began with the humble realization which James Yerkes shares in his book *The Christology of Hegel* (1983) as he relies on the wisdom of Immanuel Kant to ignite hope in the contemporary world. He writes with conviction, “it is the question about ‘what we may hope’ in a time when the questions about ‘what we can know’ and ‘what we ought to do’ need a larger, more comprehensive and integrated frame of reference than is presently available” (pp.2-3). This research ends also with the same certainty that Meister Eckhart who inspired generations of intellectuals and common flock has a peculiar wisdom to share through both apophasis and non-attachment (*Abgescheidenheit*) to humanity now and forever.