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SCEPTICISM AND MYSTICISM IN INDIAN
PHILOSOPHY

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REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE WORK

1. The first part of the report deals with the work done during the year.

2. The second part deals with the work done during the year.

3. The third part deals with the work done during the year.

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6. The sixth part deals with the work done during the year.

7. The seventh part deals with the work done during the year.

8. The eighth part deals with the work done during the year.

P R E F A C E

The Centre's Occasional Paper Series is essentially a medium for pre-publication distribution of its academic staff's research results. However, it has, on occasions, included ~~the~~ pre-publication/^{drafts}for comments and discussion by a wider audience of lectures delivered at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta by scholars who had been specially invited in consonance with particular research interests of the Centre's faculty. Such lectures are meant to awaken the interest of social scientists in frontiers of various disciplines and to provide views of interfaces on which more consideration is necessary. Occasional Paper No.23 was by Dr. A.P. Rao of Jaipur entitled An Essay on John Rawls' Theory of Distributive Justice and its Relevance to the Third World (since published in book form in 1981 by the Indian Philosophical Quarterly, Department of Philosophy and Pratap Centre of Philosophy, Amalner, University of Poona and entitled Three Lectures on John Rawls) and Occasional Paper No.35 by Mr. Iqtidar Alam Khan of Aligarh Muslim University entitled "Coming of Gunpowder and the Response of Indian Polity".

Dr. Bimal Krishna Matilal, Spalding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics, Oxford University and Fellow, All Souls College, Oxford, is one of our most eminent Indian philosophers. He was invited to speak at the Centre on 19th December 1985 on a topic which is of concern for the philosophical frontiers of the social science disciplines. This lecture is presented for discussion and comments.

Surajit C. Sinha
Director

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Scepticism and Mysticism in Indian Philosophy

An ordinary man by nature is neither a sceptic nor a mystic, but it is obvious that some of us have sympathy for both. It may be that a philosopher has more sympathy for the sceptic than for the mystic.

In my study of the history of scepticism in India I have often been struck by the following phenomenon: The outstanding and even extreme sceptical arguments are usually to be found in the writings of the authors who were initially mystically inclined or who would like to push the philosophical or dialectical argumentation to its utmost limit so that the rational means would prove to be bankrupt ! I propose to deal with this phenomenon very briefly. It is hoped that an 'empathetic' understanding of such a phenomenon is possible even when one does not have either a sceptical or even a mystical point of view.

It will be seen at the end that the connection that I believe to be there between the sceptical attitude and the mystical is a contingent one. A sceptic does not necessarily become a mystic. Or, to put the matter in another way, it is not true, at least not always true, that the end of the path for a true and serious sceptic is mysticism. Sceptics do not always take a plunge into the 'oceanic feeling' of mysticism. At least I do not hold such a thesis. However, that is why it seems more interesting and more intriguing to find the above phenomenon: why did the sceptical tradition form a very important,

and almost an inseparable, component of the major mystical traditions of India ? What did the mystics have to do with the use of logic and rational means that would have been more appropriate for scepticism ? Why is this craving for rational explanation using logic and dialectics if at the end, all this would be superseded by some irrational, inexplicable and ineffable consciousness ? If I am going to enjoy poetry would it matter much if I discover that the poet used bad logic and fallacious arguments ? The answer to such a question is not immediately obvious.

Initially there seems to be sustained opposition between a sceptic and a mystic, and this opposition is not fully exhausted by our reference to the unbelief and doubt of the sceptic and the belief or faith of the mystic. A sceptic is also a pessimist as well as an activist. He does not uphold hope and is ready to knock down any assumed certainty. A mystic on the other hand burns with optimism and radiates hope, and he is or seems to be a passivist; all his activism turns inwards which is the other name for passivism, but here, one may argue, is a tentative meeting point. For the goal of a sceptic is a sort of passivism too, a calmness or an ataraxia, a suspension of judgment and unperturbation.

I am not bringing in an irrelevant notion here by talking about pessimism and optimism. For "what may we hope", is one of the fundamental questions of metaphysics which both a sceptic and a mystic are supposed to tackle. We may recall that three initial questions of metaphysics, a la Kant, were "What can I know ? What should I do ? What may I hope ?". An easy way to dismiss a sceptic would be to say that he does not care for truth, that for him everything is equally true or untrue, but I think this would be wrong. A philosophical sceptic is not an iconoclast or an aggressor in the Temple of Truth, but

because of his extreme concern for truth he is reluctant to accept anything less. He persists in seeking and probing. If a philosopher is one who tries to expound or defend a view about the world or the way the world is or appears to us, a sceptic takes the position of his opponent. Scepticism has, in fact, formed an important part of philosophic activity in almost all ages everywhere. Indeed, if philosophy is understood as a kind of activity, as it is consciously done to-day in the post-Wittgensteinian era, sceptical questions and doubts supply the vital moving force of such activity.

It is difficult to define scepticism, but some broad characterisations can be offered. If the word 'sceptic' means simply "an inquirer" or "an investigator" (as has been noted by R.G. Bury in his Outlines of Pyrrhonism), then many philosophers could be called 'sceptics'. Obviously, the word has a more specific sense. Scepticism can be understood as a critical philosophical attitude consistently maintained throughout. However, scepticism has acquired a negative connotation. A sceptic rejects the validity of any knowledge-claim or truth-claim. It seems to represent a despair of the philosophy of life. Scepticism, it is claimed, is not a philosophy so much as the denial of the possibility of philosophy.

The spirit of scepticism can be carried on to the fields of morality, religion and politics. The concern of the sceptic in such fields is not so much with truth as with the justification or rightness of certain principles, concepts or ideas. Scepticism usually aligns itself with pessimism as well as 'passivism'. It is difficult for a sceptic to be an optimist or a political activist or a revolutionary, for his scepticism would not be consistent with his activity, but activism and scepticism would not be an impossible combination, in some

humans, for consistency is not an inalienable trait of all humans. A sceptic's positive self-characterization is that he is a seeker after truth. In practice, however, a sceptic may be a conformist with the prevailing social and political norms. He may live by the existing rules and standards while not believing in their absolute validity. He is not, as I have already said, a revolutionary, for he lacks conviction about the truth or the goal of such actions. A sceptic has to be a good dialectician, skillful in the art of argumentation. He can be a 'sophist' in a non-pejorative sense. He is like a well-armed man always on guard and ready for the argument, but ideally he should never provoke one. Or, he may be a man who carefully avoids arguments and renounces contentions, for it may be that "philosophic problems completely disappear" for him (as Wittgenstein notes in Philosophical Investigations I, 133).

Who deserves to be called "a sceptic" according to the above characterizations? In the Indian context, we can mention Sañjaya and a few other śramanas who were contemporaries of the Buddha (563-483 B.C.). In the history of Western thought, Sextus Empiricus (c. 200 A.D.) is often regarded as the most well-known of those who call themselves sceptics. In developing the position of Indian scepticism, I shall draw mainly from the writings of three different philosophers, Nāgārjuna (c. 150 A.D.), Jayarāsi (c. 800 A.D.), and Śrīharṣa (c. 1100 A.D.). They represent three different philosophic traditions of India. The first was a Mādhyamika Buddhist, the second was either a materialist or an agnostic, the third was an Advaita Vedāntin (a mystic), but in spite of these differences, they shared a common style of philosophizing as well as a common attitude towards the discovery of truth. Śrīharṣa, the last named philosopher, noted explicitly this common style and argued that in spite of the well-known

differences in their metaphysical beliefs, their philosophical style was bound to be in the same way critical, sceptical, refutative, and destructive.

A philosophical position can hardly be vindicated or established unless it has answered its critics and responded to the objections of its opponents. In the Indian tradition, the opponents' criticisms and objections are usually grouped under the rubric pūrvapakṣa. To build up the pūrvapakṣa in a greatly meticulous manner has been the general practice of all systematic philosophers of India since the first century A.D. It has been claimed that if the pūrvapakṣa is not properly understood, the philosopher's own position will hardly make any sense. Our understanding of a doctrine deepens by our understanding of not so much what it says as what it refutes and rejects.

An opponent is not always a sceptic. For usually the opponent refutes a rival position and gives, at the same time, arguments to sustain his own position. However, if the opponent does not have a position of his own or he does not want to argue for his position but is simply interested in refuting all other positions or theses, then he becomes a sceptic or a follower of sceptical methodology. A sceptic cannot have a position of his own in principle, for to be consistent he has to be sceptical of all theses, all positions. Scepticism in other words has to be paradoxical in order to be consistent, but the air of paradoxicality, I suggest, can be removed.

Refutation of a philosophical position usually implies acceptance of its negation, i.e. a counter-position, a counter-thesis, but a sceptic cannot maintain his scepticism by assenting to a counter-thesis. It is his duty to disagree with both the thesis and its anti-thesis or counter-thesis by assigning reasons in both cases. He has to suspend his judgment in favour of either. It is, however, not easy to maintain such all-round scepticism. It is rather easy to be a non-believer in some particular doctrine or other, but philosophical scepticism is of a different breed. A sceptic has to be well-conversant with the art of philosophic debate. For scepticism can be sustained only by a master-debater, a dialectician. He has to employ skilfully his pro-arguments, as well as his contra-arguments so that his sceptical position, if it is a position at all, will remain uncompromised. For any pro-argument for a doctrine, he has to find an equally strong contra-argument so that the tug-of-war of pros and cons comes to a standstill and balances one another. It is, therefore, obvious that such scepticism can hardly flourish unless in a miliou where the art as well as the theory of disputation or dialectic has reached a well-developed form. Such a situation did obtain in ancient and classical India, as it did in Greece. Hence the sceptics were not far behind.

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SANJAYA

I wish to associate the origin of scepticism in India with Sanjaya. Although sceptical questions and doubts were raised in the Vedas and the early Upanishads, there were no systematic arguments.

Professor H. Ui has described Sañjaya's philosophy as a sort of scepticism on the one hand and a primitive step towards a critique of knowledge on the other. This assessment of Sañjaya seems to me to be fairly correct. This tradition must have been the precursor of the latter-day scepticism about knowledge and perception as reflected in the writings of Nāgārjuna, Jayarāśi and Śrīharṣa.

Sañjaya questioned the knowledge-claims of other śramanas and brāhmanas regarding certain moral, religious and metaphysical matters. Typical questions asked in those days (see Dīgha-Nikāya) were: "Is there a soul?", "Is there an after-life?", and "What is right and what is wrong?". Sañjaya and his followers argued that it is impossible to know correct answers to such questions.

It should be noted that these early Indian sceptics attached higher value to ethical development and final salvation than to resolution of the philosophical questions. They apparently maintained that it would be wrong or morally reprehensible to make false claims, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Thus, Sañjaya said that since he did not (and in fact, nobody did) know the answers to such questions, he would not claim that he knew, for that would be a false claim and would mislead people (which would be immoral). The Jaina canonical literature, as Hermann Jacobi pointed out, noted that these śramana sceptics maintained that not knowledge but tapas (ascetic austerity) was necessary for salvation or final beatitude. These sceptics were similar to those described by Sextus, who resorted to their epoché (suspending all judgements) to gain the state of unperturbedness or ataraxia. Sextus says :

"The man who determines nothing as to what is naturally good or bad neither shuns nor pursues anything eagerly; and in consequence, he is unperturbed".

In the Indian context, these sceptics were also recluses (sramanas) and hence were committed to the ascetic way of life practising austerities (tapas) to achieve quietude.

Some of these sramanas were, however, astute debaters. In this regard, they can be placed somewhere midway between the Greek sophists and the Greek sceptics. The early canonical literature of Buddhism and Jainism bears ample witness to this fact. Oldenberg has put the point nicely in his outstanding book The Buddha (tr. W. Holms);

"Certain phenomena which developed themselves in the busy bustle of the ascetic and philosophizing circles, may be described as a species of Indian sophistic: wherever a Socrates appears, sophists cannot fail to follow. The conditions under which these sophistic arose were quite similar to those which gave birth to their Greek counterpart... there followed Gorgiases, and Protagorases, and a whole host of ingenious species, somewhat frivolous virtuosi, dealers in dialectic and rhetoric".

Even if we discount Oldenberg's enthusiasm for comparison of East and West, his general point is correct, as the later history of the art of philosophical disputation in India shows.

The concern of the early Indian recluse-sceptics were mainly spiritual, moral and religious. Hence, unlike the Greek sophists, they did not go to the extent of teaching the art of debate and rhetoric to the rich young men in exchange for money. Nor did they, (with a few exceptions, e.g. Jābāli in the Rāmāyaṇa) "meddle" in politics or public affairs of the government.

The principles of the art of argumentation that were developed in classical India made room for the kind of debate that a sceptic had to adopt in order to refute all theses without asserting any of his own. This type of debate was called vitandā later in the Nyāyasūtras. In the early period, Sañjaya developed a crude technique of what may be called a five-fold rejection of a position :

1. "Not so"
2. "Not thus"
3. "Not otherwise"
4. "Not not so"
5. "Not no to not so".

The upshot of this rather clumsy negation and double negation was to maintain an attitude of "non-assertion". Sañjaya used this method in its crude form, but Nāgārjuna perfected it with his tetralemmas, dilemmas and reductions (prasāṅga).

Notice that this does not amount strictly to "anti-rationalism" or illogicality. Refutation in this context can be taken to be an "illocutionary" negation (distinct from a 'propositional' negation), as it is done in the modern Speech-Act Theory of John Searle. Sañjaya said about the existence of

the after-life: "Neither do I say that there is an after-life nor do I say that there is none". This seems consistent, for it is not a conjunction of a proposition and its negation, but conjunction of the negation of two speech acts.

NĀGĀRJUNA

I shall take this opportunity to reformulate a Nāgārjunian tetralemma in order to show how sceptical arguments of this kind lead to the direction of mysticism and ineffability doctrine. Consider the following debate modelled after the first verse of Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika Kārikā:

1. Is a thing produced from itself ?
 - 1a. No.
2. Is it produced from something other than itself ?
 - 2a. No.
3. Is it produced from both itself and others ?
 - 3a. No.
4. Is it produced from neither (or nothing) ?
 - 4a. No.

It is clear that 1 and 2 are not at least contradictories, for it is possible for a thing to be produced partly from itself and partly from others. Hence 3 is a possible formulation not exhausted by the rejection of 1 and 2. Now the question arises: have we exhausted all possibilities by three rejections 1a, 2a, and 3a ? If we have, the fourth must be construed as a question about production itself: Is it not produced at all ? But

Nāgārjuna asks us to reject this also by 4a ! How to make sense of this rejection ? The problem is this. If refutation of the refutation of production amounts to production itself, then we are back in the game, i.e. with one of the three alternatives, 1, 2, or 3. But they have already been rejected ! Therefore, 4a cannot be regarded as an ordinary refutation. I intend to call it "the Nāgārjunian refutation" or "the mystic's refutation" to talk or to play the ball-game. It rejects the context of the debate, the dichotomy of production and non-production. In other words, the sceptic-debater returns the ball to the opponents court in the first three cases. In 4a, however, he refuses to play. Scepticism thus points up to mysticism, to the ineffability of the ultimates.

One can achieve the same goal by using dialectical arguments and reduction. Nāgārjuna, Śrīharṣa and Jayarāsi were champions of this method. Is scepticism self-refuting ? It has been the general contention of the philosophers through the ages of both India and the West (but perhaps mainly in the West) that the history of scepticism shows that it is impossible to remain in this position. Since it is necessarily artificial, it accuses everybody else except accusing himself. Besides, it is self-refuting, for to say that we cannot know anything is to admit that we at the very least know that we cannot know and hence knowledge is possible. Can this charge be answered ? Or, can it be answered satisfactorily ? I would say yes to the first, but no to the second. Remember, Sañjaya did not claim this. His only claim is that we cannot know anything in the field of morality or metaphysics. Let me explain it very briefly. The idea is to construe all the possible positions about a philosophical topic or a concept, and reject them one by one by reducing them to some sort of absurdity or showing some contradiction within the concept.

When all the positions are in this way refuted, the sceptic debator can then say that he has no position or thesis of his own to defend nor can he assert any. Thus Nāgārjuna answered when he was confronted with the paradoxicality of his own position :

"I have no (philosophical) thesis to defend".

A thesis (pratijñā) is technically defined in Nyāya as the statement of a position or a view to be proved. Hence the above remark can ambiguously mean either that he has no position of his own or that his position is not stateable. I think that it is this ingrained ambiguity that transforms scepticism into mysticism.

Nāgārjuna developed a systematic critique of the concepts of knowledge and the knowable. He attacked the idea that there are pramānas, i.e. the accredited means of knowledge. The argument is rather well-known. Roughly, it is this. If there are accredited means of knowing, either we know them, or we do not. If we know them, we need further accredited means to know that we know them, and to know the second set of means we need another, and so on. This is regressus ad infinitum :

"Each dog has on its own back a little flea to bite him, and on the flea another flea, and so ad infinitum"

In Sanskrit, the fault is called anavasthā, which means that we are on slippery ground, slipping ever backwards without stopping. Russell has said about such a paradox (My Philosophical Development, p.82)

".... the process is like trying to jump on the shadow of your head".

But suppose we do not know the means. If this is so, how is it established that they are valid means and not tricks? Who or what validates them? There is an old village parable about a witch doctor in Bengal who was a successful exorcist because he used to exorcise persons or objects possessed of evil spirits with the help of a handful of mustard seeds. One day the evil spirit, in order to baffle the exorcist, entered into the seeds themselves. Our situation would be similar if the means were invalid or defective. In reply we may say that certain means are self-validating and self-established, but Nāgārjuna counters this as follows :

- a) the notion of self-validation suffers from circularity;
- b) if certain means cannot be known, then it contradicts the original thesis of the philosopher about knowledge; we know everything by knowledge (hīyate vādah); and
- c) we need to give a satisfactory answer to the question: why certain objects are self-validating while others are not? What differentiates them? (viśeṣa-hetuś ca vaktavyah).

One can say that a sceptic may answer the objection that scepticism is self-refuting in the way Nāgārjuna answers (quite satisfactorily according to some) the objection that his emptiness philosophy is self-refuting. For the usual argument is this: If the sceptic's position is true, it contradicts itself, if it is false, then there is at least something that is true. Nāgārjuna however, forestalls this question before the onset of the dichotomy, true or false. If he has a position, it is not stateable, no pratijñā, no sādhya-nirdeśa. Hence the question is nipped in the bud, it

does not arise.

JAYARĀSĪ AND ŚRĪHARSA

Jayarāśī was not a Buddhist. He is usually taken to be a follower of Brhaspati, the materialist, the anti-religious sceptic. Professor Walter Ruben is reluctant to call him a materialist because, except for paying only lip-service to Brhaspati, he does not propound any positive materialist doctrine. I agree with Ruben who calls Jayarāśī an agnostic. Jayarāśī critically examined the available definitions of such means of knowledge as perception and inference. In this way he developed the general thesis: it is not possible for us to have "knowledge" in the required sense. For all the available definitions are fundamentally flawed. Definability of concepts ensures their intelligibility. Hence if these concepts lack definability they lack intelligibility. Scepticism thus wins the day.

To illustrate another argument of Jayarāśī. Roughly, the received doctrine about knowledge is that while not all our cognitive experiences would amount to knowledge, some would become knowledge. Let us say that whenever a cognitive experience has the character E it amounts to knowledge. Now, how do we know that a cognitive experience has E? For if we do not, we would never know that we have knowledge. If we know E through another cognitive experience, then we need to know another E that characterizes this cognitive experience. And so ad infinitum

Śrīharṣa continued the debate (three hundred years later) almost in a similar vein. In the course of his argumentation, he developed also a sceptical paradox which has kinship with what is to-day called "Gettier's sceptical paradox" about the concept of knowledge as justified true belief. Śrīharṣa was arguing against the concept of knowledge as the object-corresponding (true) cognitive experience derived from reliable evidence (pramāṇa). He said that this is faulty for we can have true cognitive experience ("there is fire") from reliable evidence, viz. the premiss or the awareness that there is smoke, where such awareness is falsely derived from the misperception of a dust-storm as smoke, and where by accident there is fire. Here the evidence is reliable, a deductive inference, for the falsity of the premises has nothing to do with soundness of inference, but such evidence again is not connected with the truth of the cognitive experience in the relevant way. Scepticism wins again for knowledge cannot be defined in this way.

Śrīharṣa also takes up the cue from Nāgārjuna and continues to defend the position that a sceptic can participate in logical debate without asserting and defending any position of his own, i.e. without forfeiting his sceptical claims. Here the paradox is this. If all philosophical theses are, as the sceptic claims, wrong or 'empty' (śūnya) of any substance or essence, then this very thesis suffers from the same fate, and if it does, it cannot do its role, i.e. assert or state anything. If it does not, we have a counterexample to prove that the thesis is wrong. The way out of this is suggested by the sceptic as follows: it may be that all these are EMPTY, but such a thesis cannot itself be asserted or stated. A.N. Prior in explaining J. Buridan's paradox about "no proposition is true" suggested a similar way out:

"If God were to annihilate all negative propositions, there would in fact be no negative propositions, even if this were not then being asserted by any proposition at all. In short, it can be that no proposition is negative, though it cannot be that "no proposition is negative" is true".

Making a 'parody' of this, a Buddhist might say: If the Buddha were to empty each proposition of its own meaning-essence, there would be in fact no non-empty proposition, even if this fact remains unasserted or unstateable.

A logician like a Naiyāyika may say to a sceptic: "You have to believe in the principle of argument and reasoning. For if you do not, you cannot use them to derive your sceptical conclusion. You should remain silent". In reply, Śrīharṣa has said that this is indeed a poor argument, given in desperation. For the history of philosophy shows that no sceptic, nor even a mystic, remained silent without arguing or debating. The choice is open to the sceptic to accept the principles of debate only provisionally. The above argument Śrīharṣa says, cannot be a new kind of "silencing charm" to set the matter at rest. In short, the sceptics do argue and the onus (of making him silent) lies with the opponent, not with them.

It has been facetiously suggested that the practical life of a true sceptic would be impossible, for if he did not even believe that the floor would not melt under his feet or that food would not satisfy his hunger, he would not be able to walk or eat to survive. This point is easily answered. Jayarāsi has said that those who are wise recommend that we follow

the ordinary worldly behaviour, for "with regard to practical behaviour the wise resemble the fool or the child". An echo of this is found in the comment of Sextus:

"We live in accordance with the normal rules of life, undogmatically, seeing that we cannot remain wholly inactive".

As I have said, a sceptic has also to be a conformist in practical behaviour.

MYSTICISM

William James in his Varieties of Religious Experience (1902) noted four common distinctive marks of any 'mystical experience :

- (1) Ineffability
- (2) Noetic quality
- (3) Transiency
- (4) Passivity.

W.T. Stace in his Mysticism and Philosophy (1960) has mentioned several other characteristics of the mystical experience. Of all these, I have concentrated upon only one crucial concept: ineffability. In the above, therefore, I have referred to this one characteristic of mysticism wherever I have shown how a transition from scepticism to mysticism might eventually take place. I shall conclude by elaborating upon this issue.

A sceptic is not necessarily a mystic. At least he is not so initially. The mystic cannot always be a thoroughgoing sceptic, but the following situation might obtain. A sceptic might keep his mind free of any dogmas, dicta and doctrines. His attitude is something like this. If the mind is free then truth, if there is any, will dawn upon the person automatically. It is sometimes put metaphorically: If the darkness is dispelled, encumbrances of false views and ignorance are removed, then truth will shine in its own glory. No other effort is needed. Sextus has put the point in a different manner. Arne Naess said :

"The mature sceptic decides neither for the positive nor for the negative in relation to any doctrine, but allows both possibilities to stand open.... To his surprise he eventually finds that epochē (suspension of judgment) leads to, or is accompanied by, just that peace of mind (ataraxia) which he sets out to achieve by finding truth. The mature sceptic will not, of course, claim that there is a necessary connection between epochē and ataraxia.

Srināsa argued that truth or the ultimate truth is either self-evident or unknowable. In either case, it stands to reason for us to keep our minds purged of all the false views, conceptions and dogmas about such ultimate truth. The sceptic's use of logic and dialectic is instrumental. So is the mystic's use of philosophical argumentation. Negative dialectic is like the ladder to be kicked away when the purpose is served. Or to change the metaphor of Wittgenstein to that of Candrakīrti, this use of arguments, etc. is like the raft that one uses to cross the river. Once you are on the other side, however, you should

forget about the raft. Or, as the Buddha said in one of his dialogues: "You need the medicine to cure your disease, but once ~~and~~ you are cured, you must get the medicine itself purged out of your system. For otherwise you get rid of one disease (one false view) to make room only for another".

Mysticism in short can absorb scepticism. In Indian history, it did absorb it. Scepticism can find a natural home in emptiness philosophy which refutes both pros and cons and does not endorse any. This was the Buddhist or Nāgārjunian way. It can also be absorbed in an essentially pluralistic philosophy. This was the Jaina way, which does not refute but always accepts both pros and cons simultaneously, in the same breath, and called it the ineffable, avaktavya. It conditionalizes each categorical thesis and thus integrates all conflicting theses. The ultimate truth is like a many-sided gem and can be revealed only to an omniscient being who also has total knowledge. We ordinary humans do not have it. Therefore, our best bet is pluralism, integration of all possible, partial, views.

Now the mystics have claimed that the ultimate reality is ineffable. Is it really so? I beg to differ. To call it ineffable is one way to make it effeable. There are other ways which the mystics have resorted to, to convey the truth of their belief. Elsewhere I have broadly divided this method of showing the effable into three :

- a) use of negation only, it is not this, via negativa
- b) assertions or acceptance of contractory pairs or contrary pairs of predicates, the high and low, short and long, p and not p
- c) use of metaphor and poetry.

Mystical poems are numerous. Literature on mysticism beginning from the Upanishads in India abounds in such poetic description of the experience. Mystical poets form a familiar category. Mystical experience eludes a description in ordinary language, just as poetic or aesthetic experience does. Hence, if aesthetic experience is deemed communicable through art, poetry, etc. then a mystic-poet can possibly communicate through poetry and art, metaphor and extrapolation of analogies. A Bengali mystic-poet has said "How can one understand the pain from snake-bite, if one has not already been bitten by a snake?" But to say this is already to say enough, i.e. it already communicates through resonance, suggestion, indication and dhvani. The analogy with poetry goes even further. The medium is, of course, imperfect but the message is comprehended as a whole. To understand poetry, it is claimed by the aesthetes of India, one must be a sahrdaya, a person with aesthetic sensibility heightened by constant practice and training by reading poetry (Abhinavagupta). The same is true of mysticism. To understand the message of mysticism, one has to be mystically inclined, otherwise mystical poetry will fail.

Modern semantic theory (Henle) adds more strength to this claim. One's adopted system of symbolism limits what can be said in it. Hence certain thoughts are always ineffable in a given system of symbols, but to show that a thought is ineffable, one must have a broader symbolism in which it can be expressed. The mystic claims that his insight, prajñā, is ineffable with regard to all accepted symbolism. To show this, he adopts the sceptical stance, but if art or poetry is regarded as a very different sort of symbolism, then, I believe, the mystic's insight is communicable in it, much as an ordinary poet's or artist's is.

It may be that connection between scepticism and mysticism was not as pronounced in the Western tradition as it surely was in the Indian tradition, but this may be just a matter of emphasis. For the connection is obviously not a necessary one. It is contingent, and such contingency does arise. Let us notice still that Sextus has compared the sceptic with Apelles, the court painter of Alexander the Great. Once Apelles was painting a horse and wanted to paint the foam in the mouth of the running horse. Being unsuccessful several times, in despair he flung a wiping sponge at the canvas, and lo and behold, the foam was suddenly there as a result of the marks of the sponge. Sceptics get their ataraxia in this way, suddenly. One can easily be reminded of the sudden illumination theory of the Indian mystics !