

Documents of Resistance:
A Study of Some Indian Spiritual Autobiographies in English

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This is to certify that I, G. K. Sandhya, have carried out the research embodied in the present thesis for the full period prescribed under Ph. D. ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.


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To

The Cosmic Director

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"Though the lore of the Vedas takes up its dwelling on your tongue,
Though you be learned in scripture, gifted in writing prose and verse,
Yet if the mind be not absorbed in the guru's lotus feet,
What will it all avail you? What, indeed, will it all avail?"

(Adi Sankaracharya's *Guruvashatakam*, verse 3)

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Preface

This study of five Indian spiritual autobiographies in English has been a spiritual and literary Odyssey and a happy return to my native traditions. I selected these texts initially because I was interested in narratives of spiritual experiences. But I also found that these texts were published between 1900 and 1950 and that they were documents of resistance where notions not only of "self" and "sainthood" were being explored but also that of Indian nationhood. I found myself fascinated by the wonderful blend these texts had of the inner and the outer, the subjective and the objective and the personal and the political. I realised that our spiritual masters had strong views regarding Indian nationalism and reading their texts was going to be an important exercise in constructing our idea of the nation.

Moving from text to text, I encountered only differences between one text and the other -- in form, content, the paths of spiritual pursuit, the manner of narrating spiritual experience and even in the very way the authors allowed the texts to undermine themselves. The texts one after the other dispelled any notion that the "spiritual" meant turning away from the "social" and that the ochre-robe, or the Himalayas, or *ashrams* were the only sources of, means for, or end of self-realisation. I also realised that *sadhuism* "is not a joke". It was clear to me that these texts deserved serious attention because they critiqued caste, culture, religion, gender, family, the East-West encounter, colonial culture and revealed the rhetorical shifts in spiritual discourse that encouraged a dialogue between Modern Physics and spiritual experience. These texts thus are not linear narratives of a "self in quest of "Self. Instead they are a celebration of the role of social experiences and cultural differences in expanding spiritual consciousness. In the process they help us to understand that the India prior to independence was also perceived not as a monolith but actually as a pluralistic and multicultural community. In other words these texts were challenging the

unitary view of India which nationalist discourse is supposed to have promoted. These texts have a strong sense of the audience. They speak as belonging to a generation that was struggling to find a balance between faith in tradition and the challenges of modernity. In order to understand the autobiographical tradition, I read some of the well-known Western spiritual autobiographies like St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Thomas a Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ* and St. John of the Cross's *The Dark Night of the Soul*. I could not relate to them as well as I was able to relate with Indian autobiographies. I also read up critical studies of autobiography and of nationalism from a Western perspective and found that only some of those insights blended with my own nativist predilections. Clearly here was a situation where no one approach would be sufficient. The approach became a confluence of a Benedict Anderson and a Partha Chatterjee, a Foucault and a Bakhtin, a Cronin and a Sinha, a Bharata and an Olney deployed effectively. Thus I found that in certain contexts my Indian sensibility facilitated the application of *ashramadharma* to understand Gandhiji, *Natya Sastra* to understand Ramdas and Purohit Swami and Sri Sankara to understand Tattvabhushan. I also found that my experience with *shravanabhakti* i.e. my own "hearing" of the spiritual discourses of Swami Jnanananda Saraswati, Swami Chidananda Saraswati and Swamiji's of the Chinmaya Mission, of *Bhagavatha Saptahams* and the recounted experiences of my grandparents, parents and aunts stood me in good stead. The impact of what I heard, saw and had become a part of were a testimony to communion with the spirit and these did service in my analysis. These texts have a dynamic dialogue imbedded in them and bring out the interconnection between art, science, language and religion in a world of Quantum Mechanics, "Matrix theory" and the challenge to the matter-spirit dichotomy evident in science where consciousness is erected into an important intellectual category. These texts proved to be very exciting indeed.

I had in fact asked for something beyond comprehension when I wondered in my childhood days how the ochre-robed *Swamijis* I met and listened to experienced God. The texts show that God is the *rasa* which evokes in the seeker a sense of *ascharyam* (wonder) beyond words. How does one "problematise" such texts which have already "**problematised**" themselves? Was my hypothesis wrong? How was I to defend my stance if my approaches to these texts were to be attacked for lacking the conventional coherence? I found G.N. Devy's *After Amnesia* extremely useful in this context. To my surprise I found that Devy provided confirmation of many of the opinions I myself was forming.

Now as I present my understanding of "nation", "religion", "modernity" and "secularism" from a nativist and devotee-like perspective, I am convinced that I am not wrong. I find that I can relate better to Shanti's disenchantment with violence in *Anandamath* because that provides a context for an understanding of Gandhiji. The synthesis between the rhetoric of post-Relativity Theory in the West and the vision of matter as "signifiers" in Yogananda is yet another confirmation of my eclectic approach. Mirabai's and Bahina Bai's revolt against patriarchy provides the context for understanding Purohit Swami just as Kabir Das's secularism and Sant *Tukáram*'s revolt against casteism illuminate Ramdas. Hindu spirituality, as I see it, has never been a monologic discourse of "*neti*". Instead it is a twilight zone in human consciousness. It signifies transition and synthesis, the dynamics between duality and non-duality. It is located between the constraints of space and time on the one side and the experience of freedom from these constraints on the other.

Introduction

This study examines five Indian spiritual autobiographies in English written and published between 1900 and 1950. The texts chosen for study are chronologically speaking Swami Ramdas's autobiography in two volumes, *In Quest of God* (1923) and *In the Vision of God* (1935); Mahatma Gandhi's *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927), originally written in Gujarati and translated into English by Mahadev Desai; Purohit Swami's *The Autobiography of an Indian Monk* (1932); Sitanath Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* (1942) and Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946). Spiritual narratives, Western or Eastern, are generally considered to be unrelated to social and material concerns. However, this study assumes that Indian spiritual autobiographies in English written between 1900 and 1950 do have several significant social messages to offer and that it is worthwhile to attempt to trace them.¹ These autobiographies written during the first fifty years of the twentieth century, coincide with the nationalist movement in India and bear an intimate relation to the revolutionary changes that were taking place in Indian social, political, cultural and religious spheres. These autobiographies are significantly sandwiched between the nineteenth century Indian Renaissance and India's independence. This period also coincides significantly with the 'Modern' and the various debates in the West on Enlightenment Reason and Post-Enlightenment thought not to speak of the Post-Relativity Theory situation which undermined most of those thought patterns. This study explores both the spiritual dimension of the autobiographies — their status as texts portraying the individual spiritual quest for self-realisation - and their key supporting role as contributions to the discourse of Indian nationalism where the dichotomy between the social and the spiritual gets blurred. The study assumes that these texts offer resistance to modernity particularly to Western cultural hegemony, participate in the process of nation building, define the

identity of the nation and mark radical rhetorical shifts in the nationalist thought.

Partha Chatterjee in his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* identifies the growth of nationalist thought particularly in the colonial world as an "evolution" and relates it with the very historicity of thought (Chatterjee 1996: 42). "Thought" at any given point of time and space in **history** works like a catalyst in society and stimulates reversible reactions between the past and the present. This can be viewed as a part of the constant struggle to achieve an imagined, ideal state of equilibrium and harmony between the individual and society. Spiritual autobiographies here are identified as catalysts that participate in this reversible reaction. The study assumes that spiritual autobiography is a part of the "fascinating story of the encounter between a world-conquering Western thought and the intellectual modes of non-Western culture" (41). The attempt is also to show that these texts seek to strike a fine balance between silence and speech, tradition and modernity, the East and the West, the material and the spiritual and several such contending claims that the Indian elite met with during that period.

We need to underscore the relation between autobiography, spirituality and nationalism at this point. Autobiography enables an interface between the inner life of the writer and the reading public. In this process of "self-life-sketch", autobiography explores not only the writer's own notions of the self but also shares notions of the self in general in a "cultural moment".² In this study, the term spiritual autobiography is employed to mean the writer's portrayal of the self in its interaction with the outer world and in its conscious pursuit of the higher states of consciousness in a socio-cultural context. The link between spirituality and nationalism in India is not a new thing. The contribution of spiritual masters like **Swami** Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo to nationalist thought has been thoroughly discussed by various scholars. The introduction of autobiography into the spiritual domain and of the English

language as the medium is of special interest here. In contrast to the age-old Western autobiographical tradition, verbalising one's own **supramental** experiences by a spiritual aspirant or a saint in India was a rare occurrence. Predominantly Western in origin, these autobiographies represent not only a dynamic transaction between the "inner" and the "outer" but also the encounter between Western and Eastern literary traditions and between the coloniser and the colonised.

Partha Chatterjee in his *Nation and Its Fragments* (1994) challenges notions of our nationhood as a derivation from the West and ascertains a distinct contribution of *our* imagination to nationalism. I wish to quote Chatterjee here to show my points of agreement with, extensions to and departure from him. He points out that

History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial - resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must forever remain colonised.

I object to this argument not for any sentimental reason. I object because I cannot reconcile it **with** the evidence on anticolonial nationalism. The most powerful as well as the most creative results of the nationalist imagination in Asia and Africa are posited not on an identity but rather on a *difference* with the "modular" forms of the national society propagated by the modern West (Chatterjee 1994: 5).

Chatterjee further shows that anticolonial nationalism

creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle with the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices

into two domains - the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the "outside," of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an "inner" domain bearing the "essential" marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula is I think, a fundamental feature of anticolonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa (6).

The autobiographies chosen for study assert their recognizable *difference* from any Western experience in various ways. The various culture specific rhetoric employed to communicate spiritual experiences, as we shall see, is a good example. Chatterjee's view also somehow gives us the impression that the spiritual was kept as distinct and even mysterious in order to preserve the essence, put up a resistance and assert superiority in that domain. Numerous colonial narratives also show that this is true to a great extent. Interestingly, spiritual autobiographies follow another route. Spiritual autobiographies do not occlude the domain of the public, the material and the Western from the domain of the private, the spiritual and the Indian. Instead by communicating aspects of the spiritual to the material, the texts demystify the spiritual, initiate a dialogue and subtly challenge the dichotomy between the two. These narratives also refrain from glorifying the essential *difference*. Instead they become a platform for introspection and critique religious culture. Chatterjee's study focuses basically on nineteenth century Bengal while this study will examine autobiographies by spiritual aspirants and saints from various parts of the country and written and published in the first half of the twentieth century. Hence the texts are to a certain extent representational. This will help us to

discern the diversity and trends in the rhetoric of spiritual discourse as well. Points of such interface are an extension of Chatterjee's view that our difficulty arises because "we have all taken the claims of nationalism to be a *political* movement much too literally and much too seriously" (5). Accordingly, spiritual autobiographies project nationhood as *ways of life*, while providing, among other things, vignettes of family traditions, pilgrimage, travel ethos, modes of expressing devotion, communal amity and defiance of caste and gender discrimination.

It is apposite at this point to define terms like "religion", "spirituality" and "nationalism" in the context of this study. The spiritual autobiographies chosen for study show that these three terms are inextricably linked. First, "religion" is understood here as ways of life, prescribed or non-prescribed, if consistently or meticulously followed that will lead to the experience of the spirit of cosmic play or what is known as self-realisation. In Hinduism, *karma yoga* (service), *bhakti yoga* (devotion), *jnana yoga* (wisdom) and *raja yoga* (the exercise of will power) are various ways of life that facilitate self-realisation. "Spirituality" is the *aspiration* for that state of consciousness in which the self communes and merges with the spirit and realises the meaning and the essence of life. The texts chosen for study are called spiritual autobiographies because the authors narrate their experiments with various ways of life like *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* that lead them to spirituality and self-realisation. The autobiographies show that not all the authors were fully evolved, self-realised people. They however stand the test of spirituality in their conscious choice and pursuit of a way of life to attain self-realisation. The term "rhetoric" is frequently used in this study. Here the term stands for the art of communicating spiritual experience through the paths of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga*. The study assumes that the portrayal of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* in these texts represents certain Indian ways of life and certain modes of our cultural and knowledge transactions with the West. It will be interesting

to see how these ways of life and modes of transaction dispel certain mistaken notions of religion and spirituality and widen the scope of secularism in a pluralistic nation. The very choice of autobiography as the form and the English language as the medium also has a persuasive role in the rhetoric. This aspect will be further explored in the second and third sections of the second chapter. By "nationalism" and its related terms like "nationality" and "nationhood", I mean the spirit of co-existence of races in a vast geographical area, diverse in its climatic conditions and landscaping, that *shares* social, religious, cultural, political, linguistic and ideological *differences* and similarities simultaneously. The relation between religion, spirituality and nationalism in these autobiographies addresses the changing notions of the "self and the "other" in social, political, cultural, ideological, economic and literary spheres in the wake of modernity.

The above definitions have evolved out of my analysis of these autobiographies which were written prior to the partition of India. In what way is the study of these texts relevant to the present times? The introduction of democracy in India after gaining political independence from the British has radically changed our perceptions of the nation and the self. There are reasons to believe that it is best suited to serve the interests of a monolithic political, linguistic and religious culture. When adopted in a nation of diverse cultures like our own, the result as we see now is the proliferation of various difficulties and a process of churning. The "self has now affiliations with power, wielded through knowledge of these political strategies. Democracy has become an exercise in conflict management and in the promoting of interests of various collectivities like class, caste, language, region and religion. However, the texts under study instead share the lived experiences of certain individuals, who in the course of their quest for the self as citizens of the world, adopted a midway between the two extremes of self-abnegation and self-promotion and tradition and modernity.

The causes for the preponderance of spiritual autobiographies during the nationalist phase are integral to the observations made above and are also examined in the second section of the second chapter and also at various points in the subsequent chapters that deal with individual texts. It also needs to be noted that the texts examined were written by *Hindu* men. Studies in the Renaissance show that colonial enterprise directly affected the Hindu religious practices in various ways. The effects were immediately cognised among the Hindu elite. One must hasten to add that just as it is not possible to define anything like an Indian culture, (or even the term culture for that matter) it is also not possible to define Hindu culture as a singular entity. The multiplicity can be understood from the variety of discourses that proliferated in the Renaissance itself. It is possible to say that at various points of time, certain trends in this culture proliferate or predominate or tend to define themselves as the representative voices of Hinduism. Hinduism, basically understood as the *Sanatana Dharma*, revolves around a human being's duty towards society and describes ways of life that serve to fulfil this duty. His or her birth as a human being in itself is construed as the enjoyment of a right and in doing so he or she should fulfil certain duties. The fulfillment of duties leads to self-realisation. The paths of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* are ways of life that facilitate fulfillment of this objective. While following these paths the authors of these autobiographies treat scriptures not as *prescriptions* on ways of life but as *descriptions* because they freely experiment with these various ways of life. For instance, the autobiographies explore notions of individual freedom that spiritual realisation entails. The authors deviate radically from the conventional Hindu social structure and defy class, caste and gender distinctions. In other words we see that the authors follow these ways of life not because any scripture prescribes them but because a certain way of life suits their temperament. Though these authors are men, they reveal extraordinary sensitivity to the patriarchal social structure and defy it. The autobiographies

show how even the world of spiritual pursuit is not free from male domination and the narrative act subsequently defies it. The autobiographies narrate the nation through these representations and resistance strategies. The study sees *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga*, the four ways of life, as an integral part of national identity. The variety, methodology and freedom, which these paths offer, are responsible for the identity of the nation as a spiritual land.

The study proceeds chronologically by first examining the Renaissance as a background to the study. Accordingly, Chapter Two titled "Backgrounds" is divided into three parts viz. "The Renaissance — A Reading Back", "Autobiography in India" and "Quest for Theory". The first part, "The Renaissance -- A Reading Back", defines certain theoretical concepts frequently used in the study and undertakes an analysis of the Renaissance in India as a backdrop to the study of twentieth century Indian spiritual autobiographies. The chapter identifies certain inflections of the Renaissance and sees spiritual autobiographies generically as a product/effect of these inflections. The term "inflection" is defined in the first part of Chapter Two. Further the literature of the Renaissance period and spiritual autobiography as an effect of the Renaissance are seen as contributions to the interpretation of culture. They uniquely define modernity by their modes of resistance to its onset during the colonial period. Cultural resistance in the light of these inflections is identified and defined as a positive potential force which in the process of assimilating or countering Western religious practices, knowledge systems and cultural discourses gives rise to new worship methods, new knowledge systems and new cultural discourses. These movements are thus viewed as pioneering attempts at decolonisation which contribute to nationalist thought and give new dimensions to the construction of cultural and national identity. The section concludes with the view that eclecticism, spiritualising of religion, scientism, the integration of Science and Yoga, disenchantment with violence and the spirit of service which were high points of these socio-religious

movements in fact served as re-adjustment mechanisms to effect resistance (very much like immunisation in medical science) and to prevent things from "falling apart". Spiritual autobiographies as inflections of the Renaissance show how the quest for self-realisation as "ways of life" is a part of constant negotiation between tradition and modernity and notions of the self and the other in the colonial and post-colonial set up in a multi-cultural state. In the process, these narrative acts demonstrate this negotiation by amalgamating a predominantly "Western" form with "Eastern" experience and become part of the ongoing quest for rhetorical structures to communicate spiritual experience.

Section two of this Background chapter titled "Autobiography in India" undertakes a study of the nature and scope of the form and language of autobiography in India as a literary genre in general and of spiritual autobiography in particular in its social, political and cultural context. The section also addresses at the outset the apparent contradictions pointed out very often in relating spiritual masters of India with the autobiographical act.

Section three of this chapter, "Quest for Theory", attempts to problematise some of the characteristic features of the texts under study. The "quest" takes off from the premise that though spiritual experience *per se* remains largely independent of external influences, in spiritual discourses the language, the words and the forms chosen to narrate spiritual experience carry and convey strong socio-political and cultural messages and thus project Various dimensions of the cultural moments in which they were narrated. The chapter also demonstrates how Western assumptions are usually unsatisfactory as theoretical base for these composite texts. The primary concerns of this study, viz., the aspects of the "self, the presence of other literary devices and the rhetoric of the narrative of spiritual quest through *karma yoga*, *bhakti yoga*, *jnana yoga* and *raja yoga*, demand a theoretical framework that can accommodate the social, political, cultural and spiritual inflections in the text. I, therefore, use

certain aspects of Bakhtin's theory of Dialogism in my attempt at recognising and problematising these inflections.

Chapters Three, Four, Five, Six and Seven examine the texts in accordance with the paths chosen by the authors to attain self-realisation viz., *karma, bhakti, jnana and raja yoga*. Gandhiji's role as a Karma Yogi in politics finds mention at various points in almost all the autobiographies chosen for this study. Therefore the analysis begins with Gandhiji's autobiography widely read in its English translation.

Chapter Three titled "The Rhetoric of *Karma Yoga*" examines Gandhiji's *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* as a spiritual discourse rendered through the rhetoric of nationalism. The chapter at the outset identifies the dialogic imperatives in the text that reveal the author not as an individual *per se* but as a way of life. The attempt is to see how Gandhiji as a way of life affects and is affected by social changes of the period. Further his experiments with ways of life explore how decolonisation of the nation can be facilitated by decolonising the mind. In Gandhiji we see how self-realisation becomes not only the end but also the means to that end through a passionate pursuit of *karma yoga*. The first section of the chapter examines both the form and rhetoric of the text and sees how they participate in amalgamating nationalism with spirituality. To that end the study identifies a discursive pattern that emerges in the narrative and this is systematically examined under four sections viz., "Dynamics of *Garhasthya*", "Potency of *Brahmacharya*", "Redefining *Vanaprastha*" and "Inflections of *Sannyasa*".

Chapter Four titled "The Rhetoric of *Bhakti Yoga* - *Dasya* and *Putra Bhava*" examines the two-volume autobiography "of Swami Ramdas as a discourse on *bhakti yoga* which critiques certain aspects of national character and national consciousness. The chapter at the outset examines *bhakti* as a *rasa* which manifests itself in various *bhavas* in the God-devotee relationship. The second section of the chapter examines the rhetoric of *bhakti bhava* in Swami

Ramdas's autobiography. Section three of the chapter examines the socio-cultural dynamics that significantly permeate his narrative of *bhakti* and of his pilgrimage across the length and breadth of the country. Pilgrimages are thus seen as a socio-spiritual act that serves to both spiritually charter human mindscape and geographically reiterate national consciousness. The study reveals the role of the railways as a colonial prop during the period in undermining the spirit of various indigenous devices that accommodated the indigent and the itinerant *sadhus*. Swami Ramdas's autobiography is seen as a contribution to nationalist discourse for its specific critiquing of a highly caste-ridden, caste conscious and gender discriminatory social set up of the period.

Some of the above aspects are also found in the autobiography of Purohit Swami. In Chapter Five titled, "The Rhetoric of *Bhakti Yoga - Madhura* and *Anuraga Bhava*" the characteristic features of the *bhakti bhava* of Purohit Swami are examined. This is followed by an analysis of the socio-political dimensions in the autobiography, particularly, in the light of W.B. Yeats's introduction to the text and the nexus between gender, *bhakti* and a reversal of what appears to be, to adapt an expression from colonial theory, the Western male gaze.

Chapter Six titled "The Rhetoric of *Jnana Yoga*" examines the autobiography of Sitanath Tattvabhushan as a nationalist discourse in the light of the rhetoric of *jnana* employed in the text. The text is similar to the autobiographies of Purohit Swami and Swami Ramdas in terms of the critique of the social transitions and of the tensions in inter and intra-religious relationship. The author's disenchantment with schisms in the Brahma Samaj is latent in the discourse and is in a way instrumental in the production of the text.⁴ The dialogic imperatives are striking since Tattvabhushan inducts other genres like diary entries into the text to reveal the spirit of his philosophical inquiry. The text also reveals the role of the colonial subject initially as an unassuming votary of the British Empire and then as a contestant.

Tattvabhushan, as one of the leaders of the *Brahmā* Samaj movement, squarely addresses the issues relating to colonial practices and also the inner communal tensions that delayed the winning of the country's independence. The autobiography shows the dynamic tension in the philosophy of *Brahmaism* between the influence of Classical Western metaphysics that held spirit and matter as dichotomous and Hindu thought that held an organic view of the universe. Empiricism in the West has yet to keep pace with this organic view of the universe and Tattvabhushan's return to Upanishadic thought, while intellectually envisioning this unity, hopes for the future to endorse and prove this scientifically as well.

Chapter Seven titled "The rhetoric of *Raja Yoga*" examines Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* as a nationalist discourse rendered through the rhetoric of *Raja Yoga*. The text is seen as heralding a significant shift in the rhetoric of Hindu spiritual discourse in the wake of the post-relativity theory era. In a sense the book picks up the thread from Tattvabhushan. Einstein's Theory of Relativity earmarked radical shifts in scientific discourse in the West for it undermined the post-Enlightenment trends of thought. To that end, Section One of the chapter titled "The Physics of *Yoga*" examines the contextual aspects that render the rhetoric integral to nationalist thought. Section Two titled "Autobiography as Research" examines the architectonics of the text as integral to the spirit of the work. Section Three titled "Miracles - A Critique" identifies the miracle discourse in the narrative as a strong reading of *Yoga Sutra* in relation to modern scientific theories that challenge the classical Western metaphysical notion of matter and spirit as dichotomous entities. Consequently, the text is seen as addressing the cultural experience of the period as well. In other words, the felt dynamics between science and spirituality in that cultural moment permeates the text both rhetorically and content-wise. Moreover the employment of the rhetoric of *raja yoga* as a scientific discourse projects *yoga* as capable of addressing the concepts of

consciousness, space and time that intrigue the modern world of scientific inquiry. At this point the narrative functions as a counter-hegemonic exercise by not contradicting but by accommodating certain aspects of modernity into the spiritual discourse. Section Four titled "Linking Past and Future" traces the fusion of the rhetoric of the Renaissance and the compelling rhetoric of science in Yogananda. The popularity of *raja yoga* in the present day can definitely be attributed to the persuasiveness achieved through this fusion that other masters were to emulate.

"Conclusion" recapitulates in brief the findings of the study and identifies these texts as both inter and intra discursive as they address nationalism in the spiritual agenda. The relevance of these texts to the twenty-first century is that their life-sketches problematise modern notions of secularism. Secularism is not life divorced from religion. Nor is life seen as unproblematic if wedded to religion. The autobiographies are relevant as they deliberate on the notions of religion, culture, secularism and spirituality as problematic both in theory and practice in a modern civil society. The identity of the self as a citizen in a multi-cultural postcolonial society is in fact a constant negotiation and struggle to attain the difficult and delicate balance between tradition and modernity, between the self and the other. Secularism in these texts emerges as ongoing experiments with ways of life, as a dialogic exercise in a multi-cultural State.

Notes

¹ I have used the term autobiography in its strictest sense, I have not included memoirs or edited versions of journal entries like Sri Aurobindo's *On Himself* in this study.

² Georges Gusdorf points out that autobiographies are placed in their cultural moment (Gusdorf 1980: 35).

³ I have deliberately avoided using terms like "saint", "ascetic" and "mystic" while describing men or women in the Hindu spiritual tradition. Hindu spiritual tradition employs terms like *brahmachari*, *sadhu*, *sannyasi*, *yogi*, *avadhoota*, and so on that indicate various paths of spiritual pursuit and stages of spiritual progress. However, for the sake of convenience, the term "saintliness" which William James introduces as the "collective name for the ripe^ fruits of religion in a character" (James 1961: 220) can be invoked to describe the spiritual status of the authors I am studying. It is interesting that even James points out that he is using this word in spite of a certain flavour of "sanctimoniousness" which sometimes clings to it, because no other word suggests as well the exact combination of affections which the text goes on to describe. William James defines the saintly character as "the character for **which** spiritual emotions are the habitual centre of the personal energy" (220). He frames "a certain composite photograph of universal saintliness" (220) which have the following distinct features. These features are, to paraphrase James, a feeling in a wider life; self-surrender to the control of the ideal power; an immense clarity and freedom, as the outlines of the confining selfhood melt down; and a shifting of the emotional centre towards affirmations. These are, no doubt, universal traits of spiritual people.

⁴ Following the spelling used by Sitanath Tattvabhushan, I have used the letter "a" in expressions like "Brahma Samaj", "Brahmism" and "Brahma" instead of the phonetic spelling popularly used as in "Brahmo Samaj", "Brahmoism" and "Brahmo" throughout this study.

Chapter -- II

Backgrounds

This chapter, as the title suggests, seeks to provide a backdrop to the study of spiritual autobiographies in the forthcoming chapters. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section titled "The Renaissance - A Reading Back" defines at the outset a few theoretical concepts frequently used in the study. Secondly, it examines what is termed as "inflections" of the Renaissance that have been traced in the texts chosen for study. The study also sees these texts as effects of these inflections. The second section "Autobiography in India" examines the evolution of this genre in India particularly in the spiritual context. The third section "Quest for Theory" relates the dilemma and ambivalence in identifying critical approaches to these texts. This section uses Bakhtin's theory of dialogism for the analysis of the autobiographies. This theory enables an analysis of the heterogeneity found in these texts for which I later found support in G.N. Devy's *After Amnesia* (1995).

I

The Renaissance - A Reading Back

This section is an attempt at a reading back of the nineteenth century Indian Renaissance located mainly in Bengal, and traces what I choose to term as "inflections" of the Renaissance discourses found in the spiritual autobiographies chosen for study. Revivalist tendencies, appeals to rationalism, synthesis of the Christian and Hindu methods of worship, attempts at alleviating class-caste distinctions and gender inequalities by accentuating the spiritual and universalist qualities of Hinduism, communal tensions between the Hindus and Muslims, resistance to proselytisation and the depiction of the East-West relationship as an encounter between the spiritual and material worlds constitute some of the characteristic traits of the period identified as the

Indian Renaissance. The autobiographies I have chosen for study are clearly products of the Renaissance. They question, synthesize, refine and interweave various aspects of the Renaissance discourse. I use the term "discourse" in this study in somewhat similar ways to Merry's use of the term which he defines as follows:

"Discourses are aspects of culture, interconnected vocabularies and systems of meaning located in the social world. A discourse is not individual and idiosyncratic but part of a shared cultural world. Discourses are rooted in particular institutions and embody their culture. Actors operate within a structure of available discourses. However within that structure there is space for creativity and actors define and frame their problems within one or another discourse" (qtd.in Candlin 2001: 2).

The Indian Renaissance, as various studies show, has to be seen in the context of its encounter with modernity.¹ This had had a tremendous impact on the spiritual discourses of the Renaissance and it is particularly felt in the distinct shifts in the rhetoric employed to communicate spiritual experience. Of these, autobiography by spiritual masters is a significant development. The study will also show how some of these texts add dimensions to the very concept of the autobiographical act. For these reasons, the terms "intertextuality" and "interdiscursivity" recur in the study, particularly in the chapters that analyse Sitanath Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* and Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*. I have borrowed these terms from Vijay Bhatia who uses them to explain multiplicity of texts, genres and contexts that simultaneously occur in a particular discourse. According to Bhatia, intertextuality is a shorthand for "texts providing a context, texts within and around the text, texts explicitly referred to in the text, texts used implicitly in the text, texts embedded with the text, texts mixed with the text as part of the rhetorical structure" in a discourse (Bhatia 2001: 1). Interdiscursivity is referred to as "genre-mixing,

genre- embedding, one set of generic conventions used to exploit another, system of genres, change and development in genres and appropriation of genres" in a discourse (ibidem).²

Texts facilitate a better understanding of context, the historical processes that went into the making of the text. These autobiographies enable us to read significant developments in the Renaissance period in a new light and then to trace some of its continuities in the autobiographies. Thus the reading of these autobiographies engage the reader not only in a dialogue with the times in which they were written but also with the past that influenced the production of these texts. This study, therefore, represents a dialogic experience of reading.

The term "modernity" remains to be defined. However it does have affiliations to Tejaswini Niranjana's definition of "modernity" in her introduction to *Interrogating Modernity* as a short hand for industrialisation, expansion and consolidation of colonialism, the institution of democracy and post-colonial nation states (Niranjana 1993: 2). "Modernity" is a post-Enlightenment idea and has to do with institutions, discourses and value systems that facilitated the colonial practice. Orientalism and Anglicisation were important aspects of the colonial practice. This study shows how spiritual autobiographies challenge the "post-Enlightenment thematic", that deals with the mechanistic view of the universe and a belief in the distinction between matter and spirit and science and religion.³

Against this background, spiritual autobiographies contribute to the interpretation of culture and function as documents of resistance to cultural hegemony. Edward Said points out the role of resistance narratives in decolonisation: "In the cultural discourses of decolonization, a great many languages, histories, forms circulate. As Barbara Harlow has shown in *Resistance Literature*, the instability of time, which has to be made and remade by the people and its leaders, is a theme one sees in all genres - 'spiritual autobiographies, poems of protest, prison memoirs, didactic dramas of

deliverance" (Said 1994: 280). Said's point is clearly influenced by Michel Foucault's concept of power: According to Said, "resistance far from being merely a reaction to imperialism, is an alternative way of conceiving human history. It is particularly important to see how much this alternative reconception is based on breaking down the barriers between cultures" (260). In other words, cultural resistance in this context can be considered as a positive potential force which in the process of assimilating or countering Western religious practices, knowledge systems and cultural discourses gives rise to new methods of worship, new knowledge systems and new cultural discourses. Verbalising spiritual experience in English, of which autobiography is one of the forms it takes, is an intense cultural message in the context of the colonial encounter. The expression of subjective spiritual experience by Indians in a Western form and language is a dialogic exercise. Cultural resistance and dispelling of stereotypical notions regarding Indian spirituality are some of its effects.⁴ These texts placed at a significant point of time in history neither seem to indulge in a glorification of an imagined past nor are they indulging in a full advocacy of modernity. They do not do away with the material world in seeking the spiritual world; nor do they advocate self-abnegation in relation to self-assertion. What these texts seek to do is to define the self within a delicate and difficult framework of a possible synthesis between the East and the West, the spiritual and the material, the self and the other as *ways of life*. Nationalism and citizenship are envisioned as striving for this balance in an individual. Saints perhaps envision such a balanced living as true nationalism. This is where autobiographies as a new form and rhetoric of spiritual discourse in India achieve a power over the reader. They become agents of conversion where the reader seeks to emulate the *way of life* of the autobiographer. Contrary to the popular concept of spirituality as negation of life, these texts affirm life. These texts initiate a phase of imparting spiritual knowledge in a rhetoric of sharing an individual's direct encounter with the spirit.

We will now examine the inflections of the Renaissance traceable in spiritual autobiographies. What is meant by the term "inflection" can be briefly illustrated. Primarily, the term is derived from "Inflectional Morphology" in Linguistics which studies "the way in which words vary (or 'inflect') in order to express grammatical contrasts in sentences, such as singular/plural or past/present tense" (Crystal 1987: 90).⁵ The term "inflection" is used here to indicate certain shifts and variations in the rhetoric of spiritual autobiographies for which the Renaissance trends are largely responsible. Sitanath Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* for instance, is marked by his disenchantment with the schism in the Brahma Samaj in the post-Rammohan Roy period. Tattvabhushan's very quest for self-realisation through philosophical pursuits springs from a strong ~~felt-need~~ to identify ~~an~~ acceptable theological position in Brahma faith, the absence of which was the root cause for the schisms. In this context, the schism as an inflection of the Renaissance is latent in the rhetoric of Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography*. Hence a study of his autobiography will be incomplete without an understanding of this inside story. Most of the studies of the Renaissance examine the contribution of the Brahma Samaj to social and religious revival. This inside story was however traced in Pt. Sivanath Sastri's *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (1974) and David Kopf's *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Mind* (1988). The historical accounts relating to the schisms of the Samaj will be examined here and whatever theoretical insights emerge will be utilised later in the respective chapters that deal with these inflections. Further, the appeal to and encounter with Western Science in Dayanand Saraswati's rhetoric, the *bhakti* of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the nationalist spirit in Swami Vivekananda's address to the West, the disenchantment with violence in Bankim's *Anandamath* are some other inflections useful to understand the changing patterns in the rhetoric of spiritual discourse through the autobiographies chosen for study. We will now proceed to understand the dynamics in the Brahma Samaj after Rammohan Roy.

The reform movements initiated by the Indian Renaissance were basically religious reform movements that worked at two levels — at the societal level and at the intellectual level. It can also be seen that the social life and religious life in India had been inextricably linked in such a manner that any reform at the religious level meant a reform at the societal level as well. For instance, the movement sought to abolish or reform certain customs and practices which had both social and religious implications. These included customs like Sati, idolatry, casteism and the ill-treatment of widows. The second level at which this worked was the intellectual, academic and literary level which was an engagement in dialogue with the West through a comparative study of Eastern and Western philosophies and Theology of the kind we find in Rammohan Roy's *Precepts of Jesus*. Roy's contribution to Unitarianism is well known and his Brahma Samaj appealed for a spiritual regeneration and sought to synthesise Hindu and Christian methods of worship to achieve this goal. Spencer Lavan in "The Brahmo Samaj: India's First Modern Movement for Religious Reform" points out that Brahma Samaj turned out to be the "first modern Indian challenge to foreign domination, Christianity and internal religious disintegration" (Lavan 1991: 23). What is relevant to our study is the post-Rammohan Roy developments in the Brahma Samaj particularly the schisms that took place repeatedly due to the absence of a theistic doctrine.

As Pandit Sivanath Sastri points out in his account, Rammohan Roy's contribution towards establishing a universal religion that believed in the concept of one God was significant. Sastri writes that Roy "derived his ideas on the spiritual side from Hindu sources; but his passion for Unitarianism was derived from Mahomedanism and many of his moral ideas he got from the Precepts of Jesus" (Sastri 1974: 49). However, Sastri points out that Roy could not do much towards building up a constructive theism and that as a pioneer his duty was to clear away a mass of popular prejudice paving the way for the

next generation to take over. Hence his work was mainly **negative** and reformatory and not positive and constructive (48-49). After Rammohan Roy's death Vidyabagish "kept the lamp burning" till Devendranath Tagore's initiation into the Samaj in 1843. After Tagore's entry into the scene, "a great **theological** revolution in the principles of the Samaj was impending" (63). In the wake of the **anti-Christian** agitation of 1845, the doctrine of Vedic **fallibility** ~~was~~ prominent and the *Vedas* were publicly **proclaimed** as the basis of Brahma- Theism. Akshay Kumar Datta, the editor of the *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, as a rationalist raised voices of dissent against this stance and was also supported by many young men of similar temperament. Under pressure and after much contemplation and debate, (the specificities of which will be examined in the chapter on Sitanath Tattvabhushan in this study) **Devendrenath** Tagore decided to reject the doctrine of Vedic infallibility. The period mat followed i.e from 1850-1856 was one of new social ideals and rationality. With Keshub Chandra Sen's entry into the scene during the 1860s, a new impetus was given to the activities of the Samaj. The appeal to faith, intuition, salvation and atonement could be traced to the religious temperament of Keshub who was a charismatic personality. The first schism in the Brahma Samaj took place in **the** wake of differences of opinion between the older and the younger generation **on** the question of caste. This resulted in the **formation** of the Brahma **Samaj** of India and Devendranath and others remained part of what came to be known as the Adi Brahma Samaj. Besides social welfare activities, the hey-day of Keshub's leadership also saw the infusion **of bhakti** in the methods of worship which is attributed to the influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on Keshub.⁶ Moreover Keshub was also to introduce the four-fold classification of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga*. In one of his lectures delivered in 1879, he reasserted his view that Christ was an Asiatic. "Behold Christ **cometh** to us as an Asiatic in race, as a Hindu in faith, as a kinsman and a brother and he demands your heart's affection. Christ is a true Yogi" (206).

[This view of Keshub is important for he seems to anticipate Paramahansa Yogananda's spiritual rhetoric in the West. This will be taken up in the chapter on Paramahansa Yogananda.

However Keshub Chandra Sen was also not immune to further progressive tendencies of the younger generation which demanded constitutional modes of Government in the affairs of the Church. Also the marriage of Suneethi Devi, Keshub's daughter, to the Prince of Cooch Behar became controversial since it seemed to contradict the doctrines of the Samaj. This led to a further schism and resulted in the formation of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. Ananda Mohan Bose, Shibchandra Deb, and Umeshchandra Datta were instrumental in introducing constitutional modes of governance. Sitanath Tattvabhushan, whose *Autobiography* is one of the texts chosen for study, was a member of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj. As a part of revivalism Keshub further announced the birth of a New Dispensation. Tattvabhushan is located during a period that saw such schisms and lack of direction in Brahma activities following these schisms. The absence of a theology, that Sivanath Sastri draws our attention to, continued. Considering the "instability of time", adoption of a theology could not have avoided schism. Moreover, theological positions were based on the temperamental leanings of the leaders like Devendranath Tagore and Keshub. In the absence of their charismatic presence, the spell was broken and reason and faith were again in conflict. Tattvabhushan's contribution was to fill this void through a dispassionate criticism of loopholes in Brahma thought over the years and to re-establish the credibility of the *Upanishads* in Brahmanism through deep and comparative study of both Eastern and Western metaphysics.

Apart from the "return to Vedas" slogan of Dayanand Saraswati's Arya Samaj, its rationalism is also important. It was the rational spirit in Dayanand that made him question idolatry in the first place. Kenneth W. Jones in his article "The Arya Samaj in British India 1875-1947" (1989), points out that

Dayanand's religion was monotheistic, open to all, rationalistic and compatible with modern science. Zacharias's example in his study on the Renaissance will suffice to illustrate this point: "Where others are satisfied to translate Rig Ved 1,2,7 as follows: 'I invoke *Mitra* and *Varuna* for the success of my poem" - Dayanand loftily informs his adherents that it means that water is generated by the combination of hydrogen and oxygen!" (Zacharias 1989: 38). Though **Zacharias** dismisses this explanation as puerile the above quotation throws light on one major trait of the period - a subtle reading of *Vedic* truths as not effete but as seminal, compatible and contemporary — on par with modern science which rationalists have been using to attack Hinduism. This kind of application of rationalism to religion during that period served to counter growing scepticism towards Hinduism among the educated elite and worked as an effective resistance to colonialism in its garb of cultural hegemony. The message of the Arya Samaj was not confined to the nationalist intellectual elite but had **mass** appeal as well. "With the Arya **Samaj**....we have reached a movement, whose founder never knew English and who made his appeal, not to an English educated elite, but to the broad mass of his fellow country men" (35). The above aspect has been highlighted as an inflection because it is the synthesis of science and *yoga* in the rhetoric of spiritual discourse that can be traced in Yogananda as well.

The lucidity and simplicity in communicating spiritual wisdom was a remarkable **feature** of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's spiritual rhetoric. If "liberal religion in the 1880s taught that religion based on reason could rid the world of superstition, idolatry and the social ills which weighted down the men and women" (Williams 1991: 59), Ramakrishna Paramahansa showed how the simple rhetoric of *bhakti* could equally contribute to this. Sivanath Sastri (39) and Partha Chatterjee (46) have made a mention of the influence of Ramakrishna Paramahansa on Keshub Chandra Sen and the subsequent infusion of *bhakti* in the Church. In Swami Ramdas's autobiography, we find traits of Ramakrishna's

childlike bliss and lucidity of expression. If Ramakrishna achieved this in Bengali, then Ramdas made it possible in English as well.

In Swami Vivekananda, we find a blend of rationalism of the Brahma Samaj and spiritual conviction derived from his Guru's guidance. The impact of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual rhetoric at the World Parliament of Religions in the United States was so great that it served to dispel stereotypical notions in the West regarding Hinduism. Swami Vivekananda emphasised the futility of proselytisation in India by missionaries when he said: "The great need of India today, which is not the India of fifty years ago, is, ... missionaries to educate the people industrially and socially and not religiously. The Hindoos have all the religion they want, and the Hindoo religion is the most ancient in the world" (Vivekananda 1984: 469). In this sense Swami Vivekananda's mission in the West was also to resist and counter "virulent missionary propaganda which was eagerly and gratefully accepted in many circles because it seemed to provide a sanction for Western imperialism by reinforcing highly derogatory images of the Oriental races" (Gupta 1987: 121). In offering a counter hegemonic rhetoric to the West, Swami Vivekananda's speeches and writings became popular and were held up as an important contribution to nationalist thought. Swami Vivekananda's U.S. tour further opened passages to spiritual masters like Paramahansa Yogananda in the West. It is also important to note that the receptivity to Hindu spiritual thought was more pronounced in the United States in comparison to England. This can however be traced to the growth of Unitarianism in the United States to which Rammohan Roy also contributed as a pioneer. With Swami Vivekananda we see how the rhetoric of modernity came to be employed in order to counter cultural hegemony in spiritual discourse. Unlike Rammohan Roy and his times, Swami Vivekananda's rhetoric appealed more to the commoner than to the intellectual. This is clear in Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* in which he criticises Swami Vivekananda's

lectures as "shallow and unsystematic notwithstanding his undoubted religious zeal and earnestness" (Tattvabhushan 1942: 66).

A similar nationalist spirit with elevated rhetoric is traceable in Sri Aurobindo's writings. Sri Aurobindo's disenchantment with violence and his retirement from active politics, the subsequent emphasis on the role of spirituality in the independence of the nation through an irresistibly energetic rhetoric, further **integrated nationalism** with spirituality. An agnostic turned nationalist turned Yogi — that was Sri Aurobindo Ghosh who was also the progenitor of the doctrine of passive resistance, which was later adapted and utilised by Gandhiji in India's struggle for independence:

"Passive resistance is an attempt to meet such disturbers by peaceful and self-contained *Brahmatej* Our attitude is a political Vedantism. India, free, one and indivisible, is the divine realization to which we move, emancipation our aim; to that end each nation must practice the political creed which is the most suited to its temperament and circumstances; for that is the best for it which leads most surely and completely to national liberty and national self-realization. ... Passive resistance may be the final method of salvation in our case or it may be only the preparation for the final sadhana. In either case, the sooner we put it into full and perfect practice, the nearer we shall be to national liberty" (qtd. in Hay 1991: 151).

Sri Aurobindo also held that *Sanatana Dharma* was nationalism, that one did not exist without the other. It is interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo and Gandhiji shared certain views about integrating religion with politics. In other words, they did not see one as different from the other, in fact one was the other. It is this vision that is embodied in the above quotation especially when Sri Aurobindo uses the term "national **self-realisation**". For Gandhiji, self-realisation was the service of India, her freedom, not merely in terms of

political governance but in terms of **self-governance** as a citizen of a nation by pursuing ways of life befitting national character (Gandhi 1927: 132). Gandhiji's autobiography shows this constant quest for or interpretation of the idea of nation by experimenting with truth. The nationalism of Sri Aurobindo and Gandhiji was not Hindu oriented. Rather it attempted to inform followers of Hinduism to identify its' true spirit. To that end, Sri Aurobindo was also responsible for lifting the veil of esotericism on *raja yoga* and can be seen as a precursor of Paramahansa Yogananda in making it a "scientific", rational, comprehensible and practical exercise. His narrative style also served to dispel the misconception that the end of spirituality was escape from earthly existence:

The inter-penetration of the planes [material, vital, mental and supramental] is indeed for me a capital and fundamental part of spiritual experience without which yoga as I practise it and its aim could not exist. For that aim is to manifest, reach or embody a higher consciousness upon earth and not to get away from earth into a higher world or some supreme Absolute. The old yogas (not quite all of them) tended the other way — but that was, I think, because they found the earth as it is a rather impossible place for any spiritual being and the resistance to change too obstinate to be borne; earth-nature looked to them in Vivekananda's simile like the dog's tail which, every time you straighten it, goes back to its original curl (qtd. in Hay 1991: 158).

With Sri Aurobindo we see the tendency to impart the knowledge of *yogas* as an efficient path to harmonious existence in this world. Aurobindo, as the above passage shows, challenges the concept of God as separate from earthly existence. Paramahansa Yogananda's spiritual rhetoric picks up this thread and gains greater force and persuasiveness when seen in consonance with the

changes in modern science. This aspect will be discussed in the chapter on Paramahansa Yogananda's autobiography.

The Renaissance also saw a renewed sense of service among the ascetics of India. This should be seen as an answer to the challenge posed by the Christian missionaries whose activities included establishment of schools and hospitals across the country. Indian ascetics reacted proving their mettle in social service. Besides providing spiritual guidance, they served the community by establishing orphanages, vocational training centres, schools and dispensaries. Of these Swami Sivananda Saraswati, founder of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh, deserves special mention. He was a medical practitioner in his *purvashrama* and did not refrain from continuing to render medical services even after his initiation into *Sannyasa*. This is an example of modernity fusing with tradition. We find spiritual masters like Swami Ramdas initiating similar activities in the South.

Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai was also a focal point for seekers during the first half of the last century. His mode of imparting spiritual initiation and of providing answers to seekers was through, what could be termed, a dialogic, eloquent silence. Paul Brunton's *Search in Secret India* (1934) shows how the Maharishi, in an inexplicable manner would challenge a seeker's tendency to gaze outward for answers by reverting it inwards to ask "Who am I?" Ramana Maharishi's method, interestingly turns the seeker's attention to engage in a dialogue with himself in order to dismantle the sense of difference between the self and the other irrespective of race, caste, culture and religion. This reversal of gaze that Paul Brunton experienced cannot be ignored while discussing the influence of the Renaissance on the subject of our study for it conveys a significant dimension of the East-West encounter:

The Maharishee turns and looks *down* into my face; I in turn, gaze expectantly *up* at him (Brunton 1934: 152, emphasis mine).

And again:

The hall is becoming pervaded with a subtle, intangible and indefinable *power* which affects me deeply____Those lustrous orbs seem to be peering into the inmost recesses of my soul. In a peculiar way I feel aware of everything he can see in my heart. His mysterious glance penetrates my thoughts, my emotions and my desires; I am helpless before it. At first this disconcerting gaze troubles me; I become vaguely uneasy. I feel that he has perceived pages that belong to a past which I have forgotten. He knows it all, I am certain. I am powerless to escape; somehow, I do not want to, either (162).

The above lines are also an instance to show the role of Western writings as well in reiterating the construct of the East as spiritually "superior" to the West. Brunton's *Search in Secret India* appeared at the same time as Purohit Swami's autobiography. Hence we cannot ignore a similar strain present in Yeats's introduction to Purohit Swami's autobiography in which Yeats declares that a "converse impregnation has begun with the East as the male" spiritually. While examining Purohit Swami's autobiography, we shall see how the narrative evades the Western demand for "experience" voiced in Yeats's introduction to the text; instead words are rendered inadequate to communicate *the* "experience". The readers are urged to turn their gaze inwards for this experience. The narrative conveys the author's 'intimations of immortality' and not the experience of immortality as such. Such a ploy often works to add persuasiveness, to unsettle the reader and carries out the conversional effect on the reader. In studies of Western mystical autobiographies this is termed the 'conversional effect'; in other words these texts act as agents of change. These aspects are discussed at various points in this study.

No discussion on the Renaissance and its inflections would be complete without referring to the theme of the *Sannyasi* rebellion in Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Anandamath*(1882). This novel shows a dynamic tension between renunciation and householderhood, violence and non-violence, sin and salvation and life and death in the context of envisioning nationhood and national identity. The most popular interpretation of this text is that it gave a tremendous impetus to the various religious, patriotic and national activities beginning with Hindu missionary activity and culminating in the terrorist movement in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁷ In contrast, in this study, the text is read as one that reveals disenchantment with violence in the revolt against colonial power. The prologue to the novel reveals the tension between violence and non-violence at the outset:

"What can you sacrifice to win your heart's desire?"

"My life itself!" was the reply.

"Life is so insignificant that it is the simplest thing for anyone to sacrifice!"

"What more have I? What else can I offer?"

"Devotion! My friend, devotion!" declared the voice from above (Chatterjee 1992: 23).

Underlying the tone of the masculine, ascetic and militant voices in the novel is the "passive" yet persistent voices of the women characters the echoes of which can be found in Gandhiji. These voices foreground themselves towards the last paragraphs of the novel in *Shanti*'s conversation with Jiban:

"...How strange that I am fully cured so soon! Where do you want to go now Shanti? There, there, I hear the noise of our victorious army!"

"We shall go there no more," Shanti said firmly. "We have won victory for Mother India. This part of the country belongs to us. We want no reward for doing our duty. So why should we go there?"

"What we have won by force, must be protected with the strength of our arms."

"Mahatma Satya and Mahendra are there to protect our kingdom. You sacrificed your life for the Children in order to make atonement for a sin. The Children have no more claim upon you. We are now dead to them. If they see us now, they are sure to say: 'For fear of atonement with death Jiban hid himself somewhere during the battle. Now he has come to claim a share in our kingdom'."

"What do you mean, Shanti? Do you think that for fear of public opinion we should refuse to do our duty? My duty is to serve the Mother unselfishly. Let people gossip any way they like. I must continue to serve the cause of our Mother India".

"You have forfeited all your right to do that. For you did sacrifice your life in the Mother's service. If you can serve her again, then where is the atonement? The outstanding part of the atonement is to be fully deprived of all opportunities to serve the Mother. Otherwise, just to sacrifice an insignificant life is not a great thing in itself.

"Shanti, it remains for you to understand the real kernel of the great problems of life. My greatest happiness lies in performing my duty as a child in the service of the Mother. I must deprive myself of that happiness. But where shall we go? We certainly could not be happy at home, thus abandoning our Mother's service".

"That is certainly farthest from my mind. We are no longer householders. We shall ever remain ascetics. And we shall ever observe strictest continence. Come, let us travel all over India, visiting the holy places of pilgrimage".

"What shall we do after that?"

"After that? Yes, after that we shall build ourselves a little cottage on the Himalayas. There we shall pass our days in prayer and meditation - in the service of God. We shall ask direct from Him the boons that are best for Mother India and for all her children; and also for Mother Earth and for all her children; the world over" (134-35).

In the light of such a passage one can draw a connection between Bankim's *Anandamath* and Gandhiji's non-violence. As a narrative on ways of life, Gandhiji picks up the thread that Bankim leaves. Shanti, (a name that significantly suggests peace and non-violence), is the character that dissuades Jiban, (a name that suggests life), from giving up life through violence in the name of sacrifice. Non-violence has also to do with observing celibacy the possibilities of which Gandhiji explored in word and in deed. Celibacy was a ploy for empowering women in the new nation. *Anandamath* concludes on a note of *Jiban-Shanti*, i.e. living in peace.⁸

David M. Miller in his essay on the Divine Life Society Movement points out that Western representation of traditional institutions such as monasticism and asceticism as "escapist", "other-worldly" or "world negating" is incorrect. In fact the opposite is true because these institutions were instrumental in the process of change. Drawing insights from Agha Hananda Bharati's views, Miller also highlights the ambivalence of the modern Hindu toward the "old fashioned", non-English speaking, peregrinating or *ashram-bound* sadhu who does not contribute to modern life (109). The contribution of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda Saraswati in addressing such attitudes in the language and rhetoric of modernity is remarkable. Moreover, "to be a modern Hindu, then, is not only to engage in the rhetoric of the apologetic, but to carry out its pronouncements in religious action, and of those groups directing sociocultural change, the modernist sadhus are at the helm of things" (110). The above view throws light on three significant aspects of the autobiographies I am studying. First, the rhetoric of the apologetic is constantly subjected to change. This is clear from the evolution of spiritual autobiography as a form of this apologetic. Secondly, while moving from text to text chronologically, remarkable shifts in the rhetoric of spiritual discourse can be detected. Thirdly, it shows that the scope of the genre expanded in various ways, the most important of it being not only a "self-life-sketch" of a modernist *sadhu* but a

vindication of the lives of seekers and devotees who function beyond the purview of "modernity", quietly, unnoticed, perhaps even subjected to ridicule by the ambivalent group. It is in this sense that we can detect the strong sense of the audience in these texts. They seem to address an English speaking audience, both Westerners and Westernised Indians. The rhetorical shifts in spiritual discourse thus show how modern apologetics worked both as an empowering mechanism and resistance mechanism.

II

Autobiography in India

This section undertakes an analysis of spiritual autobiography as a literary genre in India in its social, political and cultural context. The apparent contradiction pointed out very often in terms of relating spiritual masters of India with the autobiographical act will also be addressed.

Not many critical studies on Indian spiritual autobiographies exist except for the painstaking survey and study undertaken by R.C.P. Sinha in his *Indian Autobiographies in English* (1978) and by K.C. Yadav in his "Introduction" (1976) to the English translation of Swami Dayananda Saraswati's autobiography originally written in Marathi. Some interest in Indian women's autobiographies has been initiated by scholars like Ranjana Harish and others but a concerted attempt is yet to be made.

A word about the shifts in the rhetoric of literary criticism in India over the years would be appropriate here. The reasons for the shift could be attributed to the social, political, cultural and ideological imperatives within which a critic functions. For instance, if R.C.P. Sinha views the development of Indo-Anglian autobiography as "inextricably linked with social, political, literary and religious forces operating in modern India" (Sinha 1978: 193), Sivarama Padikkal has viewed the development of the novel in India as "a social practice linked to social and economic production and reproduction, connected

therefore with other kinds of social practices" (Padikkal 1993: 220). In any case, the development of spiritual autobiography in India as a genre in itself is not free of contextual influences. Accordingly, this critical study of spiritual autobiographies is pitched at a level that is not free of, what Said terms as, "contrapuntal" renditions and responds to current trends in literary theory and criticism as well.

R.C.P.Sinha points out in his study that an impression continues to persist that the practice of writing autobiography did not exist in India before the advent of the British. He says that it was not as though the autobiographical impulse was discovered for the first time during the Renaissance in India: "An autobiographical tradition of a sort did exist, but it had been too tenuous and irregular to become a significant feature of the national culture" (Sinha 1978: 4). His well researched chapters, "Autobiography in Ancient India" and "Autobiography in Medieval India", are brilliant expositions with the purpose of dispelling this notion. He points out that, there were indeed some elements in the Hindu tradition that hindered the free and natural growth of autobiography (ibidem). To illustrate, K.C.Yadav in his introduction to the English version of Swami Dayananda Saraswati's autobiography points out that "in the olden times a general notion had persisted amongst Indians that self-portraiture was *Ashistata* (bad manners). The popularity of this belief probably accounts for the complacent indifference to the composition of autobiographical writings" (Yadav 1978: 1). However, Sinha quotes instances from the *Rig Veda* in which a *risbi* narrates his life story in terms of his transformation from waywardness to spiritual living. "The Lament of the Gambler", according to Sinha, is remarkable for its autobiographical appeal (Sinha 1978: 13-14).

It is possible to read the *Mahabharata* as Sage Vyasa's autobiography. Such an interpretation would however provide a new dimension to the term autobiography. The *Mahabharata* spans events that go beyond the direct

concerns of the "author" though his birth and mission are inextricably linked with the events he narrates.

Bahina Bai's *Atmanivedan*, her autobiography, in verses written in the 17th century is another instance to prove the existence of the autobiographical impulse in India. Bahina Bai's autobiography, quite interestingly, throws light on the social life of the times and places that she visited. One can analyse her work as a brilliant critique of the way religion was practiced in those days, the inaccessibility of certain practices to women, the way women were treated, and the caste system. Here are some instances to illustrate her protest against exploitation of the woman's body:

Possessing a woman's body, and myself being subject to others, I was not able to carry out my desire to discard all worldly things [*vairagya*] (Bahina Bai 1929: 38).

The *Vedas* cry aloud, and the *Purans* shout that no good comes of a woman.... The characteristics (of a woman) are foolishness, selfishness, seductiveness, and deception. All connection with a woman is disastrous. (Such is their opinion) . Says Bahini, "If a woman's body brings disaster, what chance is there for her to acquire in this life the supreme spiritual riches?" (39).

Bahini also protests against the gender and caste discrimination in the religious field:

(As a woman) I have no right to listen to the reading of the *Vedas*. The Brahmins have made a secret of the *Gayatri mantra*. I am told I must not pronounce the sacred word 'OM'. I must not listen to philosophical ideas. I must not speak to anyone about them. My husband is Jamadagni himself (if I did those things) (ibidem).

It was Sant Tukaram's times. The verses reveal the attitude of some of the members of the upper classes towards Sant Tukaram since Tukaram was a

“shudra” by caste. Bahina Bai records the assertion of her husband regarding Tukaram: "What is all this! The *shudra* Tuka! Seeing him in a dream! My wife is ruined by all this! What am I to do?" (24). Further after her husband undergoes a total change of heart, and becomes his disciple, other Brahmins admonish them: "You have received an *anugraha* in a dream, and you have made a *Shudra* your *guru*. And he is a good-for-nothing and without knowledge. You should be ex-communicated from the Brahman community" (31). Bahina Bai discreetly protests against not only the beatings but also sexual violence she has to suffer from her husband, a thirty year old person who had married her when she was hardly nine years old. She turns these sufferings to her advantage to facilitate her spiritual quest:

Thou art causing this irritation by the hand of my husband, but my soul has made its determination____
Now then, O God, Brother-of-the-distressed. Thou art seeking to test me? For through my husband my body is being destroyed. What am I to do? I am in the midst of hardship. I have no desires for my body (40).

One can infer from these sporadic instances of autobiographical writing in early India that in a society where self-life-sketch was considered as bad manners, certain dominant interests of the community were protected. These interests were more important than individual aspirations leading to great insensitivity to and repression of women's spiritual aspiration. Bahina Bai's *Atmanivedan* and verses hold testimony to this interesting inflection of the Hindu socio-religious life.⁹

A late nineteenth and early twentieth century instance is the *Memoirs of Dr. Haimabathi Sen*, originally written in Bengali which was discovered and published only in 2000. Sen who became a child widow and later married a Brahma does not hesitate to expose the debilitating practices even among the Brahmas of the period. She depicts instances of oppression and sexual

exploitation in the Bengali society. Though such autobiographies existed, they did not see the light of day for several years. The fact remains that they were written even though women were not expected to be educated enough to write thus during that period. This would perhaps account for the conspicuous absence of *published* spiritual autobiographies by women during the nineteenth century. The term "publish" of course has the sense of going public when actually women's voices of protest remained "private."

Whenever there has been social repression, there has been rebellion. The role of saints as rebels against oppression was significant. Saints urged the individuals to work for social change, to awaken and to work for their own salvation from social practices that fettered them. This also served to uplift the downtrodden and enlighten them. Since religion has been the most dominant and influential social practice prevalent in India for centuries, religious reformation was the source of social change. People were sensitive and receptive to the "rhetoric" of religion and as we have seen through the ages, social reformers appealed to them through the very same rhetoric to bring about changes within the religion and thus in the society as a whole. *Jnanappaana*, a devotional poem, by Poonthaanam Vasudevan Nampoothiri written in the sixteenth century in simple Malayalam is an intense criticism of social life which is steeped in ignorance, corruption and immorality. By attacking class and caste distinctions, gender oppression and power play, Poonthaanam conveys the true essence of wisdom. Here for Poonthaanam, *jnana*, wisdom, did not require sublimity of style for the expression of simple truths. The popularity of *Jnanappaana* even today is due to its relevance to social mores and personal conduct. One may also recall Sri Narayanaguru's (1854-1928) retort to the Brahmins who challenged him for establishing a Shiva temple for the Ezhavas. He said: "I have only installed an Ezhava Shiva". (Ezhavas were deemed as lower caste). Religion as such can be perceived as an experiment with or a quest for modes of regulating social and personal

behaviour. Renaissance literature is only one part of this ongoing historical process of rhetorical shifts in religious discourse. Spiritual narratives thus became social narratives, acts of protest against exploitation in the name of religion. The Hindu cultural mosaic has readjusted itself through such individuals and survived as a consequence. Otherwise it would have ceased to exist the way Greek or Roman civilization did. Buddha, Adi Sankaracharya, the poet saints of the *Bhakti* movement, Sri Narayanaguru, Sai Baba of Shirdi, Guru Nanak, the social and religious reformers of the Renaissance period and Gandhiji in the twentieth century spearheaded these 'readjustments', thus preventing the Hindu culture from fading into oblivion. They were men or women who rebelled against the existing evils in the society and devised ways and means appropriate to the needs of the times to repair the fissures in society. Culture, it is important to note at this point, should not be misunderstood as "unchanging", as something which remains in a "glorious past" and in "tradition", but is a process that contributes to new perceptions and new definitions of identity. The reformers were individuals whose quest for the self led them to realization and were also people who disseminated those experiences through the spoken and written word. The self was not divorced from the social, and scriptures and spiritual discourses were fundamental tools to bring about social change. If we examine the pattern of religious reformation movements from the time of the Buddha to the present, the expression of spiritual experiences was in an idiom suitable to the needs of the audience addressed. Considering the inextricable link that prevailed between social and religious life in India, discourses or singing in the temples or on the streets were an important means of reaching the masses. Saints, thus were the most sensitive to the needs of the people. For example, the *abhangas* were palpable in a period when the print media was unheard of and picked up, repeated and sung in households. After the advent of the British, when print media became prominent and literacy increased, there was no dearth of

spiritual literature. Also, the curious Westerners and English educated Indians needed "subjective" or "true" spiritual experience to "believe" and reform. The autobiographical impulse in India is therefore closely linked to reformation. In this sense, autobiography, as we have hinted, is a **discourse** of conversion. Both the author/narrator and the listener/reader experience a change. Autobiographical narrative of a spiritual experience that exemplifies "this happened to me", is inextricably linked with the mode of communicating it. Harpham in his study views autobiography as a particular organization of the conversational aspects of language acquisition and use (Harpham 1988: 48). It follows that the genre in itself embodies persuasion. In the texts chosen for study the rhetoric of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* also embody persuasion. What was the impulse that necessitated persuasiveness? G.N. Devy's view on the impact of colonialism would be apposite to answer this: "Colonialism creates a cultural **demoralization**. It creates a false sense of shame in the minds of the colonized about their own history and traditions" (Devy 1995: 10). Spiritual autobiographies counter **demoralising** forces of colonial culture and contribute to the interpretation of culture. Spiritual autobiographies in the twentieth century served the same function as the *abhangas* of the *Bhakti* movement.

The study presupposes that the autobiographies written in English and in Indian *bhashas* were influenced by Western notions of form and structure. However they also retain a peculiar Indian quality and my analyses of the texts demonstrate this. The autobiographers wrote at the behest of their friends, disciples or well-wishers who were either Westerners or Indians who had come under Western influence. The earliest forms were written in **prose**, but were fragmentary. Rammohan Roy's self-life sketch was termed "autobiographical remarks" and Sinha identifies this as the first example of autobiographical writing in English. Srinivasa Iyengar points out that Roy "started the tradition of Indian leaders writing autobiographies, and modern autobiographers like

Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Surendranath Banerjee, Rajendra Prasad and M.R. Jayakar may proudly trace their lineage to him!" (Iyengar 1985: 33). Roy's style does not seem to be too deliberate and certainly does not suggest self-consciousness:

My ancestors were Brahmins of a high order, and from time immemorial were devoted to the religious duties of their race, down to my fifth progenitor....In conformity with the usage of my parental race, and the wish of my father, I studied the Persian and Arabic languages; these accomplishments being indispensable to those who attached themselves to the courts of the Mohammedan Princes....I devoted myself to the study of the Sanskrit, and the theological works written in it, which contain the body of Hindu literature, law and religion....After my father's death I opposed the advocates of idolatry with still greater boldness; availing myself of the art of printing, now established in India, I published various works and pamphlets against their errors, in the native and foreign languages....(qtd. In Hay 1988: 19-21).

The evolution of the autobiography into its present form in India has parallels to the evolution of the novel in India. Indian autobiography, like the Indian novel, was not derived, to use Sivarama Padikkal's words, "simply from a Western form" nor is it "merely continuing....pre-colonial culture of narrativity" (Padikkal 1993: 222). It is a good mix of the two. In so far as the novel and autobiography in India are a translation of a Western genre, one is seeing a complex historical transaction taking place. As Padikkal puts it, "even the transfer of literary genres can be treated as a part of a tale of resistance" (222). Swami Dayanand Saraswati's autobiography in Marathi is a pioneering example of this tale of resistance. It is not possible to decide whether the autobiographical impulse had this common motive attached to them. But in terms of their effects, the narratives strike us as being impelled more by

reformatory zeal and resistance than the lonely enterprise of the radical rupture between individual and society as it existed in the West (Sinha 1978: 11).

Is the expression "spiritual autobiography" an oxymoron? Is it possible for enlightened spiritual masters who have dissolved their ego to write autobiography? When St. Augustine wrote his *Confessions*, he was conveying the spirit of the dissolution of the ego, the moment of surrender and intense spiritual insight. The primary concern of a spiritual aspirant is the quest for the Self, **that** which pervades the multitude of "selves" which we cognise. Spiritual autobiography springs from the urge to share this experience **with** the world and to impel the reader to embark on a similar quest. This must not be mistaken as indulgence in one's ego and as indicative of the absence of spiritual maturity. However, **the** truth remains **that** the enlightened one who chooses to remain at the highest level of spiritual consciousness is likely to remain silent. It does require that the enlightened one must come down to a certain material level to translate that silence into words. After all spirituality is also the spirit of sharing **the** experience of God **with** the widest commonality of man.

III

Quest for Theory

In this section an attempt is made to problematise some of the characteristic features of the autobiographies under study. This will help us to identify various focal points of analysis in the following chapters. It needs to be noted **that** though spiritual experience per se remains largely independent of any external influences, in spiritual discourses the language, **the** words and **the** forms chosen to narrate spiritual experiences convey strong social, political and cultural messages and hence project the various dimensions of the cultural moment.

I tried to identify a suitable framework for this study and came to the conclusion **that** Western theoretical notions of autobiography were not always

suitable for an analysis of the Indian spiritual autobiographies I was focussing on. For example the place accorded to the authorial self in Western criticism is not suitable in the context of Indian spiritual autobiography because the authorial self is one among the many voices which emerge from the texts. The reason for this is that as G.N. Devy observed in a different context, the functions of literature in India "are not necessarily what the European sociology of literature stipulates"(Devy 1992: 123).

Secondly, Western terminologies do not always apply to Indian texts written in English even though they *appear* to conform to the Western autobiographical form. For example, Carole Slade, in a seminal article, "A Definition of Mystical Autobiography" makes a distinction between mystical autobiography and spiritual autobiography. According to Slade, while both spiritual and mystical autobiography rely on introspection and hermeneutics, the spiritual autobiographer writes from a human perspective and the mystical autobiographer takes the vantage point of the divine. "While the spiritual autobiographer emphasizes his or her own activity in understanding the movements of the soul, the mystical autobiographer foregrounds the divine action that produced those spiritual events; that is, the mystic portrays the interior life as a relationship of the transcendental eternal self with God rather than as introspection actively conducted by the historical, empirical self for the purpose of coming to know God" (Slade 1991: 228). If one measures the texts chosen for study by Slade's parameters, differentiation of them in terms of mystical or spiritual would be difficult. Gandhiji may perhaps be called spiritual while Swami Ramdas is a mystic. The same distinction would not be applicable to Paramahansa Yogananda and Purohit Swami. The apparent distinctions between the human and the divine do get blurred in the narrative. Further, Indian spiritual masters have identified *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* as four paths for the quest and realisation of the self. Each one of these paths may be chosen according to individual temperament. But they also believe that

these paths are not mutually exclusive. One *marga* is inevitably linked with the other three and all four are inextricably linked. Thus, though Gandhiji, for instance, was basically a champion of *karma yoga*, his zest for God-realisation was manifest not only in service (*karma*), but also in his inherent devotion (*bhakti*), in his intellectual apprehension of the scriptures (*jnana*) and in the practice of *raja yoga*. **Swami Ramdas** was a champion of *bhakti yoga*, but he was also a *jnani*, a great *karma yogi* and practised *raja yoga*. Paramahansa Yogananda was a great exponent of the *kriyayoga*, but he was likewise a *jnani*, a great *bhakta* and a *karma yogi*. Their autobiographies represent the complex spiritual pursuit of all four paths. Slade's distinction primarily applies to the dominant strain of Western autobiographies, and they break down in the context of Indian texts. Hence in this study, the term "spiritual" is used as an umbrella term to include those who are in conscious pursuit of the Self through all four paths.

A third question derives from the insight of Slade's reference to spiritual autobiographies as a "hermeneutic genre". What Slade means is elaborated by Linda H. Peterson in her study titled "Gender and Autobiographical Form: the Case of Spiritual Autobiography" where she points out that the English autobiography derives from a Protestant tradition of religious introspection, one that is insistently "hermeneutic":

By "hermeneutic" I mean first that the autobiography from Bunyan to Gosse has placed in the foreground the act of self-interpretation: the **autobiographer's** interpretation of himself and his experience. Second I mean that English autobiographies have traditionally appropriated their pattern and principles of interpretation from biblical hermeneutics (Originally from biblical typology) and that they have done so self-consciously. One might even call autobiography a hermeneutic genre (Peterson 1988: 213).

If Western spiritual autobiographies depend to a large extent on Biblical interpretation, our autobiographies depend on the interpretation of Hindu

culture rather than on a single text like the Bible. These autobiographies have participated in and contributed to the re-interpretation of Hindu scriptures, cultural practices and spiritual traditions to suit the need of the hour in which they were written. For most of the Western autobiographers, Biblical hermeneutics was the source of rhetorical support in narrating their spiritual experiences. Spengemann's point in his *The Forms of Autobiography* (1980) that St. Augustine devised three autobiographical forms viz., historical self-recollection, philosophical self-exploration, and poetic self-expression from which every subsequent autobiographer would select the one most appropriate to his situation is significant. He also identifies certain autobiographies like *Grace Abounding* and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* under historical autobiography, *The Confessions of Jean Jaques Rousseau* and *The Prelude* under philosophical autobiography and *Sartor Resartus*, *David Copperfield* and *The Scarlet Letter* under poetic autobiography. Such a framework comes out of Spengemann's true identification of the trends in Western thought and literature in relation to the notions of the self. Similarly it is important for us to construct our own appropriate frameworks to understand Indian texts. Indian spiritual autobiographies reflect the cultural specificities, cultural encounters and cultural transitions in relation to political developments and dissemination of knowledge in Indian society. The inapplicability of a Western theoretical framework to Indian texts is reiterated by Partha Chatterjee in his *Nation and its Fragments* when he observes that the "inner" domain of national culture has been different and deemed superior in our nationalist discourse (Chatterjee 1993: 6). The study will closely examine the nature of the difference and meeting points in the texts chosen for study. Taken this way, these texts may be seen as a part of the genre of cultural hermeneutics. These autobiographies as "self-life-sketches", do not seek to proclaim the ego-based notion of the self. Instead, they attempt to share the experience of the gradual effacement of the self as ego-sense and its confluent expansion into the Self. It is this experience of

of "expansion" that becomes indescribable. Autobiography is perhaps the best medium to communicate the paradox of existence since the author speaks from a certain level of cognising the nature of Being even while consciously remaining in the range of physical consciousness that embodies the ego sense. These texts thus embody the absent presence of the author in the act of sharing the dissolution of the ego, the experience of "decentredness," the bliss of self-realisation called *aparokshaanubhuti*. The urge to share this bliss in fact leads them to search for a befitting rhetoric to communicate. The very expressions in Eastern philosophy like "*advaita*"¹⁰, "*aparokshanubhuti*"¹¹, "*ashtam drushtamatre*", "*nirmuktam nityamuktam*"¹² that convey the verbal paradox of the human-divine communion are autobiographical. "*Ascharyām*" (wonder) is the word employed in the *Bhagavad Gita* to convey the ineffability of the *atman*. The word also suggests the sense of the seeker being a part and yet not completely merged into the Being. But its very intimation results in evoking a sense of wonder in the seeker. The beginning and end of spiritual quest is this sense of wonder. The very act of reading such texts should be urged by this sense of wonder and willingness to wonder. As Lord Krishna puts it to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*,

*aschryavad pasyati kashchidenam
ascharyad vadati tadaivachanya
aschrya vachaina manyashrunoti
shrutvapyainam vedanachaiva kashchid (29,2).*

(One sees the *atman* as wonder, another speaks of the *atman* as wonder, yet another hears of the *atman* as wonder; still no one knows what truly it is.)

The sense of wonder remains and this is what the texts chosen for study also embody. In the attempt to communicate, the texts divulge the sense of wonder felt at points where the experience cannot be embodied in words. Our scriptures and our saints time and again emphasise the point that verbal communication breaks down when one attempts to explain the ultimate

experience. The expressions of paradox that we **find** in all the scriptures are a testimony to this view. It is in such a sense that spiritual autobiography as a genre also becomes the rhetoric of paradox; the form becomes the rhetoric, one undermines **the** other. Gandhiji's autobiography, for instance, anticipates this in his Introduction: "There are some things which are known only to oneself and one's maker. These are clearly incommunicable" (Gandhi 1927: x). Purohit Swami, in his concluding chapter of the autobiography also addresses the same issue:

Matter and spirit, illusion and reality, *maya* and **brahma** are all equally eternal, and therefore the relations we indicate by the contrasted terms are inscrutable. Information cannot enlighten us concerning them; we can only realise something through experience. . . . we can say nothing that the discursive intelligence can understand, save in distant images and parables, for language is sensuous and reflects the illusions of matter which forever veil and disguise the spirit (Purohit Swami 1993: 150-51).

It is interesting to note that matter, illusion, and *maya* are considered as "sensuous" and are all aspects of the eternal, though they are apparently dichotomous in relation to spirit, Reality and *Brahman*. The problem with words is perhaps that it arises out of the sense of dichotomy and is an instrument of communication in a world that lives in a context of relativity. However for those who have not yet had the experience, only words can inform them there *is* such an experience, one's very existence is a part of it and that we do not need words once we know that experience for ourselves. This is perhaps the function of spiritual autobiography. The lines also interestingly show how the very existence of language is a sign of spiritual ignorance (it has been pointed out that in Nietzsche rhetoric loses its instrumental character and becomes the name for the rootlessness of our being (Bender 1990: 27)). These are some of the ways in which the texts undermine themselves in the narrative.

Nevertheless, saints and sages of all religions have down the ages resorted to various rhetorical devices such as figurative speech, philosophical discourses, songs and commentaries to explain the process of yoking the soul with God for the benefit of humanity. The advantage of spiritual autobiography is that the narration of the nature of spiritual experience, the personal touch in the God-devotee relationship that is conveyed to the reader through the autobiography, often bring a reader closer to the realm of God communion than do other genres.

However in these texts they do not confine themselves to any sense of the conventional framework of autobiography except of course for the fact that they have a bearing on the conventional form. Their pursuit of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* to search for the root of Being also throw light on their temperament and social location. Autobiography becomes the rhetoric, the mode of verbalising the ways of life for self-realisation and essentially mark its difference from its Western counter part.. Their narratives are thus the re-enactment of ~~the~~ the performance of their spiritual pursuit. It is qualified as a *performan c* because, as we shall see, the perception of the world as a cosmic drama, as a cosmic motion picture is a recurring motif in these texts. Life in general and self-realisation or its pursuit in particular, is seen as a conscious enactment of one's role in this cosmic drama and not as destiny's handiwork. Accordingly, the study identifies various *rasas* and *bhavas* that surface in these narratives besides *adbhuta* (surprise) or *ascharya* (wonder) experienced in the course of enacting this role.

It is in this spirit that the chapters have been titled "the rhetoric of *bhakti*", "the rhetoric of *karma*", and so on. By virtue of the choice of the English language and the context of these texts, it is clear that they are not monologues of the author, nor are they dialogues between the author and the reader. They are rather an interplay between various voices, various forms of narratives, various contexts and even planes of consciousness. The very act of

reading becomes "dialogic". The act of writing the text in English is also a dialogic experience. The bilingual nature of these texts cannot be ignored since the experiences and the interactions take place in an indigenous setting, and in the indigenous languages. The autobiographer is also thus a translator. The expression "dialogic" is strongly rooted in Bakhtin's theory of **dialogism**. "Each word", according to Bakhtin, "tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions, contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word" (Bakhtin 1981: 293). Consequently Bakhtin sees language not as a neutral medium but as "over population with intentions of others" (294). It is in spiritual autobiographies like Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* that we can see Bakhtin's multiplicity of voices at work to the maximum degree. The autobiographer is thus a ventriloquist as well. The spiritual vision of the self as universal in fact accommodates the post modern view of the "self as a position, a locus where discourses intersect".¹³

Besides, the narration of one's own spiritual quest as autobiography challenges the notion in Hindu tradition of the autobiographical act as bad manners. The texts include various narrative props that generally may be seen as too fictitious to be included in a genre that takes its form from memory. For example, the employment of **dialogue** between people in profusion in the narrative makes one wonder how it is possible for the autobiographer to remember a dialogue that went on between two people so well. Would not this undermine the "authenticity" of the text? The texts themselves provide the answer. Autobiography is not only a distinct recollection of memory, but as pointed out earlier, it is also a re-enactment of lived experience. It does not undermine the authenticity of experience but *challenges* the role of the author or the reader as the sole "authority" who constructs meanings. The texts blur generic boundaries and conventions of reading. For these reasons, the texts stand the test of literary criticism.

Notes

1 Studies in the Renaissance I have referred to are *Religion in Modern India* (1989) by Robert D. Baird, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Mind* (1988) by David Kopf, *History of the Brahmo Samaj* (1974) by Pandit Sivanath Sastri, and *Renascent India: Raja Rammohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi* (1989) by H.C.E. Zacharias.

2 These terms resemble Bakhtin's "heteroglossia". They, incidentally, also have a strong bearing on Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality that reveals how "every seemingly closed, evidently personal or otherwise situational utterance actually consists of all but infinite interlocking networks of reference, quotation, and paraquotation...every text merges without boundary into every other, just as for Bakhtin ---every word abides in, and itself contains, countless intersecting ideological contexts" (Bender 1990: 37).

3 Partha Chatterjee in his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* has identified this conflict between matter and spirit and similar binaries as the post-Enlightenment "thematic".

4 However, the Western tendency to verbalise spiritual experience is criticised too. For example, Julius Lester points out in "Cultural Nationalism" the following: "With Western culture's emphasis on the verb, the result has been the creation of a subject-object relationship between man and his experience. The verb-oriented culture separates man from his experience in such a way that for a man to relate his experience he must set himself on one side, the experience on the other, and the verb in between to connect the two. Thus, for example, for the German mystic Meister Eckhart to state his oneness with God, he had to say "I am God," which to his congregation sounded like the highest egotism. If Meister Eckhart had been African, he would simply have been possessed by the rhythm of his particular God and exemplified the dynamic oneness" (Lester 1970: 522). Interestingly, in the texts chosen for study, there is a clear resistance to describing spiritual experience in the way Meister Eckhart verbalises. We also find a constant postponement, a deferring, of the verbalising of experience.

5 I have deliberately chosen the word "inflections" in order to show that spiritual autobiographies work like variants of the Renaissance discourse.

6 See Pandit Sivanath Sastri's *History of the Brahmo Samaj* and Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* for details on their meeting and its effect on Keshub Chandra Sen.

7 See Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*: "It is not surprising that in the history of political movements in India, Bankim's direct disciples were the 'revolutionary terrorists' "(Chatterjee 1996: 79). Also see "Preface" to *Anandamath* by William J. Jackson and "Translator's Introduction" in the Orient Paperbacks edition (1992) of the novel. The introduction to the author also points out that *Anandamath* "gave tremendous impetus to the various religious, patriotic and national activities beginning with Hindu Missionary activity and culminating in the terrorist movement in Bengal in the first decade of the twentieth century"(2).

8 Shanti also cautions Jiban regarding the dynamics of power and dissent in the post-battle leadership context as can be seen when she tells him "If they see us now they are sure to say: 'For fear of atonement with death Jiban hid himself somewhere during the battle. Now he is out to claim a share in our kingdom' ". Echoes of these occurring in Gandhiji's adoption of passive resistance and non-violent struggle and his apprehensions regarding leadership questions in the post-independence period show how Bankim's *Anandamath* can be read as anticipating Gandhiji.

9 Shanta Subba Rao has thrown interesting light on Mira Bai's travails as a spiritual aspirant in "Mirabai" published in *Poet Saints of India* (Rao 1996: 111-122).

10 *Advaita Vedanta* of Adi Sankaracharya

11 "The consciousness of the *atman* is a matter of intuitional perception, and as such, any amount of mere ratiocination cannot help to comprehend it. It is more to be felt than reasoned" *Kathopanishad* 2:9.

12 These expressions are from the opening sloka *oi Narayaneeyam* of Melpathur Bhattathiri who lived nearly 500 years ago in Kerala, a contemporary of Poonthanam who wrote *Jnanappaana*

13 These are the words of Felicity Nussbaum in Jan Walsh Hokenson's "Intercultural Autobiography" (Hokenson 1995: 106).

Chapter—III

The Rhetoric of *Karma Yoga*

This chapter examines the rhetoric of *karma yoga* in Mahatma Gandhi's *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) which also embodies his idea of nationalism. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section seeks to establish the relevance of examining this text in this study particularly in the light of Gandhiji's understanding of the term "religion" which is inextricably linked with his idea of the nation. The second section outlines the discursive pattern of the text while the remaining four sections are analyses of the text in detail.

I

Spiritual Quest as Nationalism

The autobiography is a narration of Gandhiji's lived experience in which his quest for the nation and national character is not different from his quest for self-realisation. The narrative style further reinforces the inextricable link between the spiritual and the social in his quest for truth. The style is quite interestingly, a confluence of the confessional and the inspirational modes of narration. The confessional mode is reminiscent of the rhetoric in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The inspirational trope is quite similar to Benjamin Franklin's mode of addressing his audience in his autobiography in which he sets examples of ways of living for the citizens of the United States. A combination of these two tropes in Gandhiji's autobiography further indicates the link between the social or political and the spiritual in Gandhiji's life.¹ Gandhiji construed the term "religion" and practised it "in its broadest sense meaning thereby self-realisation or knowledge of self (Gandhi 1927: 27).

However, this definition and practice of religion was premised upon his struggle for India's independence and the service of India: "I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realised only through service. And service for me was the service of India" (132). The autobiography, thus, is so imbued with the spirit of what is termed as *karma yoga* (which means action with detachment or active inaction that yokes the *Jivatman* with *Paramatman*), that it is virtually possible to perceive Gandhiji's nationalist zeal as the path of his spiritual quest.² Hence, this study will specifically explore the spiritual dimensions of the text particularly the spirit of *karma yoga* that will contribute to our understanding of Gandhiji's vision of the nation.

However, while the language and the form of the autobiographies are decisive factors of this study, the inclusion of this text in my study requires some justification. The reason is that the autobiography was originally written in Gujarati and was later translated into English by Mahadev Desai (under Gandhiji's direct guidance and supervision) in the form in which it is now available to us.³ Second, the autobiography was not originally written in book form, but in instalments for the columns of *Navjivan*: "The Swami [Swami Anand] wanted me to write it separately for publication as a book. But I have no spare time. I could only write a chapter week by week.... Why should it not be the autobiography?" (ix) However the very fact that Gandhiji wrote an autobiography and that it was translated into English in the 1920's helps one to recognise the fact that the text served as a document of resistance to British imperialism and that it generated discourses on spiritual life as integral to nationalist thought. Moreover this analysis is also based on the insights derived from his other important work viz., *Hind Swaraj* which has helped me to pick up the nuances of his characteristic literary style and rhetoric. Also as R.C.P. Sinha points out in defence of his study of Gandhiji in his *Indian Autobiographies in English*, Gandhiji's autobiography is an outstanding contribution to the genre and a study of Indian autobiography will indeed remain incomplete without

attention to it. Moreover the text was translated into English under the direct supervision of Gandhi who was after all a master of English prose (Sinha 1978: 3). Prof. K. Srinivasa Iyengar cites the instance of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* to justify the inclusion of Gandhiji in his study of Indian writing in English: "If I have erred in including an appreciation of *My Experiments with Truth* in my book, I am at least in very good and honourable company" (4). I had these precedents in mind in including Gandhiji's autobiography in my study.

The dialogic imperatives in the narration enable us to examine the text not just as a "self-life-sketch" but as a mediation on discourses and counter discourses that went into the shaping of events to come at crucial points of time in the history of the nation. In this study I have detached Gandhiji as an individual and elevated him as a contrapuntal representation of a *way of life*. Paramahansa Yogananda in his autobiography views Gandhiji as "Innocent artist he was in all ways of his life, Gandhi became a supreme artist at the moment of his death" (Yogananda 1974: 446). Sunil Khilnani, in his Introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Gandhiji's autobiography views Gandhiji as an "artful choreographer of his doings" (Khilnani 2001: 1). Needless to say, Gandhiji's 'performance' is intimately bound up with nation building, resistance to imperialism and the decolonisation of the mind.

The autobiography constantly challenges us to clarify our understanding of terms like culture, education, religion, secularism, spirituality and modernity. In this respect Gandhiji's autobiography echoes his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* published in 1910. The autobiography also reads as a mellowed version of the spiritual and **nationalist** verve found in the *Hind Swaraj*. *Hind Swaraj* is an explicit dialogue between the reader and the editor while *An Autobiography* is an implicit dialogue. Anthony J. Parel points out the advantage of the dialogue form in his Introduction to *Hind Swaraj*:

Dialogues, especially those on 'difficult subjects', remain open-ended affairs, requiring an attitude of give and take from the participants. There is little room for dogmatism, and this should be kept in mind when interpreting the controversial issues in the book, including the topic of modern civilisation. Even when the argument seems conclusive, it is open to further discussion by other people at other times. Being open to each other's point of view is of course the hall mark of a *satyagrahi* (Parel 1997: xli).

Hind Swaraj both in form and content, documents the spirit and thought of Gandhiji in his formative years while *An Autobiography* is a sublime, mellowed rendition of the lived experience of the ideas and thought expounded in *Hind Swaraj*. The autobiography like *Hind Swaraj* manifests its dialogic proportions when it generates a flux of discourses and dialogues at every fresh reading of the text in any cultural moment. A close look at the introduction to the autobiography reveals the dialogic tendencies in the text. At the outset, in the introduction, the author addresses through the voice of his "God-fearing friend" the feasibility of attempting "anything like an autobiography" and on the consistency of utterances made in the autobiography:

But a God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. 'What has set you on this adventure?' he asked. 'Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence. And what will you write? Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today, or supposing you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your word, spoken or written, may be misled? Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet?' (Gandhi 1927:ix).

The passage is not merely the reservations of an individual. It highlights a problematic cultural difference between the East and the West and the consequent scepticism and resistance of a native 'consciousness to a literary practice peculiar to an alien imperialist culture.⁴ At this point it is this sense of cultural difference that resists the autobiographical act. Second, we find the **genre-itself** subjected to interrogation on grounds of human infirmities through the passage of time when the friend asks: "Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today...",

A third dimension is also brought out when Gandhiji turns his attention to the reader and engages in a dialogue with her on questions of the form and the content of his narrative. A wonderful amalgamation of the form and the content takes place here:

But it is *not* my purpose to *attempt* a *real* autobiography. I simply want to *tell* the *story* of my numerous *experiments* with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the *story* will take the *shape* of an autobiography. But I shall not mind if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. . . . But I should certainly like to *narrate* my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. *If* the *experiments* are really *spiritual*, then there can be *no* room for *self-praise* (ix-x).

A bargain between "attempt[ing] a real autobiography" in the Western sense and "tell[ing] the story of my experiments" reminiscent of the indigenous oral tradition-is taking place. There is spontaneity in the rhetoric of the bargain. The tendency to narrate one's own life objectively as a "story" is interesting. A deal struck, the result is synthesis. Since the narrator's life is full of experiments, note that the story is said to take *only* the *shape* of an autobiography. The precondition is that if the content is nothing but spiritual experiments, which he

shall not mind at any rate, then there is no room for self-praise. Thus though the text is autobiography in shape, it is the story of his performance of spiritual experiments in content and hence not a real autobiography. It is possible to see the entire text as a negotiation between the Western form and the Indian content particularly when he uses the rhetoric of science to convey the spirit of his quest:

I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final (x-xi)

I hope and pray that no one will regard the advice interspersed in the following chapters as authoritative. The experiments narrated should be regarded as illustrations, in the light of which everyone may carry on his own inclination and capacity (xii).

Such an idea of the phrase "experiments with truth" also interestingly rejects the claims of science as "truths" and also the anthropomorphic notion of God. The experiment is a middle path that accommodates scientific temperament and faith which dismantles the science/religion dichotomy. Truth for Gandhiji is God that manifests itself in human beings through acts of virtue. The passage also anticipates the conversional effects of his experiments on the reader.⁵

As though intuitively apprehending critical pronouncements on the questions of veracity, authenticity and consistency pertaining to generic

considerations, Gandhiji devotes one chapter in between to address these issues in the chapter titled "Intimate European contacts-Part I". Gandhiji holds that he is not writing the autobiography to please critics. It is here that he expressly mentions that writing itself is one of the experiments with truth. Moreover he started writing it in compliance with his co-workers' wishes (234). Further he problematises an author's predicament in his choice and evasion of events and names of people in the narrative:

I understand more clearly today what I read long ago about the inadequacy of all autobiography as history. I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interests of truth? (234).

Gandhiji's belief that a man of truth must be a man of caution manifests itself in his strong awareness of his audience and of the possibilities of the audience interpreting his utterances:

Only those matters of religion that can be comprehended as much by children as by older people, will be **included** in this story. If I can narrate them in a dispassionate and humble spirit, many other experimenters will find in them provision for their onward march (x).

Also in the chapter on intimate European contacts, his predicament on what to mention and what to omit is expressed; for "If things that are relevant are omitted truth will be dimmed" (234). The same predicament urges him to stop his narration at a certain point:

And my principal experiments during the past seven years have all been made through the Congress. A reference to my relations with the leaders would therefore be unavoidable, if I set about describing my experiments further. And this may not do, at any

rate for the present, if only from a sense of propriety (419).

When Gandhiji treats autobiography writing itself as one of the experiments with truth (234), he is providing interesting theoretical insights into autobiography writing as a* spiritual, nationalist enterprise. These preliminary remarks hopefully place in perspective the linkages between spirituality, nationalism and the autobiographical act in Gandhiji. The following sections try to show Gandhiji representing 'ways of living' in which spirituality and nationalism amalgamate.

II

Gandhiji's 'Ways of Living'

Judith Brown in her study *Gandhi - Prisoner of Hope* (1990) holds that Gandhiji's own attempt to trace his spiritual pilgrimage is erratic in the autobiography and often confusing if the reader is seeking some clear chronological development or reasoned analysis:

In Gandhi's case the difficulties are compounded by the fact that there is no 'conversion experience' as a landmark, as is so often the case in a Christian context. Although there were in his South African years certain times and experiences crucial in his inner development - his first year of religious ferment, reading a seminal book, the vow of celibacy, the writing of *Hind Swaraj* - his experience was more a process of deepening enlightenment and discovery, influenced by a multiplicity of sources which reinforced each other (Brown 1990: 74).

One may agree with Brown's view that Gandhiji's spiritual experience was more a process of deepening enlightenment and discovery. But the narrative is not so erratic as Brown points it out to be. It is erratic, if one were to place it in

the Christian context and then look for a 'conversion experience' as the turning point in his life. Brown's predicament comes from using Western theoretical paradigms to understand a text deeply rooted in another culture. The following analysis demonstrates that it is possible to trace a clear chronological development or reasoned analysis of spirituality in Gandhiji's autobiography if one were to look at the narrative from the point of view of Hindu religious tradition particularly in its concept of the four *ashrama dharmas*:

A clear discursive pattern based on the *ashrama dharmas* emerges in the autobiography itself. *An Autobiography* is divided into five parts. It can be seen that every part narrates a particular way of living that dominates Gandhiji's lifestyle during that particular period and points to significant transition from one *ashrama* to the next. Part one and two show Gandhiji's travails as a householder and also the re-orientations in the Gandhi household brought about by the onset of modernity through English education. Part three shows Gandhiji's increasing inclination towards control of the senses. This culminates in his taking the vow of celibacy and the practise of it. Part four focuses on his life away from the country in South Africa, rigorously practising the ideals of dispossession and self-help. Part five marks his active entry into the Indian political arena and is notable for his initiation into the life of an ascetic. These life patterns narrated in the autobiography are analysed as Gandhiji's own version of the four stages in the *ashrama dharma* mentioned in the Hindu scriptures as *brahmacharya* (celibacy, studenthood) *garhastya* (householderhood) *vanaprastha* (mendicant hood) and *sannyasa* (asceticism). A conscious pursuit or a strict observance of the life style prescribed for each of these stages facilitates spiritual awakening and evolution of consciousness, thereby ensuring freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Since Gandhiji married as a child, the only deviation from the usual order set forth by the Scriptures is in his starting with *garhastya* and then moving on to *brahmacharya* and the subsequent stages. There is no indication in the narrative that Gandhiji set forth to follow these patterns

consciously though there are indications that he was strongly aware of these stages. Gandhiji re-interprets *ashrama dharma* in order to strike a balance between tradition and modernity.

III

Dynamics of *Garhastya*

The stage of householderhood in Gandhiji's life can be divided into three phases. The first phase portrays an almost idyllic picture of an erstwhile **traditional** Indian family, with vignettes of its members as active in the then political, social and religious spheres in which Gandhiji's parents also figure. The second phase reveals the role of certain colonial cultural practices in causing re-orientations to the Indian system of the household. Here we notice Gandhiji's **encounter** with the period of transition effected by the onset of modernity through Western education. Here the individual rebels and his interests clash with the community's interests and prevail over them. He even counters their ambivalence towards any affiliation with Western cultural practices. Changes take place in the configuration of his family setup due to the demands of a modern professional practice like the law. Part one and part two of the autobiography mark these two phases. Now the third phase marks a reconstitution of the family setup that ascribes a broader definition to the term "householder". The analysis will explore how this way of living extends to the concept of community living and broadens the space of the household, breaks the class/caste distinctions and makes *garhastya* synonymous with nationhood and spiritual living.

Part one and two of the autobiography sketch Gandhiji's formative years. Here we see that it is not the experiences as such but his response to the experiences which go into making Gandhiji's ways of living truly **spiritual**. These formative years are punctuated with conflicts at various levels, some of

which would represent the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Here the narrative style is akin to that of Christian confessions. We have at the outset the individual interests and societal interests clashing at various levels. We encounter these expressions of conflicts, both inner and outer, rendered through various rhetorical devices. Humour is one such device employed here. Depicting one's own innate passion for truth in an autobiography, but in defiance to **any** possibility of sounding self-righteous, is a challenging exercise. Gandhi⁵ achieves this by letting his characteristic sense of humour permeate the narrative. This is incidentally a major premise of dialogism.⁶ For instance, recollecting his initial school days, he modestly reports in chapter I-

It was with some difficulty that I got through the multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt, in company with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names, would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish, and my memory raw (5).

In chapter II, we have the oft-quoted 'kettle' incident which is an instance of the most powerful dialogic rendition of an episode through humour:

The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot, but I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been *stupid*. *The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect*. I never could learn the art of 'copying' (5-6).

"Honesty" here is depicted as "stupidity" from another's point of view. What is depicted is not a contrasting picture of honesty and dishonesty but of one through the other.

For an individual, striking a balance between one's own contending interests in a traditional Indian household was no easy job. Gandhiji focuses on the inner conflict between his "devotion" to parents and "lustful love" towards his wife. This also is a metaphor of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit:

I was devoted to my parents. But no less was I devoted to the passions that flesh is heir to. I had yet to learn that all happiness and pleasure should be sacrificed in devoted service to my parents___'Renunciation of objects, without the renunciation of desires, is short lived, however hard you may try.' Whenever I sing this song or hear it sung, this bitter untoward incident rushes to my memory and fill me with shame (8-9).

A series of incidents that point to the conflict between the flesh and the spirit follow, the most important of them being his experiments with vice which his friend initiates him into. Gandhiji befriends this friend in a reformatory zeal but in turn falls prey to his counter reformatory zeal. The context was "the wave of 'reform' sweeping over Rajkot" (17). The bait was the friend's explanation that "the English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters. We are a weak people because we do not eat meat. Our teachers and other distinguished people who eat meat are no fools. They know its virtues. You should do likewise..."(17). The vice comes in the garb of virtue, reminiscent of Satan's strategies employed to deflect those from their search for Truth. Also note that this is the first reference made in the text to the movements in the country on self-empowerment to counter the mighty Englishman. The "wave of reform" was to strengthen the weak Indian's physical prowess that would make him mentally fearless. Gandhiji unable to

savour this path of "reform" searched for alternatives. He worked on spiritual methods to attain physical, mental and spiritual prowess **that** would serve to **decolonise** the mind, strengthen **the** body and the spirit and through **this** decolonise **the** country. The decolonisation of the outer world was to be achieved by first decolonising the inner world. In this chapter Gandhiji makes a passing reference to the popularity of a doggerel by the Gujarati poet Narmad which was popular among the school boys:

Behold the mighty Englishman
He rules the Indian small
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall (18)

By quoting this doggerel Gandhiji is of course underlining his own understanding of the English power as having more to do with cultural, legal and political systems than with physical prowess as popularly understood.

In his experiments with meat-eating, brothel visits, smoking, stealing and suicide attempts, a teenager's characteristic tendency to break the rules of the household is seen. But Gandhiji was one in whom the voice of the conflict between the spirit and the flesh was too loud to be ignored. For instance, on the meat-eating experience, Gandhiji describes his inner struggle:

The goat's meat was as tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating.

I had a very bad night afterwards. A horrible nightmare haunted me. Every time I dropped off to sleep it would seem as though a live goat were bleating inside me and I would jump up full of remorse. But **then** I would remind myself that meat-eating was a duty and so became more cheerful (19)

One can see that the nature of the conflict is complex. **Meat-eating** was carried out on account of patriotism much against familial norms and against

one's own conscience. It is not surprising therefore if Gandhiji should have searched for alternative measures to decolonise the nation.

Two incidents, one narrated in chapter VIII "Stealing and Atonement" and the second in chapter IX, "My Father's Death and Double Shame" mark a denouement in his involvement with such experiments. The first gave him a lesson in *ahimsa*. The second, as Erik H. Erikson points out in his psychoanalytical study *Gandhi's Truth*, had a major impact on his mind and was instrumental in his taking the *brahmacharya* vow in later years. A third re-orientation in his householderhood is in his leaving for England for higher studies. The suggestion from their well wisher that Gandhiji should go to England to study law is received with ambivalence in the Gandhi household. On the one hand we see Gandhiji's mother's apprehensions in sending a young man to England and on the other we see Gandhiji's brother's sense of sacrifice in helping him against all odds to make the trip. Nevertheless Gandhiji is made to take the vow that he will not touch wine, woman and meat.

Another hurdle awaited him in Bombay and that was the objection of his caste people. This clash of interests between the individual and the community and tradition and modernity is portrayed quite dramatically in chapter XII titled "Outcaste". Between the contending claims of tradition and modernity, Gandhiji strikes a wonderful balance in this incident. His resistance, in the course of his balancing act, is to the baseless apprehension of his caste people on the one hand and to the negative influence of modernity on the other. It is important to note that Gandhiji narrates this encounter in a dialogue form:⁷

'In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is **not** possible to live there without compromising our religion. One is obliged to eat and drink **with** Europeans!'

To which I replied: 'I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from the three things you fear most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe.'

'But we tell you, rejoined the Sheth, 'that it is not possible to keep our religion there. You know my relations with your father and you ought to listen to my advice.'

'I know these relations, said I, 'and you are as an elder to me. But I am helpless in this matter. I cannot alter my resolve to go to England. My father's friend and adviser, who is a learned Brahman, sees no objection to my going to England, and my mother and my brother have also given me their permission'

'But will you disregard the orders of the caste?'

'I am really helpless. I think the caste should not interfere in the matter.' This incensed the Sheth. He swore at me. I sat unmoved. So the Sheth pronounced his order: 'This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas' (34-35).

Through this ~~resistance~~ and balance, Gandhiji ventures into experiments in dietetics and becomes a champion of vegetarianism during his stay in England. This marks the first unconscious step towards the challenging and arduous path of the quest for self-realisation. He notes in chapter XVII "Experiments in Dietetics" that,

My experiments in England were conducted from the point of view of economy and hygiene. The religious aspect of the question was not considered until I went to South Africa where I undertook strenuous experiments which will be narrated later. The seed, however, for all of them was sown in England (50).

However Gandhiji points out that experiments in plain living had a positive impact on his body and mind:

Let not the reader think that this living made my life by any means a dreary affair. On the contrary the change harmonized my inward and outward life. It was also more in keeping with the means of my family. My life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds of joy (47).

Scriptures hold that food habits play a major role in controlling one's senses and any fresh initiate into spiritual practice must observe dietary restrictions as the first step towards gaining control over his senses. Moreover fasting was to become Gandhiji's non-violent weapon against colonisers and communal forces.

The influence of Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism* on Gandhiji is significant:

From the date of reading this book, I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice.... I had all along abstained from meat in the interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission (41).

A number of such books by the English were instrumental in convincing Gandhiji of the positive aspects of vegetarianism. These books seem to have given him logical explanations for what originally began as a religious taboo attached to non-vegetarian food. The explanation as Gandhiji points out in "Experiments in Dietetics" was based on religious, scientific, practical and medical aspects. This appealed to Gandhiji's reasoning spirit. Vegetarianism

also contributed to deepening Gandhiji's sense of morality in action during his stay in England. We also see another instance in which Oriental studies brought the colonial subject closer to one's own scriptures and also to Western thought. This as we can see in Gandhiji resulted in the comparative study of religions. Chapter X "Glimpses of Religion", and chapter XX "Acquaintance with Religions" in part one and chapter one "Raychandbhai", chapter XI "Christian Contacts", chapter XV "Religious Ferment" and chapter XXII "Comparative Study of Religions" in part two should be read together in order to get a full picture of the way in which exposure to scriptures and sectarian practices both Eastern and Western in his formative years in England and South Africa became significant. "Glimpses of Religion", as the title suggests is a chapter on Gandhiji's preliminary, but significant encounters, with most of the world religions in the Gandhi household in India. The chapter is also a critique of Hindu methods of worship and Christian missionary enterprise. For instance when Gandhiji says that he had to often go to the *Haveli*,

...it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality practised there, and lost all interest in it (27).

He is in fact pointing to a moral decadence in Hinduism as it was practised in those days, in some parts of the country. The second instance is more significant in the colonial context because it refers to activities of the Christian missionaries in India:

In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods I could not endure this... I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about

in European costume including a hat—I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of *his ancestors, their customs and their country*. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity (28-29, emphasis mine).

In Gandhiji's dialogic narration, the "country" is objectively perceived from the point of view of the convert — "their country". Note that for the new convert it ceases to be his country and the customs cease to be his anymore. It is to be noted that Gandhiji criticises not Christianity as such but the way it is practised and its disruptive force. Even in South Africa, Gandhiji recollects instances of Indian Christians alienating themselves from other Indians and owing allegiance to the English. Gandhiji painfully interrogates Christianity and critiques the **proselytisation** policy of Christian missionaries that effaces one's sense of identity with one's nation: "Was this the meaning of Christianity? Did they cease to be Indians because they had become Christians?" (116). Gandhiji is not alone in his resentment. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism is an effect of proselytisation, the divide and rule policy of the British and of colonial cultural hegemonic practices. It goes without saying that these remarks should not be mistaken to be Gandhiji's final word on Christianity as such. "Acquaintance with Religions" documents his first encounter with the *Holy Bible* and his special attraction for the Sermon on the Mount. By then he had also started a careful study of Hindu scriptures, the *Bhagavad Gita* in particular. It was through the Theosophists that Gandhiji gained a wider and deeper perspective on Hinduism. Their works also served to dispel Gandhiji's several wrong notions about Hinduism which had almost made him an atheist. Madame Blavatsky's *Key to Theosophy* "stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition" (58). Moreover, Mrs. Besant's book *How I Became a Theosophist* in turn strengthened his aversion to atheism. It is significant that Gandhiji's first encounter with the *Bhagavad Gita*, the text that was to

influence him and guide his experiments with ways of living, took place in England at the instance of the Theosophists. The age was noted for its Orientalism in the West and of revivalism in India. This, as has been noted earlier, facilitated the circulation of a number of Eastern religious texts in the West. For the English educated Indian the re-discovery of religious practices and scriptures took place in the context of socio-cultural cross-currents. For Gandhiji too such contexts became instrumental in his devising new ways of living for formulating a new sense of national identity and nationhood.

Chapter One of Part Two marks the entry of Raychandbhai, to whom Gandhiji ascribed the status of his spiritual mentor, into his life. We can infer from Gandhiji's description that Raychandbhai was a true *karma yogi* (74). Interestingly, this anticipates Gandhiji's later role as a *karma yogi* for it is said that one's spiritual aptitude determines one's spiritual guide. Gandhiji himself points out in this chapter that "one gets the Guru that one deserves" (74). Though Gandhiji could not place Raychandbhai "on the throne of (his) heart as guru", as a mentor, Raychandbhai was a constant source of inspiration in his spiritual quest.

It is important that though Gandhiji's first encounter with Christianity in India was unpleasant, he spared no chances to mend this dislike during his stay in England and South Africa. Chapters like "First Day in Pretoria", "Christian Contacts", "Religious Ferment" and "Comparative Study of Religions" show that Gandhiji had kept an open mind in his interactions with Christian missionaries and Christian friends on matters relating to Christianity. These chapters also provide, through Gandhiji's characteristic humour, a critique of Christianity as it was interpreted, preached and practised in England and in India, as a part of colonial policy. Gandhiji with latent sharpness and humour attacks the rhetoric of persuasion in Christian preachings. He challenges their notion that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in Him, would have everlasting life. "If God could have sons, all of us

were his sons____My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there must be some truth in it" (113). Gandhiji felt that philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. Even after years of maintaining contacts with Christians, discussions, participation in prayer services and careful study of books on Christianity, what repelled him perhaps was the Christian stance that Christianity was "a perfect religion" or the greatest of all religions". He was not entirely satisfied with the Bible and its accepted interpretation (104). However Edward Maitland's *The Perfect Way* and *The New Interpretation of the Bible* seemed to satisfy Gandhiji; he says "they seemed to support Hinduism"(114). Gandhiji was equally critical of Hinduism, particularly in his denunciation of untouchability. Islam also influenced him:

As Christian friends were endeavouring to convert me, even so were Musalman friends. Abdullah Sheth had kept on inducing me to study Islam, and of course he had always something to say regarding its beauty____I purchased Sale's translation of the Koran and began reading it. I also obtained other books on Islam (114). -

However Gandhiji nowhere in these chapters critiques Islam the way he critiques **Christianity** and Hinduism. Under Raychandbhai's constant guidance Gandhi undertakes a wider and deeper study of a number of Hindu sacred texts. Special mention, however, must be made of Tolstoy's influence on Gandhiji:

Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance (114-15).

The lasting impact of Tolstoy's life and thought on Gandhiji can be seen percolating through the lifestyle he adopted in his later years in South Africa and then in India. The chapter "Comparative Study of Religions" shows Gandhiji's path of spiritual quest well-defined:

I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realised only through service. And service for me was the service of India, because it came to me without my seeking, because I had an aptitude for it. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realisation (132).

As we read Gandhiji's reports of his encounters with a number of religious texts we realise that he was also acquiring *jnana*, through reading and studying scriptures and contemplation:

The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies. Thus I began some of the Yogi practices, as well as I could understand them from a reading of the Hindu books. But I could not get on very far, and decided to follow them with the help of some expert when I returned to India. The desire has never been fulfilled (133).

Nevertheless this desire was fulfilled years later in Wardha ashram when Swami Paramahansa Yogananda visited Gandhi in the year 1935. Yogananda initiated him into *kriya yoga* practice. Yogananda devotes one entire chapter of his autobiography to this **meeting and** initiation:

On the previous night Gandhi had expressed a wish to receive the Kriya Yoga of Lahiri Mahasaya. I was

touched by the Mahatma's **open-mindedness** and spirit of enquiry. He is childlike in his divine quest, revealing that pure receptivity which Jesus praised in children, of such is the Kingdom of heaven (Yogananda 1946: 437).

These instances show that Gandhiji never left any stone unturned in his quest for self-realisation. Though the path of *karma* was his primary concern, Gandhiji did attempt to practice *yoga*, gain *jnana* and feel *bhakti*. Further Tolstoy's books prompted him to explore the unending potentiality of universal love (Gandhi 1927: 133).

In the light of the above instances one can easily infer that Gandhiji's religious temperament was marked by receptivity to various ideas while at the same time he adopted a selective approach in implementing these ideas to conduct his experiments with his ways of living. Margaret Chatterjee in her insightful study *Gandhi's Religious Thought* aptly describes this aspect of Gandhiji "if not as concordant discord (within the scope of his new person) then as contrapuntal in a way which challenges new listening" (Chatterjee 1983: 9). This also partly explains Gandhiji's unfulfilled quest for a *Guru*. Gandhiji was not one who could easily have aligned himself with a specific method, approach or doctrine propounded by a spiritual head. He himself was independent, sceptical, experimental, selective and consistently inconsistent in his methods. He chose to model and remodel, process, revise and re-interpret all the religious principles he encountered, assimilated and implemented in his life-long experiments. Thus his *Guru*, his master, was his own self. He followed the dictates of the inner voice of the self in the course of his experiments. Margaret Chatterjee is also right in pointing out that Gandhiji was "no eclectic, if by eclecticism we mean a patchwork of ideas culled from here and there, guided by the whim of the moment and the chance influences that may come one's way.... But the man and his thought reveal far more than eclecticism. ,

What emerges is a personal **testament** which is strangely moving" (9). Chatterjee's recognition of Gandhiji's "contrapuntality" strikes me as similar to my reading of the autobiography as a contrapuntal rendition of Gandhiji's way of living in the context of socio-cultural transitions. The apparent dichotomies of tradition and modernity, simplicity and sophistication, layperson's living and sublime thinking all melted and merged into Gandhiji's ways of living as he zealously worked towards reducing himself to a "zero" (Gandhi 1927: 420). This in fact, Gandhiji recognised, is the be-all and end-all of self-realisation. Gandhiji's life was consistently guided by this awareness.

We will briefly survey the re-orientations in the Gandhi household on Gandhiji's return from England and then his subsequent settling in South Africa. Gandhiji **self-critically** depicts the influence of Western education on a traditional Indian household. For instance, on his return from England, the expenses in the Gandhi household mounted on account of Gandhiji's as well as his brother's attempts at Europeanising their lifestyle. The cultural imperatives a modern profession would engender and their impact on the traditional family setup, life and manners are narrated self-critically and with characteristic humour. When Gandhiji's self-less service and concern for the rights of Indians in South Africa demanded a longer stay in South Africa, Gandhiji moved in with his wife, nephew and children. Gandhiji looks back to see how he laboured to impose changes in his family's lifestyle in order to cater to the demands of his professional and social identity in South Africa:

So I had to think out the details of the dress to be adopted by my wife and children, the food they were to eat, and the manners which would be suited to their new surroundings.... I believed, at the time of which I am writing, that in order to look civilised, our dress and manners had, as far as possible, to approximate to the European standard. Because, I thought, only then could we have some influence

and without influence it would not be possible to serve the community.

I therefore determined the style of dress for my wife and children. How could I like them to be known as Kathiawad Banias? (155)

Gandhiji draws a connection between "civilised looks" a "European standard" and his ability and "influence to serve the community". Also note how Gandhiji decides to ~~adopt~~ the Parsi dress code:

The Parsi used then to be regarded as the most civilised people amongst Indians, and so, when the complete European style seemed to be unsuited, we adopted the Parsi style (155).

Note how "civilization" is made synonymous with "Europeanisation". These remarks subtly record some of the very many ways in which colonial culture seeped into an average English educated Indian's life. Colonisation was more of the mind than of the body. As Gandhiji explicitly states in *Hind Swaraj*, we ourselves are to be blamed for consciously or unconsciously facilitating colonialism. The chapter "Education of Children" in the autobiography reveals two aspects of Gandhiji's formative years. He identifies a connection between liberty and learning. He realised, though not entirely clear to himself at that time, that English education will not serve to liberate the young Indian minds but will bind them to the negative aspects of Western civilisation. He greatly feels the need for the children to stay with the parents in their youth. Also Gandhiji ~~beginns~~ to experience the merging of the public and the private. Inevitably, it was causing mild tensions in the home front, especially with his children, and in matters concerning their education and raising. This chapter is significant for its revelation of a number of his tensions regarding his eldest son, their differences of opinion:

... though I have *not been* able to give them a literary education either to their or to my satisfaction, I am *not quite sure*, as I look back on my past years, that I have *not done* my duty to them to the best of my capacity. *Nor do I regret not having* sent them to public schools. I have always felt that the *undesirable* traits I jsee today in my eldest son are an écho of my own *undisciplined* and *unformulated* early life. I regard that time as a period of half-baked knowledge and indulgence. It coincided with the most impressionable years of my eldest son, and naturally he has *refused* to regard it as my time of indulgence and inexperience. He has on the *contrary* believed that that was the brightest period of my life, and the changes, effected later, have been done due to *delusion, miscalled* enlightenment. And well he might (167-68).

The proliferation of negatives in the above sentences is worthy of note. The narrative follows as though the thought and the language guide each other. Gandhiji attains to a rhetoric which matches his intention directly. The contemplative, moody tone and the unwieldy nature of the situation make the thought and the narrative reinforce each other, thereby creating form out of content and content out of form. This chapter should be seen as narrating one of the most crucial phases in the life of a *karma yogi* and shows the path of a seeker as problematic. Here not only the seeker but also his dependants suffer. This is clear from the way Kasturba, much against her will is asked to join him in the "service" of emptying the chamber pot used by Gandhiji's companion. On the other hand, the chapter "Spirit of Service" is one of the most enlightening for a householder. Gandhiji, by depicting the nature of his own relationship with his wife, discusses the possibilities of striking a balance between the material and the spiritual as a *gruhasta*. His participation in parenting is a case in point:

I read Dr. Tribhuvandas' book, *Ma-ne Shikhaman* 'Advice to a Mother' — and I nursed both my children according to the instructions given in the book, tempered here and there by such experiments as I had gained elsewhere The birth of the last child put me to the severest test____I had to see through the safe delivery of the baby. My careful study of the subject in Dr. Tribhuvandas' work was of inestimable help. I was not nervous (170).

Significantly, Gandhiji's participation in parenting and his assumption of feminine roles, anticipates his recognition of woman power in nation building and their role in the non-violent struggle for independence. Ketu H. Katrak's views may be invoked at this point to understand this observation in a better light:

...Gandhi enjoined Indian men and women to engage in acts of passive resistance which feminized the usually masculinist struggle against the colonizer; who more than women, used to maneuvering patiently through patriarchal authority, could offer better models of passive resistance....Gandhi represented himself as "female", performing "feminine" roles like Spinning. His own feminization in this type of political iconography — the image of the "Mahatma" sitting before the "charkha" patiently spinning "khadi" — was effective particularly in mobilizing women and men for *satyagraha* work (Katrak 1992: 395, 397).

Also relevant to our concerns in this study are Gandhiji's views on the spiritual dimensions of the man-woman relationship and of sexuality. Gandhiji, like the spiritual masters, held that sexual union should not be for the fulfilment of lust, but only for the purposes of bearing children. He also holds that the physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception had an impact on the baby (Gandhi 1927: 170). It was perhaps for this reason that Gandhiji stressed the need to control lust during sexual union. Gandhiji as

a nation builder, throws light on the fact that to ensure a healthy **mind**ed future generation for the country, parents have to practise abstinence and maintain sound mental health:

...during the period of pregnancy it [the child] continues to be affected by the mother's moods desires and temperament, as also by her ways of life. After birth the child imitates the parents, and for a considerable number of years entirely depends on them for its growth (170).

Gandhiji also sensitises the readers to the deeper meanings of existence and procreation. The chapter also touches on the *brahmacharya* vow which is the central concern in the subsequent chapters of the autobiography:

The world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the playground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. He who realizes this will control his lust at any cost, equip himself with the knowledge necessary for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of his progeny, and give the benefit of that knowledge to posterity (170-71).

IV

Potency of *Brahmacharya*

Gandhi was seeking a transformation of Indian, and ultimately human, society. This he felt could only come about through a change at the level of the individual's body and soul, as well as in his or her relations with others. He realized that in this process, sexuality had to be redefined, and **male-female** relations transformed before other changes could take place. Why he chose to solve this problem through an advocacy of celibacy can be explained

partly by his own personal circumstances, and partly through the influence of strands of thought emanating from both Hinduism and Victorian England. (Caplan 1987: 272).

Brabmacharya or celibacy is regarded as the first phase in a human being's *ashramadharma*, according to Hindu scriptures. Studenthood is synonymous with *brabmacharya*, for the seeker of knowledge should lead a life free of responsibilities, worldly desires and lust and thus develop the power of concentration in order to pursue knowledge. But in Gandhiji's time the practice of child marriage was in vogue and thus, one often embarked on one's life's journey with the responsibility and practices of a *gruhasta*, the householder. Young girls were prepared by elders to assume the role of a wife at a very tender age. It was not surprising if *brahmacharya* were to be observed at a later stage in one's life in such social circumstances. But *brahmacharya* would prove its potency and effect if it were consciously pursued and practised during a stage in one's life when its practice would mean rigorous effort - when one was still young and married. Gandhiji, receptive to various religious discourses and austerities that circulated around him in that period also embarked upon this major step in his spiritual pursuit. As we have seen, Gandhiji's South African experiences moulded him politically and spiritually. Significantly, the *brahmacharya* vow was also taken during his service in South Africa:

I had been wedded to a monogamous ideal ever since my marriage, faithfulness to my wife being part of the love of truth. But it was in South Africa that I came to realize the importance of observing *brahmacharya* even with respect to my wife (Gandhi 1927: 171).

It is interesting to note that Gandhiji discusses the significance of *brahmacharya* in two chapters of Part Three of the autobiography. Thereafter he narrates several social and spiritual experiments he carried out which ultimately

led him to take the *brahmacharya* vow. He takes up the issue only in Chapter XXV, "Heart Searchings" in Part IV of the text. Hence one needs to understand the importance of Gandhiji broaching this topic well ahead in Part III, Chapter VII of the autobiography. Gandhiji's idea must have been to sensitise the reader to the circumstances that worked towards his taking the vow, the slow invasion of the private by the public life, of the material by the spiritual. Gandhiji also believed with Nishkulanand that "renunciation without aversion is not lasting" and he wanted to show the ways in which "aversion" took place and how aversion facilitated renunciation. Gandhiji himself admits that his main object in this venture was to escape having more children. But the fact that he began to strive for self-control instead of using contraceptives shows that he had succeeded in checking his desires. Gandhiji's experiments with the regulation of the body and sublimation of its instincts is germane to his idea of the way of life as an individual who belongs to a nation should adopt. *Brahmacharya* thus not only means the seeker's control over lust physically but also over the senses in thought, word and deed. Simple living is but a step towards achieving the highest ideal of gaining complete freedom from lust. To that end, Gandhiji's attempts at self-help in washing his own clothes, in cutting his hair prove to be significant. The chapter on the Boer war re-asserts his role in public life as a *karma yogi* while "Sanitary Reform and Famine Relief has both microcosmic and macrocosmic significance — in identifying and eradicating impurities that plague both the inner and the outer world. In Gandhiji's case one must say that the cleansing of the outer facilitated the cleansing of the inner and in South Africa under his initiative, Indians recognised the need for keeping the environment clean and worked towards it. This led to the authorities becoming sympathetic to assertion of their rights by Indians.. There is a statement in this chapter which reveals that for Gandhiji, sanitary reforms means purification of not only the outer world, but also of the inner world: "...though I had made it my business to ventilate grievances and

press for rights, I was no less keen and insistent upon *self-purification*" (182, emphasis mine).

"Self should be read here as carrying two meanings — the Indian self and one's own self. Here again, the fact that Gandhiji attributes 'self' to mean Indian shows his growing identification with the community and the service of it, the eradication of egoism thereby to reduce oneself to a "zero". Here was also sown the seeds of his ideal of self-help which he will advocate with great zeal in times to come. Sanitary reform measures were also a gesture of getting rid of the shortcomings that plagued the Indian being for, "an aspirant after *brahmacharya* will always be conscious of his shortcomings, will seek out the passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them" (176). On his visit to India, he identifies such shortcomings in the Indian life-style and attempts to rectify them. Incidentally, *brahmacharya* also manifests itself as his non-acceptance of the gifts showered on him and his family on his departure to India. Also important to note is the point that instead of directly returning the gifts to those who made them, he creates a trust of these gifts in favour of the community, to be used in times of need. Gandhiji concludes his chapter "Return to India" by saying that "I am definitely of the opinion that a public worker should accept no costly gifts" (185).

The chapters that narrate his experiences in India during this trip viz., "In India Again", "Clerk and Bearer", "In the Congress", "Lord Curzon's *Darbar*", "A Month with Gokhale" (in three parts) and "In Benares" show that Gandhi looks at his experiences through a different eye altogether. This also explains the reasons for his deliberations on *brahmacharya* earlier. The narrative is from the point of view of a fresh initiate into *brahmacharya*. One cannot miss Gandhiji's aversion towards and subsequent criticism of the opulence of the Congress leaders, the indifference of the members and social and religious exploitation of the masses. The fact that Gandhiji chooses to narrate these

experiences after his discussion on *brahmacharya* is significant because he sees these experiences through the eyes of a *brahmachari*. More importantly, the critical eye is turned towards himself, towards his own countrymen and their lifestyle before criticising the colonisers. The following instances reveal the formative years of certain ways of living he was to adopt as a Congressman later. In the chapter "In India Again", Gandhiji mentions in passing Pherozshah Mehta's lifestyle: "I knew the kingly style in which he lived" (186), "The president was taken to his camp with great *eclat* by the reception committee"(186) and on Tilak: "And as was natural, Lokamanya would never be without his *darbar*. Were I a painter, I could paint him as I saw him seated on his bed..."(186-87). Gandhiji criticises the lack of discipline in Congress. They were instances more of disorganization and confusion, disunity and discrimination than of meetings:

You asked one of them to do something. He delegated it to another, and in his turn to a third and so on; and as for the delegates, they were neither here nor there...The Congress would meet three days every year and then go to sleep__And the delegates were of a piece with the volunteers. They had no better or longer training. They would do nothing themselves. 'Volunteer do this', 'Volunteer do that', were their constant orders... To the Tamil delegates even the sight of others, whilst they were dining, meant pollution...There was no limit to insanitation....I pointed it out to the volunteers. They said point-blank: 'That is not our work, it is the scavenger's work'. I asked for a broom... I saw that, if the Congress session were to be prolonged, conditions would be quite favourable for the outbreak of an epidemic (187-88).

Gandhiji realised that these meetings lacked a sense of common goal, a plan of action, an agenda and a spirit of unity. The prerequisites for nationhood were to be built up and instilled. The superfluity in the functioning of Congress

is further brought out quite dramatically in the chapter titled "In the Congress". Gandhiji also shows how these meetings are informed by the patronising attitude of the leaders like Pherozshah Mehta while he himself comes through as passive and feminine. Clearly there is a connection between Gandhiji's femininity and the nationalist movement. The following is an instructive passage:

'So we have done?' said Sir Pherozshah Mehta.

'No, there is still the resolution on South Africa. Mr. Gandhi has been waiting long,' cried out Gokhale.

'Have you seen the resolution?' Asked Sir Pherozshah.

'Of course'.

'Do you like it?'

'It is quite good'.

'Well then, let us have it, Gandhi'.

I read it trembling.

Gokhale supported it.

'Unanimously passed', cried out everyone.

'You will have five minutes to speak on it, Gandhi', said Mr. Wacha.

The procedure was far from pleasing to me. No one had troubled to understand the resolution, everyone was in a hurry to go and, because Gokhale had seen the resolution, it was not thought necessary for the rest to see it or understand it! (190-91).

Gandhiji, in a pained way, points out the prominence English enjoys as the language of their discourse. The influence of English lifestyle too on Congress leaders does not escape Gandhiji's piercing eye. In the chapter, "Lord Curzon's *Darbar*", he says: "Gokhale frequently went to this club [the India club] to play billiards" (192) an English game. The chapter also throws light on the other extreme of the Maharajas attending Lord Curzon's *Durbar* bedecked

in their traditional attire. The chapter also furnishes much information on the political bankruptcy of the period:

'Do you see any difference between Khansamas and us?'...'they are our Khansamas, we are Lord Curzon's Khansamas. If I were to be absent from the *levee*, I should have to suffer the consequences. If I were to attend it in my usual dress, it would be an offence. And do you think I am going to get any opportunity there of talking to Lord Curzon? Not a bit of it!' (192).

In the course of his stay with Gokhale, he also meets Sr. Nivedita:

I was taken aback by the splendour that surrounded her, and even in our conversation there was not much meeting ground....In spite of my failure to find any agreement with her, I could not but notice and admire her overflowing love for Hinduism (198).

The chapter "In Benares" reminds us of the travails of an itinerant seeker. The plight of the third class passengers, the unhygienic practices of the passengers themselves that made it worse, the exploitation of the devotees by the temple priests, the unhygienic conditions even in the temple cities are all portrayed scrupulously by Gandhiji. Gokhale in his own ways had paved way for Gandhiji's entry into Congress politics. However Gandhiji was not yet destined to settle in India. He was called to South Africa again. This again called for, as Gandhiji points out, "the breaking up of a settled establishment, and the going from the certain to the uncertain" (209). Though separation from the family brought momentary pain, Gandhiji had by then inured [himself] to an uncertain life (209). Part IV of the autobiography shows how *brahmacharya* was growing upon him with experience (174) and how he happened to nurture the virtue of non-possession, a pre-requisite for *vanaprasthashrama*, the third stage. This part of the autobiography also shows that spiritual ascent if

consciously followed would unveil newer and newer experiences. Part IV hence should be regarded as the most complex part of the text for this is where the dynamics of *garhasthya*, the potency of *brahmacharya*, the freedom of *vanaprastha* and the sublimity of *sannyasa* in Gandhiji's life become completely manifest in myriad ways.

The chapter "Faith on Trial" in part three of the autobiography reveals Gandhiji as a *bhakti* who prays for the speedy recovery of his ailing son while the chapter "Result of Introspection" reveals Gandhiji as a *jnana yogi*, contemplative and in pursuit of scriptural knowledge. This chapter is an example of narration as contemplation. His study of the *Bhagavadgita* reveals to him the secret of *vanaprastha* and he takes no time to implement what his heart prompts.

Gandhiji's narrative shows that one stage or path of spiritual pursuit permeates the other. The narrative in itself is a slow but steady graduation from one stage to the other. For instance, in the chapters on *brahmacharya* Gandhiji emerges as one who realises that *brahmacharya* is not something that can be achieved as soon as one takes the vow. He takes the vow when the need to observe celibacy grows out of his aversion for sensual pleasures. He thereafter continues to strive all through his life, as the narrative progresses, to fulfill the vow. One has to experiment with dietary habits, keep watch over one's speech and deeds in order to fulfill the demands of celibacy. *Brahmacharya* or for that matter every stage of the *ashrama dharma* emerges in the narrative as both the means and the end. There is no end to one's striving for perfection, for Truth is not shown as something which exists *out there*. Spirituality is an endless experience of bliss, revealing newer and sublimer truths. Truth, as the narrative reveals at every point, exists and defines itself in various manifestations. Spirituality is a constant realisation of this. The striving for *brahmacharya* leads him to the profundity of non-possession. However before

going into the aspects of *vanaprastha* as Gandhiji practised it, we will examine the conditions under which Gandhi undertook the *brahmacharya* vow.

The chapter titled "Heart Searchings" in part IV should be read as an extension of the chapters "*Brahmacharya* I" and "*Brahmacharya* II" of part III in order to understand Gandhiji's pursuit of celibacy as a way of life. For Gandhiji, celibacy was not just a matter of personal choice but a discovery of its inextricable link with social life and the life of a nation.

Gandhiji has a revelation of the link between spirituality and nationhood during his service at the Zulu rebellion. While nursing the wounded Zulus he realized that if one were to be devoted to service, indulgence in the pleasures of family life ought to be given up: "In a word, I could not live both after the flesh and the spirit — Without the observance of *brahmacharya* service of the family would be inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent" (264). Moreover he also realises that "procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service" (172). The chapter "*Brahmacharya* II" and "Heart Searchings" are Gandhiji's invaluable discourses on the beauty of self-restraint, on the means to achieve endless rewards of *brahmacharya*. It is self-restraint that elevates man from animal passion to higher consciousness:

"Life without *brahmacharya* appears to me to be insipid and animal-like. The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because, he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint" (265).

Most importantly, Gandhiji owed the birth of *Satyagraha* to the potency of *brahmacharya*. The autobiography testifies to the fact that Gandhiji regarded *brahmacharya* as a potent way of life which facilitated spiritual ascent and an awakened consciousness even for a *gruhasta*. Here we see the spiritual life, the social life and the political life reinforcing each other. As Margaret Chatterjee

rightly puts it, Gandhiji sees *brahmacharya*, "as a necessary part of the self-purification required of a servant of society, a renunciation which was the prerequisite for the total involvement in the affairs of men which was to be his destiny" (Chatterjee 1983: 141). As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Gandhi viewed *brahmacharya* as contributing to "change the nature of relationship between sexes" (Caplan 1987: 278). Thus through the practice of *brahmacharya*, Gandhiji perceived the participatory role women were to play in the nationalist movement as two pronged. The practice of *brahmacharya* empowered them to put up resistance to foreign power through *satyagraha* and also enabled them to resist sexual exploitation and patriarchal power structures.⁸ For Gandhiji *brahmacharya* was a means of freeing women from male domination and facilitating social visibility and mobility. In fact Gandhiji opened a whole new paradigm of active female participation in the practice of *brahmacharya*. In this respect he dispelled the stereotype of woman as "temptress". Gandhiji was not thinking of "empowerment" of women. On the other hand he was recognising their equality with their male counterparts. Gandhiji's own feelings towards Kasturba dramatises this. In his younger days he felt jealousy, possessiveness and a desire to control Kasturba's movements. As he experimented with truth, Gandhiji's attitude towards his wife proved to be liberating. Their common acceptance of *brahmacharya* sublimated them and channelised their energies to creative purposes.⁹

V

Redefining *Vanaprastha*

This section examines Gandhiji's experiments in the Phoenix settlement and in Tolstoy Farm in South Africa. These experiments constitute a re-definition of the third *ashramadharma* viz., *vanaprastha*. According to the scriptures, *vanaprastha* is a way of life to be adopted when one retires from

household cares in order to pursue self-realisation. Taken in a literal sense, *vanaprastha* means leaving one's possessions behind and heading towards the forest to settle there and to practise austerities and penance as a preparation for *sannyasa*, the fourth and final stage of the *ashramadharma*. *Aparigraha* (non-possession) and simple living are to be adopted by a *vanaprastha* as a preparation for *sannyasa*. Self-help is a pre-requisite for *vanaprastha*. Part IV of the text shows that Gandhiji understood the spirit of *vanaprastha* both in its literal and figurative sense. Though Gandhiji was in exile in South Africa, that by itself marks the stage of his *vanaprasthashrama*. It is his reading of Ruskin's *Unto this Last* which gives a fillip to *vanaprasthashrama*. He founded the Phoenix settlement under the influence of Ruskin. Ruskin himself reinforced what Gandhiji learnt from the *Bhagavad Gita* about simple living. Gandhiji acknowledges this in one of the revealing passages in the text

I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure (250).

If we were chronologically to examine the evolutionary aspects of the fruition of *vanaprastha* in Gandhiji's life, we would trace it to his inclination towards *brahmacharya*, to the influence of the *Bhagavad Gita* and insights of Jurisprudence and to the spirit of service that culminated in his medical services during the Zulu rebellion. The aspiration for perfection in observing celibacy permeates the text. The *Bhagavad Gita* influenced his day to day activities greatly. The spirit of the text came home to him with greater force because of his understanding of the doctrines of "*aparigraha*" (non-possession) and "*samabhava*" (equability) from Jurisprudence. He practised this lesson in daily life and he pondered ways and means to practise them. Gandhi records his

views on this matter in "Result of Introspection" Chapter V in Part IV, reminiscent of the characteristic style of Christian confessional literature. The chapter reveals the essence of *vanaprastha* as Gandhiji understood it, redefined and practised it:

How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had. My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly in the light of the *Gita* teaching the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude (221-22).

The role here of a number of knowledge systems in spiritual evolution is important. The passage unfolds the experience of inner life facilitated by scriptural dialogues within one's consciousness. The narrative also portrays spiritual enlightenment as a progressive recognition of the meeting and crossing of "consciousnesses". The distinction between the East and the West, between the personal and the public is blurred in this meeting of consciousnesses. The text is an ordered and discursive portrayal of the vying of these voices with each other. The narrative is but a patterning of the inner dialogues between

Eastern scriptural knowledge and Western Jurisprudence. This helps him to redefine *vanaprastha*. The narrative depicts Gandhiji's re-definition and practice of *vanaprastha* in a modern social system. In Gandhiji, tradition and modernity become part of the meeting of consciousnesses.

The spirit of non-possession leads Gandhiji to allow an insurance policy to lapse and to utilise his savings for the benefit of the community, his extended family. Here, the concept of "family" is re-defined in Gandhiji's *vanaprastha* way of life. In resolving to give up all future savings for the benefit of the community in South Africa, Gandhiji gave wider dimension to the concept of *garhastya*:

.. I was doing exactly what our father had done. The meaning of 'family' had but to be slightly widened and the wisdom of my step would become clear (222).

The act of voluntary dispossession of savings is symbolised in his letter to his brother:

To my brother, who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future savings, if any, would be utilised for the benefit of the community (222).

The widening of the sense of 'family' takes place through a literal and figurative "breaking up" of the narrow sense of 'family':

I had to break up my household at Johannesburg to be able to serve during the 'Rebellion'. Within one month of offering my services, I had to give up the house I had so carefully furnished. I took my wife and children to Phoenix and led the Indian ambulance corps attached to the Natal forces. During the difficult marches that had then to be

performed, the idea flashed upon me that, if I wanted to devote myself to the service of community in this manner I must relinquish the desire for children and wealth and live the life of a *vanaprastha* — of one retired from household cares (172-73).

The need to practise *brahmacharya* followed by non-possession and equability arises out of the demands of the life of service Gandhiji had already started leading. The Phoenix settlement is one phase in *vanaprasthasrama* that manifests the confluence of Eastern and Western thought in Gandhiji's vision. Anthony J. Parel throws light on the extent of the influence of Ruskin's *Unto this Last* on Gandhiji. Parel views the Phoenix settlement as the prototype of the three other communities or ashrams he founded later in his life, the Tolstoy Farm outside Johannesburg, the Sabarmati Ashram outside Ahmedabad, and Sevagram outside Wardha (Parel 1997: xl). Gandhiji also translated *Ruskin's Unto this Last* into Gujarati for the sake of Indians who did not know English. Parel points out that Gandhiji understood Ruskin's 'social affection' in terms of the Hindu concept of *daya* (compassion) "and Gandhi understood honour in terms not of obligations of status. But of equality and of *satya* (truth). Finally Ruskin saw the value of handicrafts even in an industrial society; Gandhi saw the value of the spinning wheel and handicrafts for the whole of India" (xli). Partlia Chatterjee in his appraisal of Gandhiji's vision in the *Hind Swaraj* shows that Gandhiji in his adaptation of Eastern or Western thought was far more than merely eclectic, romantic, or idealist as it was often thought to be:

Quite unlike any of the European romantics, Gandhi is not torn between the conflicting demands of Reason and Morality, Progress and Happiness, Historical Necessity and Human will. His ideal of a peaceful, non-competitive just and happy Indian society "of the past could not have been 'a romantic longing for the lost harmony of the archaic world',

because unlike romanticism, Gandhi's problem is not conceived at all within the thematic bounds of post-Enlightenment thought. He was not, for instance, seriously troubled by the problems of reconciling individuality with Universalism, of being oneself and at the same time feeling at one with the infinite variety of the world. Nor was his solution one in which the individual without merging into the world, wants to embrace the rich diversity of the world in himself. Indeed, these were concerns which affected many 'modernists' of Gandhi's time, perhaps the most illustrious of them being Rabindranath Tagore. Gandhi shared neither *the* spiritual anguish nor indeed the aestheticism of these literary romantics of his time. Instead his moral beliefs never seemed to lose that almost obdurate certitude which men like Tagore, or even Jawaharlal Nehru, found so exasperating. The critique of civil society which forms such a central element of Gandhi's moral and political thinking is one which arises from an epistemic standpoint situated outside the thematic of post-Enlightenment thought (Chatterjee 1996: 99-100)

Chatterjee's observation that Gandhi's critique of civil society arises from an epistemic standpoint situated outside the thematic of Post-Enlightenment thought to a great extent explains the "tremendous power Gandhian principles acquired in the history of nationalism in India" (Chatterjee: 100). ¹⁰ An ideal propagated for enabling decolonisation could not have emerged from inside the thematic of Post-Enlightenment thought but would have emerged from inside the thematic of philosophical principles which were indigenous to India. Gandhiji imbibed its spirit from the *Gita*, and saw it in other religions and viewpoints of Western thinkers. Thoreau sought to practise *vanaprasthashrama* literally in Walden while Gandhiji practised it both literally and metaphorically in the Phoenix settlement. Quite interestingly, Gandhiji's experiments with *naturopathy*, particularly with earth and water treatment and with dietary habits should be seen as another aspect of

vanaprastha in action. Gandhiji's experiments with fruit diet reminds one of the life of a *vanaprastha* in the forest:

The fruit diet turned out to be very convenient also. Cooking was practically done away with. Raw groundnuts, bananas, dates, lemons, and olive oil composed our usual diet (Gandhi 1927: 275).

The significance of fasting dawned upon him during this period, as a means of self-restraint. **This** period also facilitated his experiments with truth in the field of education, and in the practise of law. The chapters titled "As Schoolmaster", "Literary Training", "Training of the Spirit", "Tares among the Wheat", and "Fasting as Penance" are about Gandhiji's views on education. "Some Reminiscences of the Bar", "Sharp Practice", "Clients Turned Co-workers" and "How a Client was Saved" show Gandhiji's role as a lawyer in South Africa. Instinctively and consciously Gandhiji sought to integrate teaching and learning with spirituality as also professional life with spirituality. The chapters also record Gandhiji's reservations about "modern" tools and methods of educating young people. It is important to note that even in this attempt he resorted to indigenous methods and found them effective:

Of textbooks, about which we hear so much, I never felt the want....I did not find it at all necessary to load the boys **with** quantities of books. I have always felt that the true textbook for the pupil is his teacher____It was laborious for them to remember what they learnt from books, but what I imparted to them by word of mouth, they could repeat with the greatest ease. Reading was a task for them, but listening to me was a pleasure (281-82)

In the chapter "Training of the Spirit" Gandhiji subverts the common notion that *sannyasa* (renunciation) is possible only in the fourth stage of life. Gandhiji's emphasis was on character building as a means to nationhood, to

self-realization. He stresses the necessity of pursuing the ideals of *sannyasa* right from one's childhood. His experiments with ways of imparting spiritual training at Phoenix can be seen as a manifestation of this conviction. Gandhiji opines that a teacher's spiritual ways of living is one method of imparting training to children. In the course of his experiments he realises that teaching is learning and that a teacher should be a learner. His views convey the inextricable link between education, nationhood and spirituality:

Just as physical training was to be imparted through physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher___It is possible for a teacher situated miles away to affect the spirit of the pupils by his ways of living. It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupil the value of self-restraint. I saw, therefore, that I must be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with me. They thus became my teachers, and I learnt I must be good and live straight, if only for their sakes (283).

Gandhiji's views on education transcend parochial concerns of building to a particular national character through education. However they do question subtly and at certain points explicitly, modern methods of teaching introduced by the British. His reservation about using textbooks (also extendable to the proliferation of the print media as a product of modernity) in class is a case in point. Instead he appreciates learning through listening — close to the oral tradition of teaching followed in ancient India. Gandhiji saw this as a potent method of imparting spiritual knowledge to students.

The chapters on his reminiscences of the bar should be recognised as a critique of a profession introduced by colonial masters. The chapters are invaluable contributions to legal discourse, to Jurisprudence in particular. The inherent contradiction that ethics and truthfulness posed in his experience as practising lawyer is well brought out in the following lines:

— I was confirmed in my conviction that it was not impossible to practise law without compromising truth. Let the reader, however, remember that even truthfulness in the practice of the profession cannot cure it of the fundamental defect that vitiates it (305).

Two things are conveyed at this point. First that there is a fundamental defect that vitiates legal profession. Second, truth alone can sustain one even in such a profession. Truth helps one to see the "immorality" and the "temptations" the professional demands may breed (Gandhi 1997: 59).

I have attempted in this section to view the South African period as the period of *vanaprasthasrama* in the course of Gandhiji's spiritual evolution. I have also tried to show that he was also sharpening his vision of the nation. As has been widely recognised, Gandhiji's South African experiences served as a preparation for his decolonisation strategies. His life as a *vanaprastha* comes through his experiments in community living in Phoenix and Tolstoy farm, the practice of the ideal of trusteeship, his role as an educator, self-help, dietetics, service, and practice of *brahmacharya* even when he led the life of a *gruhasta*. What remains to be examined is how this way of living extended to the professional, the social, the public and ultimately the nationalist sphere as a poser to colonial hegemony.

In the third, fourth and fifth parts of the autobiography we see that Gandhiji's experiments with ways of living in his professional, public and private life helped him to identify the colonisation processes in South Africa

and India. Gandhiji identified two major aspects of the colonisation process. The first was the mighty English legal system that legitimised colonial policies in the British colonies. The second was the "modern" cultural system that percolated into Indian soil through political and economic policies facilitated by the English law. Gandhi reacted to both these forces by employing the same jurisprudential rhetoric to challenge their legitimacy and legality. As Gandhiji himself put it, "The main key to British power is the law court, and the key to the law court is the lawyer" (Gandhi 1997: 61). *An Autobiography* shows how this recognition was crucial in Gandhiji's struggle with the British. Gandhiji employed the same persuasive rhetoric of the English legal discourse to make Indian voices heard in their portals. Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy quoted in the autobiography and references to many a legal battle fought particularly in South Africa show this. The British realised that Indians were fast recognising their democratic, political, social, economic and legal rights. *Satyagraha* that inspired Indians as a spiritual non-violent weapon in fact functioned as a double edged sword. Violence is crime against an individual and the State under Common Law. *Satyagraha* due to its non-violent character limits and blunts persecutions or sanctions under English Law against agitating Indians. Even when persecutions took place or atrocities were committed against *Satyagrahis* for agitating non-violently, the onus fell on the British. It brought out dramatically the discrepancy between the laws that governed the British in their homeland and the Indians in the colonies. Whenever Gandhiji bowed before the English law he was also questioning the legitimacy of oppressive laws: *Satyagraha* thus owes its birth to the jurist in Gandhiji.

The seed of this approach can be traced back to the Pretoria train incident which was a turning point in Gandhiji's life. Looked at from a legal angle, this incident is interesting. That Gandhiji was a lawyer made him acutely sensitive to his legal right to travel first class. He found this right being violated by the same British system that preached equality before the law. This personal

experience made him recognise the need for creating legal awareness among South African Indians and for exposing discriminatory colonial policies:

It is my duty to place before the people all the legitimate remedies for grievances. A nation that wants to come into its own ought to know all the ways and means to freedom. Usually they include violence as the last remedy. *Satyagraha*, on the other hand, is an absolutely non-violent weapon. I regard it as my duty to explain its practice and its limitations. I have no doubt that the British Government is a powerful Government, but I have no doubt also that *Satyagraha* is a sovereign remedy (Gandhi 1927: 316-17).

Gandhi's experiments with ways of living were also directed towards countering the channel of the "modern" cultural system. Judith Brown, in her insightful study paraphrases Gandhi's apprehensions about and solutions to the debilitating influence of modernity:

...he had abandoned any notion that there was a distinctive Western or European civilization; rather there was a 'modern civilization' and it was purely material, based on industrial production in factories and the rise of large cities, and its standards were determined by the accumulation of wealth. He believed that such a civilization threatened man's true nature and goal, by inculcating false wants generated by the capacity for excessive consumption; and furthermore, through the unequal distribution of wealth and the factory system of production inevitably led to competition and violence between man and his fellows. It was truly the reign of the devil and unrighteousness, as opposed to the reign of truth and morality; it had the West in its grip and through Western influence threatened to strangle the life out of India.... But the point is that Gandhi believed passionately in what he perceived as the Indian way of life before the spread of Western

influence, and built much of his social and political programme upon that belief (Brown 1990: 87-88).

However for Gandhiji it was not just a going back to the Indian way of life that preceded the advent of Western influence. His attacks on the evils of various customary practices in his writings prove that he never believed in or bemoaned the erasure of a "glorious past". The attempt was to decolonise the mind not just by propagating the evils of colonisation and modernity but also by devising alternative ways of living that would in practical ways counter the evils of modernity. So Gandhiji's ways of living were of course *rooted* in Indian soil but were certainly not a going back to the past.

Gandhiji's alternatives challenged the influences of modernity viz., destabilisation, disunity, centralisation of power, class based distinctions and so on. Such experiments with alternatives seemed to spring from Gandhiji's recognition that even if the British were physically ousted from Indian soil, the retention of their administrative paraphernalia would only mean the transfer of power from the white masters to the brown masters. The system would continue to serve those in power and oppress the masses. Hence he relied on the *vanaprastha* way of life that would slowly render British administrative system vestigial. Thus decolonisation was to be a two-way process. Decolonisation of the nation was to be achieved by decolonising the mind and vice versa. Gandhiji's ways of living demonstrated this process.

IV

Inflections of *Sannyasa*

This section will analyse the fifth and last part of Gandhiji's autobiography as describing the period of *sannyasa* (asceticism). Two factors are responsible for identifying this part as the period of asceticism in the author's life. The first is the number of pilgrimages that Gandhiji undertook in India

and **the** second is the establishment of *ashrams* first in Ahmedabad and later in Wardha. *Sannyasa* is the fourth and final stage in the *ashramadharma* and as noted earlier, Gandhiji was one who seriously believed that the spirit of asceticism should be understood at a much earlier stage in one's life. Asceticism ought to permeate one's day to day activities in order to achieve perfection. The qualities of all the previous three *ashramadharms*, *virg*, the purity of a celibate, the spirit of service of a householder which helps one to see humanity as one's own extended family and the spirit of non-possession, detachment and austerity of a *vanaprastha*, help one to attain the final stage of complete renunciation. The spirit of asceticism if imbibed even while living in the midst of responsibilities leads one to material and spiritual fulfillment. The pilgrimages that Gandhiji undertook with special reference to part V of the text have the spirit of asceticism.

Pilgrimage:

This section will examine the socio-spiritual implications of pilgrimage in general and of Gandhiji's pilgrimage in particular with special reference to the journeys described in part V of the autobiography. The term 'pilgrimage' according to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* is "a journey of a pilgrim; esp; one to a shrine or a sacred place" and a pilgrim is a person "who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee". Gandhiji attaches a great deal of importance to pilgrimage as a socio-spiritual activity for he holds that places of pilgrimage contribute greatly towards forging a common national identity (Gandhi 1997: 48n). In *Hind Swaraj* he challenges the common notion that the introduction of the railways kindled a new spirit of nationalism in India. He points out that nationalism was not a new idea for the very fact that our ancestors established a number of pilgrimage centres all over the country and brought people together 'as one nation' :

You will admit they were no fools. They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own homes. But they saw that India was one undivided land so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world (48-49).

It is with the same spiritual-nationalist zeal that we see Gandhiji undertaking pilgrimages in India travelling third class. Here we need to identify the nature of the course and destination as well as the intention behind such pilgrimages undertaken by Gandhiji. It throws light on Gandhiji's ideas of religion. Gandhiji undertook his pilgrimages as a seeker first and as a benefactor later. His destinations were holy places like Benares, the *Kumbh Mela* and Lakshman Jhula. However his intentions for undertaking what he calls as a "tour" in part III of the autobiography, "through India travelling third class" was to acquaint himself with the hardships of the third class passengers (Gandhi 1927: 199). Here we see Gandhiji travelling as a seeker. As he travels third class, he is touched by the travails of Indians on the one hand and is disillusioned by the hypocrisy, irreligion and unhygienic conditions at religious centres on the other. This trip parallels the *brahmachari's* pilgrimage as a fresh initiate into spirituality. Incidentally, this first tour was conducted during his *brahmacharya* phase.

The rhetoric of his narrative of the pilgrimage to *Kumbh Mela* and Lakshman Jhula in part V (chapters VII and VIII) informs us that Gandhiji had already become known as the benefactor of Indians. People kept streaming in to seek his "*darshan*": "My business was mostly to keep sitting in the tent giving *darshan* and holding religious and other discussion with numerous pilgrims who

called on me" (324). Now Gandhiji's response to this trip is subversive of the conventional role of a pilgrim. He notes about the *Kumbh Mela* of 1915:

It proved a red letter day for me. I had not gone to Hardwar with the sentiments of a pilgrim. I have never thought of frequenting places of pilgrimage in search of piety. But the seventeen lakhs of men that were reported to be there could not all be hypocrites or mere sight-seers. I had no doubt that countless people amongst them had gone there to earn merit and for self-purification (325).

Chris C. Park in his *Sacred Worlds* points out that pilgrimages usually entail social, economic and physical difficulties or sacrifices for the pilgrims, who usually accept them with resignation as part of the special nature of pilgrimage (Park 1994: 259). Gandhiji of course faced nothing but physical difficulties. The woes of the third class passengers and the unhygienic conditions and exploitation prevailing in the country including in religious places, made him realise that Indians have to fight the enemy within to enable themselves to oust the foreign enemy. One immediate effect of this trip was an act of self-denial on his part, in atonement for the iniquity prevailing at the *Kumbh Mela*. He began following dietary restrictions. His visits to Rishikesh and Lakshman Jhula are not spiritually exhilarating, but they serve to show us a picture of the Indian social conditions of the period.

However Gandhiji's trips to Champaran, Kheda, Viramgam, etc. should also be seen as pilgrimages of a different kind. By fighting for the rights of the workers, he served as their social and spiritual benefactor. These trips marked the beginning of a number of such trips Gandhiji would make all over India to create awareness among people of their legal, social, economic and political rights as also their duties in terms of sanitation and healthy living. These trips thus should be seen as a pilgrimage of an itinerant *Sannyasi*. Park's view that "in pilgrimage it is the journey itself that really matters, perhaps just as much as

arrival at the destination" (260) is true in the case of Gandhiji. For Gandhiji, pilgrimage meant more of travelling in third class compartments, seeing rural India, identifying the problems of the masses and fighting for their rights. He thus gave a whole new dimension to the idea of pilgrimage in redressing the difficulties of his fellow 'pilgrims' through legal battles. It was difficult for Gandhiji to find God in pilgrimage centres but he did find Him in the teeming masses of India. In so doing Gandhiji deconstructs the sacred/profane dichotomy.

Ashram Life:

As pointed out earlier, the rhetoric of part V of the text reveals a number of aspects of the ascetic life style of Gandhiji. The establishment of *ashrams* is one aspect of it. It is important to note that in South Africa, two centres of community living established by Gandhiji were called Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. There is no reference to anything like an *ashram* at that point. The idea of establishing an *ashram* as he arrives in India with the Phoenix party is discussed only in the fifth part of the autobiography. However, people would not have been able to recognise the spirit of community living and service had he not termed his experiment as *ashrams*, for community living is not alien to Indian lifestyle. By calling it "settlement" or a "farm" in alien terms or anything other than *ashram* Gandhiji would not have been able to make it a point. Gandhiji gives us an insight into the experiment that went into naming the *ashram*. In the chapter "Founding of the Ashram" he discusses this aspect:

Our creed was devotion to truth, and our business was the search for and insistence on truth. I wanted to acquaint India with the method I had tried in South Africa, and I desire to test in India the extent to which its application might be possible. So my companions and I selected the name '*Satyagraha*

Ashram' as conveying both our goal and our method of service (Gandhi 1927: 330).

However the greatest challenge was the people's hostility towards the "untouchables" and the ambivalence of the *ashram* inmates themselves towards housing them. Gandhiji was of course making a statement by housing an "untouchable" family. However the gesture did contribute to shaking the foundations of untouchability:

The fact that it is mostly the real or orthodox Hindus who have met the daily growing expenses of the Ashram is perhaps a clear indication that untouchability is shaken to its foundation. There are indeed many other proofs of this, but the fact that good Hindus do not scruple to help an Ashram where we go to the length of dining with the untouchables is no small proof (333).

Another instance that reiterates the rhetoric of *sannyasa* is when people who did not recognize him took him for an ascetic:

My fellow passengers had taken me to be a *sadhu* or a *fakir*. When they saw that I was being molested at every station, they were exasperated and swore at the detectives. 'Why are you worrying the poor *sadhu* for nothing?' they protested. 'Don't you show these scoundrels your ticket', they said, addressing me (335).

Most of Gandhiji's references to train journeys have parallels with Swami Ramdas's narrative of his spiritual quest and his experiences during train journeys in India. I shall discuss this in Chapter Four.

Gandhiji's *karma sannyasa* thus extends from scavenging to educating the masses and fighting legal battles. Though Gandhiji does not claim any metaphysical experiences, one can see that the coining of the expression

“*satyagraha*”, the launching of civil disobedience, non-violence, non-cooperation, *hartal*, etc. are described as revelations or results of intuition at various stages of his spiritual advancement. He could also foresee the detrimental effects of the Hindu-Muslim conflicts on the country. He urged the young Muslims in the country to become *fakirs* for the service of the motherland:

But my South African experiences had convinced me that it would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my *Ahimsa* would be put to its severest test, and that the question presented the widest field for my experiments in *Ahimsa*. The conviction is still there. Every moment of my life I realize that God is putting me on my trial (368).

Gandhiji blends the rhetoric of law, nationalism, service and religion into a harmonious whole in his day to day activities including most importantly the letters sent to the representatives of the British Raj. For instance, in his letter to the Viceroy assuring him that India would serve British during war shows not only his power of persuasive rhetoric and logical reasoning characteristic of a lawyer, but also his conviction that the law of love was service and religion:

____Thus Champaran and Kheda affairs are my direct, definite and special contribution to the war. Ask me to suspend my activities in that direction and you ask me to suspend my life. If I could popularize the use of soul-force, which is but another name for love-force, in place of brute force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst. In season and out of season, therefore, I shall discipline myself to express in my life this eternal law of suffering, and present it for acceptance to those who care, and if I take part in any other activity, the motive is to show the matchless superiority of that law (374).

This humanisation, the spiritualisation or in Justice Krishna Iyer's words "jurisconscience" (law with a conscience) was Gandhiji's greatest contribution to legal discourse and was also the very basis of his struggle. He showed the potentiality of Jurisprudence not just in theory but in practice. Every petition or letter drafted to the English showed the way Gandhiji recognised the possibilities of persuasive language and logical reasoning.

The *Mantra*:

Gandhiji popularised the spinning wheel. It added a dimension to Gandhiji's spiritual pursuit. For him it stood for self-help that would lead India to freedom. A country/geographical entity could become a nation only when it became free **and** true freedom would come only when the mind was decolonised. His mission in life was endless striving for decolonisation and initiating Indians into this enterprise.⁶ While ascetics told their beads and chanted their *mantras*, Gandhiji adopted the act of spinning as the *mantra* for achieving freedom. Gandhiji's reference to the "hum" of the spinning wheel reminds us of the "hum" of the *mantra* and its healing effects:

The wheel began to merrily hum in my room, and I may say without exaggeration that its hum had no small share in restoring me to health. I am prepared to admit that its effect was more psychological than physical. But then it only shows how powerfully the physical in man reacts to the psychological (411).

Gandhiji's ways of living were both profoundly God-centred and man-oriented, as Judith Brown has pointed out (Brown 1990: 80). Martin Green's definition of religion in his study of Gandhi and Tolstoy will sum up the link between Gandhiji's spirituality and his nationalism:

What I mean by religion here is, **in effect, the** opposite of Empire: that which **binds** people

together and motivates the group not at or from the peak of its pyramid, but from its base; not for conquest, but for resistance; not in pride of greatness but in solidarity of faith. This definition is obviously not objective or value-free, but partisan and tendentious. I would not in other arguments deny the name of "religion" to the kind of vision that inspired the crusades or militant Islam, but here I mean something quite different from that. Empire here means a complex of technology and ideology (the rationalism, democracy, and economic enterprise of the West) which often offers itself as anti-imperialist, but can be seen by underdeveloped peoples as dominative. And so religion, as the opposite and the opponent of empire, means the resistance to all those things (Green 1986: 7).

We may recall that Gandhiji's vision of local self-government in the post-independent *Ramrajya* was an indigenous form of democracy. Adoption of the "modern" notion of nationhood through democratic and constitutional systems has resulted in corruption, ~~power-play~~, partition and violence. Gandhiji's vision of decentralisation of power was an indigenous *concept and practice* of nationalism. This, the English educated policy making brown masters perhaps did not choose or dare to perceive. What remains of his vision of *ramrajya* is our indulgence in dubbing him a "philosophical anarchist" (yet another borrowed term) and in questioning the "seculancy" in *ramrajya*. Gandhiji, like Tolstoy, rightly identified the sources and roots of the Empire outside politics (15). This will explain Gandhiji's assertion in the last chapter that "those who say that religion has nothing to do **with** politics do not know what religion means" (Gandhi 1927: 420).

Gandhiji foresees these tendencies when he decides to refrain from venturing further with his narrative. On the one hand he mentions that the public and the private have merged in such a manner in his life that there is nothing left that is made to be known: "My life from this point onward has

been so public that there is hardly anything about it that people do not know" (419). On the other hand he also wishes to refrain from creating unpleasantness between himself and his co-workers: "A reference to my relations with the leaders would therefore be unavoidable, if I set about describing my experiments further" (419). The author's decision to share a dialogic silence with the readers in terms of "you and I know" throws light on an important function of autobiography writing. It is the merging point of the narrative of a political visionary with a silence which is eloquent.

Notes

1 Martin Green also identifies the Franklin mode in Gandhiji's methods of self-help and hard work. Green points out that both Tolstoy and Gandhi were "prodigiously hard workers in the Franklin mode" (Green 1986: 10). The rhetoric of conversion seems to be integral to these narratives. Franklin and Gandhi through their autobiographies continue to inspire their readers to follow suit. As regards the confessional mode, Margaret Chatterjee also refers to the confessional character of Gandhiji's religious thinking that blended with a "splendid vision which he believed could be a beacon light for all men everywhere" (Chatterjee 1983: 9-10).

2 The *Bhagavad Gita* details how selfless action is "always already present" in "inaction" and vice-versa — to realise this in real life and to practise this is *karma yoga*.

3 Hence any reader is likely to feel the frustration of having missed, "the subdued passion, the significant poignancy and the gentle humour which often characterise Gandhiji's Gujarati, as well as his use of English" (Erikson 1970: 60).

4 Secondly, note that the term used is 'East' and not "India". A particular cultural practice is seen as peculiar to *the West* as against the East and not to *India*. This leads us to throw light on one of the many divergent dialogues on the Indian concept of the nation. Here one sees the Indian psyche's idea of the nation in fact extending more to cultural memories that created an East as distinct from the West than narrowly to an "India", the geographical boundaries of which are often subjected to frequent re-definitions through repeated invasions.

5 Hence the caveat that comes through the use of the auxiliary "should" while admitting the reader's power of discretion by the use of "may".

6 Margaret Chatterjee sees this as a Gandhiji's "technique of spiritual instruction" (1). She adds that "For Gandhi godliness... was a fragrance which expressed itself in human, in kindly acts, in stubborn self-questioning, in courage, and in humility — a strange amalgam of elements" (Chatterjee 1983: 94).

7 This throws open the whole question of the relevance of dialogue in a genre like autobiography. One may argue with William L. Andrews that "dialogue in autobiography... is a feature of what Bakhtin has called the "novelisation" of

the narrative, a phenomenon that helps to keep any genre in "a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality" (Andrews 1988: 91). Moreover, adapting William L. Andrews' viewpoint on the relevance of dialogue it may be held that Gandhi as an autobiographer who dialogues his narrative functions as a dramatiser of basic socio-cultural dynamics between the Indians themselves and between the Indians and Europeans in the colonial context.

8 Pat Caplan perceives Gandhiji's experiments with self-control by sharing his bed with young women as consonant with *Tantrism*. It is true that *Tantrism*, through a positive channelisation or sublimation of sexual energy seeks to increase the aspirant's spiritual power. But this would not mean that as some critics point out, for Gandhi women "are merely a means to an end (just as were Gandhi's great nieces)" (Caplan 1987: 278). This was practised with the active participation and consent of his nieces. Our criticism of this practise seems to spring from our stereotypical notion of woman as being at the receiving end. The paradigm of male domination in a practice like *Tantrism* needs to be addressed at another level.

9 Moreover as Erikson points out in his psychoanalytical study of Gandhiji in *Gandhi's Truth*, his aversion towards sex slowly developed from feeling guilty about being with his wife when his father was dying. He saw *brahmacharya* as a great liberating and potential force that sublimated the urge for sensory pleasures and channelised it for creative purposes. In Gandhi's case it was service. However Gandhi strongly believed in saving grace and emphasised the need to practise devotion. "...His name and His grace are the last resources of the aspirant after *Moksha*" (Gandhi 1948: 177).

10 Joan V. Bondurant in the chapter titled "Hindu Tradition and Satyagraha: The Significance of Gandhian Innovations" in her study, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* identifies the syncretisation of the traditional and the modern in Gandhian elements of *Satyagraha* (Bondurant 1988: 105-145).

11 The rhetoric of the narrative is so persuasive that it continues to influence its readers' ways of living. As Margaret Chatterjee points out, one cannot not really call this 'conversion' in the narrow sense of the term, but to mean that "the opponent is to be converted, to undergo a change of heart when he sees that the Satyagrahis are willing to stake their all for what they believe to be true" (Chatterjee 1983: 80).

Chapter - IV

The Rhetoric of *Bhakti Yoga- Dasya* and *Putra Bhava*

This chapter examines the rhetoric of *bhakti* (devotion) in the two-volume autobiography of **Swami Ramdas** viz., *In Quest of God* (1925) and *In the Vision of God* (1935) as a representation of the nation and as a document of cultural resistance.¹ Accordingly the first and second sections of this chapter examine the aspects of *bhakti* that contribute to national identity. The third section examines certain instances in the narrator's spiritual quest that subvert Western cultural hegemony, fundamentalism, casteism and patriarchy and as a consequence contribute to nationalist thought.

Swami Ramdas, whose name was Vittal Rao before he embraced *sannyas*, was born at Hosdurg, Kanhangad, North Kerala on 10th April 1884. His taste for literature was remarkable and this "enabled him to acquire even at so early an age a remarkable fineness and facility in his English style" (Ramdas 1991: viii). He had a great flair for Fine Arts and acting. He pursued a course in Textile Engineering and received his diploma in Textile Manufacture. He worked as Spinning Master in a cotton mill at Gulbarga and was married to Rukmabai in 1908 and a daughter Ramabai was born to him in 1913. Subsequently he faced numerous vicissitudes in his career and thus streamlined his spiritual temperament. In *In Quest of God*, Ramdas points out that it was in 1920, when he was 36 years old, that a keen desire to realise God developed. To put it in Ramdas's own words, "It was about two years ago that Ram first kindled in the heart of His humble slave, Ramdas, a keen desire to realise His Infinite Love"(1). Incessantly chanting the Ram mantra he embarked on his spiritual quest. The trials and tribulations during the course of the quest are narrated in *In Quest of God* which was first published in 1925. Following the period of itinerant life, the sense of spiritual liberation set him off on a mission

of serving humankind. To that end he established an ashram at Kanhangad, Kerala. He established a school, vocational training centre and a dispensary particularly for the benefit of the marginalised sections in the society. *In the Vision of God* first published in 1935, chronicles his experience of God vision in everything that he cognised in this world. Lovingly called as "Papa" by devotees, he travelled world-wide extending spiritual bonhomie to people irrespective of class, caste, religion and nationality. The Anandashram at Kanhangad continues to generate the spirit of service and the bliss of "Papa's" God vision to this day. His autobiography is thus a text that portrays the spiritual way of life of a people that is integral to their national identity. The path of *bhakti*, as we can see is the path of the common masses and Swami Ramdas represents in this text the simple devout life of common people in the "nation" that is India. The text also shows how the idea of "nation" in the eyes of the self-realised grows beyond mere parochial concerns and how the spiritual way of life in a modern civil society will further the spirit of secularism. The influence of Gandhi's ideas on Ramdas and his special regard for Gandhi (which other autobiographers viz., Purohit Swami, and Yogananda shared) traceable in the autobiography show how they shared a vision during that period. Swami Ramdas attained *mahanirvana* in July 1963.

When Swami Ramdas recounts numerous experiences as a seeker and as a visionary in his autobiography, he is not narrating from a vacuum. Firstly, the choice of the form and language in itself shows that he is in dynamic interaction with the society of a significant period in the history of the nation. Secondly, the representation of his *bhakti*, of his social choices as a visionary and of his resistance to adverse forces in the autobiography project certain characteristic features of a nation's ethos. The following sections titled "*Bhakti ~ the Rasa*", "*Bhakti — its Bhava*", and "*The Railways — the Colonial Prop*" identify certain interesting links between devotion and the nation. The following section, "*Bhakti — the Rasa*", analyses the scriptural representation of

bhakti and identifies the varying *bhava* (moods/emotional fervour) of *bhakti* as a *rasa* (sentiment).²

I

Bhakti- the Rasa

Bhakti or devotion is considered to be the easiest path to attain divine communion and hence is the most popular and most widely followed of all paths to self-realisation. *Bhakti* is characterised by an intense emotional attachment towards God. In other words, God is meditated upon as one who has attributes like name and form at the preliminary stages of *bhakti yoga*. This stage known as *sagunopasana* is characterised by an intense yearning for God's presence and manifests itself as exalted versions of various emotional attachments in human relationships.³ Thus *bhakti* as *rasa* springs from and manifests itself in various *bhavas* in the God-devotee relationship. Sage Vyasa says:

*“Sravanam, keertanam, vishnorsmaranam, padasevanam
Archanam, vandanam, dasyam, sakhyam, atmanivedanam”⁴*

(Listening, chanting, remembering, serving, offering flowers, paying obeisance, becoming servant, befriending, and self-surrendering).

These are the nine types of *bhakti* (*navavidhabhakti*) as enunciated by Sage Vyasa in his composition, *Srimad Bhagavata*. The above quote is from "Prahladacharita" of this text and the context is Prahlada's answer to Hiranyakashipu, his tyrant father, who challenges his son's devotion for Lord Vishnu. Moreover, though *bhakti* is "*eka*" — one — Sage Narada identifies that *bhakti* in *sagunopasana* manifests itself in myriad ways. Accordingly he too identifies eleven manifestations of *bhakti* in *Naradabhaktisutra*:

*gunamaahatmyaasakti __roopaasakti __poojaasakti __smara
naasakti __daasyaasakti __sakhyaasakti __vaatsalyaasakti
__kaantaasakti __aatmanivedanaasakti __tanmayataasakti
__paramavirahaasakti __roopaa __ekadhaa __api
ekaadashadhaa bhavati (naradabhaktisutra 5:82).*

From the above we may infer that the devotee, according to his/her disposition choose to look upon God as his/her beloved (*anuraga bhakti*) as manifested in *paramavirahaasakti*, as husband (*madhura bhakti*) as in *kaantaasakti*, as friend (*sakhya bhakti*), as master (*dasya bhakti*), as mother/father (*matru/pitru bhakti*), as son (*vatsalya bhakti*) or in a neutral manner (*santa bhakti*) as in *tanmayataasakti*.

Thus, *bhakti marga* usually involves the incessant chanting of a chosen divine name and subsequent meditation upon the divine by attributing or without attributing a form. This intense *sadhana* (spiritual discipline) ultimately evokes divine fervour and a consistent intense longing for the divine presence. The various *bhava* of *bhakti rasa* are always characterised by complete self-surrender to and intimacy with the divine will. *Saranagati* or complete surrender is not an easy state of mind to be achieved since it involves complete dissolution of the ego. In *Quest of God*, the first volume of Swami Ramdas's autobiography, reveals both in form and content this spiritual process he experienced. Then God is realised as the self itself — the *nirgunabrahman*. At this stage, God is realised as *nirguna*, without 'attributes' but as all pervading and as the essence of all attributes that one perceives in the world. However, there are devotees who prefer to experience God-communion by retaining a sense of duality even after realising their non-dual nature, the Absolute oneness. As Swami Ramdas himself points out in one of his speeches: "Beyond duality there is Absolute Oneness. Remaining on the highest peak of *Advaita*, namely non-duality, you should still be acting on the dual plane and living playfully like a blissful child" (Ramdas 1996: 99). He also gives a culinary analogy to drive the point home: "Realising him, you must remain His child. There is joy in this. It is not that

one should simply lose oneself in Him. . . . There is no joy in merely becoming sugar. You must also become like an ant, and enjoy the taste of it" (112).

God, as Yogananda Paramahansa records in his autobiography, is *rasa*, the one to be relished or the relish itself which is a supra-sensory experience. *Bhakti* is a pre-requisite for anyone choosing to pursue other *margas* of self-realisation. For *bhakti* is ultimately *the* experience, in other words, the means to attain God and the end — ie God herself as we shall see in the narratives of Swami Ramdas and Purohit Swami. Swami Ramdas experienced *dasya bhakti* and *pitrū* and *matru bhakti* while Purohit Swami experienced *madhura bhakti*.⁵

The following section will examine the effect of Swami Ramdas's *bhakti* on the language and genre of the narrative and in his descriptions of his various social interactions.

II

Bhakti- its Bhava

Unlike most other spiritual autobiographies that are examined, Swami Ramdas's narrative begins at the stage of his **entry into the fourth *ashramadharma*** i.e., *sannyas*. The autobiography details various stages of God-experience encountered by the narrator in this fourth and the last *ashrama*. The first stage is marked by the adoption of a new name and assuming *sannyas* formally by wearing ochre robe. The next stage is the chanting of the holy name and undertaking pilgrimages as a seeker. The third stage is his pilgrimage as a self-realised soul. The fourth stage is the establishment of an *ashrama*. In *Quest of God*, the first volume of Swami Ramdas's autobiography narrates his renunciation, the adoption of *sannyas* and his pilgrimage as an itinerant seeker. In *the Vision of God* chronicles his expanding God-consciousness in his pilgrimage as a self-realised being and the activities undertaken by the *asram* he established to serve humanity.

This two-volume autobiography is a fine expression of the various stages of God-experience, of what the *Kathopanishad* terms as “*aparokshanubhuti*”, not only in content but also in form. Written in the third person, the narrative mode is conspicuous by the absence of the narrating subject “I” and is, dissolved into “some timeless pattern of spiritual biography” (Peterson 1988: 214). The narrating subject is referred to as “Ramdas” and all the others - animate and inanimate as reflections of “Ram”. Hence what needs to be addressed at the outset is the impulse behind the narrator’s choice of writing the autobiography in the third person. The introductory chapter of the autobiography informs us of the “happy synchronisation” of Swami Ramdas’s birthday with *Hanuman Jayanthi*. Hanumanji, the greatest devotee of Sri Rama is the embodiment of *dasya bhakti*. The beginning of the narrative on this note, informs the reader of the tone of his *bhakti*. For, when he embarks on his quest for self-realisation he flings himself at the feet of God in *dasya bhava*, as his slave. The narrative begins by invoking God as his master and addressing himself as his slave: “It was about two years ago [in 1920] that Ram first kindled in the heart of His humble slave, Ramdas, a keen desire to realise His infinite Love” (Ramdas 1991: 1). At this point it is to be noted that Swami Ramdas attributes a name to the divine while it is almost clear from all his writings that he did not attribute him a form. He perceives God — Ram — as “the only Truth — the only reality,” as “a subtle and mysterious power that pervades and sustains the whole universe” (1). The expressions, to “submit ourselves to the will of and working of that Infinite Power” (1), to “completely surrender” (2) and to “humble ourselves to such a degree as to subdue our egoism, our self-assertion as a separate individual existence” (2) set the tone of his *bhakti* and serve to establish the master-slave relationship between God and the narrating subject. The complete effacement of self-assertion and individuality is not only manifested through the deeds of the slave but also through his words particularly while consciously addressing oneself in the third person and not as “I”. Thus addressing oneself in the third

person in this context should be seen as a direct outcome of his attempts at dissolving ego-consciousness. It is interesting to note that this has a direct impact on the very form of the autobiography. The narrating subject distances himself from or dissolves his sense of the "I" and the text becomes an exemplification of this exalted state of human consciousness. This narrative about oneself in the third person thus works so much like an oxymoron in the sense that it conveys the author's conscious ego-effacement on the one hand and reiterates personal experience of God-communion on the other. At this point it is important to recount the context in which he wrote the autobiography. *In Quest of God* was written during his stay in a cave after he achieved *sahaja samadhi* (a trance-like state which is natural and ever-present) as a culmination of his one year itinerant life in quest of God. The first chapter of *In the Vision of God* mentions how and when he started writing his autobiography: "It was during this time that Ramdas as willed by the Lord, devoted two hours past midnight to the work of writing the book "In Quest of God"" (Ramdas 1992: 8). The text thus is a product of inspiration, of the will of God. It is to be noted that it is after he entered into *sahaja samadhi* that Ramdas could not say "I". This is particularly felt during his stay in the cave after his wandering in India for a year. Though the autobiography does not reveal this transitional phase, at a later stage in his life, in one of his addresses he points this out, perhaps as an answer to a query:

It was from this time that Ramdas could not say "I".
 Me strangely started referring to himself as Ramdas.
 After that Ramdas began to see the world before
 him as the manifestation of the divine spirit. Ramdas
 tried to say "I" again but it did not come. Somehow,
 he dropped it and could not pick it up (Ramdas
 1996: 86)

So one may gather from this that though **Ramdas** must have referred to himself as "I" during his early itinerant years, in the autobiography all such instances of self-reference have been transcribed as "Ramdas".

Having examined this aspect of Ramdas's *bhakti*, we shall proceed to examine how the narrative engagingly captures his initiation into God consciousness and the evolution of his *bhakti bhava* in *In Quest of God* and the exalted **manifestation** of *bhakti rasa* in *In the Vision of God*. As mentioned earlier, *In Quest of God* does not dwell in detail upon his early struggle and initiation. In a few paragraphs, he effectively captures the gradual but steady replacement of the anxieties of the world by the blissful presence of Ram. The first chapter titled "Struggle and Initiation" depicts how every worldly activity was pleasantly affected by God-related thoughts. It starts with a cry for and response from God: "Where is relief? Where is rest?" was the heart's cry of Ramdas. The cry was heard, and from the Great Void came the voice "Despair not! Trust Me and thou shalt be free!" and this was the voice of Ram (Ramdas 1991: 3). (The use of expressions like "thou" and "shalt" while quoting God's response is of special interest here. This use of archaic language establishes an otherworldly quality to a happening in modern times.) Ramdas mentions that "a part of the time that was formerly totally devoted to worldly affairs was taken up for the meditation of Ram" (3). "Devotion" here is towards worldly affairs and only a part of that time is "taken up" for meditation initially. But in course of time, nights are "utilised" for *Rambhajan*. When God starts reciprocating by coming to his aid, "...**whenever** free from worldly duties___he would meditate on Ram and utter His name" (4). The slow invasion of his world by the divine does not stop mere. With careful choice of words Ramdas conveys this invasion most effectively. We notice Ramdas's interest in sensory pleasures diminishing when he says, "No *taste* but for Ram..."(4). Meditation, he says, "*encroached* upon the hours of the day and the so-called worldly duties" (4, emphasis mine) too. Further, his initiation into the Ram *mantra*, "Om Sri Ram Jai Ram **Jai Jai** Ram",

by his father, streamlined the spiritual progress. Moreover acquaintance with scriptures, both Christian and Hindu, and with Gandhiji's writings electrified his *bhakti* (5). Now the spiritual progress is marked by a gradual development from aversion towards sense pleasures to aversion towards mental attachments. It is interesting to note how the rhetoric effectively participates to convey the pace and force with which Ram was conjuring up Ramdas's world:

It was at this time that it *slowly* dawned upon his mind that Ram was the only Reality and all else was false. Whilst desires for the enjoyment of worldly thing were *fast falling off*, the consideration of me and mine was also *wearing out*. The sense of possession and relationship was *vanishing*. All thought, all mind, all heart, all soul was concentrated on Ram, Ram *covering up and absorbing* everything (5, emphasis mine).

Note the underlined verbs that convey the pace of spiritual change in Ramdas. As it slowly dawned upon his mind that Ram was the only reality, desires for worldly pleasures were "fast falling off". "Me" and "mine" were wearing out while the sense of possession and relationship was vanishing. In the sixth line, the repeated use of "all" four times, the use of expressions like "concentrated on", "covering up", and "absorbing" and the consecutive repetition of "Ram" twice create a rhythm that conveys the force, the intensity and the power of concentration in spiritual awakening. To quote the last line again, "All thought, all mind, all heart, all soul was concentrated on Ram, Ram covering up and absorbing everything" (5). This line creates a powerful three-dimensional impact on the reader - just as a powerful visual image is zoomed before a viewer's eyes. The impact of the line is such that a reader tends to feel she is almost engulfed by that powerful force of that moment of man's tryst with God - the awakening of the human into higher states of consciousness. Moreover since this is also the last line of the first chapter the impact is conspicuous.

The first line of chapter two titled "Renunciation" clearly carries the deluged, swamped, inundated feeling, this tryst has on the narrator. The sense of transformation of consciousness is conveyed by the use of contrasting images — "pond" and "ocean": "Now from the narrow pond of a worldly life Ram had lifted up his slave to throw him into the extensive ocean of a Universal Life" (6). His expression of *bhakti* in *dasya bhava* is first noticed here. After the introductory chapter, the expression "slave" is used for the second time here. He calls himself "Thy slave". It is clear that the dissolution of ego-consciousness is both a pre-requisite for and effect of the assumption of *dasya bhava*. We are exposed to an interesting spiritual paradox when we see that *dasya* or slavery here does not bring or mean 'bondage, but absolute' freedom, ineffable bliss and eternal peace. Man thus becomes God's slave in order to become free — free from the taunting cares, worries, fleeting pleasures and nagging pains of the world — yet another paradox of the God-human relationship. However one is led to wonder whether it is self-surrender that brings about self-effacement or it is self-effacement that causes self-surrender; the following lines make it difficult for us to distinguish one from the other:

O Ram, when Thy slave finds Thee at once so powerful and so loving, and that he who trusts Thee can be sure of true peace and happiness, why should he not throw himself entirely on Thy mercy, which can only be possible by giving up every thing he called 'mine'? Thou art all in all to Thy slave. Thou art the sole Protector in the world. Men are deluded when they declare, 'I do this, I do that. This is mine, That I mine!' All O Ram, is Thine, and all tilings are done by Thee alone. Thy slave's one prayer to Thee is to take him under Thy complete guidance and remove his T — ness (6-7).

In fact, **such a** recording of the narrator's thought processes conveys his progressive, discursive mode of realising the Self, a mode of "becoming" the

"being". This comes very close to the mode of narrative found in Christian confessions, particularly St. Augustine's *Confessions*, in which words themselves become manifestations of higher consciousness. God's response to the above quoted prayer comes in the form of a "hazy desire" to renounce all and "wander over the earth in the garb of a mendicant - in quest of Ram" (7). Words here serve to indicate God's complete take over even of his droughts when he notes "Ramdas was made to think" (6) much contrary to "I thought" or "Ramdas thought".

Swami Ramdas's renunciation and the consequent itinerant life for a period of almost one year in quest of God seem to reveal that self-surrender is not sudden but is a gradual process. The decision to renounce is only one of the stages of self-surrender. The capacity to fling oneself at the feet of the Divine develops through constant *sadhana*. This is the means as well as the end is a message that permeates the text. For instance in chapter two, there are situations that reiterates self-surrender, through *dasya bhava*. The moment of physical renunciation of the world also reflects the inner renunciation:

At once Ramdas made up his mind to give up for the sake of Ram, all that he till then hugged to his bosom as his own, and leave the *samsaric* world....At five o'clock in the morning he bade farewell to a world for which he had lost all attraction and in which he could find nothing to call his own. The body, the mind, the soul — all were laid at the feet of Ram — that Eternal Being, full of love and full of mercy (8).

The rhetoric of renunciation is well captured in the above words. He "gives up", "leaves", "bids farewell", "loses attraction" and "finds nothing". All that he is left with is his body, mind and soul and those are laid at the feet of Ram. The following lines show the effect of surrendering body, mind and soul at the feet of God:

The morning train carried Ramdas away from Mangalore and dropped him in the evening at Erode - a railway junction....He did not know where he was being led by Ram A Tamilian ...inquired of him regarding his movements. Ramdas was unable to say anything in reply. Ram alone could determine his future (9-10).

At **Srirangan**, he is first let into the secret of Ram's purpose in drawing him out from the sphere of his former life and surroundings, and that purpose was to take him on a pilgrimage to sacred shrines and holy rivers (10). Here Ramdas adopts *sannyas* and christens himself by the new name "Ramdas", that encapsulates his *dasya bhava* towards the Lord: "Yes, Ramdas, what a grand privilege it is to become the *das* of Ram who is all love - all kindness - all mercy — all forgiveness!" (12). The expressions like "kindness", "mercy" and "forgiveness" characterise the subordinate-superior relationship. It is only after the adoption of *sannyas* that the inner turmoil within him ceases. This is particularly clear in paragraph one of chapter four titled "Srirangan" as it stands in contrast to the mood and anxiety he felt that are expressed in the previous chapters: "The thrills of a new birth, a new life, with the sweet love of Ram was felt. A peace came upon Ramdas' struggling soul. The turmoil ceased" (12). The adoption of the name "Ramdas" is by God's will as pointed out in this chapter. He says, "Ram's own hands seemed to have touched the head of his slave - Ram blessed The great blessing came from Ram: "I take thee under my guidance and protection — remain ever my devotee — thy name shall be Ramdas" (12). Further in the narrative of his itinerant life along the length and breadth of India in *In Quest of God*, we see that his *dasya bhava* leads to a sublime state of no anxiety, no planning, no worry and no cares. In chapter seven "Chidambaram" *putra bhava* surfaces: "Ram had made him a child, without plans, without any thought of the next moment but with his mind ever fixed in the one thought of Ram, Ram" (21). The repetition of "Ram" twice in

the above line is indicative of the incessant flow of the chanting of the Ram *mantra*. His experience at the Pondicherry Police Station is narrated from a child's perspective; it is a child's characteristic portrayal of a fierce policeman:

About half a mile's walk, and the police station was reached and the Sadhus found themselves standing in front of a tall man of middle age with fierce looks and a well-curved and twisted moustache....For now he talked fast, his eyes glistening and his hands twisting his moustache furiously (29-30).

The appeal is more towards the visual impact of a fierce policeman towering over two ordinary *sadhus* man to what the policeman spoke; for Ramdas only says "he talked fast" and describes more of his physical appearance. *Putra bhava* manifests again when Ramdas also describes himself as "a careless, thoughtless child of Ram!" (35) who wandered over the hills amid the shrubs, trees and rocks. God is also addressed as "the loving Parent of all" (43), when he finds God's mysterious ways of taking care of the needs of the seekers during their pilgrimage. In *In Quest of God*, thus we see both *dasya bhava* and *putra bhava* alternately assumed by the narrator in his interaction with the divine. Much later in his life, in one of his discourses he explains these myriad forms of his relationship with the Divine:

Ramdas is a child of the Divine Mother. For him the whole universe stands as an expression or the embodiment of the Divine Mother and you are all to him the veritable forms of the Mother who has accepted Ramdas as Her confiding child. From the very beginning Ramdas has been looking upon God in these three aspects: the Divine Mother, the Master and the *Purushottama* beyond. As servant of the Master, he used to obey Him. As Divine Master he was guiding Ramdas. As Divine Mother, He was protecting the child in all conditions of life (Ramdas 1996:4).

This in fact becomes the very basis of the dissolution of the "I" (86). In *In the Vision of God*, the second volume of the autobiography, Ramdas portrays himself in *putra bhava*. The "Preamble" to this volume depicts Ramdas as "His new born offspring". *Putra bhava* sets the tone of *In the Vision of God*:

He was also discovered to be like a child, passive, docile and obedient. He was bathed, clothed and fed and led in all things. In fact he had neither attraction nor repulsion for the world__Even intellect and emotion seemed to have ceased to function. Truly, God by His power had eradicated from his heart the false, self-asserting ego, and was working Himself in its place — the one great power who causes both the internal and external movements in this world of phenomena (Ramdas 1992: 3).

His *putra bhava* evokes, as we can see from the above passage, *matru bhava* towards Ramdas among the devotees. Pertinent at this point is Ramdas's description of the "sugarcandy mothers". Two old women treated Ramdas like their baby when they pushed "into his mouth large pieces of sugarcandy__They would softly rub their palms on his cheeks and gazing on him with a fond smile, say: 'O! my beloved' " (120). At another instance in the house of a cultivator, "He beheld a bonny baby playing near a grinding stone. He got the baby at once on his lap and began to fondle and laugh with it. The cultivator and wife were tenderly watching him as though a new child had come to them to play with theirs" (241). When a scuffle took place over Ramdas between a pundit and a doctor for establishing guardianship over Ramdas, Ramdas depicts himself [mischievously though!] as "snugly lolling on a chair" (324).

A further new dimension to his *bhakti bhava* is added in the dramatically narrated episode, "God assumes all forms" in *In the Vision of God*. Here the boundary between the stranger who dispossesses Ramdas of all his belongings as a man and as God is hazy or almost disappears. The stranger asks him *

give even the *kaupin* that Ramdas was wearing. As Ramdas is about to willingly part with it, the stranger stops him and instead asks if Ramdas can follow him. The ensuing dialogue depicts the stranger as an intermediary between God and man. The reader along with Ramdas is left wondering if it was God himself who came in human form or if it was just another human being. His strange behaviour that makes one feel that God has come to test man. Ultimately Ramdas's narration of this episode conveys the point that duality between man and God, at a certain point of spiritual evolution, does not exist. After divesting Ramdas of every possession, the "stranger" asks him:

"Can you follow me?"

Ramdas lost no time in replying "By all means".

"Not now, some other time," he said and prepared to start. It was now raining in torrents. In one hand he held the lantern and in the other the umbrella, and the palm pole flung across his shoulder with the bundle suspended on it, at his back.

Standing on the landing steps he flashed a parting shot. "What do you think of me? I am not mad. I am not," he said with great emphasis.

"You are He, you are He," gasped out Ramdas — his throat fully choked with emotion.

The friend descended the steps and walked away.

Ramdas returned to the room and the moment he sat down on the floor, he was lost in a deep trance
(22-23)

Ramdas leaves the episode at this point of suspense. Quite unlike a vision which explicitly conveys a direct spiritual intervention, this episode occupies a grey area of "man in God and God in man" which subverts the God-human dichotomy. This may also convey Ramdas's state of spiritual consciousness poised to enter the exalted realm of divinity. In the expression, "you are He" the use of the letter "y" in lower case and the letter "H" in capitals is an

excellent example of the interplay between the meaning and the *signifier*. *Bhakti* here becomes the means and the end. This aspect gains a significant proportion in another instance as well. The reader's sense of distinction between the rational and the non-rational is challenged in this episode. Here attuning the reader as though into a "willing suspension of disbelief, Ramdas narrates an episode of an intimate moment with the divine; this time not in any physical external form but from within his own consciousness. It is to be noted that the narrative does not leave any explanation of the source of the Divine voice. Is it the voice from within? Or from without? Or is it that these questions are not relevant for the saints in their exalted moments of consciousness that transcend the sense of within and without - "Ramdas' chat with Ram" is one such dramatic moment:

Ramdas: "O Ram, how blessed is Ramdas to be conscious of your company with him even in this lonely place!"

"My child," Ram assured Ramdas, "you shall in future be always aware of my presence with you, in you and everywhere about you. I grant you this knowledge based upon your perfect oneness with me. You and I are one."

Ramdas hearing this, laughed through intense joy. Half-a-mile was traversed. Now he came to the brink of another precipice, steeper than the previous one, but with no footholds of any kind for climbing down. It was a smooth flat rock, running vertically down. Looking at it he giggled and said:

"Ram now you are caught. Ramdas should like to know how you are tackling the problem now."

"Soft,soft," instantly put in Ram. "No doubt you are clever but I am more clever than you can ever imagine. Look to your right. There the ground slopes down, though the incline is sharp **and** slippery, try that way."

Ramdas stepped towards it and dancing a caper or two, laughed and spoke:

"Ram, you are a brick, but it won't do; you see the slope is not only sharp but it is covered by loose earth. To put the foot on it is to slip, and Ramdas will then be rolling down like a folded mattress until he reaches the bottom; you like it eh?

He at last reached the bottom. Now Ram had his laugh at Ramdas' expense. Ramdas was silent. Every time he was beaten, and Ram would have the upper hand (261-2).

The episode depicts a subtle interplay between two states of consciousness, the divine and the human — where God's power over human weaknesses triumphs. The description of the precipice and the absence of foot holds show figuratively as well the moments when human consciousness challenges or doubts, though playfully, the potentials of a higher state of consciousness, the divine will. The expressions, "I grant you this knowledge based upon your perfect oneness with me", "you and I are one", "every time he was beaten, and Ram would have the upper hand" are sure indications of the state of divinity Ramdas's consciousness was fast achieving. His choice of this "chat" in his narrative has thus both figurative and literal implications. Like the earlier episode one finds it difficult to find distinction between the human and the divine — one has to see it as another subversion of the sense of duality felt between human and God in this world. The above narrative takes the reader to a stage in which she cannot distinguish Ramdas from Ram. *Bhakti* at this point becomes the *rasa*, the *bhava*, the *bhakta* (the person who experiences *bhakti*) and *bhagavan* (divine consciousness). This sense of *advaita* is clear in one of his later speeches picked up from *Ramdas Speaks*:

Ramdas was considering himself as a servant of God. Later he realised that servant and God are one. Then he did not know how to refer to himself. He sometimes speaks now as T and sometimes as 'he'. You see in his writings, he now uses the first person

T. It is all the same whether he uses T or 'he' because all these are He, the one Truth. Formerly there was to him the division. World and God. Now world is God. Whatever he talks about is of God. His impulses, thoughts, words, everything is God. He talks, moves, lives and has his being in God; everything is God, everywhere it is God. Manifest, unmanifest, moving, not moving, changing, not changing, with name and form, without name and form — everything is HE. He is all inclusive, all pervading, all-transcendent Divine. There is nothing besides HIM.

This T is beyond first, second and third person. It is not the individual T. This 'I' is equated with God... At a big meeting in America, when Ramdas was speaking as usual in the third person, one stood up and asked, "What became of your T?". Another from the same audience said, "His T has become God". Your 'I' should be transformed into the universal T - God (Ramdas 1996: 28-29).

This vision explains the use of "we" in the concluding sections of *In the Vision of God* which narrates activities pertaining to the development at the Anandashram he established at Kanhangad in Kerala.. The use of "we" instead of "they", may be referred to the above explanation that indicates another stage in Ramdas' spiritual evolution in which the distinction between "we" and "they" or "I" and "Ramdas" wears off. Also, Ramdas's state of consciousness in *In the Vision of God* in particular is "Eke enjoying the taste of sugar being separate from it, and the same time becoming sugar yourself. Ramdas is one with the divine parent Ram, and still he is the child of Ram" (Ramdas 1996: 102). In *In the Vision of God* he uses another analogy to convey this state of consciousness: "His position is this...he is like the river Ganges which, having reached the ocean and become one with it, still continues running towards it" (Ramdas 1992: 153). A stage comes in which *bhakti*, the *bhakta*, and *bhagavan* all become one. The implication of his chat with Ram will be made clear when we

comprehend this analogy. Another spiritual vision conveyed through figurative expression is his perception of the world as God's *lila*, a play, quite similar to Yogananda's perception of the world as a motion picture: "All of you are Gods. Ramdas is the servant of God. Suddenly God becomes the servant. Master is God. Servant is God. He plays all parts. This is his *lila*! It is not *Maya*. Ramdas remembers Shakespeare's words 'All the world is a stage....' " (Ramdas 1996: 124). In *In the Vision of God*, the allusion to drama also clarifies Ramdas's response to the "stranger's" behaviour: "... the world is His manifestation in which He expresses himself in a multitude of forms, assuming various characters. Ramdas looks on all with the same unclouded vision and his love for all is alike, be they saints or sinners. He does not see any difference. It is the Lord who plays all the parts in the world-drama" (Ramdas 1992: 132).⁶ He refers to healing and bi-location which are looked upon as miracles or as God's "mysterious ways" and attributes all to "Ram's glory". Ramdas sees himself as a medium through which God operates to help his devotees or to manifest himself before them. The case of Ramdas's bilocation is one such: "Ramdas asked him[a devotee] what the matter was. It was then that Ramdas heard from his lips the whole story of the double personality. While Ramdas listened his hairs stood on his end, eyes were filled with tears, and his entire frame thrilled with indescribable ecstasy. He only muttered: "It is all Ram's glory. His ways are inscrutable" (98). The depiction of freedom he enjoys both inwardly and outwardly through the use of animal imagery shows another dimension of his *bhakti bhava*: "Ramdas was, during the day time, like a frisky monkey. He could not stand quiet. He would either dance or run. When he was not engaged in dance he would run up the surrounding tall hills like a squirrel" (192). The use of imagery shows that the bliss of God-ecommunion charges up his frame to such an extent that it attains a remarkable agility that can outwit the most agile of human beings. For instance: "The friends were quick trampers accustomed to hill climbing. So they thought it would be as well to make Ramdas walk

before them so that he might not lag behind. But the power of God was tingling in Ramdas' veins. He skipped, danced and ran....He was running up like a squirrel" (244). But when he is forced to follow them, "the gallop was now reduced to a trot, and when close to their back he would jump like an India rubber ball. The play of *shakti* in him was irresistible" (244). He records one more instance of this overflowing power coursing down his frame: "Ramdas ran, danced and skipped in the cool shade beneath the chenar trees for sometime, and suddenly climbed up a slim and tall giant among them with Ramcharandas in close pursuit. While Ramdas was going up the tree at incredible speed like a monkey, the members of the party gazed on the performance agape with amazement..."(332). *Naradabhaktisutra* also recognises similar behaviour as an expression of bhakti and self-realisation in the first chapter titled "*Parabhaktisvarupam*": "*yajnaatva matho bhavathi, sthabdho bhavathi, atmaramo bhavathi*"(1.6) which when translated means "The self-realised person becomes intoxicated and stunned for he is absorbed in the bliss of self-realisation"⁷. *Srimad Bhagavatha* also mentions that such souls due to God-intoxication may even behave like animals even though adept at the *vedas*.⁸ Moreover the use of expressions like "tingling", play of *shakti*" and "power of God" and the frequent reference to his body gaining lightness and remarkable agility point to the awakening of the *kundalini* and its ascension described in the *raja yoga*. Though Ramdas does not make a direct reference to it in the autobiography, we can infer from his highly active state in the second stage of his itinerant life as a self-realised being. The arousal of this Inner Energy is considered a pre-requisite for, a means to and sign of one's evolution of consciousness.

The analysis of *bhakti* as *rasa* and *bhava* was to show that Swami Ramdas's autobiography is a demonstration, a performance of a certain Indian way of life. Hence the manifestations of his *bhakti* represented in the text are intricately linked with social dimensions. Ramdas's expressions of *bhakti* are

highly **interactive**, dynamic, flexible, simple and community based. *Bhakti* as a way of life in this autobiography is not sectarian; rather it encourages service, freedom of expression, respect for the individual and other sects and the celebration of differences while perceiving everything as God's play. Thus, Ramdas's autobiography reveals the community based Indian *bhakti* culture, a way of life, which also reminds us of the role Sri **Ramakrishna**, Mirabhai, Kabir Das, Surdas, Tulsidas, Poonthaanam, and Sri Chaitanya played among common people for whom religion is the guiding force of life. **This** is a significant contribution to our concept of the nation and national identity. The simple analogies that Ramdas employs to communicate God experience reveal his sense of the common audience and the employment of simple language as the characteristic feature of *bhakti*. The narrative however does not paint an **unproblematic** picture of Indian social life. As pointed out in the second chapter of **this** study, the paradox of life and language is that while conveying the experience of the non-dual through language, a saint cannot but avoid the apparent dichotomies or the dual aspects that life and language embody. For instance, though a saint does not entertain any distinction between a saint and a sinner, the expressions 'saint' and 'sinner' need to be inevitably used to explain his transcendence of the saint-sinner dichotomy that prevails in the world:

...for Ramdas there is none impure or sinful, although he might mention the particular purity and greatness of the persons he came across. His task is merely to chronicle his experiences with regard to events that befell him and to people who came under his observation. He presents the history from the standpoint of a dispassionate witness of God's lila. For, the world is His manifestation in which He expresses Himself in multitude of forms, assuming various characters. Ramdas looks on all with the same unclouded vision and his love for **all** is alike, be they saints or sinners. He does not see any

difference. It is the Lord who plays all the parts in the world-drama (Ramdas 1992: 132).

These significant 'presences' invoked to convey the sense of 'absence' serve to share with the readers the social conditions **that** prevailed in the times. Communal conflicts, untouchability, the coloniser-colonised relationship, national consciousness, etc. in the India of the 1920's and 30's find mention in implicit and explicit ways. The socio-cultural dynamics of the period surfaces **significantly** against the backdrop of his pilgrimage across the length and breadth of India in the narrative. When we read these texts we feel that the author's portrayal of this dynamics shows his sensitivity to social issues and that he sees the spiritual integral to the social. The narrative as such sensitises the readers to certain inequalities that permeate all classes of people of India. It is here that we realise spiritual awakening is **nothing** but social sensitivity and that social sensitivity is a pre-requisite for God-realisation. In this sense the self-life sketch becomes the nation's life sketch. With characteristic humour but imbued with empathy and pain for suffering humanity, Swami Ramdas sketches the inequalities he encounters in his God-quest and God-realisation.

III

The Railways -- The Colonial Prop

This section will examine the tension between modernity and the indigenous travel ethos against the backdrop of pilgrimage in colonial India, resistance to fundamentalism and subversion of social hierarchy and patriarchy in the autobiography of Ramdas. Ramdas, as is evident in *In Quest of God* and *In the Vision of God* commences his quest for God in a state of God-intoxication going on pilgrimage from one place of worship to another covering the Indian sub-continent of the 1920's and 1930's. The entire autobiography foregrounds his experiences during his pilgrimage by train and on foot as a seeker and as a

self-realised person. **This** serves to identify the social dynamics of the period. The narrative also serves to prove that the social and the spiritual are not dichotomous entities but reinforce each other. The Ramdas-God relationship gains a whole new dimension as his narrative of pilgrimage progresses. Here we are impelled to look at pilgrimage as an ancient symbol that stands for the realisation of the macrocosm in the microcosm. Pilgrimage charts sacred spaces in the geography of nations and in the geography of minds simultaneously. Ramdas puts this in simple words: "God is everywhere but he wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere" (Ramdas 1991: 41). Thus not only the destination but also the course towards destination is considered a holy experience that chastises the pilgrim through adversities and challenges, physically and mentally. Therefore pilgrimages become important not only for the sanctity attached to the destination points but also for the chastening effect of the journey on the pilgrim. More often for Ramdas social experiences demonstrate spiritual truth. The dichotomy is once again blurred at such instances. Pilgrimages serve to re-define one's pre-meditation of a nation's socio-cultural and geographical patterning, to identify the underlying unity of the apparently diverse human traits and to accept or deliberate over differences created by the geographical, political, cultural or social forces. Pilgrimages thus spiritually charter the human mindscape and geographically reiterate national consciousness. Pilgrimage centres were the earlier yardsticks of our sense of nationality and signified our earliest concept of national consciousness and national character by virtue of their locations sprawled across the length and breadth of a particular geographical area. Mahatma Gandhi for instance in his *Hind Swaraj* points out that the establishment of pilgrimage centres by our ancestors presupposed their vision of India as an undivided land, "so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in

various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world" (Gandhi 1997:133).

It goes without saying that there were several in-built mechanisms like the ubiquitous *dharmashalas* and *annakshetras* established by solicitous affluent people, eager to serve renunciates; and concessions and consideration in case of their journey by horse damage, bullock carts or boats. It was well-known that real *sadhus* had no concern for and never carried money. Such indigenous means of transport, accommodation and food in the India of those times treated the ubiquitous *sadhus* most favourably. But the introduction of railways by the colonisers seems to have transformed the very nature of social interactions in the course of a journey. Pandit Sivanath Sastri in his *History of Brahmo Samaj* first published in 1911, points out that "railways takes no account of caste, but rather helps in breaking it down by promoting the intercourse of races" (Sastri 1974: 6). Swami Ramdas's autobiography shows that this view cannot be accepted in toto. The text shows how the railways and such manifestations of modernity not only created a class division in travel but also rendered an indigenous travel ethos effete. Railways failed to accommodate and provide concessions for the economically disadvantaged, the *sadhu* race being one of them. It further created divisions between the Indians on the basis of class acutely felt, (whose division on the basis of caste and religion was already glaring) through this means of transport. Ticketless travelling was to be treated as "unlawful" since the "law" was a colonial prop. The 'space', the concession and the solicitude mat were characteristic of various indigenous transport systems and rest houses were absent in the way in which this prop of modernity operated. Therefore towards a renunciate who was free from want and care and never believed in carrying money, this modern means of transport was indifferent. Ramdas dramatises these in *In Quest of God*:

Ramdas threw himself more completely than ever on the support of Ram with only two clothes and a few books - all his possessions in the world. He started with the Sadhuraṃ whom Ram had sent as a guide. He led him to the railway station and both got into a train running to Rameshwaram. No ticket - Ram was ticket and all in all... a ticket inspector came into the compartment in which Ramdas and his kind guide were seated. After checking the tickets of other passengers, he approached the sadhus and cried, "Tickets - Tickets".

"No tickets, brother, we are Sadhus", was the reply.

"Without tickets you cannot travel any farther. You have to get down here", said the Inspector. At once getting up, Ramdas told the Sadhuraṃ that it was Ram's wish that they should alight at that place....the Sadhuraṃ grumbled over the action of the Inspector. To this Ramdas said:

"Brother, we cannot travel all along to Rameshwaram by train. Pilgrimages should be made on foot. But somehow Ram was kind enough to take us on the train so far...." (Ramdas 1991: 15-16).

What is noteworthy here is the rhetoric of the *sadhus*'s response dwelling in a world of their own to the kind of treatment meted out to them. Another interesting encounter between the indigenous and the modern is in the dynamics of being an English educated *sadhu*:

A Ticket Inspector, a Christian, dressed in European fashion, stepped into the carriage at a small station, and coming up to the Sadhus asked for tickets.

"Sadhus carry no tickets, brother, for they neither possess nor care to possess any money," said Ramdas in English.

The Ticket Inspector replied: "You can speak English. Educated as you are, you cannot travel, without a ticket. I have to ask you both to get down" (40).

The knowledge that Ramdas is an English educated man travelling as a *sadhu* makes the Inspector open a conversation with them. He in fact questions Ramdas on his God quest through pilgrimage since it is widely accepted that God is everywhere. The very purpose of pilgrimage is questioned through this conversation. Ramdas replies that,

"God is everywhere but he wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere."

"Well then," continued the Inspector, "if you are discovering God where ever you go, you must be seeing Him here, on this spot, where you stand."

"Behold, He is here, standing in front of me!" exclaimed Ramdas enthusiastically.

"Where, where?" cried the Inspector impatiently.

"Here, here!" pointed out Ramdas smiling, and patted on the broad chest of the Inspector himself. "In the tall figure standing in front, that is, in yourself, Ramdas clearly sees God who is everywhere."

For a time, the inspector looked confused. Then he broke into a hearty fit of laughter. Opening the door of the compartment from which he had asked the Sadhus to get down, he requested them to get in again, and then did so, followed by him. He sat in the train with the Sadhus for sometime.

"I cannot disturb you, friends, I wish you all success in your quest of God" (41-42).

The Ticket Inspector's change of heart reveals for Ramdas the complex force of the divine that diffuses the distinction based on religion. The episode also shows the social status that English education provided in the light of the ticket collector's attitudinal change on learning that the *sadhu* could speak English.

The tension between modernity and the indigenous travel ethos surfaces significantly in another episode. Ramdas quotes an instance of an Indian policeman breaking the law of the railways to allow the *sadhus* to travel without

ticket. Resisting the remonstrations of the other Indian railway officials, he speaks in defence of the sadhus: "You see, these *Sannyasis*, deserve to be allowed to get into the train. As regards tickets, they cannot be expected to carry money since money is not their quest, as in the case of worldly people" (44). Thus *In Quest of God* provides glimpses of the travails and unsettling experiences this colonial prop caused to the *sadhus* who unassumingly or oblivious of colonial rules travelled third class, ticketless, and were often thrown out on account of this "misconduct". Ramdas's experiences show how a *sadhu's* felicity in the English language elicited favourable responses from various agnostic quarters in the course of his journey and dispelled stereotypical notions of *sadhuism* even among the Hindus "Two English educated Hindu youths" (note that Ramdas makes it a point to mention to which religion they belong to here as well) pass adverse remarks about Ramdas in English during another train journey:

On the front seat facing Ramdas were seated two young Hindus -- English educated. Both of them stared for sometime at the strange, careless, and quaint *sannyasi*, that is Ramdas in front of them. Then one of them remarked to the other in English (they thought that the *sannyasi* before them was ignorant of the English language).

"Mark closely the Sadhu facing us. He belongs, take my word, to a class of *sannyasis* who are perfect humbugs. The fellow has adopted this mode of life simply as a means of eking out a livelihood. This man is a veritable imposter and a hoax" (25-26).

Ramdas expressing perfect agreement with these remarks, gently retorts:

"... But one thing more you discover in him and that is, he is mad of Ram and every moment he cries out to him to make him pure and only live for Ram's sake...."

This speech surprised both the friends, not so much on account of its import as the knowledge it brought them that the vagrant *sannyasi* could understand English and therefore had grasped the purport of their remarks, which were never intended to be known to him. A sudden change came over them and both fell at his feet and sought his pardon for their "thoughtless remarks" as they termed them (26).

Note that Ramdas specifically mentions they are English educated young Hindus. Moreover, they apologise not on account of the importance of *sadhuism* but on account of his acquaintance with modernity — here the felicity with the English language. The reverence shown towards them as *sadhus* seems to be on the basis of this discovery. *Sadhuism* gets venerated *because* he is a *modern* man.

Ramdas also records various instances in which *sadhus* are harassed by officials and co-travellers in the course of his pilgrimage. Hostile behaviour by votaries of other religions and attempts at proselytisation by Christians or Mohammedans are instances. His eclectic spirit, characteristic of liberal votaries of any religion, helps him to resist attempts at proselytisation. Whenever a Christian missionary or a Mohammedann urges him to follow their religion, Ramdas immediately acknowledges Christ and Prophet Mohammed as votaries of Truth and as manifestations of God and refers to himself as a *votary* of their precepts. A railway employee who Ramdas identifies as an Anglo-Indian harasses Ramdas and his fellow *sadhu*. In the course of the harassment he discovers a *New Testament* in Ramdas's bundle. He asks Ramdas:

"What have you to do with this book?"

"Everything, brother," replied Ramdas.

"Do you believe in Christ?" asked he.

"Why not? Christ is also a messenger of God — come for the salvation of mankind."

This reply at once touched the heart of the friend.
 Coming close to Ramdas, he said:
 "Master, kindly pardon your servant who gave you a
 good deal of trouble without knowing you" (53).

Another instance is when a Christian missionary urges Ramdas to follow Christ. Ramdas replies: "Ramdas has enthroned Christ in his own heart and ever feels his union with the great Teacher whereas you seem to believe that Christ is an outside ideal to hold communion with, as a person apart from you. Christ is truly the Lord of our life, soul and body. Does he not say The Kingdom of God is within You? Verily God or Christ is ever with us" (Ramdas 1992: 414). Two encounters with Muhammedans who tried to convert him into Islam are of the similar kind:

"I have come to have a chat with you. I want to know if you have faith in Muhammad," inquired the young friend.

"Why not? He is one of the greatest prophets of God," replied Ramdas.

"Why do you say - one of the prophets? - Why not *the only one*?" put in the Muslim friend.

"Young brother, although Muhammad is a world Teacher, there are others also who are as great Teachers, for instance — Buddha, Jesus Christ and Krishna - and in our days - Mahatma Gandhi. If you try to understand the message they deliver to the world, you will find that in the essentials they all agree and hold out the same goal to mankind" (Ramdas 1991: 113).

In Ajmere, his Muslim guide asks him to enlist himself as the *chela* of Muhammad : "At once Ramdas knelt as bidden by him, in all reverence. Then looking up to the kind friend, he said: 'Brother, there is no need of this enlisting himself here as Muhammad's chela because he has already been a *chela* of Muhammad' " (117). This eclectic spirit also seems to work as a defence against or as a resistance to any forced conversion to another faith. In fact such

challenges existed not only in terms of inter-religious encounters but also in intra-religious discourses. For instance, whenever followers of other paths of God-realisation *viz.*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* accost him questioning the efficacy of *bhakti* as an 'emotional' path to attain God, Ramdas wards off such accusations on the basis of his direct felt experience of God-communion through the path of *bhakti*. It is this conviction that makes Ramdas's autobiography a discourse of "conversion" — conversion of readers from a contentment felt through indirect experience to an intense urge to directly feel God. Ramdas also maintains throughout the autobiography that verbal battle on God, communal disharmony and discrimination of human beings on the basis of race, caste and creed are against the spirit of God quest. In this vein the text addresses the existence of differences and demonstrates his way of promoting harmony within these differences. Ramdas's autobiography is a contribution to nationalism in the twenty-first century for these reasons. The various encounters with proselytising forces and his way of accepting every prophet as a votary of truth and himself as a *chela* of that prophet or believer avoids friction and disharmony. Ramdas demonstrates at his individual level without sermonising that considering one prophet as the only prophet can cause bigotry, fundamentalism and intolerance. These precepts have been preached and practised by saints and sages of all religious faiths. The autobiography provides a lived experience of this truth and is a record of the positive effects of cultivating the eclectic spirit necessary for citizens who live in a multi-cultural society. One need not become a *sadhu* to understand this. But Ramdas practised a sophisticated form of secularism. What is interesting is that our modern secularists seem to equate religion with fundamentalism thereby divorcing religion from social and political life. This leaves the law to deliberate or debate over issues on morality and ethics in public life. As pointed out earlier, this is perhaps what is different about Indian spiritual autobiographies from Western spiritual autobiographies. Western spiritual narratives are

intensely personal while Indian spiritual narratives are intricately linked with myriad social issues and conflicts. They grapple with the question of faith in a painful and violent backdrop of socio-cultural differences and demonstrate that God-quest cannot be divorced from these concerns. In fact the text is not only the autobiography of Ramdas but also is a chronicle of the experiences of the *sadhu* race that quietly faced the transitions modernity brought about in India. He also critiques *sadhuism*. The autobiography depicts *sadhus* of varying temperament and spirit, shows that not all *sadhus* are self-realised people. Because though some are sincere seekers, they often succumb to weaknesses of their own. "Through independence alone does a sadhu learn the secrets of life and Truth. Hanging on always to an external prop in spiritual matters hampers his progress, because his vision lacks then the flexibility for expansion and universalization. The centre of interest becomes cramped and localised, while his aim should be to comprehend and realize the infinite nature of Truth" (Ramdas 1992: 288-89). Ramdas is seen as one who never let his own ego take the upper hand. This in fact prevents friction and disharmony during his encounter with people who challenged his belief:

An Englishman named Abbot desiring to see Ramdas motored him to his bungalow. Abbot and his aged sister received Ramdas in the verandah. The English mother talked in high admiration of Jesus Christ and his teachings. Ramdas perfectly agreed with her in her laudation of the divine Teacher. But her enthusiasm carried her so far as to speak in contemptuous terms of Sri Krishna, Buddha and others.

"Mother, Ramdas cannot be one with you there," he told her. "He holds Sri Krishna and Buddha in the same high estimation as, if not higher than, Jesus. You are speaking of them as you do, because you have not understood them. Similarly, there are Hindus who speak disparagingly of Christ without knowing him."

The mother combated his view and started attacking it by arguments. But Ramdas remained silent (132).

Most noteworthy in the second volume of the autobiography is the depiction of the charitably disposed, devotional people of the country irrespective of their class, caste and religion. The text is a tribute to a people who would sacrifice anything for helping a *sadhu* or to facilitate his aspiration to reach God. The text focuses equally on the rustic and the urban life. What is appealing about his portrayal of the rural areas is his sensitivity to their simplicity and solicitude despite the difficulties they themselves faced. An incident near Pathankot is illustrative of this:

He approached first a small thatched house, where he saw the mother of the house at the front door.

"Will you kindly feed your child with a roti, O mother?" Ramdas begged in Hindi.

"O sadhuji, I am a Muslim by religion while you are a Hindu sadhu. How can you eat food at my hands?" she asked.

"Ramdas knows no difference between a Hindu and a Muslim. You are his mother and he knows only this relation and nothing else," Ramdas answered.

She at once fetched from her house one roti on which was some chutnee, made of green mangoes. Ramdas, sitting down in the open yard, ate the food and, drinking some water from the hollow of his hands, went up to another house in the neighbourhood (289).

The autobiography dispels the notion that spiritual quest and serving *sadhus* are the business of the affluent. In fact it also shows that *sadhuism* is "not a joke" for it entails disregard for material comforts, temerity in the face of difficulties of any kind and freedom from want and care. As Ramdas points out, "Through independence alone does a sadhu learn the secrets of life and Truth" (288).

The autobiography reveals the early twentieth century India as a highly caste-conscious society. People are identified by the caste they belong to. Those who are, in Ramdas's words, "the so-called untouchables" are very conscious of the status attributed to them. *In the Vision of God* has an instance in which Ramdas reprimands Dwarakadas for insulting Kanda who offers him some plantains. Ramdas collects the images of God that Dwarakadas worshipped, flings them into a ditch and says: " '...your devotions have been taking decidedly a wrong turn. That devotee before you...came to you with a heart full of love and reverence...Now you chose to discard him. That means you have discarded the very love of God. Therefore, get up and prostrate before Kanda whom you have wantonly insulted. He is your Ram, God and all. This is the vision that you need. Worshipping brass images and conceiving hatred for man is not devotion....' " (Ramdas 1992: 395-96). Dwarakadas undergoes a change of heart and prostrates before Kanda, "the so-called untouchable", and thereafter treats every one with the same vision. However it is Ramdas's status and attitude as a *sadhu* that enables him to undermine such caste-distinctions. This even invites hostility from the members of the higher ~~echelons~~ of the caste-based society. The life of a true *sadhu* in this autobiography emerges as that of a radical, free from caste-based distinctions, wants and worries. *In the Vision of God* has a paragraph that subverts caste hierarchies at a congregation:

As he entered the place the people of the cobbler caste also freely made their way inside and mingled with the Brahmins by taking their seat in between them. He was watching from his seat the wonderful work of God which brought a people who were despised as untouchables in close touch with the intolerant brahmans, and that too within a temple.... Suddenly stillness and peace pervaded the place....What peace and bliss, what freedom can man enjoy when he attains the vision of God in all creatures and things! But as it is he is a slave to false

traditions that breed hatred and strife between man and man (408)

The narrative does not project a stereotypical spiritual India; rather it provides an inside picture of a race that wanders India in quest of God and as self-realised humans. He critiques, time and again the various forces that create strife both within and without and urges the expansion of one's vision to see God in all and to treat everyone alike. Ramdas's remarkable sensitivity towards social ills plaguing the nation is sporadically spelt out in the texts:

If there is one country in the world, where beggary and starvation have taken hold of vast masses of the population, it is India. The remedy lies in the eradication of ignorance and selfishness from the minds and hearts of the exploiters, within and without. The case of the exploiter is in fact harder than that of the exploited. For, he sows a karma which will bring dire retribution on himself. An inner realisation of equality, based upon a purified vision and awakening of the spirit of sacrifice through love and compassion, can alone bring peace, harmony and happiness into the world (85).

The reference to exploiters "without" seems to suggest exploitation by foreign rule. On an occasion answering an American lady's query, Swami Ramdas vehemently argues for India's freedom:

He added that she must admit it was but right that India should be self-sufficient and independent. India must learn to maintain herself with regard to her main needs of life, namely, food and clothing from her own produce and manufacture. Ramdas did not believe in India's isolation from the rest of the world which would mean her decay and death. She must have free inter-course with other countries of the world, but such intercourse should be based upon equality and independence (363).

Note the use of imperatives like "must" and "should" that indicate vehemence. Ramdas' special affinity for Gandhian ideals and regard for Gandhiji is quite

explicit in the text. During the researcher's interview with Swami Satchidananda, a direct disciple of Swami Ramdas, he pointed out that Swami Ramdas was a great admirer of Gandhiji and was influenced by him. Chandrashekhar in *Passage to Divinity*, a biographical sketch of Swami Ramdas also points out that he was in his *purvashrama*, "an ardent nationalist. He became a great admirer of Gandhiji and took to wearing *khaddar*" (Chandrashekhar 1988: 105). This is also clear from the activities undertaken by Ramdas when he established Anandashram. Ramdas refers to Gandhiji as one among the prophets of the world on more than one occasion in *In Quest of God*. In the above quoted passage, his emphasis on self-reliance also shows his perfect agreement with Gandhiji on self-help, and that sovereignty stems from self-reliance. In the course of this conversation Ramdas also points out to the American lady who held "a prejudiced view about the Mahatma and his principles of public action" that she was welcome to differ from Gandhi. "But to ascribe to him a deliberate aim at fame and self-importance as she did was wrong" (362-63). Ramdas also adds that he may not agree with all that Mahatmaji said but he has a deep regard and love for him. The last part of *In the Vision of God* reflects Gandhiji's influence on the humanitarian activities that Ramdas initiated in Anandashram. He established a vocational training school, and also an elementary school for children of all classes and castes "including Harijans and Muslims" from near by villages. The curriculum also had training in hand-spinning (Ramdas gave great importance to the spinning- wheel), basket weaving, clay modelling and coir work. The children were trained in gardening and vegetable growing (446-7). In commemoration of the ending of Gandhiji's twenty-one day fast on 7th May 1933, a *bodhi* tree was planted in front of the ashram (441). Vehemence can be seen in the manner in which he reacts to communal riots between Hindus and Muslims that plagued the country during the period:

The friction between these communities, breaking off at random in several parts of India, has been creating a perplexing and grievous problem for the leaders of both the communities to tackle with. What is needed on the part of both is an attitude of respect for each other's faith. Both the Moslems and the Hindus have at their back equally brilliant traditions, and that they should fight each other exhibits their ignorance or willful forgetfulness of their glorious past (415).

He also delightfully makes specific mention of instances in which people of other faiths joined in Hindu festivities quite willingly. There is no wishful thinking on forgetting differences rather he regards acceptance of differences and respect for each other. The autobiography as a discourse on nationalism addresses issues of heterogeneity on the basis of class, caste and creed and ways of amicable living against the backdrop of these differences.

Ramdas also emerges as a *sannyasin* who defied conventional taboos attached to women in the Hindu society of the period. For instance disregarding conventional practices observed even by a *sannyasin*, Ramdas allows a woman who was going through her monthly periods to touch his feet. He unobtrusively takes care of Rukmabai, his wife in his *gruhasta* period, and allows her to stay in the *ashram*. 'Mother Krishna Bai, his direct disciple, was spiritually initiated under his supervision. *In the Vision of God* has an episode in which Swami Ramdas had to pounce on an intruder who attacked Krishna Bai. Swami Ramdas rightly recognises that empowerment of women releases them from sexual exploitation and social oppression. This can be seen in the way in which Swami Ramdas leaves all initiative in the hands of Mother Krishna Bai in *ashram* activities and attributes all developments to the dynamism of Mother Krishna Bai. We realise that the issue of empowerment of women even within a spiritual space in a society is important when we also read Mother Krishna Bai's autobiography which was published much later. She mentions how before meeting Swami Ramdas, when she was in quest of a true spiritual master,

attempts at sexual exploitation by the so-called spiritual mēn were rampant in various *ashrams*. Krishna Bai had to literally flee from such situations until she found a true master in Swami Ramdas. Ramdas seems to have felt that even in an *ashram* a woman's empowerment was her protection. Ramdas empowers her both as a spiritual disciple and as a woman in society. Some of the speeches by Ramdas shows that though this did invite opposition and criticism from various quarters, Ramdas chose to ignore them. He is perhaps casting a critical glance at oppressive systems like the- purdah when he quotes the Rani who observed the Purdah in the State of Rajasthan: " 'Look at his magnificent vairagya! How I wish I were a man instead of a woman, hopelessly caught in a golden cage! If I were a man I could have a life like his - free and blissful'. The words were addressed to the Dewan Saheb. In her tone there was a marked tinge of anguish" (121). The Rani's remark and the experience of mother Krishna Bai show that even in the world of spirituality the male-female difference can interfere with an individual's quest for inner freedom and bliss. Ramdas realised that serving humanity is service to God. To that end, he established a school, vocational training centre and dispensary for the benefit of the socially and economically disadvantaged people in particular. The *ashram* under the initiative of mother Krishna Bai undertook activities that provided means of living for people who were long deprived of their basic human rights. The autobiography thus engages the readers in a dialogue with various social issues particularly those to do with gender, class, religion and caste in an intensely religious nation. As Roy Pascal in his book *Design and Truth in Autobiography* points out, it is not so much the author's capacity to evoke the past that significantly distinguishes types of autobiography but "much rather a differing appreciation of what is desirable to be recalled...the presentation of the past is controlled by the character of the man writing" (Pascal 1960: 14).

In his later years Ramdas undermined speech and writing on spiritual experience in one of his speeches:

Ramdas would not write any more books. Sometimes, he wishes to destroy all the books he had written. He asks himself, "What is there to write or talk about? When Ramdas sees everybody as the very embodiment of God, whom can he teach or advise? Seeing God everywhere is a matter of experience. How to write about it? That is why Ramdas does not wish to talk or write anything about it (Ramdas 1996: 161).

Ramdas emerges as one who has merged with humanity, who for him are signifiers of Ram, not to speak of other tangible and intangible manifestations of God. The autobiography represents a saint's delicate balance between his spiritual vision and his social mission. This is clear from one of the "Heart Pourings" he recorded during his stay in a cave and here all dichotomies are blurred:

O man,
 where is sweetness — it is in thee
 where is bitterness- it is in thee
 where is happiness — it is in thee
 where is misery — it is in thee
 where is light — it is in thee
 where is darkness — it is in thee
 where is love — it is in thee
 where is hate — it is in thee
 where is heat — it is in thee
 where is cold — it is in thee
 where is good — it is in thee
 where is evil — it is in thee
 where is truth — it is in thee
 where is untruth — it is in thee
 where is wisdom — it is in thee
 where is ignorance — it is in thee
 where is heaven - it is in thee
 where is hell — it is in thee
 where is God — it is in thee
 where is illusion — it is in thee
 Om Sriram! (1991: 181-82).

Notes

† I have followed the 1991 edition of *In Quest of God* and the 1992 edition of *In the Vision of God*. Hence in all subsequent references to these texts I have given these dates.

2 I have gained insights from the *Natyasastra* of Bharatamuni in perceiving *bhakti* as a *rasa* and in identifying the various kinds of *bhakti* as *bbavas* of *bbhakti*. Sage Bharata points out, " It is experienced (perceived) that the relish of the Rasas is from the Bhavas and not of the Bhavas from the Rasas....dramatic experts call emotional fervour as Bhavas because they bring about the outcome of Rasas by means of the impact of different Abhinayas. Just as the side dish is prepared by means of different articles of devise[sic] characteristics so the Bhavas produce Rasas in combination with Abhinayas. There is no Rasa devoid of Bhava nor Bhava devoid of Rasa. Their effectiveness is mutual in regard to Abhinaya. The combination of spices and herbs gives rise to taste and in the same manner Bhavas and Rasas contribute to the mutual development. Just as the tree takes its origin from the seed and the flower and the fruit from the tree. So also the Rasas are the root and all the Bhavas are stabilised therein" (74). It is interesting to note that Bharata refrains from privileging *bhava* over *rasa* or *rasa* over *bhava*. It is in the same spirit that I have examined *bhakti* as both *rasa* and *bhava* in my study.

3 I gained insights into *Sagunabhakti* and *Nirgunabhakti* from discourses by H.H. Swami Jnanananda Saraswati.

4 This is the 23rd *sloka* in chapter 5 of the *Saptamaskanda* (Part 7) in *Srimad Bhagavatba* by Sage Vyasa.

5 This *bhava* of *matru* or *pitru bhakti* in which God is looked upon as father or mother is not discerned directly by Sage Vyasa or Sage Narada. However it will come close to *paadasevanam* or *atmanivedanam* in the sense that the self-surrender in Ramdas's *bhakti* is akin to that of a "thoughdless" child of God, leaving himself completely under her care.

6 One cannot resist mentioning in passing that Derrida's concepts of the "endless play of signifiers" and the "deferral of meaning" are not very far removed from the saints' vision of the world as "*lila*" in their quest for the meaning of life. The ultimate realisation, as it comes to us *through* these narratives, is that meaning or God is not something that exists *out there*. It is everywhere manifesting itself in its endless play. Some one asked Yogananda

why did he refer to God as "he" or "she"? Did God have gender? Yogananda said it was only because one might find it difficult to comprehend God as "it" !

7 Translated from commentaries in Malayalam on *Naradabhaktisutra* by Sidhinadhananda Swamikal (29).

8 From *Srimad Bhagavatha* Part 11, Chapter 18, Verse 29. Quoted in *Naradabhaktisutra* (31).

9 In *Passage to Divinity*, Chandra Shekhar quotes Swami Ramdas's letter to Rukmabai, his wife, which ran thus:

Dear Sister,

You are to me only a sister in future. Sri Ram, at whose feet I have surrendered myself entirely has called me away from the past sphere of life. I go forth a beggar into the wide world chanting the sweet Name of Sri Ram. You know I have no ambition in life except to struggle for the attainment of Sri Ram's Grace and love. To that aim alone I dedicate the rest of my life and suffer for it — suffer to any extent. We may not meet again — at least as husband and wife. Walk always in the path of God and truth, and make Ramc do the same.

Don't give up the spinning-wheel. It will give you peace and happiness. Let Ramc also work it.

Sri Ram's blessings on you and Rame. He protects you both.

Yours affectionately,

- P. Vittalrao

27-12-22

Chandra Shekhar also points out that "true to her husband's parting behest, Rukmabai made the spinning-wheel her constant companion and the source of her comfort, peace and happiness, almost till her very last day" (Chandra Shekhar 1988: 127-128).

Chapter V

The Rhetoric of *Bhakti Yoga–Anuraga* and *Madhura Bhava*

This chapter identifies certain paradigms of nationalist discourse the rhetoric of *bhakti* offers in *Autobiography of an Indian Monk* (1932) by Purohit Swami.¹ Shankar Gajanan Purohit, was born in Badnera near Amraoti in Berar on 12th October 1882 in an affluent and pious family. He studied philosophy for his B.A. at Morris College, Nagpur followed by Law at Deccan College, Pune and at Bombay University. In 1908 he was married to Godavari, or Godu Bai who also joined her husband in his spiritual practices. Two daughters, Indumati and Sumati were born to them and a son as well who died early. Following the birth of the son, Purohit Swami adopted *sannyas* and practised rigorous austerities. He was enlightened in the course of his pilgrimage to Mt. Girnar, the abode of Lord Dattatreya. His Guru, Sri Natekar known as Hamsa Swami encouraged him to carry India's message to the West.² Subsequently on reaching London in February 1931, he met W.B. Yeats whose interest in Indian spirituality led to a number of collaborative works like the translation of the *Ten Principal Upanishads*. Yeats also encouraged him to write an autobiography. Purohit Swami also founded the London Institute of Indian Mysticism. News of his Guru's failing health hurried him back to India in 1936. Purohit Swami did not show any inclination to establish an *ashram* or initiate disciples after his Guru's *mahanirvana* in 1937. The Swami entered *mahasamadhi* in 1939. Research proves that Purohit Swami was a prolific writer. His published works include *The Holy Mountain* (1934), a translation of Hamsa Swami's travelogue, *The Geeta* (1935), *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937) and Patanjali's *Aphorisms of Yoga*.³ The autobiography was initially published under the title *An Indian Monk, His Life and Adventures* in 1932. The present 1992 edition edited by Prof. Vinod Sena with a detailed introduction to Purohit Swami is re-entitled *The Autobiography of*

an Indian Monk. Besides there are less known works of the Swami like *Song of Silence* (n.d), a spiritual poem of 108 stanzas, a number of unpublished devotional poems like "The Honey Comb" (n.d), "At Thy Lotus Feet"(n.d), "The Harbinger of Love" (1914) and "In Quest of Myself" (1914) of 108 stanzas each. Other unpublished works of Purohit Swami include two plays' *Sarojini* (1914-15) and *Sanyasini* (1923) in Marathi, *Tales from Indian Mysticism* (n.d), in English, *Kathas from 'Gyan, Bhakti and Prem'* (n.d) and their interpretations and *Spiritual Tales* (n.d) in Marathi. The close association of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot with Purohit Swami will be of interest to those studying the mystical strain in their poetry.

It needs to be reiterated at the outset that the author's choice of the language and the form adopted for self-expression in the autobiography inextricably links the personal dimension with the social dimension. It is significant that the very depiction of Purohit Swami's intense personal relationship with God in the autobiography is in response to the Western demands for "experience". W.B. Yeats in his introduction to Purohit Swami's autobiography deems the West's exposure to and encounter with the philosophical discourses of the East as fast approaching a point of saturation and hence demands "experience" from India. This point will be taken up in detail later in the chapter.⁴

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the *bhakti rasa* in Purohit Swami's autobiography as a subversion of patriarchy and a reversal of the colonial male gaze. The second section analyses the representation of various socio-spiritual experiences in the autobiography that reflect the author's cultural resistance and nationalist thought.

I

The Body and *Bhakti*

A close reading of the author's spiritual struggle narrated in the text reveals that he was temperamentally inclined towards pursuing the path of *bhakti* for self-realisation. The senior members of his family, particularly his grandmother and his father conditioned his spiritual temperament and fostered a sense of self-restraint early in his life. In fact as we can see in the analysis, Purohit Swami experienced a constant battle between his mind that threatened to break loose at any moment and the values inculcated by social and familial conditioning. This is related to the two distinct but intricately linked *bhavas* of the author's *bhakti*. They are (1) *anuraga bhava* and (2) *madhura bhava*. Before identifying these moods in the text *per se*, we will examine what entails *anuraga bhava* and *madhura bhava* respectively.⁵ *Anuraga bhava* dramatises what can be termed as the "romantic" love between a lover and his beloved while *madhura bhava* is the "conjugal" love — that dramatises the husband-wife relationship. The similarities and differences between the two can be explained through examples. The *anuraga* between the legendary Radha and Lord Krishna is basically understood as the figurative depiction of the nature of the relationship between the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman*. That is to say, God's intense love for his creation and conversely the creation's aspiration to realise and to become one with God. The *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva beautifully captures the *anuraga* between Radha and Krishna by dramatising their playfulness, wooing, quarrel, reconciliation, teasing and such other attributes of "romantic" love. These are construed as figurative expressions of the *Jivatman's* experiences in the course of its ascent to attain God-consciousness, like the overcoming of various obstacles the ego consciousness poses, particularly the sense of possession and attachment. *Anuraga bhava* thus features the soul's intense struggle for realising God's unconditional love through complete self-surrender, non-possession and

non-attachment. *Madhura bhava*, the mood of conjugal love (also known as bridal mysticism) may be treated as a mood that is subsequent to the infirmities of romance. Living manifestations of *madhura bhakti* were Andal and Mirabhai who meditated upon God as their consort. As is clear from *Mirabhajans*, the uninterrupted exchange of love between the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman* subsequent to their union or self-realisation is featured in *madhura bhakti*. As we have already seen in Swami Ramdas's autobiography, *bhakti* takes you to God-experience and becomes the end in itself. However *bhakti marga* in *anuraga bhava* and *madhura bhava* were pursued not by women alone. Purohit Swami's *bhakti* can essentially be seen as manifesting itself in both these *bhavas* in the autobiography. The essence of this *bhakti bhava* can be captured in a chapter of his autobiography significantly titled "My Lord Shrikrishna". In this chapter Purohit Swami quotes an instance from Mirabhai's life that throws light on a significant social dimension in the form of the God-devotee relationship:

...Shri Mirabhai rebuked a Sadhu who boasted that , he would never look on a woman, and whenever he left the monastery kept his eyes on the ground, with "Lord Shrikrishna alone was a man, when compared with Him all others are women", and humbled him (Swami 1992: 121-22).

These lines show how intricately linked is the spiritual with gender questions. Mirabhai *does not* challenge the subordinate position ascribed to women in the social hierarchy. Instead she reiterates it. By 'reducing' the Sadhu to the status of a woman when compared to God, Mirabai severely criticises the patriarchal attitude prevalent even among the male saints towards women which sees them as temptresses and as causing deviation from spiritual pursuit. She thereby undermines man's sense of power over woman in the social hierarchy and challenges their tendency to monopolise even the spiritual pursuit. Other instances of subversion through the body and *bhakti* can be observed among

Western women saints like Terese Neumann who experienced the passion of Christ and manifested Christ's stigmata on her body. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, during his moments of *samadhi* used to manifest behavioural and physical traits characteristic of the Divine Mother.

It is significant that Purohit Swami, a male who pursued the path of *anuraga* and *madhura bhakti* for self-realisation quotes Mirabai's defiance. These lines show the linkage between gender and spirituality. What we need to note here is the role of these *bhava* in subjugating the seeker's ego-sense. When women manifest this mood of *bhakti*, they are playing their sub-ordinate role which is already imposed on them in the social domain. Now men who choose by virtue of their temperament or otherwise the path of *anuraga / madhura bhakti* for self-realisation are assuming a feminine role vis-a-vis God as male. Psychologically, by virtue of this act, man is surrendering voluntarily or involuntarily his sense of the socially powerful role, acquired through his birth, social location and conditioning, as a male. By resorting to the path of *madhura bhakti* or *anuraga bhakti*, he experiences a role reversal. Here God becomes 'He' and the *bhakta* becomes 'she'. It is 'He' who eludes 'her', it is 'He' who teases 'her' and it is 'He' who makes 'her' wait for 'His' reciprocation. These aspects of *sadhana* work as a check on the seeker's ego-sense akin to the way it works in the superior - subordinate relationship involved in the *dasya bhava* or *putra bhava*. As pointed out earlier, in *dasya bhava* God is the powerful and benevolent master and in *putra bhava* characterised by filial love, God is the powerful and loving father or mother.

My reading of these equations, it may be noted, is to be understood as radically different from the way Parama Roy reads Ramakrishna Paramahansa's mysticism in her book, *Indian Traffic*. Parama Roy reads the 'femininity' of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the "masculinity" of Swami Vivekananda from a Western perspective imbued with the jargon of postcolonial studies and as a consequence the essence of their spiritual aspirations, as the Indian psyche

understands these is totally lost sight of. In fact the significance of Mother Sarada Devi's femininity and Swami Vivakananda's masculinity and Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual persona as a perfect combination of the two (Sailaja 2001: 253) is something which Roy fails to notice. A contemporary well-known instance of a saint assuming both the feminine and masculine traits of the divine is Mata Amritanandamayi of Vallikkavu, Kerala. This aspect in itself can be taken up for independent study.

Nowhere in the text does the author explicitly state that he experienced the mood of *anuraga* and *madhura bhakti*. But various instances in the narrative indicate this. The very reference to Mirabai's reprimanding the *sadhu* is a case in point. The attempt here is to examine how the autobiography represents certain aspects of the *bhakti* culture in India in general and the discursive pattern emerging in the Swami's spiritual *sadhana* in particular through these moods of *bhakti yoga*.

Critics who have affinity for the path of self-realisation through reasoning tend to decry *bhakti* as an "emotional" path for knowing God. However votaries of the *bhakti* path endorse its exoteric nature as the basic advantage of this path. In fact as the autobiography shows, Purohit Swami himself starts identifying *bhakti* as his *marga* after various casual and serious encounters and experiments with other paths. A psycho-analytical approach will prove that temperament and social conditioning facilitate a person's choice of his way to God. The author portrays himself as quite emotional, demanding and assertive as a child and extremely passionate as a youth - aspects of his character which he started struggling to overcome once his vocation became clear to him. The Swami's inherent spiritual temperament was fine-tuned by the rigorous religious disciplines practised in the household under the stewardship of the Swami's illustrious and saint-like grandmother. This is particularly brought out in the earlier chapters of the autobiography viz., "How the Soil had been Prepared", "Grandmother and Nursing Mothers" and "I am not to be a Landlord". The

reader however cannot rule out the role of grandmother's influence in shaping the *bhakti bhava* in him. For instance, in chapter two, the author remarks: "She [Swami's grandmother] and Shri Mahalakshmi were at one. She had visions of her, consulted her face to face, and was consoled by her. In every deed her whole life was spiritualised. Though a woman moving through this world, she was in it, not of it" (Swami 1992: 4). It was the religious grooming by his father that led him closer to Lord Dattatreya who ultimately became his *aradhanamurti*. His father asked him to read the *Guru-Charitra* regularly. Purohit Swami was thus initiated into attributing a particular name and form to God and that was of Lord Dattatreya. Purohit Swami learnt his first lesson in *bhakti* when he realised that God was not to be simply approached only for the sake of fulfillment of small earthly desires. Here is an example: "Of course when my father learnt that I was disappointed because the Lord did not solve the problems of geometry for me, he insisted on a better understanding. Then at last the idea dawned on me that devotion ought to be pure and simple, and that love ought to be unselfish, and that prayer was no bargain" (21). Developing unselfish love, he understands, is the first stage if one has to elicit a response from God. He says that he "tried to love Him in the fullness of my heart" (21). Other major conversional influences were the saints and poets of Maharashtra who he met, read or heard about. All these influences, as is clear from the narrative, start working on his receptive mind and make him fancy that it is possible to realise divine life, "before doing anything else. But it was not so easy, as I found out later" (23). The intense yearning for response from God starts striking deep roots in him and encouragement of course came with rewards like the vision of the Goddess Jagadamba after an intense appeal (24). Like Paramahansa Yogananda he never misses a chance to speak to *mahatmas* and *yogis* whenever he came across them. The next stage in the course of his spiritual development is the encounter with his own self. The transition from boyhood to youth brings with it the infirmities of age that poses a serious

challenge to anyone determined to practice celibacy both in thought and deed. His encounter is first with the body and then with the mind as he becomes increasingly conscious and cautious of his sexuality and passionate nature. It is perhaps this sensitivity and caution and what seems to be an inherent sense of self-restraint that helps him to proceed further in his *sadhana*. The narrative shows how watchful he is over the mind-body nexus: "The stronger I became the more passionate I was. The books which deal with sexual love inflamed me. There were many temptations, and I needed constant self-control. Shame burned within me and made my mind weaker everyday. I felt drawn towards woman, and could very well understand that I was drifting backwards" (29).

He wages his first spiritual battle with the body:

I was lodging with a family and met many ladies, and it was no fault of theirs that I was unusually strong and handsome. One or two among them made advances, but I was a puritan like my father; my response was to forgo all showiness in dress, to grow a beard and gradually to give up food; deciding that most of it was unnecessary, till I lived on one meagre meal a day (29).

Here one may pause to note that Purohit Swami does not look down upon women as temptresses. Instead he blames himself for being a source of temptation physically for women. His war then is declared against the mind which he was then able to identify as the mischief-monger:

Whenever my mind went astray, I used to take a cold bath, then run straight into the worship-room to pray and weepIt was comparatively easy to control the physical, but what about the mind? It wavered and revolted in spite of my strenuous efforts. Unmarried, a strict celibate, I knew that unless my mind were under control all my professions would prove false. My thoughts made me angry; I would scold them, then coax them with spiritual texts into observance of the laws of religion.

It was an incessant fight, which used up all my strength (29-30).

He is conscious of the connection between the body and the mind when he says "the stronger I became the more passionate I was". This remark shows the effect of the body on the mind. The next line, "the books which deal with sexual love inflamed me" shows conversely the effect of the mind on the body. On realising this, he attempts to control the body by forgoing things that caused physical attraction. Attempts at controlling the infirmities of the mind are done through the mind. It is the mind that chides the mind, it is the same mind that attempts to control itself. As is clear from the passage quoted above the attempt of the author was to perhaps suppress his sexuality not to control it. Control of course is the next phase in his spiritual pursuit and that is by observing dietary restrictions and practise of *yoga*. Meditation and diet help him to sublimate his passions: "My conscience became very sensitive, and made me aware of my defects. I knew I had to climb the heights of the Himalayas and tried to equip myself with my whole strength in order to qualify myself for the heavy task that lay before me" (32). The same chapter indicates his loss of interest and faith in the path of reasoning to attain self-realisation. As a student of philosophy he used to engage himself in debates on philosophical reasoning. *Jnana yoga* was not beyond his reach. But it did not appeal to him because it did not help him to gain mastery over his senses. He remarks in the same chapter that "with all my philosophy I had gained nothing which could be valued in terms of peace" (29). He strictly follows the path of *raja yoga* and simultaneously has no dearth of exposure to various miracles performed by *yogis*. He reaches the fifth stage *vinyoga* called the "*pratyahara*". At this point the author informs us of a significant advance in his *sadhana* which marks his transition from faith to experience: "But the question before me was not faith, but actual experience. Faith carried me to a certain point, but when my patience began to tire, actual experience came to my aid, and thus I could successfully combat the various

difficulties that stood in the way, and attain the stage which I have attained today, whatever its value may be" (38). Direct experience could have easily led him to get carried away by demonstrations of miraculous feats with the power attained through *raja yoga*. However like all true saints he too realises at various points of time in his spiritual pursuit that such powers are not to be misused. In a chapter titled "The Engine Refuses to Move" he narrates how the demonstration of the power of *yoga* by a *sadhu* in a railway station gains popularity. He himself had experienced the power of a *mantra* to control prosperity. However he realises that these powers delay the realisation of the divine: "But 'Does this talk help them towards realisation of the Divine?' was my thought, since I was striving more and more for Bhakti Yoga (union with God through the love of Him) and I knew that I was tempted by a lower aim when asked to admire the powers displayed in such feats" (39). Here Purohit Swami translates *bhakti* as the "love of Him" and not as "devotion". This marks the turning point in his spiritual pursuit — the pursuit of the path of *bhakti*. He beholds the visions of various forms of God and one of the forms is of Lord Dattatreya and he identifies that "he was the god whom I worshipped pre-eminently" (43). He realises another great truth that "all gods are one" (44). The author records the effect of this knowledge on him: "My worship changed with my psychology. But the truth remained that God, in whatever form you worship him, is willing to manifest himself according to the wishes of the devotee. Men find the good they seek with pure love" (44). The author enters another significant phase in his pursuit on meeting his spiritual master. Greatly encouraged by his insightful assurances in terms of his success in God-realisation, his *sadhana* becomes more intense. A time comes, a point of "crisis" as he calls it, when all the sacred books are thrown away because realisation dawns on him that his need is not knowledge, but wisdom: "Learning could not give me control. My soul was sick and was not helped by medicine administered to the intellect, since they were two separate things. I must

prescribe for my soul; success in self-control, that would cure it. This plain and simple philosophy appealed to me" (47). His days of intense *sadhana* culminates in his vision of Lord Dattatreya and the hearing of a divine message on his pilgrimage to Mt. Girnar. The first phase of a direct relationship with God begins with *dasya bhava*, when he realises that "I was definitely accepted by the Master of all Masters, though not as a disciple, yet as a servant. I must strive hard to deserve to be a disciple, but first I wanted to serve and wished to see my service accepted, however humble and wayward it might be" (58). Another significant 'encounter' with the Lord at a temple in Mahur marks a departure from his status as a servant to that of the beloved. The chapter which narrates this direct experience with God is significantly titled "The God's Bed". Legend goes that Lord Dattatreya comes to take rest every night at the temple at Mahur. The priest in the temple had the vision of the Lord who told him that his "beloved child", Purohit Swami would come. The priest prepared the bed for the Lord and left the place and assured the Swami that he may be lucky enough to behold Him. The author's experience of God narrated in the chapter definitely shows the pace at which the intimacy between the *bhakta* and God increases. On the first night,

...I heard the beautiful music of the measured steps enter the hall. All of a sudden there was a gush of sweet perfume, and automatically I rose to greet Him, with my hands folded. I saluted again and again. My hair stood on end. I perspired profusely. Tears of gratitude rushed to my eyes. I had stood in prayer for a couple of hours at least when again I heard the music of the patters and felt the Master pass out. I was quite sure that He had come, taken His rest, and gone. I was extremely elated (65, emphasis mine).

The ambience described is so well set for the enactment of the divine romance. The author experiences God through three of the five senses. At first the author hears the Lord's measured steps enter the hall. Then he smells the gush of

sweet perfume emanating from the Lord's body. When the Lord returns after taking rest, the author is able to *feel* the Lord pass out. One can infer from his report to the priest, "I gave the full description of what I heard and felt" (65) that the author did not *see* the Lord. The encounter is thus tantalising which leaves the author longing for the Lord more so since the Lord is so very near — yet so far. So he waits again the second night and at first the same experience is repeated on his entry. Moreover, he gets to hear "a knock at the door of the temple room, as if somebody wanted to enter. In the morning the experience was repeated" (66). On the third night, the author takes up the responsibility of bedecking the Lord's bed: "I decked the bed of the Lord with garlands till everything looked beautiful. I was sure the Lord would be pleased with this service" (66). This deed blends *anuraga* and *madhura bhava*. However there is an interesting hurdle to his access to the Lord's bed on his arrival because it is specifically mentioned every time that every night the priest locks up this room and takes away the key. The door however opens and closes for the Lord while the author eagerly waits outside to "feel" him. The third night he gets to hear the Lord's presence more significantly:

...I heard the creaking noise of the bed as if someone was lying down on it. I moved to the door and could hear sounds quite clearly as though someone was turning over from side to side. The whole atmosphere was surcharged with perfume. I watched with rapt attention. There was no doubt in my mind that the Lord was enjoying His rest. In the morning the door opened and shut again; the sound of the Lord's pattens was heard going away, and sweet perfume filled the air. The Lord had gone (66).

Though the author uses the words "watched with rapt attention" all the experiences are listened to. Also, he had bedecked the bed for the night and the same night he gets to hear the Lord "enjoying his rest", a sign of the Lord's

acceptance of his act of love. Moreover he not only gets to hear this but also gets to see the Lord's response the next morning:

As soon as the door was unlocked, the priest was taken aback with surprise. There lay the pillows as if they had been used; the bed-sheet was crushed, and the shawl looked as if someone had worn it and thrown it away in a hurry. The priest congratulated me on my devotion. He told me that he had never before witnessed such a beautiful realisation. I told him everything that had happened and tears came to his eyes while he listened to my story (66).

The narrative of his God-experience alternates between the romantic mood and the conjugal mood. Also note the use of words while recording his response to the experience:

I desired and received — this was neither fantasy nor hallucination, but reality. If I cannot believe my eyes, my nose, my ears, my senses, what am I to believe?__I had wanted to surprise the Lord sleeping, had succeeded, and apprehended thereby that He was wide-awake. I grasped His reality but at the same time knew that He was too great for my arms to embrace (68).

One cannot miss the romantic playfulness in this God-devotee relationship. The expressions "desired", "received", "too great for my arms to embrace" etc., in the light of the expressions and ambience of the episode clearly indicate the author's sense of *anuraga bhakti*. The submissive yet playful role of the author here in surprising the Lord, knowing all the while that "He was too great for my arms to embrace" is a sublime manifestation of a woman's role in the context of *anuraga* between a man and a woman enacted on the earthly plane.

One may digress at this point to examine similar strains in the poems he wrote subsequent to his self-realisation. He wrote poems at the behest of Lord **Dattatreya** who appeared in his dreams thrice and asked him to "write for my

sake". The poems written in English are "In Quest of Myself, "The Harbinger of Love", "The Song of Silence", "The Honey-Comb" and "At Thy Lotus Feet".⁶ These poems express the author's deep sense of unselfish love as the touch stone of self-realisation. Stanza 49 of "The Honey-Comb" for instance presents the image of the devotee as one who has received the love of the Lord. The metaphor of the erotic conveys a subtle relation between the body and the *bhakti*:

The bed was strewn with flowers
 Loosened from the wreath
 That adorned my brain,
 Woven with his lover's skill.
 My yearning bosom, proudly bore
 The trace of saffron pigment
 Fondly embroidered with his hand.
 His kisses sweet lingered along my lips
 Loath to leave their lovely seat,
 The honeyed speech, the alluring smile,
 The piercing look, the noble heart,
 The promise sweet, the crowning triumph of hope
 and life,
 It is all enough to feed my languished heart.⁷

Stanza 105 of "At Thy Lotus Feet" portrays the author quarreling with the Lord, akin to the mood in conjugal love:

Before we met, he used to whisper loving words
 Every now and then,
 But since the meeting is over,
 He never opens his lips!
 Before we met, there was that love, and he used to
 Send for me day and night,
 And since the meeting is over
 He never even cares to remember me!
 Before we met, he was full of mercy and used to
 Give me whatever my want,
 But since the meeting is over

Nothing can be had at all!
 Before we met, he always felt anxious for me
 And used to give me lessons in every art,
 But since the meeting is over
 He never deigns to teach!
 Before we met, he was always pleased and used to
 Pour his mind into that of mine,
 But since the meeting is over
 He never shows himself!
 Before we met he used to
 Command and see the act was done
 But since the meeting is over
 He neither asks me to do, nor not to do
 Before we met there was the veil and he used to
 Keep me beyond with respect
 But since the meeting is over
 There is no love and no darling!
 Before we met, there was darkness and he used to
 Pour light at intervals,
 But since the meeting is over
 I know not where he is gone! ⁸

Stanza 70 of "The Honey-Comb" conveys the experience of *bhakti* and the attitude of a *bhakta* towards the Lord; this is quite akin to the sugar metaphor Swami Ramdas employed to characterise the essence of his *bhakti*:

I would like to be the humble ant and taste the sugar
 sweet,
 I would never be the sugar itself where both the
 taste and sweetness meet.
 I would feign be the truant child, and suck my
 mother's divine milk,
 I would never be the mother herself
 And would not barter my bliss for her grace benign.
 I would gladly be the sweet consort, and serve my
 Lord
 day and night. I would never be the Lord himself
 And lose the honor of kissing his hallowed feet.
 I would with pleasure be his bosom-friend
 And throw my arms round his neck,
 But I would never break the tie itself

And merge myself in the universal Self.⁹

It is also significant that after his trial through *gruhashthashrama* and service he embarks on his *vanaprasthashrama*. He also plans a trip to Mt Girnar to herald its beginning. Sexual union as metaphor in the passage that anticipate his trip to Mt. Girnar is another instance of the link between the body and *bhakti*: "I had vowed to give myself, body, mind and soul to Lord *Dattatreya*, but not a body weakened with disease and hard usage, so I had restored to it its full vigour that it might be a worthy gift" (Swami 1992: 102). After a tedious journey to Mt. Girnar, he describes the *darshan* as follows: "I had given the whole strength of my mature body to the Lord in its full vigour, not taxed by disease; He had accepted sinew and flesh and returned me in their stead the flame of His spirit burning more brightly than ever. All glory to Him!" (104) These lines place the author very much in the tradition of Mirabai and Andal and of John Donne, who in his Holy Sonnets like "Batter My Heart" wants God to "ravish" him in order to chastise him. In the chapter titled "My Lord Shrikrishna" in the autobiography, he narrates the bliss of the divine union on his visit to Mathura. The rhetoric initially reflects *anuraga* and then the *madhurya* of divine union:

As every act of His was recalled to mind, trees, the descendents of those under whose shade He once sat, were embraced, the Jumna which had been His bath, became mine, and where He had sat on the bank listening to the songs of birds, I cast my mind back thousands of years to picture Him warmed by the same sun, and when the moon rose whose lovely light had honoured His more lovely features, I seemed to hear the divine flute He had played to her. His presence was with me, eternal life enveloped mine, and mine was merging into His (122).

This passage reads like a beloved recollecting the lover's earlier rendezvous while she awaits his arrival and their subsequent union. The last chapter of the autobiography also employs the erotic to inform the reader that language fails

to convey the human-divine union. The simile he draws is the consummation of conjugal love:

Information cannot realise something concerning them; we can only realise something through experience. When a little girl grew to be eleven years of age, she said to her mother: "Why do you leave me at night and go to my father? What are you doing with him?" But her mother could only say: "When you are married, you will understand." No information can impart the essential on such matters. As a woman gives herself to her husband, when we concentrate, we apply our hearts to one thought to the exclusion of all others; we forgo the pleasures of the roving, unsettled mind and fasten on the essence of being, divine, unchangeable and ineffable, and of the joy that then grows up within us we can say nothing that the discursive intelligence can understand, save in distant images and parables, for language is sensuous and reflects the illusions of matter which forever veil and disguise the spirit. But when the child in her turn is married, she will experience and realise what it was her mother could not tell her. So those who have not yet won joy through concentration will only realise that joy when they have (151).

The focus is on the woman's experience. Her surrender to her husband is made clear when the author uses the expression, "as a woman gives herself to her husband." Though this may strike the reader as the language of patriarchy, it highlights man's sub-ordinate role in the spiritual quest which is akin to woman's role in the patriarchal structure. The above passage conveys two socio-spiritual messages as did Mirabai's. The first, as stated above, underscores the need for that complete surrender of one's ego in order to approach the Divine. The second is that words cannot communicate the bliss of Divine union. The text comes close to the post-modernist view that words as signifiers stand for endless deferral of meaning. Deconstruction in other words seems to

be a version of a saint's view of the world as signifiers (which we also saw in **Ramdas**), as manifestations of God, the "ultimate meaning out there" which in fact exists in various forms we see around. God, in deconstructionist language, exists as endless play of signifiers, as **all** that we perceive around. Though each signifier appears complete in itself it is yet not *the* essence because one can only be described in relation to the other. Though the Hindu religious code strongly revolves around the concept of a "centre", the ultimate experience defies the sense of the "centre", duality and dichotomy. As most of the texts we examine show, self-realised souls however choose to get back and remain on the dual plane of the taster i.e the *rasika*, enjoying the taste (embodied in the thing tasted--as in the ant-sugar analogy) i.e the *rasa* itself. For we can talk about the *rasa* only in relation to the *rasika*. This is the essence of *bhakti*. Purohit Swami's autobiography like Swami **Ramdas's**, thus represents a paradigm of the *bhakti* culture in India.

II

Critique of Culture as Nationalist Thought

The text serves as a document of cultural resistance to modernity in a variety of ways. First, it is significant that the autobiography was written at the instance of W.B. Yeats who conveyed to Purohit Swami the necessity to share with them the experience of God-realisation and not merely abstract philosophy. The text is thus a product of the Indo-British encounter that took place not in India but in England between a "Hindu missionary" and the English elite. Yeats was ready to promote him the way he did Tagore by getting his publishers to bring out the autobiography. Yeats' letter to Sturge Moore written on 9th Feb 1932 bears ample testimony to it:

Lady Gregory read the MSS and said she thought it would make a sensation. I can't imagine a book more appropriate to the moment—I know nothing like the book, so far as I know there does not exist in any language such a record of the life of a saintly man growing up under circumstances that may have existed over half or all the world. I assure you of course that it goes on as it starts — It is a record that may change, or rather should change man's conception of primitive history. Will you write to Macmillan yourself giving your own opinion and if you care to giving mine...He should listen to us for after all we launched Tagore.¹⁰

Yeats participated in shaping the text in a way that would cater to the Western audience. In his introduction to the text he remembers to have told the Swami:

The ideas of India have been expounded again and again, nor do we lack ideas of our own; discussion has been exhausted, but we lack experience. Write what you have just told us; keep out all philosophy, unless it interprets something seen or done (Swami 1992:xiii).

Yeats also highlights Sturge Moore's role in appropriating the text to cater to the European sense of form. As Yeats points out:

He took my advice and brought his book, chapter by chapter, to Sturge Moore for correction. Sturge Moore, one of our finest critics, would say: "You have told us too much of this, or too little of that; you must make us see that temple more clearly" or he would cross something out, or alter a word, helping him to master our European sense of form (xiii).

The introduction, verily, conveys a strong sense of the cultural *difference*, processes of cultural dialogue in which an Eastern theme and ethos is made to be perceived from a Western perspective and then fitted into a Western

language and form. It is not surprising therefore if Sturge Moore, as Vinod Sena points out in his introduction to the Indian edition of the text, came to see himself increasingly more as a collaborator than as an editorial adviser. However it became a text that Yeats wanted to read, thanks to Sturge Moore. The knowledge that Sturge Moore participated in the Swami's literary enterprise somehow interferes with our own reading of the autobiography. If one goes by the tone and tenor of Yeats's introduction to the autobiography one cannot help but see Yeats (notwithstanding the fact that he was an anti-colonial Irish patriot) and Sturge Moore as dominating Western patrons. One instance is Yeats's depiction of the Swami's modest disposition as a spiritual man from India. Yeats "Introduction" becomes a typical example of the Western gaze when he 'represents' the Swami as a person who had come to Europe "that he might interpret the religious life of India, but had no fixed plan. Perhaps he should publish his poems, perhaps, like Vivekananda go to America" (xii). He was not received, says Yeats, by Rome's Holy Father. It needs to be noted that Yeats's introduction of the Swami takes off on a negative, uncertain note. Yeats takes the credit when he says, "Then he had come to England and called upon the Poet Laureate, who entertained him" (xii). The inevitable Western male gaze falls on him as he describes his physique: "A man of fifty, broken in health by the austerities of his religious life; he must have been a stalwart man and he is still handsome" (xii). Yeats presents himself as one who is not "startled" by the Swami's ideas but as one who is "interested" because "I had heard the like from other Indians" (xiii). Instead Yeats finds the Swami "startled and shocked" with the suggestion that he write his autobiography because it contradicts all tradition (xiii). When the autobiography finally came through, it thoroughly fitted into what Yeats was looking forward to, "a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, *I found all 7 wanted*" (xiv, emphasis mine). Section III of his introduction has an expression that conveys more of a sense of possession than endearment: "*My Indian monk's habitual diet is milk and fruit...*"(xv,

emphasis mine) which sounds more like the rhetoric of marketing. Yeats however sees Western receptivity to Eastern religious enterprise as the beginning of the "converse impregnation" with the East as male (xvi). The equations, one need not say, were however not the same as the Western impregnation of the East and the effects were certainly not the same. On completion of the autobiography and on Yeats reading it, he writes to Purohit Swami in a letter dated 29 March 1932:

...It is a form of experience of which we have had previously no record and it is described with admirable simplicity...You have done quite right in keeping back your own personality, your own opinions, they would interfere however admirable in themselves with the vividness of the record. You must not think there is any lack of spirituality, your struggles, your long sacrifice, your occasional visions, turn the mind towards spiritual things in a new and unique way.¹¹

The autobiography was well received in England and even in France as numerous reviews prove. For instance, B.A.L. reviews the text in *The Morning* of 11 October 1933 under the title "Autobiography of a Brahmin Monk". Parts of it read as follows:

___In few books in fact, is this eternal consciousness of the inevitable approach of the Moment when material calls merge into the Unknown, this constant pre-occupation of spirituality, or the urge to realise divinity, portrayed with such intimacy....But very seldom indeed can one hope to find a Hindu Yogi • writing his own autobiography. If for nothing else, therefore this autobiography of an Indian Monk should be attractive, as it conducts us through the mental conflicts, reveals the austerities, the penances and the reactions that are experienced by the yogi....Strange things happen in India, and this book helps in some measure in the understanding of

the cravings, the penances and the powers of at least
some of the more genuine sadhus and fakirs.¹²

The above reviewer also finds Yeats' comparison of the autobiography with the *Gitanjali* of Tagore as too "pretentious a claim". F. Yeats-Brown reviewing the book in the *Spectator* of 17 March 1937 accredits the success of the book partly to the "discerningly sympathetic introduction" by W.B. Yeats to the book and the attention of Mr. Sturge Moore and Sir Francis Younghusband. The reviewer also sees the potential of the book as an exposition of the characteristic features of a race:

....and it will be hard for the reader, with perhaps a
Franciscan ideal of joyousness in his mind, to enter
into the the self-centred yet self-abashed attitude of
the Indian. But if one can do so, he will have learned
much of a race that is doubtless the subdest -
minded of mankind (n. pag).

The reviewer finds "the intellectual vigour which is so characteristic of the great teachers of India" missing in the writer. For this, one should hold W.B. Yeats himself responsible. As Yeats's introduction and Purohit Swami's preface to the text show, Yeats had urged the Swami to keep "abstract philosophy" out: "Dr. W.B. Yeats said he wanted from me a 'concrete life, not an abstract philosophy'; here is the result. Had it not been for him, I do not think I would ever have persuaded myself to attempt this autobiography. If any readers find enlightenment in the following pages, let them join me in thanking the greatest living Irish poet" (Purohit Swami 1992: xi). The Swami distances himself from this end product and credits Yeats with the accomplishment of this task. The reviewer also wonders how far these experiences would work out practically for a European desirous of following the path of *Yoga*. It may be recalled that the Swami did run a School of Mysticism in London during his stay there and had a large following. The "East London Advertisers" reviewing the book on

27 May 1933 found it interesting for the "descriptions of the contacts of mysticism with this practical world" (n. pag). Another fragment found in the reviews file of Purohit Swami Papers held that the reference to visions and appearances of God and invocation of *Upanishadic vakyas* incompatible in the text. The latter, according to the review, is belief in Pure *Advaitism* while the former is "Theism with an Anthropomorphic God". This inconsistency and half-understanding of the precepts by readers could have been avoided if Yeats had not insisted on keeping out abstract philosophy in the autobiography. Gwyneth Foden's review of the book in *The Hindustan Times* of 23 October 1932 is a well informed one. She throws light on the author's reference to Hindu life and social customs and their underlying spirituality. She finds the author's simplicity and sincerity in the narrative striking:

In language beautiful because it is simple, fragrant because it mirrors the mind of a saint who has no use for lies, deceit, and chicanery, and who will tell his message whatever may be the reception, we read of the nobility of the Hindu, his doctrine which colours his whole life — yes, even to his political aspirations and of his striving after human perfection even as between domestic relation and the hospitality of his neighbours (n. pag).

The reviewer also does not see any proselytisation attempt in the writing of the book. She rightly identifies his realisation that all Gods are one. She attacks the **proselytisation** attempts of Christian missionaries in India in the name of service. There is a paragraph in the autobiography which details Purohit Swami's views on the service of mankind. For he did come across a point when he had to choose between *karma yoga* and *bhakti yoga*:

Was not the service of mankind the service of God?
I seriously pondered over this idea and met those who believed in philanthropy and asked them whether they had seen God, and they dared not say

that they had___no one convinced me. I thought there must be something often [read "rotten"] in such a philosophy, or else in the way they worked it out, and was not a satisfied with their results.... I came to the conclusion that it was sheer ignorance and egoism when men talked about helping God or helping mankind. When you begin to do good to this world, you presuppose that you are sufficiently wise to understand it, and powerful enough to help it out of its difficulties. Such men profess too much (Swami 1992: 76).

Quoting a few of the above lines the reviewer criticises the British: "The author of this philosophy is a monk and if it is not the most acid test of Western religion, I do not know what is. I cannot help but wonder what influence Shri Purohit Swami would have had in Indian politics. That passage should be studied by every British man and woman who has even thought it their traditional duty to help India" (Gwyneth Foden: n. pag).

That Purohit Swami's autobiography did create an impact on literary circles and that it initiated a cross-cultural dialogue in London is clear from the various newspaper reports of the time.¹³ The reviewer could have had the precedent of Vivekananda's influence on Indian politics in mind while critiquing the "White man's burden" theory of the British. This would inevitably lead us to examine the political affinities of Purohit Swami. As Vinod Sena points out in his editorial introduction to the text and also during the researcher's interview with him, Purohit Swami was a fiery revolutionary and was "an active lieutenant of Lokmanya Tilak until his arrest and trial. He publicly spoke in Tilak's defence, and such was the tenor of his speeches that when they were published, the pamphlet was promptly proscribed and all copies seized and destroyed" (Swami 1992: xxxii).¹⁴ These aspects do not find mention in the autobiography. Nevertheless the spirit of nationalism can be traced in it. The concept of national identity and culture does not conform to the idea of the nation as a

political unity and as a mono cultural entity. The representation of the *bhakti* culture in India, and instances of class, caste, community, gender, racial, cultural and social interactions in the context of the spiritual quest show the role of the author as a spiritual aspirant and as a national subject. Our attempt now will be to see how the text represents the latter. For the sake of analysis we can broadly categorise them into three. The first is based on what can be termed as the author's inward gaze, the second on the author's social gaze and the third on the author's reversal of the Western gaze.

Thus far, our examination of Yeats's introduction to the text was to explore certain aspects of the socio-cultural and political dialogues that influenced the making of the text. Our detailed examination of the reviews of the text shed light on the cross-cultural discourses generated by the publishing and reading of the text. Yeats's introduction to the text, as we have seen, carries strong elements of the Western male gaze. On the other extreme we have the reviewers also exercising their critical gaze through a sympathetic or non-sympathetic reading of the text. We shall now revert to the Swami's reference to Mirabai's admonition of the *Sadhu*. This is central to the discourse of *bhakti* in the text and foregrounds the problematic link between gender and spirituality in India. Though the author makes only a passing reference to Mirabai's admonition of the *Sadhu*, it has a significant bearing on the author's inward gaze and his feminine role in his *bhakti*. The very reference to the incident gains significance, spills over and permeates the tone and tenor of the text. The Swami's sensitivity to gender inequalities practised even within an avowedly *samabhava* based spiritual domain can be seen in the way he represents himself in relation to women in various contexts. For instance, in the course of his *brahmacharya* phase, he does not see women as the cause of his infirmities. Instead he turns an inward critical gaze on himself to see his own sexuality as solely responsible. This inward gaze is clear in his self-assessment in various phases of *sadhana* which was discussed in the previous section. Secondly, he is

also sensitive to and conscious of (or is made conscious of?) the gaze of his Western audience who want to learn about his "experience" and not about his experiments with "abstract philosophy" as a narrator.

The author's social gaze is felt when we get to hear a variety of voices, read contexts and see cultural patterns engaging themselves in dialogue in the text. The text gives voice to various competing forces of social conditioning that work on an individual within a given cultural and cross-cultural framework. The author's critical social gaze can be seen cast basically on certain imperatives of the *ashramadharmā*, as it is understood and practised in the Hindu society, on mistaken notions of mysticism and on the misuse of spiritually acquired powers to gain selfish ends and cheap popularity. The autobiography is also thus a representation of a spiritually disposed India. The autobiography critiques the role of such an ambience in the shaping of an individual. The author's upbringing in an austere family, an erstwhile harmonious community life, the altruistic attitude of his parents, the delineation of his "Puritan" father, an affectionate mother and numerous encounters with soothsayers, saints and sadhus portray the chiseling of the self by a cultural consciousness which as a "centre" could "hold" things together. This however does not mean that an ideal past of a nation is constructed. The imposition of the *gruhashthashrama* on Purohit Swami and its impact on his spiritual pursuit are cases in point. Vinod Sena has effectively captured this peculiarity of the Indian psyche:

Purohit was now faced with a paradox which has confronted many a spiritual seeker in our country -- the paradox so unforgettably embodied in the life of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha. The Indian way of life presents liberation from the wheel of birth and death as our supreme goal and parents often help to instill this into the consciousness of the child in a thousand different ways. Yet if the child responds sensitively to such teachings, and on growing up resolves to renounce ordinary living in order to

pursue his spiritual quest, for the family it is as though the world itself threatens to dissolve. Seeing the direction of Purohit's inclinations, his parents sought to bind him down to the common human condition (xxv).

Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* also reveals the challenges the author had to face under the patriarchal roving eye of his elder brother Ananta who was keen on reverting Yogananda's interest in spiritual matters to that of a householder. Even modern saints like Mata Amritanandamayi had to face the threat of familial and social ostracism during the early years of her *sadhana*.. Saints, like children, enjoy an inner sense of freedom and become unmindful of the social constraints, inhibitions and hierarchies which basically control human behaviour. It is not surprising that the agents of these forces of oppression in the family or in the society react abnormally to a man or woman who enjoy this inherent sense of freedom and become different from the rest of the world that conforms to social conditioning. Writings by these saints, autobiographies, *bhajans*, sayings, etc., reflect **their** critical gaze on such oppressive forces. Sometimes **this** gaze is oblique. As we observed in the case of Bahina Bai, even as they describe **these** oppressions they tend to see them as trials of their faith as willed by the Almighty. Nevertheless a socially sensitive reader cannot help but see these experiences of the saints as "cracks" through which issues relating to religion versus spirituality are addressed. Purohit Swami's chapter on "Religion versus Spirituality" in the autobiography casts a decidedly critical social gaze on the imperatives woven by a social framework to the extent of patriarchal oppression in the name of religious duty. Advocates of such a social framework as the writings of these saints show, comfortably pose themselves to be "religious". When someone among them, as Vinod Sena points out, seeks to *experience* God, to really *believe*, "the world itself threatens to dissolve" (xxv).

The writings of Swami Ramdas and Purohit Swami bring to the fore the clash between religion and spirituality particularly in terms of the demanding duties of a male as a householder even after one chooses to become a Sannyasi. For instance, the plight of the wife and children in terms of their financial and social security is a definite cause of concern. Though physically and psychologically a male renounced the world, during a time when economic independence for women was unimaginable, a transition from *Gruhastashrama* to *Vanaprastha* was not a very smooth one. We see this in Gautama Buddha, Gandhi, Ramdas and Purohit Swami who were all *Gruhastas* before entering into the *Vanaprasthashrama*. Moreover as we find in Swami Ramdas, if a Sannyasi continues to take care of his family even after his initiation into the life of the ochre-robed one, he is again severely criticised by the same society that glorifies religion. Like Kasturba Gandhi we also find Rukma Bai, wife of Ramdas and Godu Bai, wife of Purohit Swami laudably adapting themselves to their roles as wives of Sannyasis. Purohit Swami shares his inner conflicts in this connection: "At our first meeting I gave her my promise before the sacred fire, the Brahmins and God. Thenceforward, in spite of the urge of renunciation that swelled in my breast, I was in duty bound to keep it" (73). The conflict is again to be on guard against the sway of physical passion: "I loved her dearly, though determined that our love should never come under the sway of engrossing physical passion. I tried to coach her in my ideals, and being a lady bred in Hindu culture, she earnestly tried to assimilate them" (73). The contending claims of religion and spirituality is brought out when he points out how the "religious code of married life" dragged him to a direction opposite to the life of a spiritual aspirant who would have the least concern for money and would prefer celibacy as the way of life:

No money, no life, is the order of this world. When
I told my wife that I did not intend to earn money

and that I would rather lead the life of a recluse, she was surprised, but tried to assimilate my spirit. Money was the tap-root of all misery, said the Mahatmas. And passion for woman the next longest. I was convinced of the efficacy of strict continence, and knew it helped concentration....

The religious code of married life dragged me the other way. No householder is allowed to renounce unless with the permission of his wife and after he has first begotten a son. Celibacy has a high spiritual significance, but marriage was instituted for the preservation of the race. And I thought that if I was not able to convince a soul so near and dear to me, about the righteousness of my ambition, it would be nonsense to pretend to do good to the world at large.

Thus the conflict continued for six months. I was absolutely honest with my wife. We talked during that period throughout whole nights on end, at the sametime observing strictest celibacy, and when I found that she responded finely to what I said, I thought it time to enter on the life of a householder, which was to be renounced with the consent of my wife after a son had been begotten (75-76).

It is also ironical that Purohit Swami was battling with himself to overcome the lure of sensual pleasures in his *Brahmacharya* stage while he had to give into it once he had actually overcome it in the *Gruhastashrama* stage. Here we cannot ignore his severe criticism of such social pressures:

My parents were very glad that my marriage bound me to my home with golden chains. They had forged those chains, and only through filial duty had they been able to enthrall me with them. They knew that I still clung to my ideal, and was trying hard to realise it. They had full faith in my strength of purpose and knew that I would rather die in the attempt than give it up. At the same time my heart knew that my difficulties would be added to by the indulgence of

my senses. But he knew all, and I had firm faith in Him (77).

In the chapter titled "Mysticism is not Mystery, it is Mystery Unveiled" he casts a severe critical glance on the "learned" who made "so great a mystery out of every plain matters [*sic*]. They wrote volume after volume about the fact which the Vedas have proclaimed to the world in three words: 'Thou Art That' which in its context means 'O man, thou art Brahma, the Divine Spirit'. When people are afraid of facing a fact directly, they try to create a halo of mysticism about it, and thus hide their ignorance from the public" (70). Needless to say the criticism is unleashed against the unending debates on the nature of God and on man in relation to God and on various schools of thought that had emerged out of it and subsequent divisions between votaries of each school of thought.

The Swami's reversal of the Western gaze manifests itself when the text represents the impact of modernity on Indian cultural and social life. It will be apposite to begin this section with Vinod Sena's befitting observation on the autobiography: "It speaks of a phase of life which, under the conditions of modern social and economic change, is fast becoming *passe* in our country" (xxxiii). The text represents a way of life that quite explicitly, unpretentiously and indigenously accepted differences in class, caste or community or language which maintained the delicate balance of an erstwhile communal amity. When the author narrates the picture of community living in the first chapter viz., "How the Soil had been prepared", he uses the past tense which goes to say that the situation is not the same any more. However he portrays the picture of the unspoiled rural India which preserves a culture of community life not without inner turmoil and tension. But as Sena points out what is important in the text is also the beneficial role played by the itinerant *sadhus* and saints in extending bonhomie and goodwill to householders and also in knitting the country together imperceptibly despite its many languages and regional cultures (xxxiii-xxxiv). Quite akin to the role of the modern public transport system like

the railways in reiterating inequalities on the basis of economic capacities and in shutting the *sadhus* out of such a system, Prof. Sena points out how forces of modernity have played a role in rendering traditional systems which accommodated *them passe* in the country:

For centuries we have sustained traditions which enabled sannyasins and renunciates to pursue their spiritual life without thought of their material upkeep. But with the increasing disintegration of strong local communities and of the extended family; with rapid urbanisation accompanied unprecedented inflation; the multiplication of material needs to sustain a capitalist market economy; it is no longer possible for the ordinary house-holder to feed those who come to his door (xxxiii).

In the chapter "The Begging-Bowl" the Swami presents the Indian continent as

...a conglomeration of so many races and sects which, though culturally the same, yet differ widely, in their customs, languages, dress, diet and conduct. Since I had no personal aims left, I could the more easily approach all whom I met or received hospitality from. Today I fed at the house of a man who hailed from Deccan; tomorrow I dined with a man born and bred in Gujarat; the third day a man from Kathiawar invited me. The fashion of hospitality differed, but each was as welcome as any other, for all were offered to me by my Divine Friend (111).

Swami Ramdas' autobiography depicts a similar picture of the sub-continent. Also worthy of note is the role played by the author himself in spreading God's message to everyone in a period of remarkable cultural transition. The Swami's sensitivity to the dynamics of spiritual rhetoric and social transition is remarkable:

I studied the varied modes of living in order to convey my message to everyone in a style that would suit his ways of thinking. This was no easy task, but success in it would realise the full significance of the title "Swami". Old-fashioned people, used to the language of the Vedas and Upanishads, failed to grasp the new thought and style, and the half-Westernised failed to understand those of the sacred books (111).

A people's faith in spiritual power as the ultimate weapon for countering colonial oppression gets reflected in the narrative. The Swami records a college student's response to a *Yogi's* power to work miracles: "Tell the Englishmen in England that all their machine guns and warships are only able to work so long as a Mahatma does not will otherwise. India is the land of the Mahatmas — beware of them!"(39). Besides representing the race and the milieu, the text represents quite pointedly people's faith in spiritual power as the solution to the political crisis that India faced during that period under the colonisers:

A great spiritual wave was passing through the minds of Indians at that time. Everybody was on the look-out for the next *avatar*.... All sane people thought that He must incarnate Himself and put new life into the Indians and re-establish the great eternal truths of religion...Lord ShriKrishna has given them a promise in the *Gita* to that effect...Indians have always believed that great promise...for had not India always been saved by spirituality? But where to find the new "avatar perplexed them all. Only the great sages understood, but they kept silence. The way to understand a Mahatma is to serve him and love, and to draw him out in privacy. He will never reveal himself until the psychological moment arrives, and there is no power on earth which can force him against his will. I was so sure of this that I took the safe way and found out the secret, kept it, and repeated in the recesses of my heart, "Not yet" (92-93).

This passage is significant for various reasons. First he shares with the readers the fact that a *Mahatma* will reveal himself, but who it is he does not reveal. However one can only infer that he must have referred to Gandhiji in this context. Prof. Vinod Sena in the course of my interview with him pointed out that the Swami was able to detect Gandhiji's potential as a politician right at the moment he entered Indian politics.¹⁵ The references to Gandhiji in great veneration in the autobiographies of Swami Ramdas and Paramahansa Yogananda also serve to buttress this point. Moreover an article by Purohit Swami himself titled "The Philosophy of Present Politics" signed as "A Fakir from Mount Girnar" that appeared in *The Bombay Chronicle* of 11 December 1920 re-affirms our convictions. In the article Purohit Swami severely criticises not only the colonial policy of the British but also the Westernised political and anti-colonial stance of the then leaders at the helm of affairs. Being a lawyer, he sharply criticises the British Legal System and the Britain-bred Indian lawyers:

These very lawyers led the Nation until now along the lines of policy chalked out by their Masters and they are still chewing the dry bones of constitutional agitation and posing as Solomon came [sic] to save the falling Nation. . . . Mr. Dadabhoy, Sir Pheroz Shah, the Hon. Mr. Gokhale and last but not the least Shri Tilak, all belonged to the Western civilization; they all fought with the missiles forged by the British, just as the Belgians fought the Germans with guns manufactured by the latter. He (Tilak) was a great patriot, not of the Aryan but of the English type. A new era begins with the advent of Shri Gandhi with his Gospel of non-violent non-co-operation with the British movement (Purohit Swami 1920: n. pag).

The article addresses the issues relating to the Hindu-Muslim conflict and the role of the British in creating this disunity. Non-cooperation, the author elucidates in complete agreement with Gandhi, is a mild form of that

renunciation which occupies so prominent a part in the realisation of the Self. He also uses the expression "Self Co-operation" in order to throw light on the spirit of non co-operation. The author in the article rightly identifies the necessity to do away completely with the systems introduced by the colonisers "making our own way for the emancipation of the nation in the immediate future. There is the chance that Sri Gandhi who is leading the nation today is consciously or unconsciously following the dictates of the law of our National Karma ~~through~~ which alone the manifestation of universal will is being asserted" (ibidem).

He also criticises the Indians' lack of will for having succumbed to foreign powers and for ~~fettering~~ ourselves. Purohit Swami points out the necessity to ~~spiritualise~~ politics which, according to him, Gandhiji is capable of doing. But the author is also quite sensitive to the agnostic, atheistic attitude of the Westernised elite to the Gandhian principle of faith. "The fact that Shri Gandhi has no real followers amply goes to prove this" (ibidem). The author has rightly been able to detect Gandhiji's appeal to the masses for he recognises that Gandhiji understood the psychology of the people and hence "instead of appealing to the intellect of the people he has appealed to their heart..." (ibidem). He further reprimands the pseudo-intellectualism of the educated nationalist elite and says that it was in fact "the crude mass of the Indian public" who suffered under the British. He goes on to say "They are not acquainted with rogueries of world diplomacy, nor conversant with comparative theology, nor do they know the subtleties of politics, but they know that they lost their Swaraj and they know that God alone shall give them back their Swaraj" (ibidem). This article is a highly inspirational and patriotic one that shuns the politics of the nationalist elite whose ideas of nationhood revolved around their Westernised understanding of nation and its administration. The author clearly sees the danger in this. In the Swami's

assessment of Gandhiji in this article we find him clearly anticipating Partha Chatterjee in his *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World*.

In the chapter "The Assassin's Dagger" in the autobiography, his anxiety regarding the effects of modernity on Indian civilisation is poignantly expressed:

The effects on India of Western civilisation so far as her spiritual life is concerned are far from healthy. Not only in India, but the world over, the more spiritual life is neglected, the more inward misery is discovered. Civilisation's superstructure may be very fine indeed, but it totters like a house of cards, for the everlasting kingdom is established in men's hearts and not outwardly to dazzle their eyes (Purohit Swami 1992: 149).

In the same chapter the author recounts his experience with Christian missionaries who admitted to him that they did not understand the Holy Bible. They hoped for an Eastern sage to enlighten them on the teachings of Jesus. He also points out "one missionary was so sincere as to admit that bringing Christ's teachings to India was carrying snow to the Himalayas" (147). Here the text allows the agents of proselytisation themselves to admit the futility of their exercise in an 'ahead' religious nation. The authorial voice intervenes to underscore the necessity to maintain for oneself and allow others, "true independence of thought and worship" (147). The last chapters of the autobiography also mention the dissenting voices in the country which considered his visit to Europe as "foreign propaganda". Moreover the author meets with ridicule, hostility and suspicion on political grounds in India. When some political leaders urged him to preach to the masses in India, the author's reply that "the educated had the greater need of it since they had lost their faith" (144) reveals the concerns of spiritual masters during the period. All the spiritual autobiographies chosen for study show this concern over the loss of

faith of the educated during that period. It was perhaps a period in India when, to quote Yeats, "the best lack[ed] conviction and the worst [were] full of passionate intensity".

Another significant instance of the Swami's reversal of gaze is with regard to the "experience" that the West sought through his autobiography. The text does not meet the Western demand for experience. At the end of the autobiography Purohit Swami employs the analogy of the consummation of conjugal love to reiterate that divine union has to be directly felt within and not communicated through words. This final announcement compels the Western reader to turn the gaze inward for that "experience". The author who has assumed the role of a female in his spiritual quest turns a feminising gaze on the demanding male West. This analogy places not only the author but also human kind in a decidedly feminine role with God as the male. It is interesting that this gaze of the author is quite akin to that of Mirabai's on the *Sadhu*. At this point the text undermines the hegemony of spiritual males and of the West. (Another dimension of the reversal of gaze by spiritual masters like Ramana Maharishi was discussed in Chapter Two).

Purohit Swami, like other spiritual masters of his time, identified not modernity *per se* but the disuniting forces of modernity as responsible for various social, political and communal instabilities lurking in the nation under colonial rule. The counter force that could resist "things falling apart" — to borrow Chinua Achebe's term (borrowed from W.B. Yeats) which aptly describe the effect of modernity on culture and community — was spirituality, that experience which provides a unifying vision underlying the differences based on culture, gender, class, caste, and religion. Moreover he sees spirituality as a decolonising force. The text helps the readers to identify discourses and counter discourses on nationalism that resonated across the nation during the period of which the author's voice was one.

Notes

1 I have followed the 1992 edition of the autobiography

2 *The Holy Mountain* is a travelogue by Hamsa Swami which provides a graphic description of his pilgrimage to the Himalayas and his initiation by Lord Dattatreya himself on Mt. Kailas. Purohit Swami's translation at the instance of W.B. Yeats captures the holy experience of the original. Here is an instance: "At last all of a sudden, the mental form disappeared. Automatically my eyes were opened and I saw, standing before me, the Lord Dattatreya, my Master, in his physical form. At once I prostrated myself on the icy ground like a staff and placed my head on His lotus-feet. Three days had passed like three moments for me! My master lifted me up like the Divine Mother and hugged me to His breast and caressed me all over the body. Thereafter He gave me the mantra (sacred words) and initiated me into the realisation of the Self. What a great bliss it was I cannot describe that joy, as it is beyond any description through words" (Shri Hamsa 1934: 180-81).

3 T.S. Eliot was instrumental in the publication of *Aphorisms of Patanjali*. Eliot's letter to Purohit Swami in this regard goes as follows :

7 May 1937

I have been in commun. with Yeats about PATANJALI , and he has suggested that I should write to you. We shall be glad to do this book on the same terms as the ten Upanishads, provided that Yeats writes an introduction. As you know, an introduction by him is of great value in starring a book on the market.

T.S. Eliot.

T.S. Eliot. Letter to Purohit Swami, 7 May 1937, Correspondence, Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Museum Library, New Delhi.

4 See the "Author's Preface" to the autobiography and W.B. Yeats' introduction to the autobiography that throw light on the making of the text. The participation and resonance of "many voices" in the making of the text is examined in my analysis. See the "Author's Preface" to the autobiography and W.B. Yeats' introduction to the autobiography that throw light on the making of the text. The participation and resonance of "many voices" in the making of the text is examined in my analysis.

5 I have gained insights from "Andal's Tirupavai" by Mohan Ramanan and "Mirabai" by Santa Subba Rao in *Poet Saints of India* (193-203 & 111-122) in my discussions on eroticism in the expression of *bbakti*. That Andal's and Mirabai's *bbakti* has *madhura bhava* when compared to Radha's *anuraga bhava* is purely my inference. Andal and Mirabai envisaged themselves more as God's consort while Radha's was *sakhya* oriented romance.

6 Only "Song of Silence" was published. The rest of the poems remain in the form of manuscripts and typescripts in the Purohit Swami Papers file in the manuscript section of the Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi. The correspondence file also contains a letter from Gandhiji to Wadia dated 14.10.1915 responding laudatorily to "The Song of Silence" published in his quarterly. Gandhiji says that "In sublimity it rises to the Shelleyan height". He also matches it with Tagore's poetry.

7 Purohit Swami. "The Honey Comb", Speeches/Writings by Him, ts., Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi Purohit Swami.

8 Purohit Swami. "At Thy Lotus Feet", Speeches/Writings by Him, ts., Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

9 Purohit Swami. "The Honey Comb", Speeches/Writings by Him, ts, Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

10 W.B.Yeats, Letter to Sturge Moore, 9 Feb. 1932, Correspondence, Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

11 W.B. Yeats. Letter to Purohit Swami, 29 March 1932, Correspondence, Purohit Swami Papers, Nehru Memorial Library, New Delhi.

12 B.A.L. "Autobiography of a Brahmin Monk", *The Morning*, 11 Oct. 1933, Press Clippings, Purohit Swami Papers, n.pag.

13 A newspaper found in the press clippings section of the Purohit Swami Papers reports under the title "The Science of Long Life - Hindu Missionary's Work" on 25.9.1933 on the influence of the Swami on Londoners: "London's latest cult is the cult of the Hindu mysteries. Hundreds of British men and women have adopted the teachings of Shri Purohit Swami____" and goes on to report at length on the practise of *Yoga* initiated by the Swami in London (newspaper name missing). Another newspaper article defends the Swami's mission in England and favourably sees his role as the interpreter of Hindu wisdom to the English. The report interestingly storms against certain Indian sceptical voices which remarked against the Swami's mission in England. G. Foden, "Saints versus Sinners", n.d, Press Clippings, Purohit Swami Papers.

14 This proscribed literature by Purohit Swami is in Marathi and is kept in the Hologram section of the Nehru Memorial Library. This proscribed literature by Purohit Swami is in Marathi and is kept in the Hologram section of the Nehru Memorial Library.

15 My interview with Prof. Vinod Sena, who edited the present edition of Purohit **Swami's** autobiography, on 20 Nov. 2000.

Chapter VI

The Rhetoric of *Jnana Yoga*

This chapter examines Sitanath Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* published in 1942 as a discourse on *jnana yoga*, the path of wisdom for self-realisation. Babu Sitanath Datta, later known as Pandit Sitanath Tattvabhushan was born in 1856 in Bengal and embraced Brahmaism during Keshub Chandra Sen's time. Though Brahmaism was established as a religion different from Hinduism, the reason for examining this text under *jnana yoga* is to demonstrate the affiliations the theistic stance of Tattvabhushan has with *Upanishadic* doctrines. Tattvabhushan shows the connection when he states in his autobiography that, "...the Brahma Samaj, which, though condemning and rejecting Idolatry, is none-the-less Hindu, nay more truly Hindu than other Hindus, as accepting and practising the religion taught in the highest Hindu scriptures, — the *Upanishads*" (Tattvabhushan 1942: 106). Tattvabhushan's contribution to Brahma theology was so significant that Pandit Sivanath Sastri in his *History of the Brahma Samaj* points out that he "did excellent service for the spread of theological knowledge amongst young men" (Sastri 1974: 293). Further, David Kopf, in *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Mind* observes thus: "Of all the proponents of the theological position among the Sadharans after the Schism of 1878, none was more effective a spokesman and prolific a writer than Sitanath Tattvabhushan" (Kopf 1988: 80).

This chapter is divided into three sections viz., "Initiation", "Contemplation" and "Action". The first section examines the concept of *jnana* as it is widely understood and shows how it gained further dimension in the colonial period during which the author lived and wrote his treatise. This section will also examine the first part of the text where there is a demonstration of the symbiotic relationship between the race, milieu, moment and the author. The second section will examine the rhetoric of the author's

narrative of his years of philosophic contemplation in the text. The third section examines the service oriented life lived by the author as a Brahma. Tattvabhushan's rhetoric of *jnana* in these sections contributes to nationalism since it puts up a strong resistance to Western intellectual hegemony in India.

I

Initiation

The term *jnana yoga* indicates knowing the self through the path of wisdom. The term "wisdom" cannot be easily defined. It stands for intellectual pursuit, reasoning, contemplation, insight, knowledge, and according to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, "accumulated philosophic or scientific learning and teachings of the ancient wise men". All these definitions are applicable to the way *jnana* is understood in Hindu Thought as well. In this study, *jnana yoga* is understood as the author's conscious and systematic pursuit of the philosophic teachings of wise men and women, ancient and modern, of the East and the West. "Philosophy" is here understood as "a search for a general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means" and as an "analysis of the grounds of and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs" (ibidem). As Swami Sivananda points out, "If a philosophy is not practical or if people take only an academic interest in it, it gets into disuse and in time disappears. A practical philosophy is a living religion" (Sivananda 1959: 15).

The basis of faith in Hinduism has been explored through labyrinths of reason and insight into the self in relation with nature. The *Sankhya* system of philosophy explains the universe in terms of two principles viz., *Prakriti*, or the primordial substance of energy, from which all material forms and energies evolve and *Purusha*, or the spirit principle, which 'ensouls' or seeks embodiment in *Prakriti*, and thus gives rise to all the various forms of differentiation, from

atoms to man. *Vedanta* is principally the latter part of the *Vedas*, also known as the *Upanishads*, and concerns itself with the questions of 'the inquiry into *Brahman*', or the Absolute, and the manifestations of the latter in the phenomenal universe (Ramacharaka 1980: 53-70). Ramanuja's *Vishishtadvaita* (Qualified Monistic) school of Vedanta and Sri Sankara's *Advaita Vedanta* (Monistic or non-Dualist) school are nuanced deliberations on ~~or~~ interpretations of the *Vedanta* philosophy.

The rhetoric of *jnana yoga* is adversarial, inquisitive, and dissenting, and engages with opposing voices. The pursuit of *jnana yoga* in the colonial context and its recordings in an autobiography are hence important for recognising the dominant challenging forces at work in the era. In Tattvabhushan's times it is clear that agnosticism, atheism or scepticism and manifestations of its Western philosophical counterparts were dominant influences on educated young Indians.

As I have pointed out in Chapter Two, Brahmaism was the subject of experimentation from time to time. The giving up of the infallibility of Vedantic doctrines during Maharishi Devendranath Tagore's leadership, Keshub Chandra Sen's experiments with *bhakti*, *jnana*, *karma* and *raja yoga* were some of them. Consequently, the Samaj was subjected to several schisms because dissent became louder and louder, generation after generation, on various issues (right from basis of faith to governance) as the century progressed. Though it was an intellectual movement the Samaj ironically got divided precisely on the issue of faith. Tattvabhushan points out that there was no Brahma leader who studied the philosophy of religion consciously in order to develop an ~~infallible~~ theistic ideology. The division and subsequent decline in Brahma zeal is linked up with the idolisation of leaders like Keshub. The schisms impelled Tattvabhushan to recognise his special object in life and that was to write a philosophy of Brahmaism. The disenchantment with schisms in

the Samaj is the dominant strain in his autobiography. The author casts a critical eye on the uncertainties in **Brahmaism** :

When I saw all this, the special object of my life flashed before me. I felt that one who had been saved from doubt by a long study of philosophy, was (called upon to write a philosophical defence of Theism, *Brahmavada*, and a systematic exposition of its *sadhana*, its practical realisation in life. The call grew clear and definite by and by. The truth and efficiency of Brahmaism must be shown, not merely by speaking and writing about it, but also by an earnest and strenuous life of *sadhana*. Thirdly, the wrong way in which Brahmaism had been preached by our leaders,—the practical ignoring of our old Brahmavadi *rishis*—had created a gulf between the old and the new Theism. Deprived of a close touch with the high ideals set forth by the old *sadhakas*, our spiritual life is being impoverished year after year. The gulf between the old and the new Brahmaism must therefore be bridged over by the publication of the old scriptures and their brief exposition in a suitable form. The special object of my life appeared to me in this threefold form (Tattvabhushan 1942: 126-27).

Sitanath Tattvabhushan's quest for self-realisation through the path of *jnana*, as pointed out earlier, cannot be treated as independent of the advent of Western knowledge systems in colonial India. Tattvabhushan points out that during his college education "the only subjects of study tasteful to me were religion and philosophy" (50). He began his regular study of philosophy with Sir William Hamilton's *Lectures on Metaphysics*.

The path of philosophical pursuit thus, in Tattvabhushan's times, was not confined any more to deliberations through the labyrinths of *Sankhya*, *Dvaita* and *Advaita* philosophies, and Eastern forms of theism, atheism and agnosticism. Instead it was to be inter-discursive and inter-textual in the wake

of challenges posed by exposure to trends in Western knowledge systems particularly classical Metaphysics and scientific thought, both based on conflict between faith (religion) and reason. In fact as his expositions reveal, Tattvabhushan began his systematic study of Philosophy through Western philosophers and later moved on to Hindu philosophy. In other words, Tattvabhushan's text reveals the felt dynamics between Hindu philosophy and Classical Western metaphysics, science and religion and ambivalence relating to 'rationalism', 'religion', 'faith', knowledge and intellect in the colonial context, prevalent among the intellectual elite in general, and among Brahmas in particular. The path of *jnana*, during the colonial period for a Western educated Indian, as one can see in the *Autobiography*, could not be a monologic pursuit. As Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* shows, Brahmaism emerged out of the ambivalences of the colonial encounter. It is clear from Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* that the post-Enlightenment trends had a major role to play in raising questions regarding reason and faith the way it was prevalent in the West. This sense of dichotomy was central to every aspect of Western practice while in the East, the philosophical part of religion was the concern of the intellectually inclined. The common masses were more comfortable with the *dvaita* approach which manifested itself in *bhakti*. Swami Vivekananda has made an interesting observation on the dualism prevalent in one form or the other in all religions of the world. "The vast mass of Indian people are dualists. All the religions of Europe and western Asia are dualistic ... How is it possible that, under the rule of a just and merciful God, there can be so many evils in this world? This question arose in all dualistic religions...."(Vivekananda 1994: 105-6).

It is here perhaps that Hindu Philosophy has its origins in non-dualistic doctrines while Western Philosophy became predominantly based on the dual vision of matter and spirit. The agnostic, existential and atheistic stances in Western philosophy are in a sense reflective of certain stages in the *Vedantic*

inquiry though their points of references are remarkably different. A study of the history of the Brahma Samaj would show that it was the *bhakti* movement in the Brahma Samaj that drew the masses to its fold while questioning of the infallibility of *Vedanta* was the responsibility of the "intellectuals" who ultimately rejected it and busied themselves with the power of intuition. Intellectual pursuit of the self became even more problematic when held within the framework of schisms due to lack of foundation and clarity in the theological perspectives of the Brahma Samaj. Tattvabhushan's autobiography shows a rather lonely and independent quest for a theological position which the Samaj could make its own. The autobiography unhesitatingly exposes the pretention and hypocrisy in Brahma intellectual culture.

Tattvabhushan's narrative impels us to re-read the history of the Brahma Samaj and the trends of thought among the intellectual elite of the period and to identify the gaps that a dogmatic religion can leave behind. During the heydays of the Brahma Samaj social upliftment was carried out under the charismatic leadership of Rammohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen. The formation of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj, the birth of the New Dispensation all show the ongoing conflict due to the lack of an intellectually satisfying theological position. Interestingly, no charismatic leaders emerged after Keshub. Brahma historians like Pandit Sivanath Sastri see the Cooch Behar marriage controversy (when Keshub gave away his daughter in marriage to the Prince of Cooch Behar in contradiction of the Brahma principles) as the denouement of Brahmoism. Disenchantment with living idols like Keshub and the Maharishi (though ironically Brahmoism aimed at removing idolatry) and the repeated schisms find mention in Tattvabhushan's autobiography. Tattvabhushan's intellectual pursuit took a consolidated shape in his *Philosophy of Brahmoism* which has as its backdrop developments in the Brahma Samaj. As a Brahma missionary Tattvabhushan was also a *karma yogi*.

His personal leanings towards *jnana* coincided with the tendencies in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj.

The *Autobiography* of Tattvabhushan becomes a document of resistance in a variety of ways. Besides his critique of the Samaj, he discusses the race, the milieu and the moment of his social location in Chapters 1-8, the discursive pattern in the development of his philosophical perspectives in chapters 9-12 and the period of his *Karma Yoga* as a *gruhasta* and Brahma activist in chapters 13-16.

We shall analyse the first eight chapters initially. Chapter One traces Tattvabhushan's lineage to the Kayasta caste, " which, as Mr. Rameschandra Datta says, is the ruling caste in Bengal" (Tattvabhushan 1942: 1). There is an assumption of shared knowledge here because Tattvabhushan does not mention who Rameschandra Datta is. It is interesting to note that in the very first sentence, the author distances himself from being laudatory about his caste and lets it be uttered through "Mr.Rameschandra Datta". This chapter also shows how central caste was to one's identity. Tattvabhushan emerges as some one who takes just pride in his ancestry, deeds, self-respect, assertion, self-abnegation and piety. While tracing his lineage Tattvabhushan speaks of his ancestor whose conflicts with the king resulted in the denial of "Kulin" status to their clan by the king. Tattvabhushan narrates this incident like a story, interspersed with dialogues in Sanskrit verses. These dialogues are reproduced as such in *Devanagari* script which creates a polyphonic and dramatic effect:

Ballalsen was then the ruler of Bengal. He is said to have founded the class of Kūlins, men most highly qualified among the Brahmanas and Kayasthas. The needed qualifications, nine in number are enumerated in the following Sanskrit couplet:-

आचारो विनयो विद्या प्रतिष्ठा तीर्थदर्शनम् ।
विष्णो वृत्ति स्तपौदानं नवधा कुलदण्डम् ॥

"Manners, humility, learning, stability (of habits), habitation, visiting holy places, devotion to religious practices, fixity of income, austerity, and charity,-- these are the ninefold qualifications of a *kula* (high family)." The Datta of Bali seems to have possessed all these qualifications of a high family, but the fact that he denied that his ancestor had come to Bengal as a Brahmana's servant prevented Ballalsen from declaring him to be a **Kulin**. He is said to have told the king as his great ancestor might have said,—

दत्त करो भूय नय ब्रौन ब्रह्मशय ।
सङ्गे मात आसियादै सङ्गे परिचय ॥

"Listen, sir, Datta is not anyone's servant. He came only as the companion of a Brahmana,--this is his introduction." Ballalsen refused to declare him a Kulin, while he acknowledged the right of the other four Kayasthas to the honour.... The so-called 'honour was not worth earning. But the whole story seems to be concoction. From other stories about Ballalsen, it seems my honoured ancestor had incurred the king's displeasure for some other reason (3-4).

It is interesting that the author chooses to quote at length a "concoction" when there are other reliable "stories". A true account of **life** perhaps should address popular misconceptions if that has to be disproved, defied or challenged. This is clearly an instance of how oral narratives gain nuances as they pass down ages and generations and substitute for written. "autobiography". Tattvabhushan thus seems to undertake the task of challenging the unsavoury on behalf of his ancestor. The chapter is also an ode to one of his ancestors who was a "remarkably kind and generous man named Data **Gopinath**...A poor low-caste man had killed a young son of Gopinath for a pair of bangles adorning his wrists. When the man was caught and the bangles brought to Gopinath, he said, 'the murderer must be a very poor man, as he killed the

child for this trifle. Better give away the bangles to him.' I am a distant descendant of this remarkable man" (4).

There are references here to "low" and "high" castes. Some of the ' references to "*Sudras*" or to "lower class" would strike the modern reader as objectionable and not becoming of a spiritually oriented writer. It is even more ironical that this was written by a well-known Brahma who was above class-caste distinctions. One can only say that caste was so central in those days that it was impossible for Tattvabhushan to refrain from mentioning caste while tracing lineage.

The second chapter traces the cultural ethos of the native village he hails from and their way of life. The organic, "salubrious life is narrated with a tinge of nostalgia. He draws a stark contrast between those days and the poverty-stricken, polluted living conditions of the villagers at the present time. He ends the chapter with a significant political statement: "In my childhood, I scarcely heard of want or poverty. Now one hears almost constantly of famine and sometimes even of death from starvation" (7).

Chapter three again portrays a better past as far as religious life among people was concerned: "religious faith and feeling were then far more common than they seem to be now" (8). However the underlying spirit of the description seems to be that the religious practices and rituals including the *Sankirtan* of the *Chaitanya* tradition of the period helped in promoting communal amity. Of the *pujas* conducted, Tattvabhushan has this to say:

The only good in them was that they brought together all classes of people,--even the Hindus and the Musalmans. The latter came in large numbers to hear the singing, the *yatras*, and the *kavis*. We reciprocated their brotherly feeling by attending their *jaris* during their Maharam. When their *goyra* was brought to our house, it was respectfully welcome, and our elders honoured it by presenting money to it in the same way as Hindu images are honoured.

Where are those happy days gone now? Hindus and Musalmans are going farther from one another every day and delaying their unification and **independence** (12).

This recollection of a better past throws light on the social and religious tensions of the period Tattvabhushan was writing in. The chapter also shows the author's reservations about modern education. He gives us a "feel" for the ambience and methodology of teaching at an earlier time. Here's a passage:

When the letters had been recognised, *matra*, the junction of vowels, was taught all at once, and not one by one. *Phala*, the junction of consonants, was taught in the same manner. This method seems to me decidedly better and far less tedious than the modern method. The first book I was given to read was *Sisubodh*, containing, among other things, a hymn to Ganga, Prahlad Chari tea, and Data Karna, the religious influence of which on the child-mind was deep and lasting, however modified it might be, by further and more liberal education (13).

Here we can trace the moment of the encounter between tradition and modernity, the transition from the religious to the secular and "liberal" education and their subsequent unsettling impact on Hindu colonial subject.

Chapter four titled "Parents and other Relations" once again reminds us that the joint family system was sacrificed to modernity. The chapter speaks of the traditional as an education in values, under the positive influences of elders in the family 'through observation and practice. Tattvabhushan however is silent regarding the sufferings of women during the period. He sensitively portrays the evil of slavery that prevailed in Bengal and particularly the sufferings of the *dasi* (female slave) in his references to Dudu, a woman slave who looked after the Datta household like a mistress and earned respect from family members. Tattvabhushan's oblique criticism of child marriage is manifested in his references to his step mother in this chapter: " My step

mother was sixteen or perhaps older when she was married. She soon realised her responsibility,--the difficult task of treating as her child a boy who was not her child" (27).

Tattvabhushan shows his sense of audience in the chapter, "Early School Education":

I give this rather long account of cordial relations between the Dattas of Sanghar and Charhamua, because it is something unique, and in order that the younger members of the two families may know one another and continue the cordiality which has hitherto existed between them (29).

It is clear that Tattvabhushan has a group of young English educated Bengali youth in mind as his audience.

Tattvabhushan introduces his spiritual mentor, Srinath Datta, who happened to be his cousin and his first teacher of Brahmaisam (23). "Under the influence of his teaching I gave up my belief in Idolatry and became a worshipper of God. About the end of 1871 I came to Calcutta and lived under his constant influence. Shortly after, I joined a body of young Brahmas of which he was a member....I have since had many a *guru*, religious teacher, but for all of them I am indebted to this my first *guru*"(23).

From Tattvabhushan's autobiography, we can infer that Hindu (intellectuals viewed idolatry from a Western perspective. Idol worship does have philosophical underpinnings. The common masses in India with their rituals and worship and puja could inherently perceive (though not with any philosophical rhetoric) what people with Western standards could not. Even the Brahmos required community prayers, a church to congregate in and conduct worship.¹ Nevertheless we see how these methods in Brahmaisam as such worked as a response to Christianity and the Western cultural force of the period.

Tattvabhushan's account of his earlier encounters with the Samaj shows that it was a strong sense of "feeling" that attracted him to the Samaj.

On the very next day after my arrival at Dacca, Brahmananda Keshavchandra went there, with Babu Trailokyanath Sanyal, to take part in the annual *utsav* of the local samaj....I was then only 13, and so unable to understand all that was said on the occasion. But I distinctly felt I was in a storm, a storm of feeling. The *Bhakti* movement was then going on and Kesav's influence on the Samaj was at its best (31).

Tattvabhushan records the conversional influence of the Brahma rhetoric during his session:

One day, in the course of the *utsav*, he, at the request of Babu Bangachandra Ray, the then minister of the Samaj, narrated his conversion to Brahmanism and his early efforts to preach it. This narration made a deep and lasting impression on my mind (31)..

The autobiography thus becomes a documentation of the insider's experience of Brahmanism and a record of the rhetoric of Brahma religion. The influence of Western acculturation on the system of education at the instance of the English educated elite in India is also documented in the autobiography:

The school was founded by S. J. Haranath Basu under the name of the "Boy's School", but from the beginning of 1872, it became an institution under the management of the Indian Reform Association founded by Kesav after his return from England. Three years hence, when Prince Albert Edward visited India, its name was changed into the "Albert School." (36).

Tattvabhushan at one place gives an objective portrayal of himself as an unassuming votary of the British Empire in his younger days:

On the day Queen Victoria was declared Empress of India, an open air meeting was held in the **maidan** to the north of the village to announce this declaration. Speeches were made by myself and two relations of mine. At the end of the meeting **sweetmeats** were distributed to all (47).

In the eighth chapter titled, "The Samaj, Sangat and Brahma Niketan", the author throws light on the **Brahmo** way of life. The careful grooming of prospective Brahma missionaries was taking place through a systematic, prescriptive lifestyle:

On the weekly meeting day they had to say how they had spent the week, whether their daily devotions had been fervent, whether they had regularly attended the Samaj services, the Sangat and the Theological School (under Kesav) and whether they had done anything seriously wrong. Everyone had to keep a diary and in that they had to record the substance of the Sunday sermon in the Mandir and that of the conversation which took place in the Sangat. Immediately after my joining the Chhota Sangat, I was asked by my fellow members, "What is the special object of your life?" (40).

The use of "had to" as imperatives in the above passage conveys the prescriptive nature of religious training that the young Brahmas underwent. But it is interesting that they were made aware of the philosophy that life has a goal and that one should identify the goal of life:

That every one has a special object to fulfil in his life, I had heard from my cousin when I was only twelve years old. The first question in the question-paper on *Sadhana* of the Brahma Vidyalaya conducted by the Maharishi and the Brahmananda was 'What is the object of your life?' Asked to explain this question, my cousin had said, that, "the general object of everyone's life is union with God,

but besides this general object, every one comes to the world to do some particular work. What this particular work is, every one has to find out by thought and prayer." This question about the special object of my life now came seriously before my mind (40).

Tattvabhushan's narrative foregrounds his cousin as a mature and independent thinker and Tattvabhushan as one who moulded himself under his influence. The other major influence was Keshub Chandra Sen. However writing the autobiography several years after significant developments in the Brahma Samaj, Tattvabhushan subtly hints at future events of dissent in contrast to the sincere devotion of the young Brahmas during his younger years. The lines share with an informed insider audience quite subtly Keshub's later failings as a *guru* figure. There are pointed references in the autobiography to the attitudinal changes among the members of the Samaj in later years. These factors lead the reader to re-read the History of the Samaj in a different light altogether:

The fear of Guruism, the question whether a *Guru* is infallible or not, had not yet entered our minds. Our object was to cultivate spirituality with the help of an advanced spirit.....That Kesav had consented to take charge of us, gladdened us so much, that we resolved to spend the whole night in prayer and hymns. We went to the College Square Park, which had no seats then___We spent several hours there in praying and singing and parted when the night was nearly over. I give these details, as they will explain the difference between the condition of the Brahma Samaj, specially of young Brahmas, of those days, and their condition at the present time (41-42).

As Pandit Sivanath Sastri's *History of the Brahma Samaj* shows us, the difference in the perspectives on religion within the Samaj, generation after generation since Maharishi's time had to a great extent adversely influenced its

growth instead of enriching it. The reason can be traced to the prescriptive and dogmatic rhetoric and worship methods followed by the Samaj.

The chapters that depict Tattvabhushan's initiation into Brahmaism show that after all it was not an unproblematic exercise. Members of the Hindu community had varying perspectives on Brahmaism. Brahmas were excommunicated from their respective caste and Sitanath Tattvabhushan faced the same fate. However Tattvabhushan also shows in the autobiography that some Hindus believed that Brahmaism was not essentially different from Hinduism in its basic tenets:

My uncle__seemed to know, what many people did not know then, and do not know even now, that Brahmaism is taught in the Hindu Sastras. When his eldest son and I embraced Brahmaism, we were bitterly persecuted and continually vilified. He did not join in this hostile treatment of us. This surprised and displeased other members of the family, so much so that they once remonstrated with him concerning this. In reply to their question why he did not take us to task, he said, "What shall I say to them? The religion they profess is taught in our sastras. Then turning to us he said, "What you profess is indeed true, but, you should attend to what is said of the wise...." I found that my uncle, though advising us to respect custom, was not its slave. It is slavery to custom, though knowing it to be wrong, that leads people to persecute reformers" (21-22).

The autobiography gives us an impression that the youth disenchanted with superstitious practices Hindu religion could find an alternative in Brahmaism.

II

Contemplation

This section is an analysis of chapters X-XII of the autobiography. Tattvabhushan rightly identifies his aptitude for the study of religion and philosophy and systematically proceeds with it after procuring a teaching job. *Jnana* facilitates the quest of the self by impelling one to go beyond implicit faith. The chapters are a record of his progress in that direction. I shall analyse his contemplation as a documentation of resistance, which in turn contributes to nationalist thought.

Tattvabhushan, unlike Keshub and others, began by reading Western Philosophy. Tattvabhushan's studies in Western Philosophy was not unusual. The educated elite in Bengal increasingly turned to the West, even at times devaluing Hindu ideas and practices. What Tattvabhushan did was to first study Western Philosophy and then to see what precisely were the objections to Hindu values and to approach the whole question in an open unprejudiced way. He attempted to give a Theology to Brahmaism. In the process he exposes the shallowness of thought and methodology of the Brahma leaders. Tattvabhushan began with a study of Sir William Hamilton's *Lectures on Metaphysics* and became an admirer of Berkeley's Idealism. Tattvabhushan after reading Mill does give a caveat to readers:

On reading his *Three Essays*, in which he says he sees no firm basis of Theism, I found that he had written it without reading the best works on the subject, so that though it would mislead the shallow and the thoughtless, it would do no harm to thoughtful and well-informed men (51-52).

Further search leads him to read the basis of Keshub's philosophical defence of faith based on "the so called Scotch Philosophy". The use of the expression "so-called" casts a critical glance at the way Scotch Philosophy was

understood by Brahmas to defend their theistic stance in a land already bestowed with philosophical wisdom. Reliance on such modes of current thought had its counter effects too:

According to them the ultimate cause of the world is an Unknowable Power. Thus the so called Scotch Philosophy, to which Brahma leaders like Brahmananda Keshava Chandra Sen and many English thinkers also had looked up to as a philosophical defence of Theism, ultimately came to that Agnosticism which swayed English thought for several decades (52).

This finding in his course of study makes Tattvabhushan realise a number of failings on the part of the Brahma leaders as spokespersons of a new religion. Tattvabhushan also feels that they took no note of the intellectual trends in the social set up of the period while preaching their religion. Tattvabhushan realised that Brahmanism was also inching towards establishing Theism on the basis of mere faith. For those who looked beyond implicit faith even Brahmanism, that attacked idolatry on the basis of rationalism, could not provide a basis for religion. However Tattvabhushan holds that it was not as though an answer was unavailable. But no one was inclined to look beyond and address questions regarding religion and faith from the point of view of an agnostic or an atheist. Tattvabhushan undertakes this task all by himself. Tattvabhushan also boldly indicates through the force of his findings that Brahmanism became something like an uncritical trust in the Brahma leaders:

Agnosticism, either of the Comtist or Spencerian species, reigned supreme among the educated classes of India in the seventies and eighties of the last century. But the Brahma leaders took no notice of this, far from making any attempts to meet. It seemed from what they said in their discourses and addresses that they had found a basis for religious faith which

was above philosophy, which was untouched and untouchable by it. But by reading their writings and having close talks with them I could find no such basis in their views. That Philosophy includes all thoughts and beliefs, the logical as well as the intuitive, if the two could possibly be separated, they did not know, and their recent followers also do not know.... Whenever the need of philosophical thought and study is urged, the invariable answer from these gentlemen is, "How could Jesus and Muhammad who were not philosophers, have such a burning faith in God?" It is the old appeal to prophetic authority though not confined to one man, book or school. **Brahmaism**, except in a very few, has not yet become a *free* religion. Its trust in 'great men' is unshaken. No wonder that the current creeds, founded on blind belief, are still triumphant. However, mere appeals to faith had, for me, failed forever. So I grappled forcibly with the Agnosticism which I found among the thoughtful. In trying to see its errors, I studied first Martineau, secondly Berkeley, and thirdly British Neo-Hegelianism (52-53).

| The reason for Hinduism's abiding presence despite various cultural invasions is basically because it has been able to constantly critique itself. The *Vedanta*, *Advaita Vedanta*, *Vishishtadvaita*, *Mimamsa*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* are all reflections of Hinduism's critical perspectives on itself. They stand for variegated paths of or processes of God-pursuit within *jnana yoga*. They have been rendered in a logical, argumentative, dialogic and persuasive rhetoric describing (and not prescribing) various possibilities of intellectual and intuitive conclusions on the nature of existence. As Swami Sivananda points out in one of his lectures, "Do not for a moment imagine that the Upanishads are abstruse philosophical dissertations on the nature of Supreme Brahman or on the creation of the universe: no, no....they tell you what the Self is and *how to realise It*?" (Sivananda 1959: 15). Brahmaism, as we shall see in both Tattvabhushan's and Pandit Sivanath Sastri's opinions, by discarding the

Upanishads failed to devise a ~~time-tested~~ methodology and encourage free-thought. In the process, it became prescriptive and failed to entertain dissent. Schism was the direct outcome of such a stance.

One must admit at this point that to analyse Tattvabhushan's philosophical inquiry meticulously documented in the tenth and eleventh chapters, one has to be a student of Philosophy oneself. The documentation serves as a good guide for those who are interested in pursuing comparative study of Philosophy — Eastern and Western. At this point I wish to move on to examine the manner in which the development of thought over the years of his Philosophical inquiry has been represented in the eleventh chapter. The author writing the autobiography years after his meticulous inquiry could not possibly recollect the details of all the books read, individual responses to each and the formulation of ideas and one's own conclusions drawn at that point of time. Moreover, observations might have undergone significant changes as well. When philosophical quest becomes the basis of self-definition, how does one record those details in an autobiography? The eleventh and central part and also the longest chapter in Tattvabhushan's autobiography provides an answer. This chapter comes as an anthology of excerpts from his diary entries during the period of his inquiry and is a telling account of the seriousness of his life's objective to seek God beyond "mere faith". Both in form and content, chapter XI can be read as adding a new dimension to the act of writing autobiography and the author's mode of communicating his perception of the self.

In this chapter, the authorial voice recedes and allows the reader to meet the persona of the author as a diarist from 4 October 1886 to 17 July 1936. These fifty years of meticulous study and philosophical inquiry presented objectively by the author are significant for various reasons. First while we laudatorily remember Rammohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen, popular figures of the Brahma Samaj, history fails to let us perceive such fine minds whose independent spirit of inquiry contributed to a cultural and

intellectual dialogue between the East and the West. It is not surprising if we have never had Philosophers after Adi Sankara to authoritatively quote from. We hesitate to Boldly apply the philosophical perspectives of Adi Sankara or others to various fields of knowledge (for the simple reason that these are considered religious philosophy and hence non-secular) while we continue to study, and with great pride, quote Western philosophers in academic circles. Tattvabhushan's autobiography shows how he was let down at various intellectual circles when he came up with his treatises like *Brahmajijnasa* and *Philosophy of Brahmaism*.

The diary embodies the dialogue Tattvabhushan initiates between various schools of thought both within Eastern and Western Philosophy and between Eastern and Western Philosophy. Tattvabhushan's philosophical sketches in the diary in fact is a representation of many voices and thought processes at work in the India during the period. Tattvabhushan has achieved what perhaps Kesub, the Maharishi or Rammohan Roy failed to achieve and that was finding a strong philosophical base for *Brahmaism* after a thorough and considered study of the philosophies of the East and West. Tattvabhushan's findings remain anachronistic for the reason that *Brahmaism*'s popularity dwindled once the charismatic spell of its leaders was broken. Moreover, the centrality that religion enjoyed during the pre-colonial days particularly till the early twentieth century in people's lives is absent- now. Science has taken over. Indeed Tattvabhushan's lectures entitled *Philosophy of Brahmaism* address science and religion as analogous, not dichotomous, to each other.

Diaries and journals, as Olney points out, are written "to the moment rather than from a retrospective time and stance." Drawing insights from postmodern theory, Olney also observes that ideas about the "self are constructs rather than eternal truths and that diaries and journals may be read as modes of signification, as linguistic representations derived from the many discourses available at a particular historical moment (Olney 1988: 128-29).²

Tattvabhushan's diary entries intertwine social and personal aspects to such an extent that the author's perception of the self is linked to the larger cause of the Samaj. The "self in Tattvabhushan and other texts examined in this study is realised not as the centre but as a part of the whole world-drama or "construct" of the mind. Here for instance, the diary entries in themselves work as a resistance narrative as he meticulously studies and challenges certain Western philosophical perspectives which had begun to influence the Western educated elite. Here the authorial self is not the centre, but a part of the larger cause. The chapters and diary entries spanning 50 years of Tattvabhushan's study strike us at the outset as an exhaustive bibliography of theistic philosophy that also provides an insight into the methodology of reading and investigation into such a discipline. Here is an example:

...I grappled forcibly with the Agnosticism which I found among the thoughtful. In trying to see its errors, I studied first Martineau, secondly Berkeley, and thirdly British Neo-Hegelianism.

To understand the last named school of philosophy, one must comprehend first the philosophy of Kant. With this object in view I took up first Sterling's *Text-Book to Kant*__ (Tattvabhushan 1942: 53).

Such a bibliography provides an insight into the intellectual inclination of such readers in colonial India. Moreover as pointed out earlier it throws light on the argumentative rhetoric that attempts logically to deduce a thesis from a questioning stand. It is a seeker's consistent dialogue and argument with texts in the absent-presence of their authors. Further, the diary entries provide glimpses into the persona of the autobiographer in his multiple roles as a diarist, reader, learner/seeker, reviewer, interpreter and critic of the books he studied:

"October 4, 1886. Comments on books read.--Have read the following:- (1) Hume's *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (2) his *Treatise on Human Nature* (with the exception of the third part),. . . .The weakness of Hume's philosophy is most clearly seen in his attempt to explain personal identity, as J.S. Mill does more unambiguously afterwards. Seth's book is very pleasant reading, but I have learnt little from it, - a very tantalising book. Seth tries to show that the doctrine of the relativity of knowledge is a most strange hallucination, but he utterly fails....He [Stoke] wants to establish a sort of Dualism as against Hegel, but goes not a step farther from the Hegelian standpoint except in the use of a few paradoxical and almost unmeaning expressions" (57-58). . . . to me, any account of philosophical theories which is not critical, fails to be interesting and instructive in the fullest sense (85).

In other words, in this chapter there is an interesting interplay of the multiple voices of the author himself as an autobiographer, diarist, reader, critic and philosopher. Moreover, as is clear from the above quotation, the many voices of the authors and philosophers he has read find their voices in his entries. Some of the entries even quote at length, passages from the books he has read with documentation. The authorial voice makes a selection of entries. He gives only "extracts from the diary of this period of my life,...."(57). Though the sense of public audience is absent, the entries anticipate future reference by the diarist himself. As the entries address his own thinking processes, the dialogues between the self as a diarist and the self as a reader cannot be missed:

However, I must now study modern Vaishnavaism more thoroughly than I have done before. I think of carrying out an intention which comes into my mind now and then, — that of undertaking a critical examination of Vaishnavaism both in its ancient and modern forms (67).

This also helps in reiterating certain points of view in the diarist's memory. The entries also record his changing perspectives. The act of reading is recorded as an experience:

However , my Krishna studies this year matured my already formed view of the mythical character of Krishna, and I feel great satisfaction at this.... From my Sankhya and Yoga studies I got a much clearer idea of these systems than I ever possessed. (60-61).

Tattvabhushan as a debater in his course of inquiry, critiques the works that represent Oriental texts. Such an observation works as a caveat to the uninitiated and as a representation of texts within texts. For instance after reading Rhys David's *American Lectures on Buddhism* and *The Creed of Buddhism* by an anonymous author, he evaluates the latter:

It proves in a remarkable way what was once revealed to me in a dream and its interpretation, namely that Buddha is the very impersonation of the religion of the *Upanishads*. Rhys David and Paul Carus are both shown to be misinterpreters of Buddha so far as they make him out to be an Atheist or Agnostic (59-60).

From the author's rather minute account of the *Mimamsists*, — Jaimini, Kumarila, Prabhakara, etc., — they seem to be philosophers in the true sense, and not mere Ritualists, as Europeans like Max Muller represent them to be (84).

Tattvabhushan clearly emerges as one who is in quest of a philosophical basis for faith. After examining the agnostic, and the atheistic forms of philosophical discourse, he also identifies certain so-called religious philosophical **perspectives** that end in irreligion. Referring to Bosanquet's perspectives in *The Principle of Individuality and the Destiny of the Individual* he notes in the diary:

This unsatisfactory conclusion, at which the author arrives, seems to be due to the absence of any religious life, properly so called, in him, and indicates the decay of real religion in the higher philosophical circles of England (65).

He also compares this with Monism and feels that the fate of Monistic philosophy in India has also been the same. This is a view he records in 1919 and years later, he re-discovers Monism in a new light altogether as we shall see later. Another perspective that comes through significantly is regarding the mechanistic view of the universe which he does not agree with:

[June Sorley's] The materialistic or mechanistic view, however, is given the credit of explaining the order of nature so far as it concerns the conservation of energy. But when we pass from the quantitative to the qualitative [*sic*] aspect of nature, the mechanistic explanation fails. Of life and mind it offers no explanation whatever (78).

The dates provided from the diary entries also help us to identify quite often the dominant strain of thought not only in the author as a reader but also among the intelligentsia during that period. For instance, the influence of Einstein's Theory of Relativity on the thinkers of the period in Europe is clear in some of the texts he has read. In response to Haldan 's *Reign of Relativity* he writes:

By "relativity" the author means the degree of truth attaching to conceptions formed at various standpoints, for instance those from which the various special sciences deal with reality. The treatment of Einstein's views on the relativity of space and time which are said to have revolutionised modern Physics and led to a rejection of Newton's views, is quite new to me (70-71)

The entry shows Tattvabhushan's access to this knowledge in the year 1923, much after Einstein in fact proposed the theory in 1905. The concept of the "static Absolute" outside the "real world" proposed by some of the Western thinkers like Bosanquet based on dualism can be seen intuitively challenged by Tattvabhushan in his diary. He seems to agree with Jones's criticism of such a view based on relativity:³

In his eighteenth lecture he first criticises Mr. Bradley's opposition of religion and philosophy, showing that knowing may be incomplete, but not, on that account, erroneous. . . . Jones illustrates the co-existence of unity and difference by reference to social and religious experience, and shows Bradley's Absolute is not a real unity. . . . Jones's chief contribution to the criticism of Bradley and Bosanquet is the exposition of the relativity of change and eternity, the impossibility of anything static, and the representation of the Absolute as a process (73).

The linkage between Modern Physics and Western Philosophy was then perhaps yet to be built up and popularly known. It is in this sense that one sees Tattvabhushan's inquiry anticipating Yogananda's rhetoric which we shall consider in the next chapter. The entries show him as one who has reservations about Vaishnavism, particularly its sensuous character. His frequent encounters with the *Bhagavatapurana* are noted in the diary and do reflect the Western perspectives on Vaishnavism. However, towards the end of the entries we find him slowly recognising its spiritual message through convincing interpretations of the *Bhagavatha*.

As a reader he is sensitive to style and language and also to the rhetoric of philosophy. There is ruthless criticism of the shallowness of style and lack of clarity in thought of some writers. In this sense, his criticism throws light on some of the famous intellectuals of the period whose works have been widely

recognised. The entries also reveal the fact that Tattvabhushan was also a prolific writer: "February 10, 1929. The literary labours of the year did not leave much time for study" (92). This is however made clear in his subsequent chapters that throw light on his activities as a Brahma. His study also reveals his extreme sensitivity to the rhetoric of philosophy and the nexus between words, meaning and thought:

Berkeley's argument he [Pringle-Pattison] calls 'circular', but he does not, as he evidently cannot, show it to be so. His only argument seems to be that though the object is necessarily related to the subject in knowledge, it need not be so *out of knowledge*. But 'out of knowledge' is a mere phrase without any conceivable meaning (74-75).

The entries also show that he read and formed opinions on Vivekananda, and Tilak's interpretation of the *Gita*. He holds that Tilak however fails to take note of the historical findings regarding the time of composition of the *Gita*. The next chapter titled "Vedantism and Brahmanism" recapitulates the findings in Tattvabhushan's study. He had pre-conceived notions regarding Hindu philosophy particularly the *Upanishadic* doctrines as lacking "method". It is interesting to note that Tattvabhushan returns with zest to the *Upanishads* after he finds parallels in Neo-Hegelianism which of course provided a "method". The strength of the *Upanishads* is that it leaves the seeker to find and adopt one's own "method" even allowing for dissent. Had the *Upanishads* provided a "method" it would have become effete. The author realises this:

When I had adopted Absolute Idealism as my philosophical creed, led to it by the Kantian method of criticising experience and the Dialectical Method of Hegel, I felt that Vedantism, of which I had got an idea from the Vedantic works just named, was very much like western Idealism in spite of its want of method. This feeling led me to a fresh study of

Vedantism, - a study much deeper than I had already gone through. Besides other things I studied the twelve principal *Upanishads*, the *Gita* and the *Brahmasutras* with the help of Acharya Sankara's commentary on the ten *Upanishads*, Acharya Sankarananda's commentary on the *Kaushitaki* and the *Svetasvatara*, and the *Bhagavadgita* and the *Brahmasutras* with Sankaracharya's commentaries on them. I also read what Acharya Ramanuja has said in his commentary on the *Brahmasutras* against Sankara's *Mayavadi* (Illusionist) exposition of the Vedanta. All this convinced me that the *Brahmavada*, Theism, of the principal *Upanishads*, which constitutes the *Vedanta* in the primary sense, is fundamentally identical with what I understand and accept as Brahmaism (104-5)

The spiritual quest of the author takes him on a philosophical odyssey through various schools of thought, both Eastern and Western. The eleventh chapter is central and constitutes the essence of his quest for self-realisation through *jnana*. The author's identity crisis, torn as he is between his Hindu origins and his Brahma convictions was in fact the impulse to carry out this quest. Tattvabhushan points out in the last chapter of the autobiography that he was, after his faith in image worship was shaken, influenced by his cousin and other Brahmas. It is to be noted that his anxiety did not end there. He was then only a "prayerful Brahma" (123). He had had not inquired into the proofs of Brahmaism. His general object in life, of realising God, became clear in his fourteenth year. "I wanted to know, and not merely to believe in, the God I worshipped" (123). Tattvabhushan rightly identifies the distinction between having "faith" in God and "knowing" God. As regards "faith", no Brahmas he met were able to enlighten him:

They had no serious doubts about the truth of Theism, and what light they wanted on the subject they found in the writings of the English and American Theists, Theodore Parker, Francis William

Newman and Miss F.P. Cobbe. I studied their works carefully and with pleasure, but found them shallow and unsatisfactory. They were not philosophers in the proper sense, but they did me the service of introducing to me some eminent philosophers whom I might and did study philosophy with profit. The Brahma leaders of those days seemed to know and admire only the Scotch Philosophers, Reid and his followers. Kesavchandra spoke of Sir William Hamilton as "the greatest of thinkers." The revolution created by Hume's thorough-going Scepticism seemed quite unknown to our leaders. They had not been aroused, as Kant was, from their 'dogmatic slumber' (123-24).

Tattvabhushan points out how this dogmatic slumber even among the widely acknowledged "learned men" of the Samaj became detrimental to the growth of the Samaj. This convinces him as to the reason why "so many well educated people of the country did not join the Samaj. Apparently they regarded current Brahmanism to be as dogmatic as current Hinduism and saw no reason why they should leave the old society for the new" (125). Tattvabhushan expresses his indignation regarding the indifference of the Samaj members towards agnostic and sceptical attitudes prevalent among the young people of India which in fact needed to be combated through a competent convincing philosophical rhetoric. The resistance among the followers of the "great men" in the Samaj towards a philosophical inquiry into Brahmanism had in fact stifled free thinking in the practice of religion. This dogmatic slumber in the limited sphere of religion in fact led Tattvabhushan to recognise and carry out his special object of life - that of writing a philosophical defence of theism in a systematic manner. The use of the expression "defence" is important for he has in mind the necessity to address, argue and persuade those who were influenced by the enemies of religion - agnosticism and skepticism that developed out of a limited and lopsided exposure to Western thought. It is important that he does this after

intellectually traversing these dissenting positions and not with a **pre-judicial** concept of the existence of any God-head. In articulating such trends of the period and by critiquing the indifference of the Brahma leaders and followers the autobiography becomes a document of resistance to the intellectual hegemony of the West. It is also a resistance text by the very fact that he establishes, in recording his years of deep study, that there is a rational ground and method for theism, that it is possible **through** the same tool employed by the agnostics, skeptics and **atheists** to know God. The most shocking finding for him is that the Brahma attitude of holding **themselves** up as non-Hindus was detrimental to cultural **upliftment**. As in many such spiritual quests which leave one with a unity of vision, Tattvabhushan's quest too makes him realise that the basis of Hindu faith and the spirit of **Brahmaism** are the same. The "self is realised through this vision.

Tattvabhushan points out that the rejection of *Vedantism* by the Samaj under Maharishi's leadership,

"hid led to a neglect, on the part of the Brahmas, of our ancient scriptures, and was thus discouraging scholarship and causing spiritual sterility. It had also created an unnecessary gulf between the old and the new society, leading many Brahmas to call themselves non-Hindus and cease from taking a just pride in the glorious literary and spiritual achievements of the Hindu race (106).

Tattvabhushan critically **perceives** that the Maharishi had committed a great mistake by rejecting *Vedantism* as **the** religion of the Samaj. If we were to examine the history of the Brahma Samaj, and see the reason for discarding *Vedantism*, it is in fact flimsy. Sivanath Sastri's *History of the Brahmo Samaj* shows that the younger generation of **the** Samaj, particularly the rationalists wanted public renunciation of the doctrine of *Vedic* infallibility following **the** anti-

Christian agitation of 1845. The inquiry into the doubts raised by rationalists had in fact been peripheral:

Doubts had arisen, . . . and these doubts were further confirmed by what the four Brahmins, educated at Benares, said with regard to the Vedas themselves. As soon, therefore, as the clouds that had gathered around the brow of the leader began to clear off, complaints became audibleDevendranath also, after a personal visit to Benares in 1847 to meet the Benares Pandits and after prolonged enquiries, began to entertain doubts as to the reasonableness of that doctrine (Sastri 1974: 68).

Tattvabhushan after his philosophical pilgrimage argues that the Upanishads do not appeal to the *Vedic Mantras* or the early *rishis* as authorities to be implicitly followed. Their appeal, he says "is to reason and experience and they differ among themselves a great deal" (Tattvabhushan 1942: 106). Further he argues that "the acceptance of a historical religion implies the acceptance of its fundamental principles, and not acknowledging the correctness of all that is taught in the scriptures" (105). He quotes the examples of Adi Sankaracharya and Rammohan Roy who treated the scriptures with a lot of freedom in their practice of religion. Tattvabhushan's sense of loss and disenchantment at the sad turn of events due to lack of thorough understanding of the scriptural methods and the consequent cultural **demoralisation** that Hindus and Brahmos suffered in a colonial context cannot be ignored. Tattvabhushan's odyssey shows that it was the rationalist's own mistaken understanding of "reason" and "rationality" that led to the questioning of scriptural "authority". The Maharishi's failure to undertake a considered dialogic examination of what was popularly perceived by the young generation of "rationalists" as "rational" and what they perceived as "irrational" in scriptures had in fact led to the sorry state of affairs and subsequent reliance on "intuitive religion". The irreversibility of

time, history and events is something that looms large before the readers as we come to this chapter of the autobiography. Despite Tattvabhushan's brilliant expositions the Brahmas who belonged to other dispensations of the Samaj, as Kopf points out, did not accept his views:

Tattvabhushan's crusade made him the target of abuse from religiously inspired Brahmos, who began to accuse him of *representing* "the rise of scholasticism in the Brahmo Samaj"...Sitanath was singled out as the philosopher wishing to replace "our generation of faith with the solid rock of logic. Through him and those like him, dry intellectualism has crept into the Brahmo ideal" (Kopf 1988: 82).

There is another side to this:

Much of this criticism seems to have come from the New Dispensation branch of Brahmos, who were quick to point out that *sterile* intellectualism differed little from secular humanism. But in fact, the younger generation of Keshubite Brahmos did support Tattvabhushan because they too saw the need for a Brahmo theology. Though the Keshubite philosophers were more inclined to use theology to find a compromise between "faith and reason", their approach to the problem was philosophic, and the end they sought was not that different from Tattvabhushan's (82).

III

Action

Chapters *thirteen*, fourteen, fifteen and sixteen of Tattvabhushan's work convey his view of work being worship. Tattvabhushan's period of *karma yoga* in fact coincides with his period of *jnana yoga*. He was a teacher, lecturer, a Brahma and a *gruhasta*. Like most Brahmas of the period, he too married a widow of 16 years of age when he himself was 29. Years after her death, he

married a *Brahmika*. He was also involved in missionary work, twice at the "Cocanada" Brahma Samaj (now Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh). The autobiography also provides glimpses of other people involved in the Samaj activities and also the erstwhile royal family that patronised their efforts, particularly the Maharaja and Maharani of Pithapuram, Andhra Pradesh who were known for their philanthropy. Tattvabhushan's narrative shows how language differences during missionary work in the Godavari District acted as a barrier in facilitating a wider reach and also engagement with people who did not know English. His engagements in a multi-lingual culture and his ambivalence towards the role of English in that context cannot be missed:

I need hardly say that everything had to be done in English except in the case of the singing. Mrs. Chaudhuri's hymns were fairly understood in these places owing to a large admixture of Sanskrit words in them which are common to both northern and southern India, and were very much liked. The services and the lectures, which were in English, *must have been* fully understood (Tattvabhushan 1942: 117, emphasis mine).

Then came the reading of poems in Telugu, 'the Italian of the East,' by four poets. I could understand nothing of these poems, but nevertheless I *felt* them to be extremely sweet (120, emphasis mine).

The last chapter shows the convergence of his general object of life with the special object of it:

I waited long for the revelation of God's will as to the special object of my life, and it was as late as my 27th year when I began to feel after it. The feeling gradually became clear, and now, in my 87* year, when my life-work is done, and life may close any day, I may perhaps confidently say that I have not made a mistake about it. The revelation has come

quite naturally. There is nothing mystical about it. It came out of a want deeply felt (122).

Tattvabhushan's appeal to the intellect becomes clear when he resists any possibility of attributing "mysticism" to this inner call. Tattvabhushan closes with a feeling of accomplishment regarding the task he had undertaken. However he does leave a message for posterity when he criticises the dogmatic slumber of the Brahmas. He is confident that Brahmaisim will become the future religion of the world if people were to follow up the earnest and strenuous life of *sadhana* holding forth *brahmavada* and bridging the gulf between the old and new Brahmaisim which he had initiated through his life and writings. Tattvabhushan's autobiography ends on a note of withdrawal. He withdraws behind the screen of time and leaves a vision of hope for the future.

Though Tattvabhushan's autobiography does not come under the category of the autobiographies by enlightened masters like Yogananda, Ramdas and Purohit Swami, there is no doubt that he was a spiritual man. He was also not a popular figure like Gandhiji, nor did he have the charismatic stature of Brahma leaders like Rammohan Roy, the Maharishi or Keshub Chandra Sen. However one needs to realise after reading Tattvabhushan that charisma is not the sole criterion of leadership. Fully aware of his own shortcomings and never wanting to become popular or dissenting, Tattvabhushan's criticisms are constructive in nature. Tattvabhushan's "truths" are yet to see the light of day. Despite the disenchantment with the course of events he had a strong desire to unite Brahma creeds through a unifying vision of wisdom. Such leaders unsung by history would live through their autobiographies. In fact such documentation show how the nation carried itself forward through trying moments of western intellectual hegemony. *Jnana yoga* is a consistent inquiry carried out in an argumentative, dialogic, inquisitive rhetoric within oneself and between oneself and other opposing or similar modes of thought. Adi Sankaracharya's *Advaita* Philosophy that won over his

intellectual adversaries and rejuvenated decadent Hinduism reflects the context, argumentation and dialogic aspects of his pursuit of *jnana yoga*. Even his *parakaayapravesha* (leaving one's body to enter another) into the lifeless body of a king was in pursuit of a knowledge forbidden to sannyasins only to equip himself adequately and then to disprove authoritatively his adversary's point of view. Tattvabhushan's autobiography also shows that perhaps Brahmaism was not understood even by its progenitors in its fullest spirit. The mode and method of its pursuit was not identified reasonably enough to stand the test of generations of varying intellectual inclinations like atheism, agnosticism or skepticism. The long years that Tattvabhushan had to spend carefully studying varying philosophical perspectives treading unknown paths shows much remained to be done within Brahma tradition. His path of inquiry and rhetoric shows how he traversed all these dissenting labyrinthine fields of thought to reach his conclusions. It is this insistent dialogic method in his philosophical pursuit that makes this autobiography a document of effective resistance to Western intellectual hegemony and a contribution to nationalism. Tattvabhushan also strikes a fine balance when his *jnana yoga* provides him a spiritual vision of the relationship between individual and society. The following lines from his *Brahmajijnasa*, will prove this point:

Ethical development is an idea of expanding conscience and consciousness. The individual develops by extending his morality to include domestic life, tribe and nation, humanity (universal brotherhood) and beyond humanity the Universal Father or Universal Source of which humanity itself is a partial manifestation (qtd. in Kopf 1988: 80).

Notes

1 Gandhi also pointed out that we cannot do without idol worship in some form or the other. "Why does a Mussalman give his life for defending a mosque which he calls a house of God? And why does a Christian go to a church, and when he is required to take an oath, he swears by the Bible? Not that I see any objection to it. And what is it if not idolatry to give untold riches for building mosques and tombs? And what do the Roman Catholics do when they kneel before Virgin Mary and before saints, quite imaginary figures in stone or painted on canvas or glass? Even so, it is not the stone we worship, but it is God we are worshipping in images of stone or metal, however crude they may be" (Gandhi 1969: 105).

2 "We can begin to conceptualize diary and journal as we expose the manifold meanings, silences and discontinuities in the texts, and question the assumptions about experience and identity that the texts ratify and challenge" (Olney 1988: 128-29).

3 Even Derrida's view of meaning as relative, a view that challenged logocentrism in Western metaphysics, seems to have a strong bearing on Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

Chapter VII

The Rhetoric of *Raja Yoga*

This chapter attempts to examine the rhetoric of *raja yoga* in Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* first published in 1946. 1946 was a significant year both for India and the world. At the national level India was about to gain independence while at the international level the world was witnessing significant changes in political thought at the end of the Second World War and scientific advancement in a post-Einsteinian world. Einstein's Theory of Relativity is a central motif in this chapter. This radical departure from Classical Physics has had a major impact on the rhetoric of various Western knowledge systems. The post-Second World War scenario is one instance of changing trends in political thought. This is of particular interest here since Yogananda's autobiography indicates these shifts at various levels in the emerging post-colonial era - in Hindu Spiritual discourse, the interpretation of the Holy Bible and in the larger discourses of the East-West encounter. *Autobiography of a Yogi* anticipates the evolution of nationalist thought in the post-colonial world and may be seen as deriving its character from a post-Einsteinian context. Certain aspects of the post-Einsteinian thematic will be addressed in the following sections of this chapter.

This chapter analyses *Autobiography of a Yogi* in four sections. The first section is titled "The Physics of Yoga" and traces certain trends in the Renaissance discourse and in science which anticipated the rhetorical shift in spiritual discourse. The second section is titled "Autobiography as Research" and demonstrates the architectonics of the text. The third section is titled "Miracles — A Critique" and examines miracle discourse in the text as a strong reading of the *Yoga Sutra* in relation to modern scientific theories. Section four is titled "Linking Past and Future" and briefly traces the fusion of the rhetoric of the Bengal Renaissance with the persuasiveness of science in Yogananda.

Samaj, for example, showed that a satisfying balance between reason and religion could not be achieved. This was because rationalism as a colonial prop was also based on the mechanistic view of the Universe. Further, Swami Vivekananda's address in the United States upheld Hindu spiritual culture while welcoming scientific knowledge into its fold. Though the need for synthesis was felt, the dichotomy between matter and spirit remained unresolved. Sri Aurobindo's rhetoric in his treatises on *yoga* opened insights into the supramental experiences of *yoga* and anticipated the erection of consciousness into an important intellectual category. Nevertheless, a satisfying effective dialogue between the East and the West remained elusive. The deadlock between Eastefn thought which promoted an organic holistic, harmonious view of matter and spirit and the West which held the two as dichotomous continued. The pre-occupation with dualism was reflected even in the way the *Holy Bible* was interpreted in the West. As Fritjof Capra puts it in his *Tao of Physics*,

from the second half of the seventeenth to the end of the nineteenth century, the mechanistic Newtonian model of the universe dominated all scientific thought. It was paralleled by the image of the monarchical God who ruled the world from above by imposing his divine law on it. The fundamental laws of nature searched for by the scientists were thus seen as the laws of God, invariable and eternal, to which the world was subjected (Capra 1982: 27).

Capra also points out that the philosophy of Descartes had a tremendous influence on the general Western way of thinking particularly in terms of the conflict between mind and body, the self and the other. He says,

this inner fragmentation mirrors our view of the world 'outside' which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events. The natural

environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. The fragmented view is further extended to society which is split into different nations races, religious and political groups. The belief that all these fragments — in ourselves, in our environment and in our society - are really separate can be seen as the essential reason for the present series of social ecological and cultural crises (28).

All Western knowledge systems that percolated into the colonised countries were based on this strain of thought and over-shadowed the organic view of life inherent in Eastern thought. The channels of the dissemination of these knowledge systems, as we are aware, were English education, Western Medical Science and Technology. David Frawley's point is pertinent here:

Modern educational systems derive from Western culture and reflect the dichotomy between science and religion that has arisen historically within it. Science is viewed as a secular pursuit that should be part of education for everyone. Religion is looked upon as a special belief or dogma that is a private or personal matter, outside the scope of secular education (Frawley 2001: 164).

Unfortunately, the hegemony of the Western educational system continues to have its impact in India while in the West itself there is an increasing realisation of its limitations. The significance of Yogananda's autobiography is that it provides an interpretation of *yoga* in a rhetoric that is "modern", "scientific", "clinical" and "secular" in spirit. David Frawley also points out how the influence of Yogananda and Ramana Maharishi laid the foundation in the West for spiritual aspiration to be understood more as "the quest for self-realisation" than as "the pursuit of salvation" (9). The role of Yogananda's rhetoric needs to be noted at every such point. *Autobiography of a Yogi* squarely addresses the problem of our current notions of "secularism".

Though the Theory of Relativity was proposed in 1905, its constructive possibilities was felt in the Western world only after the Second World War. As Capra points out, Einstein strongly believed in nature's inherent harmony. In his various writings Einstein articulated his sense of the cosmic experience as integral to scientific temperament: "...I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research" (Einstein (1954: 39). From his article titled, the "World as I See It", we can infer Einstein's idea of religion:

A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, our perceptions of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty, which only in their most primitive forms are accessible to our minds — it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute true religiosity; in this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man. I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the kind that we experience in ourselves. Neither can I nor would I want to conceive of an individual that survives his physical death; let feeble souls, from fear or absurd egoism, cherish such thoughts. I am satisfied with the mystery of the eternity of life and with the awareness and a glimpse of the marvelous structure of the existing world, together with the devoted striving to comprehend a portion, be it ever so tiny, of the Reason that manifests itself in nature (11).

This revolutionary find has yet to percolate into the Western psyche as well as into the psyche of those colonised by the West. The readings of Yogananda done by Richard Cronin and R.C.P.Sinha are examples which prove this point. They also show the quick sands which the age-old dichotomy of science and religion has created. They have failed to read *Autobiography of a Yogi* in context. Yogananda and Einstein were contemporaries and Yogananda's stay in the United States coincided with Einstein's presence and the American receptivity

to his path-breaking theories. Hence it is not surprising if Yogananda detected the integration of *yoga* and science and employed the rhetoric of Science to explain the workings of *yoga* not only in his autobiography but also in his spiritual discourses in the United States.⁴

It is against the above backdrop that one has to understand the spirit of Yogananda's text and his rhetoric. Einstein's Theory of Relativity, as we can see in Yogananda's deliberations on space and time, thus comes closer to what has been intuitively perceived in Eastern Scriptures. In short, Yogananda resolves the crises the Brahmas had originally encountered. *Autobiography of a Yogi* shows that without faith, knowledge has no sustenance and without knowledge, faith cannot hold. The failure of Brahmaism was that knowledge and faith were sacrificed one for the other. The difference in Yogananda is that he effectively mediates the dialogue between faith and knowledge and between science and religion on the fertile ground of the Einstenian thematic. It is in this sense that we should look at *Autobiography of a Yogi* as the Physics of *Yoga* that clearly anticipated later philosophers of Physics like Fritjof Capra.⁵ Einstein's relativity theory inherently gave a new twist to the idea of consciousness. If Einstein facilitated the interface between science and religion with consciousness as its base then Yogananda mediated that dialogue.

Autobiography of a Yogi transcribes the knowledge of Yoga from an ancient code into a modern code of science. Accordingly, science is not merely a site for spiritual discourse, but is a facilitator for the comprehension of the spiritual. Further, the text shows how spirituality is the source and end of scientific inquiry and how secularism is not negation or relegation of religion to "personal affairs" but a vision of harmony that enables a perception of science as a form of religion. This is clear in four of the eleven precepts set forth by Yogananda for the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India/ Self-Realization Fellowship established by him in India and the United States. (Pursuing David Frawley's point given a few paragraphs above, it is important to note that

Yogananda's Ashram in the United States was named "Self-Realization Fellowship");

To disseminate among the nations a knowledge of definite *scientific techniques* for attaining direct personal experience of God.

.....

To reveal the complete harmony and basic oneness of original Yoga as taught by Bhagwan Krishna and original Christianity as taught by Jesus Christ; and to show that these principles of truth are the *common scientific* foundation of all true religions.

To point out the divine highway to which all paths of true religious beliefs eventually lead; the highway of daily, *scientific*, devotional meditation on God.

.....

To unite science and religion through realization of the unity of their underlying principles.

To advocate cultural and spiritual understanding between East and West, and the exchange of their finest distinctive features (Yogananda 1975: x).

What this achieves is a harmonious blend of Christianity, Hinduism and science. The employment of the word "original" to qualify the teachings of Lord Krishna and Jesus Christ and the emphasis on this "original" as scientific in their spirit challenge the dichotomy set up by the West between science and religion. These precepts indicate Yogananda's penchant for authenticity and the scientific temper of his spiritual quest. The following sections attempt to examine these traits in his autobiography and their role in resisting Western cultural and intellectual hegemony.

II

Autobiography as Research

Chapter One to Chapter Ten of the autobiography are about Yogananda's childhood and his quest for his Guru; Chapters Eleven to Twenty Five are about the years of his initiation, his spiritual trials and experiences under the guidance of his Guru; Chapters Twenty Six to Thirty Six are about Yogananda's own initiatives as a Swami; Chapters Thirty Seven to Thirty Nine cover Yogananda's first American experience. Chapters Forty to Forty Six recount his meetings with Saints all over India and Chapters Forty Seven to Forty Nine about the activities undertaken by him on his return to the United States. When first published, the text ended with Chapter Forty Eight but Chapter Forty Nine subsequently added his years after 1946 till 1951 in the United States. I have followed the 1975 Indian edition of the book.

Even a chapter-wise survey will fail to single out the authorial voice consistently. In other words, the text is not a mere monologic narrative but is a dialogic exercise between science and religion. Moreover *Autobiography of a Yogi* is an interplay of generic forms like *bhajans*, scriptures, poetry, travel accounts, historical accounts, proverbs, letters, epitaphs and essays. It follows that there is a proliferation of discourses on Eastern and Western philosophy, religion, astrology, astronomy, physics, plant sciences, psychology, physiology, hermeneutics, music and art. These discourses are not articulated by a single authorial voice but by a multiplicity of voices *viz.*, scientists, poets, political figures, yogis, saints and devotees from various cultures, times, planes of consciousness and planes of existence. In short, as pointed out in Chapter Two, the term "interdiscursive" will be best suited to describe the architectonics of the text. Also a variety of texts that belong to the above disciplines, genres or discourses are employed explicitly or implicitly in the text to facilitate these narrative acts so that they may reinforce each other. The role

of the reader in this interdiscursivity and intertextuality is no less important. This will be addressed at various points in the following sections.

The text also strikes us an excellent piece of research both in form and content. The term "research" in the *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* is defined as "studious inquiry or examination; *esp.* investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws". The elements of research thus are investigation, interpretation/application, substantiation and documentation that convert hypothesis into a thesis. The autobiography investigates into and interprets Scriptures and attempts a practical application of scientific discoveries to the understanding of *yoga*. A mere application is however not enough. It has to be logically concluded, with the help of authentic sources that tend to support the hypothesis. These sources are to be meticulously acknowledged and documented. What is most striking about the *form* of the autobiography as a research piece is the presence of copious footnotes, thorough documentation of sources and cross references either in comparison, extension, substantiation or elucidation of issues addressed in the main text. At several points footnotes occupy the entire page. In such situations the hierarchical place generally attributed to the main text in the mind of the reader gets dismantled. The content or the *thesis* of the text is the *interpretation* of miracles performed by spiritual masters of both the East and the West through a subtle application of the rhetoric and spirit of scientific theories with which to understand *Yoga Sutra*. We need to again recall here that the interpretative voice is not that of the author alone. The authorial voice is one among the many voices that facilitate dialogue between various discourses on a common platform provided by the text. This aspect is a point of study in the following section.

We may now retrace to examine the *form* of the text which makes it a piece of research. A number of illustrations can be provided to show this. The analysis will however show that the form is not to be seen as separate from content. Chapter Three, for instance, titled "The Saint with Two Bodies" records the author's meeting with Swami Pranabananda and the latter's recollection of his meeting with his *Guru* Lahiri Mahasaya. Interviews are relevant props of investigation in research. Interestingly, the autobiography has meticulous recordings of the author's meetings or interviews with saints and scientists. A special feature of these recordings is dialogues within dialogues. Given below is Yogananda's meeting with Pranabananda who in turn recalls his meeting with his *Guru*, Lahiri Mahasaya: "Lahiri Mahasaya extended his hand in a benign gesture. 'You may go now and meditate. I have interceded for you with Brahma'*" (Yogananda 1975: 23-24). The asterisk indicates a footnote that explains "Brahma" as follows:

*God in His aspect of creator: from Sanskrit root *brih*, to expand. When Emerson's poem "Brahma" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, most of the readers were bewildered. Emerson Chuckled, "Tell them," he said, "to say 'Jahovah' instead of 'Brahma' and they will not feel any perplexity" (24).

Now what is important here is the presence of four or more voices that contribute to making the act of interpretation a dialogic exercise. First, there is a dialogue within a dialogue when Swami Pranabananda quotes Lahiri Mahasaya in the main text — "You may go now and meditate ____". The **authorial** voice appears in the footnote when the term 'Brahma' needs interpretation. The explanation at the footnote is not a one way literal translation of the term "Brahma". Instead, it urges the readers to re-visit Emerson's poem titled "Brahma" and further quotes Emerson's own interpretation of the poem. Emerson's voice that starts with "Tell them..." also brings in the author's strong sense of the audience. The "perplexity" that emerges out of assuming

that 'Jehovah' in the West is different from 'Brahma' in the East also gets addressed.⁰ Another significant instance of polyphonic narrative can be illustrated from Chapter Ten, "I Meet my Master, Sri Yukteshwar".⁷ The context is Yogananda recounting the moment when he seeks permission from his father to take up *Sannyas*: "All attachment[†] disappeared; my resolution to seek God as the friend of friends became adamantine" (84). The footnote for "attachment" compares Hindu Scriptures with the *Holy Bible*:

Hindu scriptures teach that family attachment is delusive if it prevents the devotee from seeking the Giver of all boons, including the one of loving relatives, not to mention life itself. Jesus similarly taught: "He that loveth father or mother more than .. me is not worthy of me" Matthew 10: 37 [*Bible*] (84).

This sort of interpretation through companson invites Christian audience to draw parallels and initiate similar dialogic readings of scriptures belonging to two different cultures. Another illustration can be taken from Chapter 26, "The Science of *Kṛiyā Yoga*":

Aum is the creative Word, the whir of the Vibratory Motor, the witness^{**} of Divine Presence (237).

The footnote to "witness" takes us to parallel readings in the Bible. The "Word" is not seen as the centre but as a witness, as a signifier of Divine Presence:

"These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true *witness*, the beginning of the Creation of God." — Revelation 3:14. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God....All things were made by him (the Word or *Aum*); and without him was not anything made that was made." - John 1:1-3. *Aum* of the *Vedas* became

the sacred word *Hum* of the Tibetans, *Amin* of the Moslems, and *Amen* of the Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Jesus and Christians. Its meaning in Hebrew is *sure, faithful* (237).

The expression "Creative Word" signifies spirit and the expression "Vibratory Motor" signifies matter. Together they explain "*Aum*" and similar sounding expressions from other religious traditions. The "Word" is seen as a signifier, an indicator of the Divine Presence. Interdiscursivity occurs while comparing God-experience from various traditions. In the process, the aura of uniqueness and mystery generally attributed to the *yogis* of India is removed and we see God-experience as common to all:

The Hindu scriptures extol the yogic science because it is employable by mankind in general. The mystery of breath, it is true, has occasionally been solved without the use of formal yoga techniques, as in the cases of non-Hindu mystics who possessed transcendent powers of devotion to the Lord. Such Christian, Moslem, and other saints have indeed been observed in the breathless and motionless trance (*sabikalpa samadhi*) without which no man has entered the first stages of God-perception (482).

The footnote to "*sabikalpa samadhi*" provides an illustration:

*....Among Christian mystics who have been observed in *sabikalpa samadhi* may be mentioned St. Teresa of **Avila**, whose body would become so immovably fixed that the astonished nuns in the convent were unable to alter her position or to rouse her to outward consciousness (482).

References to the *Holy Bible* are not confined to footnotes alone. The interpretation of Hindu Scriptures in the light of the *Holy Bible* and vice-versa is interwoven in such a manner that the two merge into each other:

Ezekiel said: "Afterwards he brought me to the gate, even the gate that looketh toward the east: and, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory" (*Ezekiel* 43:1-2, Bible). Through the divine eye in the forehead (east), the yogi sails his consciousness into omnipresence, hearing the Word or *Aum*, divine sound of "many waters": the vibrations of light that constitute the sole reality of creation (267-68).

Yogananda carves a place for his *Guru* in the world of Hermeneutics as he quotes his Guru's interpretation of the Adam and Eve story. We may note that Swami Yukteswar Giri, his *Guru*, goes beyond the literal interpretation and upholds human life as inherently divine in which the body, mind and soul are not seen in conflict with each other. Quoting passages from *Genesis*, Yogananda provides a graphic account of his *Guru's* interpretation. The authorial voice recedes as Swami Yukteswar takes over:

It was from my Hindu guru, unknown to the roll call of Christian membership, that I learned to perceive the deathless essence of the Bible, and to understand the truth in Christ's assertion. . . . "Why did God punish not only the guilty pair, but also the innocent unborn generations?" Master was amused, more by my vehemence than by my ignorance. "*Genesis* is deeply symbolic, and cannot be grasped by a literal interpretation," he explained. "Its 'tree of life' is the human body. The spinal chord is like an upturned tree, with man's hair as its roots, and afferent and efferent nerves as branches. The tree of the nervous system bears many enjoyable fruits, or sensations of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In these, man may rightfully indulge; but he was forbidden the experience of sex, the 'apple' at the centre, or 'in the midst' of the bodily garden (168-69).

Yogananda's strategy has persuasiveness and conviction. Autobiography as research in Yogananda is re-search into and interpretation of the "truths" embedded in the scriptures. It is natural for Yogananda to research the working of miracles in the context of science and that is the subject of the next section.

III

Miracles—A Critique

Miracles can be defined as those experiences or actions generally perceived as extraordinary viz., *levitation*, healing powers, materialisation and dematerialisation of body and objects at will, visions, clairvoyance, bilocation, prophecies, etc. Miracles are a familiar phenomenon across cultures. The modern mind is sceptical about miracles while others think of miracles as beyond "human" capacity and inexplicable. Miracles are often instruments of conversion; conversion to "faith" in God's powers or in the God-man who performs them. However, the inexplicability often leaves a sceptic at the threshold of faith. Yogananda in his autobiography dismantles the aura of mystery around miracles, demonstrates their ubiquity and shows how common they are in human life.⁸ Miracle discourse is a means of bringing East and West and science and religion together. Yogananda's thesis is that miracles shift our conception of God as "someone out there" to that subtle force in our consciousness of which everything we see around are signifiers. On a scientific note, miracles is a **demonstration** of the mastery of our consciousness over the constraints of space and time termed as "Maya" or illusion in Eastern thought.

Eastern Philosophy, has always maintained that space and time are constructs of the mind. The Eastern mystics treated them like all other intellectual concepts as relative, limited and illusory. For instance, Fritjof Capra quotes from a Buddhist text that "... the past, the future, physical space, ...and individuals are nothing but names, forms of thought, words of common usage,

merely superficial realities" (Capra 1982: 179) and "Be it clearly understood that space is nothing but a mode of particularisation and that it has no real existence of its own ...Space exists only in relation to our particularising consciousness" (180). Another instance is the opening lines of the *Narayaneeyam* composed by Melpathur Bhattathiri, in which he invokes God as "*Kaladeshavadibhyam*", beyond space and time.

Interestingly, space and time have always been the central concern of physicists. After traversing the "erroneous" paths of the mechanistic and absolute notions of time and space through History, scientific inquiry meets spiritual vision in Einstein's Theory of Relativity. As Capra points out: "There is no law of physics which does not require the concepts of space and time for its formulation. The profound modification of these basic concepts brought about by relativity theory was therefore one of the greatest revolutions in the history of science" (177). Miracles as a central concern in *Autobiography of a Yogi* gain strong cultural dimensions as well.

The autobiography serves another purpose which can be traced from the preface to the autobiography itself. The preface is written by W. Y. Evans - Wentz, author of a number of books on Tibetan saints and *yoga*. The book, according to him, *satisfies* what the Western audience **always** looks for — an autobiography, written in English that is not just the life sketch of the author alone but an account of the entire *yogi* race which is often seen as mysterious, grossly misunderstood and misrepresented:

THE VALUE of Yoganandaji's *Autobiography* is greatly enhanced by the fact that it is one of the few books in English about the wise men of India which have been written, not by a journalist or foreigner, but by one of their own race and training - in short, a book *about* yogis *by* a yogi.... His unusual life-document is certainly one of the most revealing of the depths of the Hindu mind and heart, and of the

spiritual wealth of India, even to be published in the West (Yogananda 1975: v)

This in fact provides a new dimension to the investigative aspect of autobiography as research. While writing about *yogis*, Yogananda's narrative shows that he has in fact investigated, conducted interviews, compared and contrasted his findings as an insider. Yogananda thus emerges as an interpreter, a biographer and a mediator between curious readers and those who are beyond the cognizance of the readers. As cultures meet, saints from across the continents meet, religions, language and forms of literature meet, the dichotomy constructed between what is commonplace and what is extraordinary vanishes.

The fact that miracles find a narrative space in the text, demonstrates the popular understanding of miracles as a phenomenon which can be performed by a chosen few — the *spiritually* initiated. The text demystifies this phenomenon and dismandes this proposition by revealing both the ubiquity and uniqueness of miracles. And finally by invoking the power of human consciousness in performing miracles, Yogananda pronounces the paradigmatic shift of both scientific inquiry and religious discourse from mind to consciousness. The ubiquity-uniqueness interplay in the autobiography demystifies miracles and impels the readers to engage themselves in a dialogue with the text. It is interesting to see how this works:

I find my earliest memories covering the anachronistic features of a previous incarnation. Clear recollections came to me of a distant life in which I had been a yogi amid the Himalayan snows. These glimpses of the past, by some dimensionless link, also afforded me a glimpse of the future (1).

However Yogananda is quick to avoid any attribute of uniqueness to his transcendence of "time":

My far-reaching memories are not unique. Many yogis are known to have retained their self-consciousness without interruption by the dramatic transition to and from "life" and "death". If man be solely a body, its loss indeed ends his identity. But if prophets down the millenniums spake with truth, man is essentially a soul, incorporeal and omnipresent (2).

As the readers are about to attribute such anachronism to prophets and yogis as a class, Yogananda, intervenes:

Although odd, clear memories of infancy are *not extremely rare*. During travels in numerous lands, I have heard very early recollections from the lips of veracious *men and women* (ibidem, emphasis mine).

Yogananda speaks of "men and women" and not of saints who possess *sidhis*. Yogananda perceives such experiences as universal, not confined to India when he says "during travels in numerous lands". The unique becomes ubiquitous at once. Such a perception conveys an impression that every man and woman is a prospective *yogi* and that extraordinary experiences are not reserved for *yogis* alone. **The** reading becomes a self-reflexive act when the text elicits a reaction like "This can happen / has happened to me...." from the reader. Autobiography as a discourse of conversion works at such points of the reader-text interaction.

There is a definite discursive pattern in Yogananda's demystification of miracles, particularly from chapter one titled "My Parents and Early Life" to chapter thirty titled "The law of miracles". It reads more like an investigation than as a quest of a seeker. It begins with low-intensity miracles through middle intensity ones which culminates in high intensity interpretation in the "Law of Miracles". In this respect it is very much like a musical rendition because the text as a whole reads like a fugue. (We have hinted at this aspect while

examining the polyphonic **structure** of the text. See end note 4). Accordingly chapter one and two - "My Parents and Early Life" and "Mother's Death and the Mystic Amulet" **respectively** - depict Yogananda's casual encounters with miracles viz., the experience of healing through prayers (7), a dream-like spiritual vision (9), appearance of a boil on his fore arm (9-10), procurement of stray kites through prayers (11), premonition regarding mother's death (13) and procurement of the mystic amulet (17). Except for the last experience, the rest are those that can be accommodated much within childhood experience. The episode relating to the mystic amulet incidentally refers to one aspect of the erstwhile community life in India which can be seen in other spiritual autobiographies as well - that of the significant presence of itinerant *sadhus* who are spiritual benefactors of Hindu households.

Yogananda's conscious quest for a *Guru* commences with "The Saint with Two Bodies", in chapter three. An aspirant's finding of his or her *Guru* will always be preceded by numerous encounters with saintly people who usually facilitate the find either through rigorous tests or through helpful tips. Yogananda's encounters are mostly with people who work miracles and with those who predict his future. Chapters three, five, six and seven viz., "The Saint with Two Bodies", "A Perfume Saint Displays his Wonders", "The Tiger Swami" and "The Levitating Saint" respectively depict metaphorically in succession a gradual widening of his *yogic* vision and increasing intensity of God-consciousness. The first shows the power of bilocation, the second incessantly produces any kind of fragrance at will, the third was a vanquisher of tigers in his pre-monastic life and the fourth shows the power of levitation. In consonance with the quest motif, these chapters can be interpreted as a *yogi's* consciousness transcending in succession the lures that the five senses and the body are often subjected to. Yogananda at every point of these encounters unveils the mystery of such wonders. The power of bilocation that Pranabananda demonstrated is explained in **Pranabananda's** own words:

"Why are you stupefied at all this? The subtle unity of the phenomenal world is *not hidden* from *true yogis*. I instantly see and converse with *my disciples* in Calcutta. *They can similarly transcend* at will every obstacle of gross matter" (22, emphasis mine).

The emphasised words suggest the interplay between uniqueness and ubiquity of miracles. However Yogananda admits his response to this feat as that of "only an awe stricken fear" quite characteristic of a twelve year old boy. The chapter, "Flight toward the Himalayas" also depicts self-critically his immaturity as a seeker; for, the power to work miracles is always luring:

As soon as the train, like ourselves was in flight, I gave utterance to a few of my glorious anticipations. "Just imagine!" I ejaculated. "We shall be initiated by the masters and experience the trance of cosmic consciousness. Our flesh will be charged with such magnetism that wild animals of the Himalayas will come tamely near us. Tigers will be no more than meek house-cats awaiting our caresses!"(27).

Besides a reader's strong urge to read this as the author's dream of the spirit winning over the flesh, the passage reveals the dynamic tension between Mukunda, the little boy and Yogananda, the prospective *yogi*; and between the lure of miraculous powers and the real cosmic experience. This chapter incidentally provides glimpses of the coloniser-colonised relationship during the railway journey as we have in Swami Ramdas and Gandhiji. The search for the young boys was already intimated to the railway officials and Mukunda sensed it:

At this moment a European station-agent accosted me. He waved a telegram whose import I immediately grasped.... "What is your name?" "I am called Thomas. I am the son of an English mother and a converted Christian Indian father."

"What is your friend's name?"

"I call him Thompson".

"By this time my inward mirth had reached a zenith; I unceremoniously made for the train, which was providentially whistling for departure. Amar, followed with the official who was credulous and obliging enough to put us into a European compartment. It evidently pained him to think of two half-English boys travelling in the section allotted to natives (28-29).

The colonial cultural ethos imbued with racial discrimination and creation of class distinctions is significant though not a central idea in writings by Indians of the period. Here there is no conscious attempt by the boys to challenge such a colonial scheme, but they spontaneously makes use of this awareness only to escape being tracked down by the family.

The greatest challenge to Yogananda's spiritual aspiration was posed by Ananda, his elder brother. It is important to note that like Purohit Swami, Yogananda was also under tremendous pressure to lead a "normal family life". The autobiography shows that the patriarchal, sceptical Ananda's roving eye was subdued through Yogananda's sheer determination. In Gandhiji, Yogananda, Ramdas, Purohit Swami and to a certain extent in Tattvabhushan, there is a dominance of the 'feminine' aspect of their personality. The spirit of surrender, non-violence, and passive resistance basically seen as feminine traits are the basis of **their** spiritual temperament. This aspect gets foregrounded as they face various oppressive forces that challenge their spiritual inclinations...bc it the British, an elder brother, father or hostile people.

Yogananda's interview with Swami Vishuddhananda, "the perfume saint", reveals the interviewer's critical attitude towards such methods of wasting spiritually acquired powers:

"Harnessing God to make odours?"

"....My own purpose is to demonstrate the power of God."

"Sir is it necessary to prove God? Isn't He performing miracles in everything, everywhere?"

"Yes, but we too should **manifest** some of His infinite creative variety."

"How long did it take to master your art?"

"Twelve years."

"For manufacturing scents by astral means! It seems my honoured saint, you **have** been wasting a dozen years for fragrances that you can obtain with a few rupees from a florist's shop" (44).

Yogananda points out in this chapter that ostentatious display of unusual powers acquired in the course of one's *sadhana* are discouraged by self-realised masters. They may be spectacular but are spiritually useless and are digressions from a serious search for God. Yogananda also illustrates in the words of his *Guru* Sri Yukteswar Giri, how miracles performed by true masters are different from ostentatious display of miraculous powers acquired by the uninitiated. In Sri Yukteswar's words,

"Afzal was not a man of God-realization"...

"Miracles of a permanent and beneficial nature are performed by true saints because they have attuned themselves to the omnipotent Creator. Afzal was merely an ordinary man with an extraordinary power of penetrating a subtle realm not usually entered by mortals until death" (184).

This serves a special purpose of forewarning the readers of the nature of a miracle. An acquired power is ephemeral while powers acquired through true sense of spiritual quest are permanent. Those who acquire such powers through spiritual means hardly demonstrate it for their material purposes. The attitude of only being a medium and not a centre is important while healing another through prayers and while performing miracles. As Yogananda points out, true masters who perform miracles do so to help mankind (276, footnote)

in a spiritually exalted state. This is reiterated in Kebalananda's recollection of his memories of his *Guru*, Lahiri Mahasaya: "It was evident in all miracles performed by Lahiri Mahasaya that he never allowed the ego-principle to consider itself a causative force. By the perfection of his surrender to the Prime Healing Power, the Master enabled It to flow freely through him" (38). Kebalananda also reiterates the ephemeral nature of miracles and the everlasting rewards of true spiritual awakening: "The numerous bodies that were spectacularly healed though Lahiri Mahasaya eventually had to feed the flames of cremation. But the silent spiritual awakenings he affected, the Christ-like disciples he fashioned, are his imperishable miracles" (38). The power of clairvoyance and the ability to transfer one's thought to another are interpreted in the chapter "The Cauliflower Robbery". Yogananda does not hold this power as a unique feature of saints, but as experienced by everyone at one point of time or the other:

Intuition is soul guidance, appearing naturally in man during those instants when his mind is calm. Nearly everyone has had the experience of an inexplicably correct "hunch", or has transferred his thoughts accurately to another person (151).

This passage is illustrative of the text-reader dialogue. Note that Yogananda uses the word "hunch" and "inexplicably", the vocabulary of the common readers when they possibly address such an experience. "Inexplicability" is what Yogananda solves in the paragraphs that follow in a common man's language - using a common man's gadget as analogy - the radio mechanism:

The human mind, freed from the disturbances or "static" of restlessness, is empowered to perform through its antenna of intuition all the functions of complicated radio mechanisms — sending as well as receiving thoughts, and tuning out undesirable ones. As the power of a radio-broadcasting station is

regulated by the amount of electrical current it can utilise, so the effectiveness of a human radio depends on the degree of will power possessed by each individual (151).

The use of the term "will power" is important in the era of science. One can infer that in the scientific era, when the individual's potential is foregrounded, the expression "faith" is simply replaced with "will power". Yogananda has effectively used the radio and television analogy to point out that scientific discoveries in the West prove empirically and tangibly, the all pervading nature of the spirit which the seers had perceived intuitively (152). The same analogy helps Yogananda to explain his direct experience of intuitive powers. The Chapter, "Kashi Reborn and Discovered" shows how a finely tuned, becalmed mind can work more subtly and powerfully than a radio or TV station. Yogananda's experiences in his attempt at locating Kashi, his reborn disciple, could not have been explained with a better trope:

Using a secret yoga technique, I broadcasted my love to Kashi's soul through the "microphone" of the spiritual eye, the inner point between the eyebrows. Using my upraised hands and fingers as antennae, I often turned myself round and round, trying to locate the direction of the place in which, I believed, he was already re-embodied as an embryo. I hoped to receive response from him in the concentration-tuned radio of my heart (257).

Yogananda points out how his proximity to Kashi was felt through "electrical" impulses tingling through his fingers. The description of the spiritual eye as a "microphone" to "broadcast" thought, of the fingers as antennae to facilitate reception of his response and of his mind as a "concentration-tuned" radio enable a common reader to understand the immense possibilities of the human body and integrates matter with the spirit. A 'unique' experience is explained through a 'ubiquitous' mechanism. In this manner, Yogananda's narrative can

be seen as a strong reading of the spiritual discourse in relation to scientific discourse. Consequently the rhetoric reflects a very significant cultural experience of the period; and that is the felt dynamics between scientific discourse and spiritual discourse as both corroboratory and contradictory at the same time. The text epitomises this state of flux effected by the advent of modernity. This is made particularly clear in the chapter titled "The Law of Miracles" (265) which marks the culmination of a series of miracle narratives in the first half of the text.

In the course of divulging certain *yogic* experiences and their interpretation, the text also shares a curious anxiety — the anxiety that the divulgence of *yogic* visions and their interpretation to a sceptical world will deem those visions as anachronistic. This interesting paradox of "the text against itself not only serves to reflect the dynamics between science and spirituality felt in the cultural moment but also allows for this dynamic tension to permeate the text rhetorically. "The Law of Miracles" structurally occurring almost in the middle of the text participates in decentering the narrative act. This may perhaps be seen as one of the effects of the advent of modernity on certain narratives of national culture. This narrative being one such, reflects a counter hegemonic ploy of not contradicting but accommodating certain aspects of modernity in order to put up a cultural and intellectual resistance. The rhetoric of science works as one such ploy. One can find the underpinnings of this accommodating strategy even in a reactionary rhetoric employed by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in his works as mentioned in the chapter, "Backgrounds" of this study. The cross-lighting between scientific discourse and spiritual discourse in "The Law of Miracles" will address some of the above mentioned views:

How did the three [Russian] saints walk on the water?

How did Christ resurrect his crucified body?
 How did Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar
 perform **their** miracles? (266)

It is interesting to note that Yogananda refers to saints from various cultural backgrounds. For instance the above question is asked in the context of mentioning a miracle performed by Continental Saints, the second refers to the Christian world and the third to the Hindus. However all of them have performed miracles. Though their religious pursuits are different, the goal and experience are ultimately the same - self-realisation. Yogananda raises these questions from the point of view of an inquisitive modern reader who may have already been exposed to the immense possibilities of empiricism and rationality of science. It is now Yogananda's turn to speak: "Modern Science has, as yet, no answer; though with the advent of the Atomic Age the scope of the world-mind has been abruptly enlarged. The word "impossible" is becoming less prominent in man's vocabulary" (266). In the next paragraph Yogananda turns one's attention to see what ancient scriptures have to say on this:

The Vedic scriptures declare that the physical world operates under one fundamental law of *maya*, the principle of relativity and duality. God, the Sole Life, is Absolute Unity; to appear as the separate and diverse manifestations of a creation He wears a false or unreal veil. That illusory dualistic veil is *maya*. Many great scientific discoveries of modern times have confirmed this simple pronouncement of the ancient rishis (266).

Now what Yogananda does is to show the qualities of *maya* manifested in scientific discoveries of the times. Science provides us explanations for the workings of the dualities and relativities of the illusory veil but cannot guide us to transcend it:

Physical science, then, cannot formulate laws outside of *maya*, the very structure and fabric of creation. Nature herself is *maya*; natural science must perforce deal with her ineluctable quiddity. In her own domain, she is eternal and inexhaustible; future scientists can do no more than probe one aspect after another of her varied infinitude. Science thus remains in a perpetual flux, unable to reach finality; fit indeed to discover the laws of an already existing and functioning cosmos but powerless to detect the Law Frammer and Sole Operator. The majestic manifeststions of gravitation and electricity have become known, but what gravitation and electricity are, no mortal knoweth (266-67).

Like a true researcher Yogananda provides a footnote to the last statement. Here he subs tantitates his view with a similar point made by Marconi, the scientist who invented the radio. Also note the switch over to the archaic expression "knoweth" that indicates the sublime age-old mystery of the cosmos. This chapter is a brilliant exercise in both scriptural and scientific hermeneutics. Yogananda decodes passages from the *Holy Bible* written in figurative language, from the *Vedas* provided in sound language and scientific theories couched in formulaic language to prove that "*the law of miracles is operable by any man who has realized that the essence of creation is light*" (271). Decoding becomes interdiscursive and counters hegemony:

In joining space as a dimensional relativity, time is now stripped to its rightful nature: a simple essence of ambiguity. With a few equational strokes of his pen, Einstein banished from the universe every fixed reality except that of light. In a later development, his Unified Field Theory, the great Physicist embodies in one mathematical formula the laws of gravitation and of electromagnetism. Reducing the cosmical structures to variations on a single law, Einstein has reached across the ages to the rishis who proclaimed a sole fabric of creation: a protean

maya. On the epochal Theory of Relativity have arisen the mathematical possibilities of exploring the ultimate atom. Great scientists are now boldly asserting not only that the atom is energy rather than matter, but that atomic energy is essentially mind-stuff (268).

Consciousness is the key here. Yogananda's spirit of investigation and mediation further draws upon new trends in Western scientific thought to underscore this point. Modern Physics challenges the Classical mechanistic view of the cosmos, recognises the potentiality of consciousness and finally arrives at the *Vedic* insight that provides for the organic view of the cosmos:

"The stream of knowledge," Sir James Jeans writes in *The Mysterious Universe*, "is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine." Twentieth-century science is thus sounding like a page from the hoary *Vedas* (269-70).

The lines show Yogananda's interpretation at work. Persuasiveness of rhetoric is achieved through the documentation of sources from twentieth century science. However he is ill at ease when he apprehends sceptical responses to these prophetic insights. It is the same insight that lets him leave it to Science to have the final say: "From Science, then, if it must be so, let men learn the philosophic truth that there is no material universe; its warp and woof is *maya*, illusion. Under analysis all its mirages of reality dissolve" (270). The growing conviction that time and space are relative is a scientific mode of communicating the concept of *maya*. As Fritjof Capra puts it "*Maya*, therefore, does not mean that the world is an illusion....The illusion merely lies in our point of view....*Maya* is the illusion of taking these concepts for reality, of confusing the map with the territory" (Capra 100). Once again the irresistible

impulse of prophetic wisdom amalgamates with research and scientific temper when Yogananda explains the law of miracles:

In his famous equation outlining the equivalence of mass and energy, Einstein proved that the energy in any particle of matter is equal to its mass or weight multiplied by the square of the velocity of light.... Stated another way: only a material body whose mass is infinite could equal the velocity of light. This conception brings us to the law of miracles. Masters who are able to materialize and dematerialize their bodies and other objects, and to move with the velocity of light, and to utilize the creative light rays in bringing into instant visibility any physical manifestation, have fulfilled the lawful condition: their mass is infinite (Yogananda 1975: 270).

Yogananda's spiritual interpretation of Einstein's " $E=mc^2$ " has been attacked and misunderstood by critics like Richard Cronin: "But just as often science is called in to authenticate the claims of religion, as in this bizarre use of Einstein to explain the miraculous powers of yogis..." (Cronin 1989: 117). Clearly this springs from Cronin's inability to reconcile his science and religion and his ignorance of the possibility that Modern Physics has established. Cronin's criticism of Yogananda as "doing marketing", "vulgar", "unsophisticated", traces of which he finds in Gandhi as well, is impressionistic and shallow. One should perhaps be grateful to Yogananda and Gandhi for this lack of "sophistication" since religious discourses have down the centuries been coming down to us couched in sophistication and esotericism that further thickened their incomprehensibility. It is however clear that Cronin *does* have ample awareness of the *race* that produced this insightful and investigative reading of discoveries in Modern Physics and *yogic* experience. R.C.P.Sinha's reading of Yogananda's text also represents the demoralising influence of Western imperialism and of Western knowledge paradigms. This is clear from

the fact that he does not attack other authors examined in his study. Worse still is his invocation of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's views on miracles in order to substantiate his attack on Yogananda:

In the autobiography of Yogananda we do not encounter, as in the records of the great mystics, the trials and ecstasies of a spiritual journey or the illumination that may be vouchsafed at the end. We begin to suspect that midway in his journey Yogananda has forgotten his real spiritual goal and taken to the comparatively easier device of performing miracles. The words of Ramakrishna Paramahansa are memorable in this context: "Visit not miracle workers. There(sic) are wanderers from the path of truth. Their minds have become entangled in the meshes of psychic powers, which lie in the way of the pilgrim towards Brahman, as temptations. Beware of these powers, and desire them not" (Sinha 1978: 106-7).

It is precisely the words of Ramakrishna that Yogananda wishes to demonstrate and further extend in his investigation. Yogananda introduces us to people who are at various stages of their spiritual quest and answers a number of questions that any modern reader could have on miracle workings. For instance, one can definitely ask that if miracles are to be despised, how is it that Christ or a Ramakrishna himself performed them? Is it possible to distinguish between those who exploit gullible people and the true masters who work miracles to help humanity? Sinha however works on a level that sees "psychic" as different from spiritual consciousness and misses the true spirit of scientific inquiry in *Autobiography of a Yogi*. What both Sinha and Cronin fail to perceive is that everyone has the potential to experience and work "miracles" and that "psychic" is perhaps the first level experience of an aspirant. It is exactly against misuse of such 'powers' that Yogananda warns us. He shows how an indiscriminate use of those powers once mastered can bring dangerous results.

Moreover an aspirant has to traverse various levels of consciousness to attain ultimate realisation and it is not certainly like "vouchsafing it at the end". It is a mode of becoming. Westernised education has annulled possibilities of collating faith and belief with scientific knowledge. It has projected man as a conqueror of nature and in a colonial context it provided the necessary justification for the unequal power relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. R.C.P. Sinha's criticism of Yogananda is a relic of this cultural and intellectual demoralisation. The autobiographies of Western saints draw heavily upon Biblical metaphors and are in a sense, in comparison with Eastern writers, free from certain ambivalences. In autobiographies of the modern Indian masters what strikes us first is the felt dynamics between tradition and modernity and the effects of colonialism in their rhetoric. The rhetoric would expose the same dilemma even if these texts were originally written in Indian languages. For, colonial enterprise has made such deep inroads into our psyche that though our native languages have not fortunately paled into oblivion yet, our modes of expression betray colonial influence. Decolonising the mind thus also means decolonising the rhetoric. Like all other spiritual autobiographies examined so far, *Autobiography of a Yogi* also becomes a resistance text when it awakens us to these realities.

Unlike the intellectual elite who carried the brown man's burden on their backs, Gandhiji's appeal, as Partha Chatterjee points out, was to the common masses particularly to the peasantry (Chatterjee 1996: 99-100). Ramdas's appeal was to the English educated devotees and Purohit Swami's was to the spiritually inclined Englishmen and women while Tattvabhushan's was to the Bengali Brahmas. Yogananda's appeal was to a generation groping in a "wasteland" created by the destructive powers of science. A bold appropriation of the creative powers of the one by the other was in fact the need of the hour. The text represents some of the intellectual trends that were emerging sporadically and spasmodically across the globe — among scientists, political

leaders and religious spokespersons. As we shall see, it is in this sense that the text becomes truly dialogic. Yogananda invokes passages from the *Holy Bible* which support the Modern Theory of Physics that light is the basis of the cosmic phenomena. Here again science, *Genesis*, *Yoga* all merge into a unity:

"Let there be light! And there was light". In the creation of the universe, God's first command brought into being the structural essential: light. On the beams of this immaterial medium occur all divine manifestations. Devotees of every age testify to the appearance of God as flame and light. "His eyes were as a flame of fire," St. John tells us, "...and his countenance as the sun shineth in his strength".

A yogi who through perfect meditation has merged his consciousness with the Creator perceives the cosmical essence as light (vibrations of life energy); to him there is no difference between the light rays composing water and the light rays composing land. Free from matter-consciousness, free from the three dimensions of space and the fourth dimension of time, a master transfers his body of light with equal ease over or through the light rays of earth, water, fire, and air.

"If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be *full of light*". Long concentration on the liberating spiritual eye has enabled the yogi to destroy all delusions concerning matter and its gravitational weight: he sees the universe, as the Lord created it: an essentially undifferentiated mass of light.

"Optical images," Dr. L.T. Troland of Harvard tells us, "are built upon the principle of the ordinary 'half tone' engravings; that is, they are made up of minute dottings or stipplings far too small to be detected by the eye. . . . *The law of miracles is operable by any man who has realized that the essence of creation is light.* A master is able to employ his divine knowledge of

light phenomena to project instantly into perceptible manifestation the ubiquitous light atoms. The actual form of the projection (whatever it be: a tree, a medicine, a human body) is determined by the yogi's wish and by his powers of will and visualization (Yogananda 1975: 271).

The above explanation reads like a harmonious orchestration of Christianity, *yoga* and Science with miracle as the theme. Its appeal to the readers is by way of removing the veil of esotericism particularly through the use of expressions like "any man". Further, the use of terms like "will and visualise" enables us to explore our understanding and practice of "faith" and "belief in God. Terms like "faith" and "belief may indicate our understanding of God "out there" terms like "will" and "power to visualise," appeal to our notion of God as the power within. In other words, Yogananda makes the dialogue open even to an agnostic or an atheist in a true sense of the term 'secular'. This is however not new in Hindu and Buddhist Philosophy.

This particular discourse on the law of miracles and the nature of light as vibrations of life energy takes us to Yogananda's own experiences of cosmic consciousness. One can notice a crescendo-like quality as the narrative intensifies from one experience to the other. The latter half of the chapter may be seen as a narrative of the most crucial and intense kind. However, in order to feel the crescendo one should retrace a few steps. Yogananda's first "intimations of immortality" is first recorded in Chapter One. God is *seen* as a wondrous glow of light, *heard* as "murmuring clouds" and *felt* as "ever-new Joy" (9):

"What is behind the darkness of closed eyes?" This probing thought came powerfully into my mind. An immense flash of light at once manifested to my inner gaze. Divine shapes of saints, sitting in meditation posture in mountain caves, formed like

miniature cinema pictures on the large screen of radiance within my forehead.

"Who are you?" I spoke aloud.

"We are the Himalayan yogis". The celestial response is difficult to describe; my heart was thrilled.

"Ah, I long to go to the Himalayas and become like you!" The vision vanished, but the silvery beams expanded in ever-widening circles to infinity.

"What is this wondrous glow?"

"I am Ishwara. I am light." The Voice was as murmuring clouds.

"I want to be one with Thee!"

Out of the slow dwindling of my divine ecstasy, I salvaged a permanent legacy of inspiration to seek God. "He is eternal, ever-new Joy!" This memory persisted long after the day of rapture (9).

The second remarkable *inturnation* is the one he receives through the intercession of Master Mahasaya, Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta *alias* "M", a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna **Paramahansa**. This experience of his transcendence of space, of possessing the omnipresent eye and of *transcending* body consciousness is explained through the analogy of silent motion pictures. Note the widening experience when compared to the previous one:

A transforming silence ensued. Just as the modern "talkies" become inaudible motion pictures when the sound apparatus goes out of order, so the Divine Hand by some strange miracle, stifled the earthly bustle. Pedestrians as well as the passing trolley cars, automobiles, bullock carts, and iron-wheeled hackney carriages were all in noiseless transit. As though possessing an omnipresent eye, I beheld the scenes that were behind me, and to each side, as easily as those in front. The whole spectacle of activity in that small section of Calcutta passed before me without a sound. Like a glow of fire dimly seen beneath a thin coat of ashes, a mellow **luminiscence** permeated the panoramic view.

My own body seemed nothing more than one of the many shadows, though it was motionless, while the others flitted mutely to and fro. Several boys, friends of mine, approached and passed on; though they had looked directly at me, it was without recognition. The unique pantomime brought me an *inexpressible* ecstasy. I drank deep from some blissful fount (79-80).

Yogananda takes us as much close to the unique experience as possible by using the analogy of the silent motion picture and the pantomime. The expression "talkies" once again reminds us of the use of other "languages" in Yogananda's narrative. The scope of his vision widens and the intensity increases when compared to the first vision. If the experience of space transcendence was confined to the terrestrial sphere in this vision, then the experience of *samadhi* or cosmic consciousness through his Guru's intercession gives him a multi-dimensional vision. The narrative gives us insights into the body-consciousness relationship in the state of *samadhi*. The body is not seen as dichotomous with soul but a facilitating medium to experience *samadhi*. This is particularly clear in the paragraph quoted below:

My body became immovably' rooted; breath was drawn out of my lungs as if by some huge magnet. Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore. The flesh was as though dead, yet in my intense awareness I knew that never before had I been fully alive. My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient [*sic*] atoms. People on distant streets seemed to be moving gently over my own remote periphery. The roots of plants and trees appeared through a dim transparency of the soil; I discerned the inward flow of their sap (141).

The experience of the immense force of cosmic consciousness is first delineated the feeling of his body being "immovably rooted" and secondly by the drawing out of breath from his lungs as if "by some huge magnet". Transcendence of body consciousness is felt as if soul and mind were "streaming out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore". The use of terms like "immovably rooted", "huge magnet" "piercing light" convey the immensity of the experience. An interesting paradox can be noted in his mentioning that "flesh was as though dead", though "I knew that never before had I been fully alive". The experience of omnipresence, a widened sense of identity is conveyed when he says that "my sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body but embraced the circumambient atoms". Also note that he says "*a* body" and not "*the* body". Omnipresence means presence in every body and in no body. Yogananda's consciousness now widens to the experience of omniscience:

The whole vicinity lay before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical light, simultaneously all-perceptive. Through the back of my head I saw men strolling far down Rai Ghat Lane, and noticed also a white cow that was leisurely approaching. When she reached the open ashram gate, I observed her as though with my two physical eyes. After she had passed behind the brick wall of the courtyard, I saw her clearly still (141).

His consciousness further widens to the experience of a third dimension, so to say, that of omnipotence:

All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures. My body, Master's, the pillared courtyard, the furniture and floor, the trees and sunshine, occasionally became violently agitated, until all melted into a luminous sea; even as sugar crystals, thrown into a glass of water, dissolve after being shaken. The unifying light

alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphosis revealing the law of cause and effect in creation (141-42).

The experience of "I am *Brahman*" or "*Tatvamasi*" while remaining in a bodily frame, of the dissolution of the sense of duality while living in a dualistic world is perhaps what one calls true liberation:

An oceanic joy broke upon calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is boundless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. The entire cosmos, giddy luminous, like a city seen afar at night, glimmered within the infinitude of my being. The dazzling light beyond the sharply etched global outlines faded slightly at the farthest edges; there I saw a mellow radiance, ever undiminished. It was indescribably subtle; the planetary pictures were formed of a grosser light.... I cognized the centre of the empyrean as a point of intuitive perception in my heart. Irradiating splendour issued from my nucleus to every part of the universal structure. Blissful *amrita*, nectar of immortality, pulsed through me with a quick-silver like fluidity. The creative voice of God I heard resounding as *Aum* the vibration of the Cosmic Motor (142).

This narrative of the experience of God-communion also integrates East with West in a unique fashion. The concept or experience or vision of light as the essence of creation is supported by quotations from *Genesis* and of the voice of God in "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God" (John 1:1, Bible). This also conveys the ultimate universal vision that all religions lead to the same goal. When Yogananda narrates the experience, the body concept is not negated. When he comes round, he also talks about his disappointment at having to confine himself to the "humiliating

cage of *a* body' (142, emphasis mine) and not of the body as such (though "a body" in that context may sound idiomatic). One only needs to perceive the relative aspect in the sense that one is microcosmic while the other is macrocosmic, the former is immense, the *viratswarupa*, the latter is limited that holds only a spark of the infinite spirit. *Yogic* techniques, as enunciated in the chapter "The Science of Kriya Yoga", train the body and the mind to be receptive to the visitations of the high-voltage experience of the cosmic communion. Yogananda also dispels from himself the notion that body is independent of, controlled by or tends to drift human beings away from the call of the spirit:

The cosmic vision left many permanent lessons. By daily stilling my thoughts, I could win release from the delusive conviction that my body was a mass of flesh and bones, traversing the hard soil of matter. . . . A master bestows the divine experience of cosmic consciousness when his disciple, by meditation, has strengthened his mind to a degree where the vast vistas would not overwhelm him. Mere intellectual willingness or open mindedness is not enough. Only adequate enlargement of consciousness by yoga practice and devotional *bhakti* can prepare one to absorb the liberating shock of omnipresence (144).

The next experience in cosmic consciousness Yogananda chooses to narrate is the one he experienced on his own without intercession, in order to intercede for his sister. The experience of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence is subtler and sharper this time:

As if by a mystic syringe, the breath was withdrawn from my lungs; my body became very still, though not inert.

An ecstatic enlargement of consciousness followed. I could see clearly for several miles over

the Ganges River to my left, and beyond the temple into the entire Dakshineswar precincts. The walls of all buildings glimmered transparently; through them I observed people walking to and fro over distant acres.

Though I was breathless and though my body remained in a strongly quiet state, I was able to move my hands and feet freely. For several minutes I experimented in closing and opening my eyes; in either state I saw distinctly the whole Dakshineswar panorama (208).

Here Yogananda also explains the nature of this omniscience (the concept of centre as explained here is in fact *de-centering*). Yogananda uses the simile of X rays to explain the working of spiritual sight, a more intense experience than clairvoyance: "Spiritual sight, X-ray like penetrates into all matter, the divine eye is centre everywhere, circumference no-where" (208). Yogananda also feels his body achieving an ethereal dimension "ready to levitate". He remains fully conscious of the activities in the dual world while experiencing non-duality. This will prepare us to better comprehend Yogananda's experience of what *may* perhaps be termed as transmigration — in which the difference between the 'self and the 'other' is almost dissolved. Here he feels that he is at once both the self and the other, inside and outside, dead and alive and ultimately the knower and the known. Yogananda qualifies this experience as an instance of realising the "unity of the Eternal Light behind the painful dualities of *maya*" (272). The first experience is that of the blurring of the self/other dichotomy through transfer of consciousness; also important to note that he qualifies this experience as "a vision of strange contrasts" that vividly established "the relativity of human consciousness":

In 1915. . . .The vision descended on me as I sat one morning in my little attic room ... For months the First World War had been raging in Europe; I had been reflecting sadly on the vast toll of death.

As I closed my eyes in meditation, my consciousness was suddenly transferred to the body of a captain in command of a battleship....A huge shell hit the powder magazine and tore my ship asunder. I jumped into the water, together with the few sailors who had survived the explosion.

Heart pounding, I reached the shore safely. But alas! A stray bullet ended its swift flight in my chest. I fell groaning to the ground (272).

For the moment, one finds it difficult to distinguish between the identity of the captain and of the author. What follows is the tension between one's concept of life and death and the blurring of it with comic interludes:

"At last the mysterious footstep of Death has caught up with me," I thought. With a final sigh I was about to sink into unconsciousness when lo! I found myself seated in the lotus posture in my Gurpar Road room (273).

Yogananda feels relieved to realise that he was not "dead". But again he finds his consciousness transferred to the captain's dead body by the shore. It is here that unity behind the apparent dualities of the knower and the known, the seer and the seen/scene, the speaker and the listener is revealed:

"Lord," I prayed, " am I dead or alive?"
A dazzling play of light filled the whole horizon. A soft rumbling vibration formed itself into words:
"What has life or death to do with light? In the image of my light I have made you. The relativities of life and death belong to the cosmic dream. Behold your dreamless being! Awake my child, awake!" (273).

Life and death are experienced as relativities, the Self as the dreamless being existing in a State of non-duality. This is also the state of consciousness in which one sees "the world as a stage" and all its inhabitants as actors in "God's

planetary theatre". Yogananda invokes the analogy of the motion picture to explain the cosmic drama:

A cinema audience may look up and see that all screen images are appearing through the instrumentality of one imageless beam of light. The colourful universal drama is similarly issuing from the single white light of a Cosmic Source (274).

Yogananda further points out that "temporarily true to man's five sense perceptions, the transitory scenes are cast on the screen of human consciousness by the infinite creative beam" (274). This makes us both actors as well as audience in God's planetary theatre. This realisation is further intensified when his consciousness is transferred to a vision of the actual European battlefields as a "play within a play" (274). Yogananda's universal vision and empathy for suffering humanity lead him to further investigate the mystery of this drama. A divine voice convinces him that the way of escape from suffering is wisdom and that the tragedy of death is unreal: "My sons are children of light; they will not sleep forever in delusion" (275). The insight, makes him, realise that like motion pictures, man's reality lies "not in it, but beyond it" (275). No better simile could have been employed to explicate this subtle experience of the interplay between the dual and the non-dual.

However this vision only *tells* him that life is like a "motion picture". He is yet to experience how it actually works. He does experience it in one of his most sublime moments and reports it unfailingly to the curious readers. This direct experience marks the crescendo of his narratives of his experiences of *samadhi*. A soul elevating account, in a language comprehensible to the readers and in a witty style, of a sublime yet intimate moment of God-communion is worth quoting here. The translation of a highly subtle vision of light, visible only to a finely tuned inner eye, into similes and images which the outer eye can relate to; the translation of God's subtle voice, audible only to a finely tuned

inner ear, into language; the translation of the sublime *rasa* of the holy communion into comprehensible *bhava* without losing the loftiness, sublimity and exaltation make this account a true discourse of conversion and interpretation. Yogananda qualifies this experience as "singular" for this is Yogananda's moment of conversion as well:

After I had finished writing this chapter, I sat on my bed in the lotus posture. My room was faintly illumined by two shaded lamps. Lifting my gaze, I noticed that the ceiling was dotted with small mustard-coloured lights, scintillating and quivering with a radiumlike lustre. Myriads of pencilled rays, like sheets of rain, gathered into a transparent shaft and poured silently upon me.

At once my physical body lost its grossness and became metamorphosed into astral "texture. I felt a floating sensation as, barely touching the bed, my weightless body shifted slightly and alternately to left and right. I looked around the room; the furniture and walls were as usual, but the little mass of light had so multiplied that the ceiling was invisible. I was wonder-struck.

"This is the cosmic motion-picture mechanism." A Voice spoke as though from within the light. "Shedding its beam on the white screen of your bed sheets, it is producing the picture of your body. Behold, your form is nothing but light!"

I gazed at my arms and moved them back and forth, yet could not feel their weight. An ecstatic joy overwhelmed me. The cosmic stem of light, blossoming as my body, seemed a divine reproduction of the light beams that stream out of the projection booth in a cinema house and manifest as pictures on the screen. . . . As the illusion of a solid body was completely dissipated, and as my realization deepened that the essence of all objects is light, I looked up at the throbbing stream of lifetrans and spoke entreatingly.

"Divine Light, please withdraw this, my humble bodily picture, into Thyself; even as Elijah was drawn up to heaven in a chariot of flame."

This prayer was evidently **startling**; the beam disappeared. My body resumed its normal weight and sank on the bed; the swarm of dazzling ceiling lights flickered and vanished. My time to leave this earth had apparently not arrived.

"Besides," I thought philosophically, "Elijah might well be displeased at my presumption!" (275-77).

Yogananda's motion picture analogy marks an epochal rhetorical shift from Adi Sankaracharya's powerful mirror analogy in "*Dakshinamurthi Stotram*" which begins as "*Vishwamdarpanadrushyamaananagaritulyam nijantargalam pashyannatmani mayaya bahirivobbutam yadha nidraya...*" (the whole of the world is found to exist entirely in the mind, like a city's image mirrored in a glass, though, like a dream, through *maya*'s power it appears outside...) and Swami Ramdas's drama analogy in his autobiography to convey the awakening of consciousness into the nature of *maya* (illusion). The language of poetry is qualified as the language of **paradox** because poets, one must conclude after reading this chapter, are seers. Seers speak of spiritual experience through *Vedas* and *Puranas* written in the poetic form. Ancient Indian poets were thus seers, and wrote of their experience of divine ecstasy and inner vision. Poems by Western poets like Milton, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Donne and others are a testimony to their intimations of immortality. "Negative capability" is the hallmark of both the seer and the poet — in fact it is this capability that makes a **seer** a poet and a poet a seer. Sage **Valmiki** who wrote the *Ramayana* exemplifies the former while Kalidasa the latter. Yogananda's narratives of spiritual experiences are no exceptions. Yogananda takes us on a full round of the ubiquity-uniqueness interplay in our perceptions of the miraculous when he ultimately mentions in his foot notes to this chapter that "Nothing may truly be said to be a "miracle" except in the profound sense that everything is a miracle. That each of us is

encased in an intricately organized body, and is set upon on earth whirling through space among the stars - is anything more *commonplace*? Or more *miraculous*?" (276, emphasis mine). God experience, as Yogananda himself points out, is "*rasa*", something that can only be relished. The experience of the *atman*, of cosmic consciousness is mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* as evoking "*ascharya*" (wonder) in the seeker (2.29). In fact the *bhava* evoked by the *rasa* of God communion, is *ascharya*. As Yogananda rightly puts it and as the nursery rhymes go - "How I 'wonder what you are" - the ineffability remains.

The second part of the autobiography, the chapters that follow "The Law of Miracles", examines the positive aspect of the "miraculous". It uncovers the lives of Lahiri Mahasaya, Babaji, the women saints of India and of the West. Babaji, Yogananda's *Paramguru*, who still lives in the Himalayas is introduced to the readers. Yogananda shows how powerful masters like Babaji who still live in the Himalayas have been taking interest in world affairs and helping to smoothed out the course of events. In the second half of the autobiography, Yogananda shares the activities of such masters as though he is addressing an informed audience. Two aspects will be examined here — one is Yogananda's conversaton with his Guru Sri Yukteswar after he reappears to him following his *samadhi* and the second is his visit to Gandhiji in Wardha.

Yogananda's conversation with Yukteswar in the latter part of the text reveals a challenging experience of the unknown made known through speech. Sri Yukteswar's revelation of a world in which language is unnecessary to communicate takes us closer to certain observations made in the background chapter of this study regarding the existence of language as a sign of spiritual ignorance. Yukteswar points out mat the nature of life in the astral world, is always already present within human consciousness, which some people recognise, in the terrestrial world as well:

"Communication among all astral world residents is effected entirely by telepathy and astral television. The confusion and misunderstanding of the spoken and written word, prevalent on earth, are unknown in the astral realms" (414).

What is perceived as knowledge in one realm is, relatively speaking, ignorance in another. However the language of spiritual knowledge achieves a remarkable degree of sublimity and subtlety as Yukteswar explains the nature of the causal world:

"Souls in the causal world recognize one another as individualized points of joyous spirit; their thought-things are the only objects that surround them. Causal beings see the difference between their bodies and thoughts to be merely ideas. As a man, closing his eyes, can visualize a dazzling white light or a faint blue haze, so causal beings by thought alone are able to see, hear, smell, taste, touch; they create anything, or dissolve it, by the power of cosmic mind. Both death and rebirth in the causal world are in thought" (420).

This chapter also reveals the fact that there is certain foreknowledge which (saints cannot share with the world. But Yogananda wrote this chapter to reveal certain aspects of spiritual truth to the world. The text at this point reveals the author becoming conscious of the act of writing the autobiography for a certain audience. The autobiography also becomes an articulation of significant silences on certain world truths:

Sri Yukteswar gave me light on certain matters which I cannot reveal here. During the two hours that he spent with me in the Bombay hotel room he answered my every question. A number of world prophecies uttered by him that June day in 1936 have already come to pass. . . ."Tell all! Whosoever knows by *nirbikalpa* realization that your earth is a dream of God can come to the finer dream-created

planet of Hiranyaloka, and ~~there~~ find me resurrected in a body exactly like my earthly one. Yogananda, tell all!"....In this chapter of my autobiography I have obeyed guru's behest and spread the glad tidings, though they confound once more an incurious generation. Grovelling, man knows well; despair is seldom alien; yet ~~these~~ are perversities, no part of true man's lot. The day he wills, he is set on ~~the~~ path to freedom. Too long has he hearkened to the dank pessimism of his "dust-thou-art" counsellors, heedless of the unconquerable soul (425-26).

Such a criticism springs from a scientific understanding of human necessity to exercise their will to cause change. This should now lead us to look at Yogananda's representation of women saints in the autobiography. Among those represented through his interviews are the wife of Lahiri Mahasaya, **Anandamoyi** Ma, Giri Bala and Terese Neumann. Yogananda's research shows how sainthood has not been the monopoly of men. But life has been different for women saints for sure. Yogananda's narrative conveys this sensitivity to woman's social positioning in the early part of the twentieth century. His autobiography also bears other genres within it like biographical accounts of women saints. The women saints he met were those empowered by virtue of having become enlightened. Yogananda's interview with Giribala, the non-eating woman saint's life shows that her turning to spirituality was a protest against the oppression and humiliation she suffered under her mother-in-law. As Yogananda records Giribala's spiritual narrative, another narrative within a narrative unfolds in which spirituality becomes an empowering path for the oppressed. The camaraderie that saints share despite gender differences is notable in Yogananda's report of the meetings he had with women saints. For instance when Anandamoyi Ma meets him, she instantly shows unreserved sense of recognition:

"Father, you have come!" With these fervent words (in Bengali) she put her arm around my neck and her head on my shoulder. Mr. Wright, to whom I had just remarked that I did not know the saint, was hugely enjoying this extraordinary demonstration of welcome. The eyes of the hundred chelas were also fixed with some surprise on the affectionate tableau.

I had instantly seen that the saint was in a high state of *samadhi*. Oblivious to her outward garb as a woman, she knew herself as a changeless soul; from that plane she was joyously greeting another devotee of God" (447-48).

Further Anandamoyi Ma tells Yogananda that there is nothing to say about her life because

"My consciousness has never associated itself with this temporary body. Before I [here Yogananda gives a foot note and says — 'Ananda Moyi Ma does not refer to herself as "I"; she uses humble circumlocutions like "this body" or "this little girl" or "your daughter" Nor does she refer to anyone as her "disciple". With impersonal wisdom she bestows equally on all human beings the divine love of the Universal Mother'] came on this earth, Father, 'I was the same'. As a little girl, 'I was the same'. I grew into womanhood, but still 'I was the same'. When the family in which I had been born made arrangements to have this body married, 'I was the same'. "And, Father, in front of you now, 'I am the same'. Ever afterword, though the dance of creation change around me in the hall of eternity, 'I shall be the same'" (450).

Anandamoyi Ma's reply throws light on the fact that saints who have attained a certain level of consciousness, who choose to remain in that state or attain higher levels do not consider it necessary to say anything about themselves. The third person reference to oneself also reminds us of saints like **Ramdas** who could not say "I" at all. It is interesting to note that Yogananda also has

more to say about other saints than about himself in the autobiography. However the text is not one saint's message to the readers but of various saints through whom the reality, the supreme intelligence that everyone seeks, has revealed itself very discreetly.

Yogananda reports how Anandamoyi Ma was instrumental in bringing about social change. The words of the "woman *chela* reveals sainthood as opposed to caste" consciousness and the breaking out from constraints that marriage generally imposes on women:

"Her courageous efforts have brought about many desirable social reforms. Although a Brahmin, the saint recognizes no caste distinctions. . . . One of her chief disciples is her husband. Many years ago, soon after their marriage, he took the vow of silence."

The chela pointed to a broad-shouldered, fine featured man with long hair and hoary beard. He was standing quietly in the midst of the gathering, his hands folded in a disciple's reverential attitude (448-49).

It is interesting to see how spirituality worked as resistance and empowerment to a number of women saints of India like Mira Bai and Bahina Bai in Maharashtra centuries ago, Ananda Moyi Ma, Giri Bala, and Mother Krishna Bai during the early and middle part of the twentieth century and Mata Amritanandamayi of the present times.

Yogananda also reports another person's account of his witnessing the exalted conversation between Babaji and his sister who also leads an ageless life. Her appearance is described in the most dramatic manner. She is one who leads *secluded*, independent existence and is quite capable of outwitting Babaji, who is her brother

" 'Blessed sister,' Babaji said, ' I am intending to shed my form and plunge into the Infinite Current.'

'I have already glimpsed your plan, beloved master, I wanted to discuss it with you tonight. Why should you leave your body?' The glorious woman looked at him beseechingly.

'What is the difference if I wear a visible or an invisible wave on the ocean of my Spirit?'

"Mataji replied with a quick flash of wit. 'Deathless guru, if it makes no difference, then please do not ever relinquish your form.'

'Be it so,' Babaji said solemnly. 'I shall never leave my physical body. It will always remain visible to at least a small number of people on this earth. The Lord has spoken His own wish through your lips.' (304).

Einstein's influence on Yogananda comes out in his recording of his meeting with Terese Neumann, the woman saint of ~~the~~ West who felt Christ's passion and manifested Christ's stigmata on her. She was also like Giri Bala, the Indian saint who never fed on gross food:

"Don't you eat anything?" I wanted to hear the answer from her own lips.

"No, except a Host at six o'clock each morning."

"How large is the Host?"

"It is paper-thin, the size of a small coin." She added. "I take it for sacramental reasons; if it is unconsecrated, I am unable to swallow it".

"Certainly you could not have lived on that, for twelve whole years?"

"I live by God's light."

How simple her reply, how Einsteinian!

"I see you realize that energy flows to your body from the ether, sun, and air."

A swift smile broke over her face. "I am so happy to know you understand how I live."

"Your sacred life is a daily demonstration of the truth uttered by Christ: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' ". Again she showed joy at my explanation. "It is indeed so. One of the reasons I

am here on earth today is to prove that one can live
by God's invisible light, and not by food only."
"Can you teach others how to live without food?"
She appeared a trifle shocked. "I cannot do that;
God does not wish it" (362-63).

Yogananda is careful to repeat the same question to Giri Bala and she too replies in the same vein. What is remarkable about the latter half of Yogananda's autobiography is his assumption of an inquisitive reporter role while interviewing the saints he meets. He alternates between a yogi's insight and a non-clairvoyant person's curious, realistic outlook which in itself creates an inner dialogue. Yogananda lets the readers also notice this as his self-conscious act, a performance. Besides the above quoted conversation, another instance of his role play is his meeting with Giri Bala:

In the manner of the American newspaper reporter,
who had unknowingly taught me his procedure, I
questioned Giri Bala on many matters that I thought
would be of interest to the world (463).

This conscious questioning indicates Yogananda's consistent sense of his audience. Moreover, through this audience consciousness, Yogananda also creates an alienating **effect** in the narrative.

IV

Linking past and future

The text ends on a note that urges humanity to realise that the "world" is our homeland and to rise above parochial concerns. This has in fact been the message of all the autobiographies chosen for my study. The last chapter of *Autobiography of a Yogi* titled "The Years 1940-51" that was published in later editions shares with the readers Yogananda's vision that the East and West shall meet on the platform of spirituality.

Yogananda does speak of the independence of India since the publication of the autobiography took place through those years. He recalls, "like so many Indians,...a now-it-can-be-told story" (479). Some of his college mates urged him to take up a revolutionary movement to oust the British during the First World War. Yogananda declined with these words:

"Killing our English brothers cannot accomplish any good for India. Her freedom will not come through bullets, but through spiritual force." I then warned my friends that the arms-laden German ships, on which they were depending, would be intercepted by the British at Diamond Harbour, Bengal. The young men, however, went ahead with their plans, which proceeded to go awry in the manner which I had mentioned. My friends were released from prison after a few years. Abandoning their violent convictions, several of them joined Mahatma Gandhi's ideal political movement. In the end they saw India's victory in a unique "war" won by peace (479,n).

Yogananda's chapter on his meeting with Gandhiji expresses the views shared by Swami Ramdas and Purohit Swami. Yogananda calls him India's "political saint".⁹ Yogananda's lines on their first meeting make us feel that they "knew" each other: "Though this was our first meeting, we beamed on each other affectionately" (428). Yogananda perceives Gandhiji as one who could influence the common people:

The tiny 100-pound saint radiated physical, mental, and spiritual health. His soft brown eyes shone with intelligence, sincerity, and discrimination; this statesman has matched wits and emerged the victor in a thousand legal, social, and political battles. No other leader in the world has attained the secure niche in the hearts of his people that Gandhi occupies for India's unlettered millions. ...For them alone Gandhi confines his attire to the widely

cartooned loincloth, symbol of his oneness with the downtrodden masses who can afford no more (428-29).

Yogananda initiates Gandhiji into *Kriya Yoga* at his request. This chapter on Gandhiji also has Yogananda's comments on Gandhiji's autobiography in a foot note. He calls his description of his life as done with "devastating candour". Yogananda further compares Gandhiji's autobiography with those of others and finds that the text is remarkable for his inner analysis; "he exposes his faults and subterfuges with an impersonal devotion to truth rare in annals of any age" (434). Yogananda also pays a fitting tribute to Kasturba Gandhi in a remarkable manner by quoting Kasturba's tribute to Gandhiji.

Anticipating as though the question in the bloody Partition, he sees it as essentially due to economic factors and not due to religious fanaticism as is so often portrayed. He invokes years of amicable existence between Hindus and Muslims in the sub-continent and envisions the difficult years of India as a passing "*karmi*" phase.

Yogananda's autobiography interestingly takes us on a full round to where we began this study - the non-violence principle of Gandhiji and the universal vision of essential unity between human beings. Yogananda also completes in a sense, the Brahma's quest for reason in religion. However there are other traits of **Brahmaism** traceable in Yogananda. Besides the appeal to rationalism in Yogananda's autobiography, certain other traits in his spiritual rhetoric have interesting parallels with Brahma rhetoric. The most notable trait is the way in which Yogananda introduced ~~the~~ method of prayer in the United States by translating Indian hymns into English. He uniquely blended the Christian and Hindu methods of worship for Western devotees. If Ram Mohan Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen introduced this method in India, Yogananda adopted this method primarily for Western devotees. In Yogananda's *Cosmic Chants*, the translation of Sadashiva **Brahmendra's** composition is given as follows:

No birth, no death, no caste have I.
 Father, mother, have I none.
 I am He, I am He; blessed Spirit, I am He.
 Mind, nor intellect, nor ego, chitta;
 Sky nor earth, nor metals am I.
 I am He, I am He; blessed Spirit, I am He
 (Yogananda 1983: 18).

The other is the use of the terms like "Yogi Christ" and "angelic guru" to describe saints like Babaji and Sri Yukteswar. There are expressions like "Christ like sages" used while referring to spiritual masters. It is interesting to note that Keshub Chandra Sen in one of his historical New Dispensation speeches, proclaimed that "Christ is a True Yogi" (Sastri 1974: 206).

Though there are no instances in the autobiography to indicate that Yogananda was directly influenced by the intellectual zeal of *Brahmaism*, he is a unique blend of the syncretic spirit of *Brahmaism*, the nationalist zeal of Vivekananda and the *yogic* appeal of Aurobindo. Yogananda is also an amalgam of *bhakti*, *karma*, *jnana* and *raja yoga*.

The text also reveals methodically, the nationalist thought of other saints. There are, for instance, anonymous saints like the one he meets in a Kali temple. He prophesies that India's spiritual potentiality is her strength. He mentions Bahaduri Maliasaya who teaches India's *yoga* to the West, and of course Sri Yukteswar, Lahiri Mahasaya and Babaji whose keen interest in bringing about an effective East-West Synthesis permeate their teachings and *yogic* vision. Babaji, for instance during his meeting with Sri Yukteswar tells him:

"...East and West must establish a golden middle path of activity and spirituality combined.' He continued, 'India has much to learn from the West in material development; in return India can teach the universal methods by which the West will be able to base its religious beliefs on the unshakable

foundations of yogic science' " (Yogananda 1975: 335)

Though *yogic* techniques remain the same as enunciated in the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, Yogananda's instruction of *yoga* through the rhetoric of science has been instrumental in providing conversional experience and in making self-realisation a reality for the modern mind. It is scientific in the sense that *yoga* is conducted as "experiments" with God-quest in the laboratory of one's own body. Yogananda's autobiography is a masterpiece because the use of scientific terminology as the rhetoric of *yoga* launched the ultimate resistance ploy to the de-stabilising forces of modernity.

As Rama Rao pointed out in his unpublished thesis on Yogananda's *yogic* vision, Yogananda achieves a rare East-West synthesis in his architectonics of the text as well. He strikes a fine balance between the two by choosing to speak on Gandhiji from India and Washington from America; Tagore from India and Walt Whitman from America; Girdhar Bala, the non-eating saint from India and Terese Neumann, the non-eating saint from England; Bahaduri Mahasaya, the levitating Saint from India and St. Joseph of Cupertino, the levitating saint from the Christian world; Luther Burbank, the Plant scientist from America and Jagdish Chandra Bose, the Plant Scientist from India. The narrative, like a fugue orchestrates multitudinous forms of texts, cultures, discourses, people, levels of existence, consciousnesses, time and place which reveal Yogananda's vision as a *yogi* and as a unique nationalist who like his guru truly realised that "the world is my homeland":

"World brotherhood" is a large term, but man must enlarge his sympathies, considering himself in the light of a world citizen. He who truly understands that it is "my America, my India, my Philippines, my Europe, my Africa" and so on, will never lack scope for a useful and happy life (473).

Notes

¹ Yogananda needs no introduction in this respect. As David Frawley points out, "Great Hindu Gurus like Ramana Maharishi or Paramahansa Yogananda are lauded by many in the West as being as great as Jesus or St. Francis. Such teachers have changed the spiritual landscape of the West permanently and 'radically'" (Frawley 2001: 9).

² I have gained insights from my research on the representation of India in American missionary fiction. Sushil Madhava Pathak's *American Missionaries and Hinduism* (1967) and Michel Foucault read together give a picture of the ways colonial practices were facilitated in India.

³ This significantly influenced political thought in colonised nations. Partha Chatterjee's study, *Nationalist Thought and Colonial World* shows how Post Enlightenment Western thought as a "thematic" greatly influenced nationalist thought in a colonial context. Chatterjee points out how Indian nationalists of the colonial period though caught in their affinities to Post-Enlightenment thought (which is the thematic) ascertained differences from it (which is the problematic). It is by virtue of these differences that their discourses contributed to nationalist thought.

⁴ His spiritual discourses are gathered and published as *The Divine Romance* (1992) and *Man's Eternal Quest* (1986).

Science and Consciousness: Two Views of the Universe (1984) is an outcome of the proceedings of the France-Culture and Radio-France Colloquium. In this colloquium, consciousness was approached from various scientific angles viz., Quantum Mechanics and neuropsychophysiology. The colloquium acknowledged the need to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach in science to understand consciousness which in turn would help in understanding the nature of the universe.

⁶ "Heteroglossia___Is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted' intention of the author. In such a discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they - as they were - know about each other___Double-voiced discourse is always internally dialogized" (Bakhtin 1981: 324).

7 In Bakhtin and here as well this "orchestration" that leads to "polyphony" indicates the appeal more to the "ear" than to the eye. The terms "fugue", "contrapuntal", "orchestration" and "polyphony" have been employed at various points in the study to indicate the careful crafting of utterances and also possibilities of such crafting creating a symphony *not* intended by the author.

8 Madame Blavatsky's and Annie Besant's rhetoric of interpretation of miracles comes close to Yogananda's. For instance, Annie Besant says that Madam Blavatsky, "would remind us that there was no such thing as a 'miracle'; that all the phenomena she had produced were worked by virtue of knowledge of nature deeper than that of average people, and by the force of a well-trained mind and will;(Besant 1939: 322)

9 *The Divine Romance*, a collection of spiritual discourses by Paramahansa Yogananda has a series of speeches on Mahatma Gandhi titled "The Mystery of Mahatma Gandhi". These speeches reveal Yogananda's insight into the spiritual dimension of Gandhiji's political life (Yogananda 1992: 116-127).

Conclusion

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism. The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past.... Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the *fin de siècle*, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà* — here and there, on all sides, *fort / da*, hither and thither, back and forth (Bhabha 1994: 1).

Autobiographies by saints and spiritual aspirants who followed the path of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* for self-realisation during the colonial period have consciously and unconsciously documented their moments of encounter with colonial culture. The colonial encounter in these contexts as we have seen in the foregoing chapters has been diverse, sometimes indirect and discreet. The texts placed at a significant moment in colonial history show that 'resistance' has been a protracted discourse. Resistance has manifested itself as violence, defiance, eclecticism, alternative worship methods, narratives that construct or re-interpret cultural identity, synthesis, *satyagraha* and quest for balance through ways of living. Spirituality is a quest for permanent balance. In the process, these texts in diverse modes explore a level of national resistance which is higher than physical or political resistance. These texts demonstrate that self-realisation is the act of balancing between self-abnegation and self-assertion and assert that national self-realisation is the act of balancing between internationalism and national sovereignty. This study has shown that Purohit

Swami, Swami Ramdas and Paramahansa Yogananda as contemporaries of Gandhiji explicitly accepted Gandhiji's nationalism. Further, all these texts transcend the post-Enlightenment dilemma of the nationalist elite, tackle modernity through bold interpretations of tradition, and effectively respond to cultural demoralisation. As texts written and published in the dusk of the British Empire and the dawn of India's freedom, they not only foreground grave social problems based on inequality but also foresee the problems and prospects of post-colonial India. Their discourses are pioneering attempts at fighting cultural amnesia while uneasy over the role of the self in the context of a *given* new identity called *nation*. They show that the idea of the nation is not confined to strategies of governance and geographical boundaries but ought to be based on a unifying spiritual vision and internationalism. Though spirituality *per se* does not emerge as a resistance strategy, the documentation of spiritual pursuit in the English language and the choice of events, *apparently* conforming to the then predominant Western standards of the autobiographical act convey a strong message. Far from being a documentation of an individual's life, the texts address and negotiate ways of life in a colonial society. They also draw our serious attention to the extinction of a certain cultural ethos which had promoted good will among people. The autobiographies also show that discrimination based on community, gender, class and caste exists independent of the colonial challenge. The depiction of the railway system in a way shows the colonial enterprise as supplementing class-based discrimination. Self-realisation is empowering and challenging since it insists more on practice and direct experience than on mere verbalising of an ideology. Spirituality is therefore a challenging factor because it is a way of life based on the understanding of the self as the other. The negotiation between the self and the other in spiritual life parallels the negotiation of one citizen with the other in a vibrant democracy. These texts demonstrate how mutual appreciation of religious and cultural differences can empower a people.

Indian spiritual autobiographies in English demonstrate that our marking of *difference* from the culture of the coloniser was not a monologic exercise to keep out the "colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it" (Chatterjee 1993: 26). Here, the *generic* and '*linguistic* choices of the **authors** provide a dialogic and hermeneutic twist to nationalist discourse. They are dialogic because as self-life-sketches of aspirants, they address the ubiquitous, yet unique and uncognisable *experiences* of the human consciousness. They are dialogic also due to the *orchestration* of various literary forms, languages, scriptural interpretations, colonial encounters, ambivalence and the dynamic tension between the seen and the unseen in their utterances. Consequently, this study has dramatised the dialogic experience of *reading* spiritual texts written in the colonial period. The encounter between these texts and the reader can result in an upsurge of multitudinous voices networking among themselves while addressing one another. These voices are linguistic, religious, political, cultural, literary and *generic*. Further, the representation of the self in these texts provides interesting possibilities for an engaged literary criticism. It is a fact though that this kind of engagement with spiritual autobiographies in English has been infrequent. The foregoing chapters have only provided an entry point and are a proof of how much has been left undone in the field of Indian writing in English, particularly autobiography studies. Criticism of Western spiritual autobiographies has been numerous while studies of Indian spiritual autobiographies has been limited. One possible reason perhaps is that religion and spirituality are considered matters of the inner domain divorced from the outer. These texts clearly deconstruct that view. Criticism cannot assume that spirituality is merely the domain of the inner.¹ An engaged criticism shows how the private and the public, the inner and the outer, the personal and the political, the private and the historical have a symbiotic relationship. This kind of study is clearly vital for an understanding of modern Indian culture.

I wish to point out that the paradigms of *karma*, *bhakti*, *jnana* and *raja yoga* and of *rasa* and *bhava* provided me an indigenous method of analysis. Just as a knowledge of the *Holy Bible* is integral for a critical understanding of Western literary, philosophical or historical texts so also this study has sought to demonstrate that an employment of nativist paradigms can provide an exciting entry for literary criticism into the world of Indian spiritual autobiographies. This study has confined itself to Hindu texts. But it is clear that researches on modern Indian autobiographies by Muslim and Christian men and women of religion would yield great rewards as well. Also this study has confined itself to male writers and it is obvious that the study of women writers would provide important insights too. The example of studies in the West of Christian women saints should inspire similar studies in India.

The texts demonstrate Homi Bhabha's recognition of border lives as the art of the present, as the epigraph to this chapter shows. These texts in their several ways guide us through the borderline existence between the past, the present and the future; between tradition, modernity and post-modernity between the seen, the seeing and the unseen. Paramahansa Yogananda's early twentieth century anticipations of the progress of science show how the space and time between the past, the present and the future will finally be narrowed. The role of texts like his in futurology is tremendous.

The spiritual autobiographies of those examined in the previous chapters carve a niche in the trajectory of dialogic imagination. Our notions of the spiritual have suffered amnesia due to the demoralising influences of colonial culture, particularly the monologic status ascribed to Orientalism in the West. Following suit, we are quick to accept and apply Western philosophical theory in our reading of Western or Indian texts, while we are reluctant to see what Eastern philosophical positions can contribute to our gaining insights into these texts. As a woman reader trained in Western literary and critical tradition but brought up in a traditional Hindu household, I felt during the course of this

analysis that insights from indigenous literatures came to me spontaneously while those from Western theories came with struggle. One contribution of these texts to nationalist thought is their role in triggering off a dialogue between the reader herself and her society and in seeing the ambivalence that the colonial encounter generated in the Hindu psyche. I would like to assert that studying these texts makes for a secular discourse. That these texts are concerned with categories like caste, gender, class and nation and demonstrate ways of living that appreciate cultural differences make them important contributions to nationalist discourse. The authors of these texts are nationalists also because their accounts throw light on the daily lives of common people in India. They demonstrate that secularism is not refraining from addressing religious issues or defying them, but is an informed, open, ongoing and non-hypocritical dialogue between religions. Fanaticism of any kind springs from a blissful ignorance of the true meaning of religion. The **scriptures** are not prescriptions but descriptions that from time to time debated, critiqued and deliberated on these differences. Religious fanaticism is basically born of ignorance, illiteracy, deprivation and insecurity bred by pseudo-secular rhetoric and a monolithic concept of culture forced on the human psyche. This is another form of cultural amnesia. The role of saints in providing a universal vision is dramatised in these spiritual autobiographies.² An enlightened dialogue between religious traditions of the kind which Gandhiji initiated will alone help us to survive. The spiritual autobiographies I have studied contribute vastly to this notion of a secular democratic polity.

Notes

1 I am reminded of Said's observation in his work, *The World, The Text and The Critic* on the scope of literary criticism and the role of the critic: "Criticism cannot assume that its province is merely the text, not even the great literary text. It must see itself, with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space, in which what has counted in the continuity and transmission of knowledge has been the signifier, as an event that has left lasting traces upon the human subject. Once we take that view, then literature as an isolated paddock in the broad cultural field disappears, and with it too the harmless rhetoric of self-delighting humanism. Instead we will be able, I think, to read and write with a sense of the greater stake in historical and political effectiveness that literary as well as all other texts have had" (Said 1991:225).

2 Swami Ramdas speaking on the role of saints points out that "Saints, incarnations and prophets come from age to age in different lands to deliver the message of unity, harmony and peace for the regeneration of mankind. They sow the precious seeds of universal love and brotherhood...this high ideal cannot be achieved by the efforts of statesmen, diplomats and politicians who lack spiritual experience of the highest Truth and whose vision is warped by considerations of personal, national or racial self-interest. The transformation can be brought about only by the divinely inspired and illumined saints with pure love for all. Their vision is truly universal, as they have gone beyond all barriers of race, religion, and nationality and their loyalty is solely to Truth or God" (Ramdas n.d: 14).

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