

**DUTY, DISCIPLINE AND DEVOTION:
THE ASCETIC IDEAL AND INDIAN NATIONALIST DISCOURSE**

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INTRODUCTION

I

An ascetic¹ is commonly perceived as pursuing a higher ideal, being blessed as well as sacred in “different kinds of religion”² in India. The ‘ascetic’, it can be said, is both actual as well as ideal³ in that it is a way of life characterized by stringent and rigorous notions of celibacy, austerity, self-discipline and humility, being a ‘perception and instinct of the most favourable conditions of higher spirituality’ (Nietzsche 129). This study explores the representation and construction of the complex, subtle and sometimes controversial politico-spiritual ascetic figure associated with Indian, read Hindu, nationalism.

Though ascetics supposedly inhabited the ‘wonder that was India’,⁴ wandering through its wilderness and ancient history, in the nineteenth century the figure of the Indian ascetic underwent a major transformation. That is not to say that the figure of the ascetic was frozen in time until then. Rather, it is to stress that the transmutation of the figure of the ascetic in the nineteenth century was of a momentous nature, so much that it can be argued that the figure of the ascetic was completely reconstructed and reconfigured during the nineteenth century.

Before progressing further, it may be worthwhile to take note of certain important ascetic figures and figurations. While the controversy of whether Jesus of

¹ Throughout the work, the term ‘ascetic’ has been used in a broad sense to include *sadhus*, *santans*, *fakirs*, *yogis*, *bairagis*, *gosains*, mendicants, *nagas*, and *sannyasis* of all sorts.

² See S.N. Balagangadhara’s *The Heathen in his Blindness*, p. 2.

³ Refer to Nietzsche’s *A Genealogy of Morals* for a full delineation of the ‘ascetic ideal’.

⁴ To echo A.L. Basham’s *The Wonder that was India*.

Nazareth was indeed an ascetic rages on, made popular by *The Da Vinci Code*, closer home it was probably Siddhartha, later recognized as Gautama Buddha, who springs to mind. More significant to present study would be the Bhakti poets, known as *sants*, who practiced different ascetic norms, for most of them did not lead a celibate life and were involved in social life. It would really be interesting to see to what extent the nineteenth century transformation of the ascetic ideal borrowed if not based itself on Bhakti traditions.⁵

A basic hypothesis in this study is that the ascetic figure in the Indian sub-continent is not merely a religious character who withdraws from the social world to live in seclusion and often in solitude, but one who connects with various socio-cultural issues. The ‘ascetic’ today represents a range of meanings: firstly of *sannyasa*, secondly of a spiritual and ethical guide and thirdly that of an authoritative socio-political leader. And such a transformation of the ‘ascetic ideal’ as a conscious technique of construction and self-fashioning was effected as part of the Indian nationalist agenda in the nineteenth century.

While being conditioned by colonial and nationalist compulsions, the figure of the ascetic also played a significant role in shaping, if not determining, socio-political and cultural history of modern India. The nineteenth century transfiguration of the ascetic ideal, arguably, also created persistent and persisting misunderstandings, tensions, conflicts and controversies that continue to irk our present. Since the figure of

⁵ Among the Bhakti poets, Kabir Das has a special place as he is known to have attained ‘inner renunciation’ within the boundaries of a social society, being discontent with institutional religion and did not attach much value to pilgrimage. Kabir is often studied from “a wider and fundamentally important process, that of Hindu-Muslim interaction”. Kabir is identified as a ‘secular ascetic’ in the Indian sub-continent bringing “the two most basic religious outlooks found there into a position of mutual adaptation and interaction”. For a detailed analysis, refer to Muhammad Hedayetullah, *Kabir: The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977).

the ascetic spreads across various domains, my attempt is limited to tracing a genealogy of the Hindu ascetic, though the figure of the ascetic must have always been in conversation with various other religious and cultural formations within the Indian subcontinent. A brief overview of current socio-cultural scene, literally littered with prominent Hindu male and female religio-political ascetics, also underscores my choice to delimit the scope of my thesis to Hindu ascetics. Though many scholars over the last two decades have discussed and debated over many of the issues⁶ pertaining to the Hindu ascetic, it is rather surprising that sufficient attention has not been given to the aspect of the ascetic figure in Indian nationalist discourse. Hence, it was important that I concentrate on the notion of the ascetic figure as it appeared in two major figures of the Indian scenario, namely Aurobindo Ghose and M.K. Gandhi.

The choice of Aurobindo and Gandhi was also determined by the decision to further narrow down the scope and focus on one particular theme: the synthesization of ascetic principles with Indian nationalism. Though this was probably not the only significant strand within Indian nationalist discourse, Aurobindo and Gandhi, as is evident from their body of work, tried to formulate a grand narrative of the nation in a particular way that often conflicted with received notions of the separation of public/private spheres.

⁶ The various issues that are in terms with the ascetic ideal are being debated from a specific contextualized point, such as; the 'invention of Hinduism' (e. g. P. J. Marshall; Brian K. Pennington; Geoffrey Oddie; David N Lorenzen; Cynthia Talbot); Indian asceticism in the 'context of the private sphere' (e. g. G. S. Ghurye; Richard King); 'asceticism in Hindu mythology' (e. g. O' Flaherty); the 'orientalist appeal of ascetics' (e. g. J. N. Farquhar; J. C. Oman); accounts of 'warrior ascetics in India' (David N. Lorenzen; William R. Pinch)

II

The imperial gaze on the ascetic figure was to a large extent conditioned by the European travellers' descriptions⁷ of a Hindu way of life. These missionaries "wrote and published books about heathen tales, practices, and idol worship" (Balagangadhara 123). The 'Vile Hindus' were refuted and criticized due to the "grossness of heathendom" (123). The constitution of the East India Company into a full-fledged administrative and military functionary around 1757, made it into a bureaucratic regime. At this stage, several tasks were taken up to streamline the administrative system. A lot of translations of Indian texts (religious) and fictional narratives on the 'natives' were taken up by the English, keeping the European missionaries and travellers' books as representational works written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Most of the European narratives seem to have attempted in representing the lifestyle of the ascetic without doing a proper analysis and blindly adopting the representations⁸ by a few missionaries and travellers.

The colonial India witnessed the amalgamation of the ascetic figure, a representative form of religious authority. By early nineteenth century it had gained momentum, as a 'native cultural hero', a status bestowed by the nationalist ideologues. This encounter came in the form of a European make-believe 'secular'⁹ idea in the form

⁷ The European narratives go as far back as 1605 by an Italian Jesuit monk Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), Samuel Purchas (1575-1626), Francis Xavier (1506-1552), Goncalo Fernandes Trancoso (1541-1621), Abrahamus Rogerius (? – 1649), Giovanni Battista Peruschi (1525-1598)

⁸ The wandering mendicant's spiritual practices were represented through a Euro-centric religious ideology. By considering the practices as heathen, they were further identified and formulated as social and political obstacles to the rule of British in the Indian sub-continent. These wandering ascetic figures were envisaged and evaluated as "rogues in disguise", "frauds", "wild", "rude" – and through other negative harsh representations.

⁹ The word Hindu itself is considered by some scholars to be secular in origin. The idea of secular in India has diverse inferences. The term has connotations that are contextualized in perceptions that are

of the English man, projecting himself as ‘man of action’ in the British colonies and a power regulator of the ‘secular’ who was looked upon as a cultural hero. However, they can be considered as marginal figures in nature, as the ascetic figure and the Englishman in the colonies, geographically speaking, are outsiders and are excluded from their main lands.

During the early nineteenth century, the British administrators who had encountered the ‘*thuggee*’ community, considered them as similar to the ascetic subject, and came to the approach of integrating both the groups and documenting them as similar in nature.¹⁰ The identities were constituted and subjectified under various acts of criminalization. The various ascetic groups were viewed as a possible threat. Moreover, the rebellions and other peasant uprisings during this period, guided by the ascetical figures fortified the thought of the British. The British administration codified laws and

diversified in Indian and Western approaches. They might be considered in terms of beliefs or approaches. Even though the European construction of India as a heathendom and theirs as a secular world, it should be remembered that India was never a mono-religious country. The sense of ‘secular’ in Indian context can be seen among the Sufis and Bhakti Saints, which I will be reviewing in one of the chapters. It can even be traced back to the *Carvakas*, who can be said maintained a secularistic and materialistic philosophical movement. The British administration which codified laws in the eighteenth century pertaining to practices within religions can be said has made the Indian mindset to think that the ‘sacred’ in religious terms and ‘secular’ in political terms. It is obvious that some the nationalist ideologues in India adopted the concept of secularism from the Western mindset. But, this act can be presumed as one that was more in terms with the political arrangement. Later on, it can be said, there prevailed a politically secular ideology. It can be subsumed that, from the colonial period, the contradiction was not between secular and religion. Here, it should be remembered that the Western world, however, faced a problem between the church and state.

¹⁰ It has been observed from various reports by the British officials that groups of peripatetic ascetic figures, like Gosains, Sannyasis, Nagas and Yogis were harassed and were considered as persons floating loosely upon society, without property or character and with an object of acquiring the property of others. Tom Lloyd points out Colonel J Sleeman, comment, “There is one great evil which afflicts and has afflicted the country, and which no government but a very strong one could attempt to eradicate. This is a mass [around 2,000,000 people, by Sleeman’s estimate] of religious mendicants who infest every part of India, and subsist upon the fruits of all manner of crime.... [They] rob and steal, and a very great portion of them murder their victims before they rob them... [using] dutoora, or some other deleterious drug” (32). Sleeman is also found making a confident and generalized claim that “There are not anywhere worse characters than these Jogies, or greater pests to society...save the regular Thugs” (33).

tried to regulate the institutional practices of Indian asceticism.¹¹ This subjectification is demonstrated through various restrictions laid through, like, the putting to death of 150 fakirs in 1771,¹² and the incident of ‘Sannyasi Rebellion’ during 1763-1800.

The augmentation of the imperial rule in India led to the development of a semi-modernized¹³ quasi industrial-technological society. There were a series of functions taken up by Europeans, viz. the conversions by Evangelicals, codification of laws, systematization of the bureaucracy. In addition to this, the British had taken up the pedantic work of writing the history of India. Around the same time, the British Orientalists were engaged in the process of translating the Hindu religious texts into English. Further, the British generated – some of them claiming themselves as having discovered – the idea of renunciation in ‘Hinduism’¹⁴ as associated with pessimism, ethical deterioration and bodily weakness.

The ‘ascetic’, a culturally authoritative source in the Hindu spiritual domain, began to be negatively pictured by the Western narratives. Such acts, were used for appropriating the West and its religion as an authority. In such a context, the nationalists

¹¹ For a detailed study, See, Tom Lloyd, “Acting in the “Theatre of Anarchy” The ‘Anti-Thug Campaign’ and Elaborations of Colonial Rule in Early Nineteenth-Century India,” *Edinburgh Papers in South Asian Studies*, 19, (2006).

¹² See, D. N. Lorenzen, “Warrior Ascetics in Indian History,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 98, (1) (1978).

¹³ As I am more concerned here with issues of the colonial period in India, I will be considering the idea of modernity as a Eurocentric view, and regard the effect of modernity on India. India saw the industrial development in a machine-technological and scientific level. The railways, telegraph, penny post system, museums and scientific issues have assisted, in a sense, in the constructing of the sub-continent into a single entity and generated the idea among its inhabitants as if they belong to a single nation.

¹⁴ The Portuguese are said to have identified the people in the sub-continent as ‘*gentues*’ and later the British re-named the inhabitants as Gentoos. However, it has been identified that the Persians named the same as ‘Hindus’ due to the inhabitancy of the people beside the banks of Sindhu River. In the nineteenth century, however, the British confounded, thinking that they have made a discovery of the Hindu religion. It has been observed that Raja Ram Mohan Roy coined the word ‘Hinduism’ in 1816, and the British writers in about 1830 onwards used it as a common name for all the people of India excluding the Muslims and converted Christians. Moreover, there is still a debate on this issue on ‘Who Invented Hinduism?’ and ‘Was Hinduism Invented?’ which I would like to leave as for now and take up this issue for a review and treat it cursorily in one of the chapters.

ventured to emphasize Indian asceticism, not by contextualizing it as a private religiosity, rather appropriating it as an interested practice in the public sphere. This had consequences for giving a religio-spiritual dimension¹⁵ to national identity and resisting the British system.

Some of the nationalist ideologues self-designed¹⁶ themselves as strict observers of Hindu ascetic principles and revived the image of holding spiritual authority within the Hindu religio-spiritual realm. Further, this period saw the transfigured ascetic model employed by nationalist ideologues imitating a counter-discourse. This, it can be said, became part of the nationalist framework and was coloured with the notion: the amalgamation of restructured Hindu ascesis and socio-political principles. This syncretism also has absorbed the aspect of militancy into nationalism, which became an important concern for the colonial administration.

This study also seeks to explore the trajectory of various ascetic aspects in “narratives”, “cultural practices” and “traditions”. The aspects, *dharma*, *bhakti*, *tapas*, duty, devotion and discipline helped the Hindu nationalists in designing a national identity. An identity which was fashioned by highlighting the *Bhagavad Gita*’s ideology of *karmayoga* (‘selfless action’), iconizing and reframing the mythical characters Krishna, Rama and Hanuman as supreme heroes – symbolizing ascetic masculinity –and

¹⁵ Adrian Hastings notes that, “Nationalism owes much to religion”, although keeping Christianity and the European context in view, it should be remembered that one of the prominent dimensions of Indian nationalism was spirituality. Hastings suggests that the development of nations is “out of a typical medieval and early modern experience of the multiplication of vernacular literatures and of state systems around them...” (205).

¹⁶ The nineteenth century India witnessed a change in the ascetic’s internal spiritual being of action – a transformation projected by the nationalist literary intelligentsia. These literati processed the redefinition of the spiritual ways of the ascetic figure as exteriorized actions, and further, created an identity of nationalist asceticism. One of the main reasons for the reconstitution of the ascetical practices and its ideals by the nationalist ideologues is due to the imperial visualization of Indian asceticism as a practice determined and inclined towards redundancy and deception.

Kali as the Mother of worship. The “Children of the Mother” from *Anandamath*, M. K. Gandhi’s ‘religio-political’ fusion, Aurobindo Ghose’s “ideal of Karmayogin”, Vivekananda’s “Song of the Sannyasin” and RSS’s notion of Hindutva and its objectification of the mythical character of the epic *Ramayana* – Ram as a warrior ascetic with bow and arrow – all become technologies associated with the ascetic model. The ascetic features like celibacy,¹⁷ regulation of diet, *Karmayoga*, interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which the Hindu nationalists associated themselves with, were popularized as indigenous. In short, a self-identity was constituted with whatever material that was available from ancient history, religious texts and myths.¹⁸

The recent events in the Indian socio-political realm, such as Anna Hazare’s anti-corruption campaign, raises the question about spiritual saffron joining hands with the political saffron. Here, the event allows us to look at the social activist Anna Hazare as a socio-political sannyasi. His implementation of the technologies of the ascetic in the

¹⁷ One of the ascetic principles, which gained prominence – and contributed a major role – among the Indian nationalists was celibacy (*brahmacharya*). Through this ascetic ideal, religion was brought out into the public. Celibacy was systematized into an important aspect and campaigned as a ‘technology of the self’ and a mechanism to control the bodily powers. It was further appropriated as an aspect that would procure one freedom from the colonialist rule. The individual body was trained and was assumed would ‘transform the soul’. The aspect of bodily training at *akharas* was constituted to relegate the “effeminate” body among the body politic. A strong male healthy body was thought would replicate a healthy nation. The religio-spiritual aspects were to be learnt through physical fitness. The observance of a perfect celibate life became crucial in the nineteenth century. The British formulated the ideology that the colonialist was at liberation to rule India, as they were competent of maintaining control over their sexuality. Due to the above British conception, a potential doubt took shape in the minds of the Indian nationalist ideologues that the Indian populace became “effeminate” as they did not retain any check over their sexual activities. This doubt prompted to take up a few necessary steps, one of them being, disciplining the body through suppressing the desires, a rigorous practice of *karmayoga* (selfless action) and secondly, through the observation of *brahmacharya* (celibacy). Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj* makes a point that, “Chastity is one of the greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness. A man who is unchaste loses stamina, become emasculated and cowardly. He whose mind is given over to animal passions is not capable of any great effort” (79).

¹⁸ The Indian populace were made to adapt to a process of thinking about themselves by delving into the past, which generated novel meanings. The qualities borrowed from the past were concretized into regulations, which have designed the procedure of constructing the mother-nation. Some of the narratives by the Indian nationalists represented the individual pursuit for self-realization and resisted the imperial attitude, predominantly – the colonialist cultural power

politico-societal plane: hunger strike, the dress code – an echo of Gandhian ascetics, shows that he supposedly espouses political sannyasi principles. Baba Ramdev, identified as a ‘new-age fitness guru’ dressed completely in spiritual saffron has merged spirituality with the marketplace. He also has made harsh pronouncements on the aspect of corruption in the country and associated himself with the anti-corruption campaign by making use of the ‘fasting’ principle. These public events are instances of the ascetic model being hauled into the socio-political and economical arena.

One of the major political incidents of the 1980s is the ascendance of the Hindu Right wing in India, which happened mainly due to the ‘ex-Jana Sanghis founding of the BJP’.¹⁹ In the present day, political activists associated with the Hindu Right wing are projecting themselves through the characteristics of the ascetic. Some of the political activists, such as: A. B. Vajpayee, L. K. Advani, Narendra Modi, Uma Bharati, Bal Thackeray are structured by methods (wearing saffron attire and beads, leading a celibate life, and practicing vegetarianism) of the ascetic.²⁰ Further, the Hindu Right wing’s framing of the ascetic subject in the present era has depended on the transmuted notions of asceticism that predominantly bring the nationalist past as a custom and also on current events that have been charged with particular meanings.

Though some of the modern ascetics living in their own *ashrams*, *mathas*, deny any political association or aspiration, a closer scrutiny will reveal them as “worldly”

¹⁹ For further reference, see, Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *The Sangh Parivar: A Reader. Critical Issues in Indian Politics Series*, (Delhi: Oxford U P, 2005).

²⁰ This rise of the political Hindu ideology simplified the way for the Hindu ascetics – to participate in communal activities. Some of the recent major incidents like the demolition of Babri Masjid (1992) and Gujarat-Godhra riots (2002) have produced extreme tension among the Indian populace. The conceptualization of the poster of Rama, the mythical hero of *Ramayana*, in saffron robes and armed with a bow and arrow, confronted him as a militant ascetic.

ascetics.²¹ Hence, the ascetic subject can no more be studied in isolation. If we look at the contemporary Indian socio-political scenario, though the activists follow different ideologies, still, are influenced by the features of the 'political sannyasi',²² constructed and represented by the nationalists of nineteenth century. This attitude has continued through the twentieth century to the present. In India, a new religiosity is also being fashioned by the media. The visual media has become one of the substructures of this new religiosity. The codification, it can be said, has been stylized through the broadcast of the programmes on Doordarshan, the *Ramayana* from 1987 to 1988,²³ and consecutively the *Mahabharat* from 1988 to 1990.²⁴

In this study, the historical and sociological accounts of the ascetic subject schematised by various institutions of asceticism are partially taken into consideration to demonstrate the association between Hindu *ascesis* and the exponents of Indian nationalism. My objective in this work is rather modest. It will address a set of issues in

²¹ These modern socio-ascetic figures are identified with labels, such as *Baba*, *Swami*, *Mata*, *Guru*, and *Amma*. These figures have become engrossed – directly or indirectly with the socio-political life and are not so much concerned about the strict implementation of the age old principles of Indian asceticism. The ascetic subject is to maintain a state of non-possession, which has become a difficult observation in the societal plane. A few modern ascetics are: Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982), Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981), Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008), Satya Sai Baba (1926-2011), Osho- Rajneesh (1931-1990), Sri Asaramji Bapu (1941-), Mata Amritanandamayi (1953-), Sri Sri Ravi Shankar (1956-), Amma Sri Karunamayi (1958-), Sant Mother Meera (1960-).

²² The concept, 'political sannyasi' formulated in the nineteenth century India and the multiple transmutations of the ascetic image in the colonial and postcolonial public sphere have given a wide scope for the modern ascetic to become a social or a political activist. For further reference, see, William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New Delhi: Cambridge UP, 2006), p. 243.

²³ For further reference, see, Babb, Lawrence A. and Susan S. Wadley, eds., *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1995). See also, Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge: C U Press, 2001).

²⁴ The broadcast of the Hindu epics, widely accepted as a key event, have prompted the masses, towards the Hindu right and enforced the power of television in the country. The television serialization had a significant impact on the religio-political culture of India and became an influential scope – designed into a manipulative technique – for the modern ascetic figure. Today, there are more than 50 regional language based religious television channels. Most of them who give commentaries in these channels are the modern ascetic figures identified by different titles.

relation to the transfigured²⁵ identity of the ascetic and the ways in which it intersects contemporary religion and current politics. Further, it will also try to unravel certain narratives that framed, and also fractured, a nationalist landscape (an emerging nation) and the importance of fighting ascetics in the popular imagination. Hence, it would be relevant and appropriate at this point to touch upon some of the different interpretations and recent debates on Gandhism in tune with nationalistic discourse, as, unfortunately, Aurobindo has hardly been studied from such angles.

Akeel Bilgrami, from a secularist point of view, advocates a discernment of the acclimatized aspect of religion by the body politic. He notes that religion is more about the perception of a common culture. Bilgrami brings out and explains Gandhi's religious conceptions rejecting orthodox Hinduism, which were further formulated by Gandhi to preach solidarity and integration of other religions with Hinduism, given his belief that religion was experiential and not doctrinal. Bilgrami notes that Gandhi's thoughts should be perceived in totality, primarily because of the highly integrated nature of Gandhi's thoughts and opinions, based on the fundamentals of his moral stance with truth and non-violence.

Gandhi is said to have looked at life as a whole, and his observations, being not severely political or legal, but integral constituents of an amalgamated whole. Gandhi's belief that one's political life is not restricted to one's social, moral or spiritual life,

²⁵ The transformation of the ascetic ideal by the Hindu nationalist ideologues for creating nationalist signs and the expostulations of the Indian literary intelligentsia exemplifies the contestation made by them against the imperialist's analysis of the Hindu ascetical traditions and religion. It is obvious that the imperialist's observation and conclusion of Indian's effeminacy can be stated was a necessitated representation of power. Moreover, it congregated and institutionalized the aspect to regulate the various modes of discipline. The regulatory mechanism is an affair of power, although a comprehensible "transparency of meaning achieved through cultural habituation may conceal its practices. Indeed, the very act of concealment and thus the naturalization of meaning is an expression of power" (Barker 161).

seems to have made him not to see life in terms of impervious spaces with distinctive approaches to different aspects. Gandhi is noted to have put into practice, non-violent political resistance as an agency, which was to be considered not as a mere political tool, but also an observation undertaken for the search of truth, ‘an experiential one’²⁶ and to mobilize and invigorate the idea of nation in the minds of the body politic. He believed that non-violence would assist in generating long-term peace and its observation further would facilitate the subjected to move ahead to take the objective of throwing out British ideas and its institutions and bring back Indianness in India.

David Hardiman²⁷ critically considers that Gandhi formulated a novel dimension to the then existing form of politics. A new design was schematized in accordance to his peculiar observations and moral activism for the cause of a nonviolent and healthy nation. Politics, at this juncture, becomes one another mode. The simple idea of resistance became the main strand through which Gandhi confronted and defended various groups and ideologies. Hardiman further notes that although there were limitations, contradictions, and failures, Gandhi lived up to the mark of being an inspiration for future generations. Gandhi transfigured the very idea of modern politics through his assertions on duty, self-discipline, sacrifice, and devotion, culled from various religious practices. However, the amalgamation of religion and politics had already reached a balanced stage, by the time Gandhism was still in its way for promulgation, and the religio-political fusion was made to be seen from a new angle, accepting itself to contradictions.

²⁶ See, Akeel Bilgrami, “Gandhi’s integrity: The philosophy behind the politics,” *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 5(1), (2002), pp. 79-93.

²⁷ For further reading, see, David Hardiman, *Gandhi: In His Time and Ours* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2005).

A dialogue seems to have been centred on this unfinished synthesis and this further varied or contrasted from one's own self. At this juncture, Gandhi is found to have come out with the idea of spiritualizing politics and further reform religions for the founding of a perfect moral state. The practice and transmutation of ascetic observances by Gandhi for a political cause remains unconvinced, antagonistic and even troubling in the contemporary political context. However, Hardiman notes the Gandhian principles have infused various social movements.

Ajay Skaria assesses the paradox of Gandhi's arguments on politics, religion and the secular and notes that Gandhi favoured politics with religion, moreover, believed that "politics without morality [*niti*] is a thing to be avoided".²⁸ The critique stresses on the aspect of Gandhi envisioning equality among religions, which looks quite contrasting from the secular tradition, when understood from a general sense. Skaria brings forth the potentialities of the concepts: tolerance and secularism, considering them, in terms of Gandhi's conceptualization of the practice of religion, which brought differentiations between the Hindu and Muslim. In one of his essays, Skaria questions the politics of the Gandhian ashram, which in Gandhi's words, was a space that removed the defects in the national life, a heterotopia, dominated with a spiritual stance of the Gandhian type.

Shahid Amin²⁹ points out that it was more of a religious charisma that convinced and attracted the masses towards Gandhi rather than his political praxis. Gandhi is considered to have transmuted the religio-ascetic principles as nationalistic and advocated them as a vocation to be followed. Further, in particular, the aspect of

²⁸ See, Ajay Skaria, "'No Politics without Religion: of Secularism and Gandhi,'" *Political Hinduism: The Religious Imagination in Public Spheres*, ed. Vinay Lal (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009), p. 174.

²⁹ See, Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 12-22," in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988), pp. 288-342.

discipline, regarded as a shield, protecting anti-colonial nationalism, becomes a weapon for Gandhi to fight the enemy within one's own self.

The experiments of Gandhi transmuting the ascetic subject in the political realm, have further, tried to mould a nation of sameness, where diversities are drawn together and juxtaposed. This rupture of 'otherness' can be elicited from various political contexts of the late nineteenth century. This period witnessed, Hindu nationalism becoming explicit by rejecting the "Indianisation of Christianity", and not only constructed 'external Others, but also produced internal Others'.³⁰ The differentiations that existed among the body politic have been refused to be accommodated at various religio-political contexts by the "majoritarian nationalism", and the "otherness" seems to have not been provided with a growth.

The early nationalist ideologues, who were aware with the local variations that were attached to divergent self-conceptions of socio-political culture, initiated a nation-building paradigm, which would be multicultural in form and accept the historical diversities that had existed in the sub-continent. However, the idea of Indian nationalism, from the inception, can be said, was drawn, identified and coloured with the mythology of Hindu religion. The Hindu symbols, were thought would be redressed, and provide accommodation for a legitimate space to the Muslim in the making of the nation. Further, the Muslim as the 'internal Other' was denied the right to speak for the nation and was alienated. However, the portrayal of these symbols and rhetoric continued in forging the Muslim community as the cultural other and inimical to the nation. The

³⁰ For a detailed study, see, M. S. S. Pandian, "Nation as Nostalgia: Ambiguous Spiritual Journeys of Vengal Chakkarai," *Economic and Political Weekly*, (2003), pp. 5357-5365.

Muslim nationalistic identity is conceptualized as the benign 'internal Other' of the nationalist thought.

Amidst the sounds of high-pitched Hindu patriotism, the voice of the Muslim nationalist seems to be ominously absent (or perhaps silenced). It looks as if the Hindu ascetic subject effectively did the ideological work of re-affirming the nation, however, while marginalizing the Muslim as the 'other'. In recent times, there has been an increasing concern about the issue of non-Hindus being disadvantaged through an alienation from the nationalist thought (not explicitly stated but implicitly implied).

It should be noted here that Muslim leaders, viz. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Allama Iqbal (1876-1938), who had headed as ardent Indian nationalists gave up their positions and landed at the verge of Muslim nationalism. The prototype shift, it can be said, produced a nationalistic idea in the form of modern socio-political schemata, prepared with educational, ideological, political and cultural trends, which in the later period was eventuated as alien. Sir Syed Ahmad Khan regarded Islam, as a culture/nation making force. He believed that religion comprises the essential element of the idea of nationality. The Muslim, though belongs to the nation, can be said, is still being represented as an 'external Other', due to the formation of a new Muslim nation. The issue of the 'secular' in postcolonial India, and the debates about the issue of India as a fragmented and 'incomplete nation' remain.

Since nationalism is an integral part of this study, it would be relevant and appropriate at this point to mention some of the definitions given by various critiques on nationalism. Benedict Anderson defines, nationalism, as an 'imagined political community' subsisting in a 'homogenous empty time', and shaped by the impact of a

body of work, and other politico-cultural mechanisms of modernity as census, maps, and museums. Eric Hobsbawm notes nationalism “as an ‘invented tradition’”. What Anderson, Hobsbawm, and others have done is to unmistakably entangle the history of nationalism with that of modernity” (Bandyopadhyay xviii). Partha Chatterjee notes that Indian nationalism is distinct but overshadowed, a derivative of colonial discourse, divided into two contradictory opinions, is indebted in commitment to a prominent historical pattern developed in the West. However, different historical incidents throw rather a different light on the subject of identity and condition of being politically free. His most important “problematic of Indian nationalism was that the nation here did not evidently inhabit the ‘homogenous empty time’, but rather the ‘heterogeneous time of modernity’” (xviii).

Yet other critiques like Adrian Hastings refer to the spiritual dimension angle in the formulation of nationalism, which appropriately represents the situation that existed in the nineteenth century British India. He points out that, “Religion is an integral element of many cultures, most ethnicities and some states....Moreover, religion has produced the dominant character of some state-shaped nations and of some nationalisms” (2-5). In India, a national identity as a cultural formation was re-constructed out of the European nationalist ideology continuously keeping the social order in view. India, a country of diversified cultures and linguistically propended internal divisions had to be unified with the concept of ‘nation’. In the process of unifying a country like India, most of the intellectual elite of the society made use of religion. The narrations were filled with principle mythological figures of collective origin, pointing to the continuity of the nation of the long past. Dipesh Chakrabarty, a

postcolonial historian, contends: “nation is thus spiritually experienced in this inner sphere, rather than mentally or rationally imagined. According to these historians, it was through such modes of spiritual imagination that Indian nationalism could permeate across various levels of popular consciousness.”³¹

Sudipta Kaviraj notes that “several institutions of the colonial state: colonial cartographers drew their territorial boundaries; the census operations counted them, transforming the ‘fuzzy communities’ into ‘enumerated communities’; and the colonial museums reinvented their antiquities.”³² Kaviraj proposes that the nation in the nineteenth century is

literally a construction, ‘an imagined community’ (Anderson 1983); and, in constituting this community through this founding imagination, history, in its popular form, as an irreducible mixture of facts and fantasy (res factae and res fictae), plays a crucial part. There appears to exist a necessary inversion in nationalist historical discourse: ordinary popular consciousness regards this search for history as a search for the past narrative of a community, already constituted, that has existed before and independently of this narrative and can, in principle, exist independently of this storytelling... It is by telling these stories, by this construction of the past that this community, in exactly this shape and form, comes into existence. It is partly this narrative consciousness that determines the being of a nation. (*Imagined* 109).

³¹ Cited from Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009).

³² Cited from Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009).

III

This thesis is divided into four chapters besides an Introduction and a Conclusion. Chapter I traces the ascetic features prevalent from the pre-Vedic period to the nineteenth century British India, such as *Bhakti*, *Dharma* and self-discipline, in order to analyze how literary intelligentsia tried to construct an indigenous category from a mythological past that would help them counter the ‘outsiders’. Needless to say, most of such features were later emphasized and re-designed by nationalistic movement in nineteenth century India.

In this chapter, I have delineated the metamorphosis of the ascetic subject in the Indian traditions. In particular, I have chosen three periods of Indian history when the idea of the ascetic gained prime importance. First, during the age of pre-Vedic and Vedic period, the ascetic figure described as “wild” and unconventional, slowly assumed new structural roles with the process of domestication and was identified as part of the *asrama* system. The second phase is when the ascetic figure again became important during the age of Sankaracharya, believed to have brought various institutions of asceticism under one hood. The third phase is during the Bhakti movement when the ascetic subject becomes a central point of the belief pattern and is elevated to the central deistic structure of many Hindu devotional styles.

The ascetic forms that have been fashioned again and again in a historical time-space, and the religio-spiritual dimension attributed to the ‘nationalist ascetic’ is analysed in this thesis. The interpretations of – pertaining to the socialization of *ascesis* – socio-religious reformers and the early nationalist ideologues radically transformed the ascetic subject. Some of the social institutions, for instance, the *Akharas*, were fabricated

with the qualities of the ascetic, in order to drive the body politic towards the arenas of masculine manoeuvre. Hence, the concepts that have devised a foundation for constituting a nationalist ascetic, to generate a sense of self-discipline and devotional duty mindedness in the masses are examined.

Chapter II surveys and illustrates the prevailing condition of the ‘native’ land and the intricacies³³ of the colonial rule in India. The representation of the ‘Orientalist’ religions by the British from a Euro-centric point of view, giving rise to negative connotations³⁴ is studied in this chapter. The idealistic processes of the ascetic used for crystallizing the national and socialist ideas to form a political modern Hindu–India as well as the institutionalization of colonial law and the administrative systematization, the circulation of the concept of ‘modernity’ in the form of English education, railways, sciences, the reform initiatives that eroded diverse religio-cultural streams and practices, giving fillip to a Hindu India, predicated on re-inventing a past, are some of the issues that are examined in this chapter.

³³ As it is found that a few narratives discuss on the existing ascetic figures, as grand and elevated Indian holy figures – these constructive and respectful appreciations of the ascetical practices by the ‘European’ gave the nineteenth century nationalists scope to structuralize a counter-discourse. In 1813, the missionary activities received complete access to convert the Indian masses to Christianity and these missionaries used educational institutions as agencies. The Evangelists and Christian missionaries regulated on their own basis, moreover, pictured Hindu religion as dark shaded, wicked, cruel and abominating. During this period, the act of resisting the British imperatives became the absolute duty of the socio-religious reform movements. These movements took the basic tenets of various religious sects and brought them under the canopy called ‘Hinduism’. The religious affairs were brought out into the public domain. The conceptualization of Bharat Mata (‘Mother India’) through a set of images, mainly Kali and Durga and its implications on the formulation of a Hindu nationalist discourse and the nationalist’s act, was charged with the idea of ‘inventing’ a political self-identity through religious images and icons.

³⁴ The British administrative system, at a particular point of time, seems to have meddled with the religious affairs of the sub-continent and further, attempted to conceptualize the indigenous customs into governmental resolutions, so as to bring the colonizers under control. This act of the British received a strong resistance. The aspect of religion was left out by the administration and an initiative to project the state of India’s degenerative condition was invoked. With this the educational reforms and utilitarian ideas were instituted, as aids for projecting a negative picture of the spiritual traditions of India.

The enumeration of a plan by Bankimchandra Chatterji, for a national revival in the garb of historical fiction,³⁵ the projection of spiritual preceptors, training a dedicated group of nationalist ascetics to fight for the liberation of the motherland is also examined in this chapter. A direct correspondence between a spiritual authority and nationalist thought is found to have been established by Bankim. Hence, in Bankim a spiritual dimension of nationalism rather than a political one is ascribed. A scrutiny of Bankim's *Anandamath* (1882) and other non-fictional narratives, particularly the 'fighting ascetics'³⁶ of the "sannyasi rebellion" provides a fitting coda to this chapter.

Chapter III engages with Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), who has tried to amalgamate the modern with the traditional in British India. In this chapter, I limit myself to the Aurobindo's politico-spiritual trajectory – by looking at his selected narratives that have tried to establish and govern the Indian nationalist movement. The chapter delineates, firstly, the idea framed for integrating the spiritual and political ideals, secondly, the limitations of such an idea. As the central concern is about religio-political synthesis attempted by Aurobindo, his sudden retirement from the Indian political arena in 1910, enables one to examine the reconciliation of nationalist politics with religious goals.

³⁵ The chapter looks at Bankim's narratives re-structuring the techniques of Hindu asceticism and the ascetic features absorbed into the nationalist discourse. Bankim's *Anandamath*, contextualized patriotism in religio-traditional and ascetical terms. The idea of nation is imagined through the notion of the 'Mother Goddess' *Kali*. The act of resistance against the imperial rule is codified as an ascetical duty. The idea of *Anusilan*, a 'system of culture', based on the concept of *bhakti* was to generate a non-possessive and rewardless duty mindedness for the nation.

³⁶ The warrior ascetics are supposed to have been surviving from a long time. It has been observed that they were organized as a sect by Sankaracharya. The fighting ascetics, probably, seem to have been kept out of the Hindu religious history, give their noteworthy appearance in the incident known as the "sannyasi rebellion", later highlighted and used as an example for the fictional narrative *Anandamath* by Bankim. The re-structured warrior ascetic qualities were to become the mechanics of anti-colonial struggle. The synthesization of the fighting ascetic element into Indian nationalism in the form of militant nationalism is found to have taken place.

The chapter analyzes Aurobindo's idea of *Karmayogin* fused with nation-formation and tries to scrutinize this complex issue from a religio-political perspective. The *Bhagavad Gita* becomes one of the central texts for conceptualizing a militant nationalist asceticism. The tremendous impact of Bankim's fictional ascetic preceptors on Aurobindo is exemplified through the pamphlet *Bhawani Mandir*, further, indicating the re-conceptualization of ascetic features as a category merged with nationalist discourse. The view of Aurobindo, who considered the nationalist movement as a Vedantic nationalist movement, further framing it as 'political Vedantism' is examined. Aurobindo's propagation on self-discipline and other ascetic features³⁷ among the masses as 'nationalist rituals' and nationalism as a religion, possessing the strength of God, and fastening it to the traditional Hindu religious notions is studied in this chapter.

Chapter IV concentrates on M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948) conceptualizing *Ahimsa* (non-violence) and *Anasaktiyoga* (selfless action), expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* for a nationalist cause. The text is used by Gandhi to defend the notions of truth, *svadharma*, *swadeshi*, and *satyagraha* and the promotion of self-discipline, which through religious devotion is altered into public power to achieve nationalist goals. The concept of *ashram* is re-framed by Gandhi, it is brought in conjunction to the nationalist discourse in British India, the ashram observances advocated and culminated with the ideas of national reform, and self-improvement. The 'experiments' undertaken by Gandhi, inclined towards ascetic features, became prominent and structured for disciplining the nation are also examined in this chapter.

³⁷ The characteristics of the ascetic are represented as instantaneous principles of action, assisting the 'self' to perform certain operations on one's own thoughts and conduct. Aurobindo, far from binding the ascetic features to the past, represented them to the indigenous individual as agencies for attaining specific attitudes and moreover for the production of a politico-spiritual transformation.

The chapter focuses on the formulation of Gandhian ascetics and its role in establishing a nexus between ‘religion’ and ‘politics’ during the Indian nationalist movement. Gandhi, known as the most influential mass mobilizer during his time, has been rooted firmly to his Hindu religious ascetic practices. The chapter elaborates on the observances and practices of Gandhi that have led to the questioning of restrictions between religion, society, politics, authority and the employing of power in diverse structures and his practices resisting some of the then widespread conventionalities.

The chapter engages with Gandhi’s ideas: *Satyagraha* (self-search), an extension of non-violence and *Swaraj* (self-rule) linked with the concept of ‘National Duty’. The *Satyagrahi*, an ascetic serving in the midst of society, according to Gandhi, assisting in re-constructing a religio-political India is studied in this chapter. The ascetic subject as per Gandhi’s notion seems to facilitate a reunification of the cultural identity in the Indian sub-continent. The very persona of Gandhi, as ascetic and domination over caste, class, religion and gender in India, leading to the ‘ascetic’ changing the social world and accepted as a cultural hero is examined.

In the conclusion, I discuss some of the after-effects of this counter-discourse on present day Indian political sphere, keeping in mind the view that that “we do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions” (Aurobindo, *On Nationalism* 484).

Chapter One

TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF THE ASCETIC

In this chapter, my attempt will be to trace the metamorphosis of the ascetic subject in the Indian traditions. The ‘ascetic’ considered as the “creator of values”³⁸ is stretched, interwoven and transfused throughout the pre-Vedic period to the nineteenth century British India. The ascetic subject has been part of the framework of Indian religious traditions for several thousand years, personifying a higher source of spiritual authority. Though, the ascetic subject is characterized as anti-structural, residing outside of and against the social structure, is an important element in the making of Indian social life. The ascetic, “devoid of worldly desire, armed with spiritual strength”³⁹ has been both revered and feared.

In order to understand the processes that have influenced the present day political sphere and to write a ‘history of the present’, it becomes an imperative to examine the discursive traces and orders left by the ascetic subject, transmuted through a number of beliefs, ideas, practices and ancient principles.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first two sections deal with the emerging contours of the ascetic subject in the pre-Vedic and Vedic period, constituted as “wild” and unconventional, and later its slow adaptation of new structural roles with the process of domestication and further its integration into the *asrama* system. The second section enlarges upon the above, in the context of Sankaracharya directing

³⁸ See, Louis Dumont, *Religion, Politics and History in India: Collected Papers in Indian Sociology* (Paris: Mouton, 1970).

³⁹ See, Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1978), p.448.

various ascetic institutions under one hood and the phase of Bhakti movement when the ascetic subject becomes a central point of the belief pattern and is elevated to the central deistic structure of many Hindu devotional styles. The third section lays out some of the themes of the ascetic subject that presaged the socio-religious reform movements in the socio-political environment of the British India. It discusses the ascetic subject, forged by the early nationalist ideologues, viz. Rajnarayan Basu, Bankimchandra Chatterji and Swami Vivekananda, for constructing a national identity in the Indian sub-continent and having a confident association with the revolutionary changes, in Indian social, political, cultural and religious spheres.

Asceticism is considered as a ‘voluntarily maintained, and a partially systematic program of self-discipline, self-denial and austerity in which, sensual, or temporal gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state and unite with the divine or a more thorough absorption in the sacred’ (Kaelber 441).

The *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* discusses and defines, ‘Asceticism’, derived from the Greek word *askesis*, meaning ‘practice’, ‘training’ or ‘exercise’ of the body and the mind. “The ‘athlete’ was one trained and one might be an ‘athlete’ in virtue. So very early the ascetic became the spiritual athlete of Church History.”

Two quite different conceptions mingle in the history of asceticism. One of these preserves the original meaning of discipline of the body for some ultimate purpose, as when William James urges sacrifice to God and duty as a means of training the will. The other conception distrusts the body altogether. Asceticism has been as its function not the training but the destroying of the body or the negation of its importance. (Hastings 2: 63)

Nietzsche's suggestion that 'asceticism enriches the feeling of power by giving a person complete control over him or herself'⁴⁰ might help us to understand the persuasive principle that has inspired people across various cultures to become ascetics. The above suggestion indicates that the lifestyle of an ascetic is life affirming than life denying. Nietzsche further explains in his *On the Genealogy of Morals* that ascetic ideals manifest themselves differently among different kinds of people.

The features of the ascetic play a prominent role in defining the way of life of an ascetic. The ascetic model becomes a method in the "degenerating life" of an ascetic, pursuing existence and trying to experiment with "himself, unhappy and dissatisfied" (Nietzsche 126). The ascetic subject is stated, as one who could reach for "a life somewhere else", if only he thought that it was necessary for him to be asocial by an austere implementation of the 'technologies of the self.'

Asceticism has functioned 'actively among different cultures, and barely any religion in the world has been without at least indications or some principles of asceticism.'⁴¹ The domain of religious culture seems to have absorbed at least some practices: celibacy, monasticism, mendicancy, seclusion, renunciation, meditation and fasting, classified as ascetic. Though asceticism is regarded as an integrant of implicitly every religion, it seems to have played, above all, a conspicuous role in Indian religions, moreover is argued as "a corner stone of Indian religions."⁴² In India, asceticism is cluttered with seers, rishis, mystics, sannyasis, saints and yogis, may be said, played a

⁴⁰ See, Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Alexander Tille, tr. William A. Hausmann (New York: Macmillan, 1897).

⁴¹ See, Brian Smith, "Hindu and Buddhist Asceticism," *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (2005), <http://www.encyclopedia.com>.

⁴² Cited from Patrick Olivelle, "Deconstruction of the Body in Indian Asceticism," *Asceticism*, ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (New York, NY: Oxford UP, 1995), pp. 188-210.

major role in moulding the Indian religious traditions. In addition, the ascetic principles, functioning as agencies of power seem to have organized, managed and manoeuvred the minds of people. Bhagat notes that “One who has need to sway the group-mind whether a religious preacher, a social reformer or even a political leader—finds it to his purpose to appear in *sannyasi*’s likeness in this country, for in that semblance he is able to command the highest respect and the readiest following” (5).

Asceticism in India goes back to the most ancient period of known history. The Indus Valley seal, referred to by Sir John Marshall, depicts a three-headed figure, seated cross-legged (a yogic posture) is recognized as the “prototype of Siva in his aspect of Pasupati” (Haripada 3). In India, the terms, *tapas*⁴³ and *sannyasa*, may be considered, as equivalent expressions for asceticism. Radhakrishnan notes, *tapas* as a “severe self-discipline undertaken for spiritual ends” (Bhagat 14).

The notion of *sannyasa*, throughout the ancient history of Indian civilization, may be said, was perceived as a self-disciplining practice, evolving further into an idea of absolute perfection and as a standard or model of perfection or excellence. An early prose passage found in the *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* may have had the greatest influence on the subsequent history of asceticism in India.⁴⁴ The ascetic subject in the Indian sub-continent is denoted by several terms.⁴⁵ The *sannyasi*, is defined by Monier Williams as “one who abandons or resigns worldly affairs, an ascetic devotee, who has

⁴³In Sanskrit the word *tapas*, is used for austerity and simultaneously for asceticism. It looks that they are all similar, however, a diminutive observation will reveal that they are all different from each other.

⁴⁴See J. M. Masson, “The Psychology of the Ascetic,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 35, 4 (August 1976), pp. 611-625. See also, A. L. Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, ed. Kenneth G. Zysk (Delhi: O U P, 1997).

⁴⁵The term ascetic, in accordance to, Indian religious traditions, may be expressed as *Sadhu*, *Muni*, *Rishi*, *Yati*, *Bhiksu*, *Yogin*, *Sramana*, *Tapasvin*, *Tapas*, *Mundaka*, *Parivrajaka*, *Dhyānin*, *Tyāgin*, *Vairāgin*, *Avadhuta*, *Digambara*, *Gosain*, *Santans*, *Fakirs*, *Yogis*, *Mendicants*, *Nagas* and *Sannyasis* of all sorts.

renounced all earthly concerns and devotes himself to meditation and the study of the Aranyakas or Upanishads, A Brahmana in the fourth *asrama* or stage of life, a religious mendicant” (43).

While the ascetic, epitomized as a renouncer and asocial, has always maintained a fellowship with the society, and the connection nevertheless became powerful. The ascetic, who had made his abode outside the society, drew students and imparted them with the best knowledge. Thus, even their position outside the society had some social links. The ascetic subject, “besides contributing to the welfare of the community also evinced keen interest in the proper maintenance of *dharma* by a righteous administration of the country by the kings” (326) and took “active interest in state-affairs” (Haripada 480). It has been noted that the ascetic subject “has been a central and important ingredient in the socio-cultural mix that contributed to the formation of historical religions in India” (Olivelle 11).

The socio-historical contexts seem to have given various shapes and have brought changes in the ascetic way of life. The lives of ascetics in India vary widely. They are found engaging in a variety of strategies, practices, methods, and forms of knowledge. Though there are vast differences, the ascetic principles, seem to, “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.”⁴⁶ The ascetic linked with some of the Indian religious

⁴⁶ Cited from Luther H Martin, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988). pp. 16-49.

traditions⁴⁷ followed radical forms⁴⁸ of self-mortification, like staring at the sun until they went blind or holding up one's arms above the head until they withered. Fasting and sexual abstinence were among the main practices. Such attempts were made to achieve various ultimate goals or ideals. The ascetic practices seem to be, techniques implemented on the "self" in various modes. Some ascetics (*aghoris*), belonging to the *Saivism* sect are noted to have gone to such extremes like 'reversing all the values' and have willingly transgressed the ascetic norms constituted in the earlier periods.

In India through asceticism, one was trying to give a bodily form to the ideal. They were trying in a self-discipline and devotional mode to conform themselves to an ultimate form or standard of excellence. Masson comments upon "asceticism as a defense – a mechanism whereby unacceptable urges and impulses can be warded off and never permitted to reach consciousness, let alone motility" (615). It looks as if the ascetics knew that the ascetic ideal was something that existed only in the mind and was an imaginary notion. They knew that this state consisted of ideas or mental images and the possibility of realizing them was difficult without practicality. Moreover, the state of ascetic ideal 'sometimes' was considered as an unattainable standard of perfection.

⁴⁷ See, Joseph Campbell Oman, *The Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India: A Study of Sadhuism, with and Account of the Yogis, Sannyasis, Bairagis and other Strange Hindu Sectarians* (London, 1903, rpt., Delhi: Orient Publishers, 1973).

⁴⁸ Some practice extreme asceticism while others mainly focus on praying, chanting or meditating. The ascetics are noted to be living by themselves, on the fringes of society, and spend their days in devotion. In the social order, they have formulated themselves with diverse identities like spiritual adventurers, ascetic warriors, devout mystics, occult rebels, philosophic monks, traders, peasants, gurus and so on. In some cases, the ascetics were considered as representing the gods, sometimes even worshipped as gods themselves.

I

The established socio-religious tradition in the Indian sub-continent is assumed to have been older than asceticism. However, asceticism is found to have been in conflict with the established religio-tradition. Patrick Olivelle argues that renunciation in early history had an anti-structural character, which he says “can be more adequately described as “anti-culture” and that the process of domestication that so radically changed the character of renunciation also gave birth to a new Hindu world within which renunciation assumed new structural roles” (*Collected* 44). Olivelle defines Indian asceticism as anti-cultural⁴⁹ and anti-structural. He says that this attitude “highlights the radical nature of its rejection of even the most basic social constructs, such as housing, agriculture, use of fire, and kinship relations” (45). As renunciation was considered as the most prominent form of Indian asceticism, it is said that it had never tried to establish or replace the existing cultural system.

The classical Brahmanical definitions are said to have classified renunciation as a state of negativeness, and “defined by what it abandons rather than by what it practices, by what it is not rather than by what it is” (45). The asceticism in India “of renunciation can only exist in opposition to, and therefore, dependent on the culture of society” (45). The individual, who belonged to the Vedic societal-structural institution, was “socially defined and assumed religious significance not as an individual but as a member of his

⁴⁹ Patrick Olivelle reminds us that the “anti-culture” (Indian asceticism in general) will not have any specific “meaning conceptually and cannot exist historically except in relation to the structure or culture that it negates” (45). However, Olivelle recalls the time and space of a culture that should have existed in and around the sixth century BCE, as asceticism should have had a specific cultural negation with a particular culture set “in a specific geographical and historical context” (*Collected Essays* II 45). He gives a brief account of the nomadic life-style of the early Aryan settlers, the economic activities that have brought a change in the political and social framework of the Vedic society, and how the society becomes the central religious institution.

group” (46). The aspect of sacrifice,⁵⁰ regarded by Vedic cosmology, as “creative power,” began the “cosmic process; it is the power that continually maintains the cosmic order” (46). The establishment of the Vedic cultural world “in North India toward the middle of the first millennium BCE” (47) seems to have been constituted on the basis of its social, economic and literature and on the language, i.e., Sanskrit, in which it has expressed about the social and ritual obligations.

Patrick Olivelle mentions specifically about a passage, which he has found to be recurring in several Upanishads. This passage juxtaposes the customs and goals of the established Vedic religion with the practices and objectives of asceticism.⁵¹ The passage clearly depicts asceticism with wilderness, which becomes “the antithesis of village” (48). Asceticism as an institution observes that “the greater the dirt, the better the ascetic” (49). Patrick opines that celibacy, vegetarianism and anti-ritualism were probably not the central themes of the “original hermit ideology” and further says that regardless of the fact, the origins are difficult and impossible to define. The ascetic seemed to have conceived the notion of culture would lead to “the result of human greed and depravity” (50). The ascetic seems to have refused to accept the hierarchical

⁵⁰ The main responsibility of an individual is to offer sacrifice, however, the complete act of taking part in society and rituals, is “restricted to the marriage householder; only he in the company of his wife constitutes the full religious persona and is entitled to perform sacrifices. Sexual activity and the procreation of children are similarly sacred acts and duties. Offering sacrifice and begetting offspring are considered the gateways to immortality. These obligations were given a theological basis in the doctrine of the three debts: at birth a man is born with debts to gods, seers, and forefathers. He is freed from them when he sacrifices, studies the sacred scriptures, and begets offspring. The Vedic homo religious, therefore, is married to a householder. The Vedic religion revolves around him” (Olivelle 46-47).

⁵¹ The ascetic restructured his life style as a mode that should embrace wilderness as its realm-considering it as the path leading to gods and “to the freedom of immortality” (48). This basic change seems to have happened mainly due to the evolution of the metaphor; “wilderness is freedom; village is bondage” (48). The ascetics seem to have been attempting to appropriate their ideals and traditions by depicting that the concept of *samsara*, as a notion represented the Vedic culture and symbolized the village and *moksha*, as the objective of an ascetic and being interpreted as symbolizing wilderness.

organised set of values structured by the society.⁵² However, it becomes clear that he was dependent on it for his living. The ascetic's lifestyle illustrates a firm rejection of the village and its structure. The ascetic does not create an independent culture for himself. However, personifies his intimacy and dependency on society and its structural organisation. The ascetic lifestyle and some of its ideals rely for their support and maintenance on the society. The ascetic to make himself significant reckons on the cultural institution – society.

The ascetic has formulated the nature and basic qualities of his life style by ruling out the cultural norms systematized by the society “in almost all areas of human life and activity: social organization and belonging, economic, sexual, and religious activity, etiquette and morality, sex roles, and even language” (51). The ascetic has moulded his way of life, which has transgressed the societal rules and regulations.⁵³

⁵² It is observed that during the Vedic phase, the ascetics have framed their own symbols - which later seem to have become the ideals - by rejecting, contrasting and inverting the then accepted values of various Vedic symbols; like the forest being considered as a dangerous place, impure, and desolated, the habitat of wild beasts, barbarians and evil spirits and further the place for disposing the dead, emerged with a new understanding as the suitable place of habitat for the ascetic. The ascetic seems to have considered and treated the concept of *moksha* as his main objective and goal. His lifestyle and livelihood were bounded and thought to be inseparable from the above said concept. The ascetic is said to have restructured his attitude and values by impersonating the 'lifestyle of wild beasts', (49) and is said to have framed his living by habituating himself to the forest, “the place where nature reigns” (49) and moreover by abandoning the village – the place representing culture, and its products, without limitation or exemption.

⁵³ The norms of kinship, caste and family are no more given a thought, which makes him “left out of the Law (dharma) that regulates human life” (51). The ascetic claimed himself independent from the norms of the society by accepting the lifestyle, which was tuned to “forest-culture”. The deviation towards wilderness from society by the ascetic represented “the freedom of the individual with regard to human conduct, a freedom denied by the very definition of dharma in Bramanical theology” (51). The ascetics as a community broke the constructed mechanisms – social taboos – that were part of the social control system. The ascetic is characterised as a personality, who denounced the family life to maintain celibacy, an important aspect among the ascetic ideals. However, it is to be noted, that due to the influence of puritanical morality, the Hindu traditions have misinterpreted the ascetic's technique – maintaining distance from family life. It is clear that many an ascetical institutions are said to have understood and implemented “celibacy as the curbing of sensual passion” (52). The ascetic and his ideals have been projected as the antithesis to the hierarchically organised society. He becomes an antagonist to the one who gets married and leads a family life. Here, the ascetic, who restrains from sexual activity is considered to lack the ultimate meaning of marriage and progeny.

Patrick notes that ascetics in India avoided the use of fire to show off their contrariety against the norms formed by the society.⁵⁴ A person who takes to asceticism is conditioned not to attain any economically related possessions and should not even accumulate food. He is to depend on the charity of the society, which he has come out from, for his means of livelihood. The ascetic is disciplined in such a manner that he is expected to beg only for the leftovers,⁵⁵ not to produce or store food, beg his food daily and forbidden to have any possessions.

The ascetic abandoning the village-society and living a nomadic life in between the forest and village becomes “a constant challenge to the virtue of stability” (53-54). The ascetics marked their peculiar identity by using the body as a mechanism. The dress symbolized their removal from society.⁵⁶ The reformulation of a new-world by the “asceticism posed an even greater threat to the established world because asceticism was not restricted to a particular heretical group or sect. The old Dharmasutras reveal the first reaction of Brahmins, the experts of the old order: rejection of the new world coupled

⁵⁴ It is clear that according to the Vedic society, fire is considered as the central and the most essential aspect to perform rites and sacrifices. Further, Patrick points out that in ancient India, fire was the symbol of the Vedic religion and culture. Vedic people were forbidden to inhabit a land not purified by fire. It played a central role in all rituals, and the taking possession of a sacred fire signalled the assumption of adult responsibilities as a married householder. The renouncer’s abandonment of fire is perhaps the most telling symbol of his anti-culture (52).

⁵⁵ The ascetic lives outside the village in the wilderness. His separation from the village, however, is not total. He returns to the village to beg his food. Although he is associated with the wilderness, his main difference from the villager is that he is a homeless wanderer. The distinctive feature of village or city culture is that its participant belongs to a place. They identify themselves as belonging to a country (or kingdom), a region, a town or village, and a home. To them the vagabond and the nomad typify the barbarian (53-54)

⁵⁶ The most extreme form was not to have a dress at all, to go naked. For humans a dress may often be a physical necessity, but culture transforms it into a uniform indicative of social position and prestige. Nakedness is both a return to nature, to the way one was dressed at birth – *jatarupadhara* is a common epithet – and to the way animals live, as well as a negation of social custom and etiquette. When not naked renouncers used garments discarded by others. The colour is *kasaya*, generally translated as “ochre” or “orange”. It is more likely that at least initially the term meant “dirty coloured”, especially when we hear that some renouncers were forbidden to wash the rags they picked up before wearing them. In any case, it means “non-white”, white being the normal colour worn by people in society (54).

with theoretical legitimations of the old” (56). At various junctures of time, it has been found that the ascetics themselves took to the thought of maintaining relationships with the society for gaining “social respectability and acceptance and to obtain political patronage” (56). They wanted to be part of the hierarchical structure and the stabilized nature of the village culture, which becomes a contrasting act.

It is a well known fact that, “the structure of the Hindu world has proven to be flexible and elastic”, which lasted with the “test of time precisely because of its inherent elasticity which has enabled it to accommodate and often to integrate new and even foreign elements without revolutionary spasms” (56). This nature of the Hindu world seems to have allowed the ascetics to behave in their own manner without maintaining any specific rule or regulation in their lifestyle. The ascetics are found to have excluded themselves and structurally internalized themselves as part of the society at their own pace. Patrick calls it, “domestication” and further points out that the ascetics incorporated the act of renouncing both at the structural-institutional level and at the level of ideas, values and practices.

The Vedic period saw an unconventional lifestyle being constructed by the ascetical institutions. These institutions were devising a system that was against the Vedic culture and traditions. They are found to have opposed the consolidated rites and rituals of the Brahmanical traditions. However, it is to be observed that the Brahmanical system performed a religio-political manoeuvre, and established the *asrama* system. This novel institution seems to have contributed in bringing the ascetic lifestyle, and making it a part of the *asrama* system. Although, the “ascetic life came to be regarded as

holy and essential for salvation at certain times and later on found a place as the fourth *asrama* as *samnyasasrama*” (Bhagat 6).

The ascetic who was an exclusion from the cultural society and until then considered as a part of the ‘wild’, was synthesized into the system.⁵⁷ He was identified as the *Sannyasi*, the one who renounces the world. But, his identity in the system was found to have been reframed as “a Brahmin in the fourth *asrama*”. The Upanishads are found to have been taken for reconstructing and codifying the identity of the ascetic. He was made a part of the Brahmanical system. The collective aspect of the set of characteristics of the *sannyasi* were derived and defused, as the ascetic may not retaliate further on the system. The very term that identified the ascetic personality “*samnyasa* is derived from *sam* + *ni* + *as*, to place or put down, deposit, give up, abandon or quit:

Kamyanam karmanam nayasam samnyasam. It also means *sam* + *nyas*, *samyag*

⁵⁷ The ascetic life style is found to have been synthesized into the *asrama* system with the passing of time by Brahmins and other cults, after the Vedic period. The *Asrama* system was an assimilation of the scheme of four-fold values. In this scheme, *sannyasa*, was held in the fourth position, whereas, *brahmacharya*, *grihasta* and *vanaprastha* occupied the first three positions. As already mentioned, the ascetic ideals were framed and reframed. With the advent of time, it has been observed that, the ascetic ideals were practiced not only by individuals, but, also by theistic sects of ancient India. There were ascetic groups that have shaped ‘a new phase of religious practices and beliefs that arose with heterodox and even foreign elements’ (Haripada, 155) in the ancient society. Tantra was one of the new aspects that gave a “new colouring to our old Brahmanism and Buddhism” (Haripada, 155). The most important and substantial innovation was the establishment of the *asrama* system by the adherents of the Vedic and the Brahmanical system. This system, which regarded itself as the pre-classical prototype, saw the formulation postulating four religious life styles as authentic or dharmic choices for the adult males: Student (*brahmacharin*), householder (*grhastha*), hermit (*vanaprastha*), and renouncer (*parivarajaka*). The *asramas* are exhibited as a fourfold division of *dharma* and seems to have been organized through the older classification, which existed in terms of *varna*. Similar to the *varnas*, *asramas* are lifelong vocation and not ephemeral stages. The focal difference between the two divisions is that, unlike one’s *varna*, one’s *asrama* is a matter of individual choice. The individual has an essential role in the determination of his *dharma*. The later history of the *asrama* system constitutes both a recede from the basic receptiveness and a fuller integration of the system into the framework of the Hindu world and ideology. The personal choice is eliminated and the four *asramas* are transformed from permanent vocations to stages of life communicating to the system of the rites of passage (*samsara*). The *asramas* exemplify the socio-religious roles desirable to various stages of man’s life. One presumes these roles via suitable rites of passage. All these institutions, in a unique way of renunciation, are bestowed into the orbit of Dharmasastric prescriptions.

prakarena, completely laying aside or down *nyasa*, abandonment of all worldly concerns” (Bhagat 12).

The significance of the *asrama* system within the ideological structure of classical Hinduism is exposed in the cliché *varnasramadhrama*, which has been exercised since at least the commencement of the common era as a shortcut for what we popularly call today Hinduism. *Asrama*, like *varna*, was basically a theological articulation giving a religious foundation for social institutions. A theological evolution which was an act of adjustment to that of the *asrama* system is the classification of dharma into *pravrtti* (active) and *nivrtti* (non-active). The former is the dharma of society and is associated with the *samsaric* process. The latter is the *dharmā* of renunciation and is attached with the path to *moksha*. Renunciation is often called *mokshadharmā* in Dharmasastric literature. Similarly, the old *trivarga*, the threefold aim of life –*dharma*, *artha*, *kama*- becomes a fourfold classification along with *moksha*.

The Hindu religious tradition, codified by the Brahmanical traditions, later on took the above said concept as its base in continuing the *asrama* system. The ascetic was merged into the *asrama* system so profoundly that a lot of ascetic ideals that were framed and devised by the older institutions of asceticism had lost their conformity. The *sannyasi* seems to have remained confined to the four stages of life for a long time. According to the Hindu worldview, “sannyas is the fourth stage in the fourfold life cycle scheme, *ashramadharmā*: *brahmacharya* (apprenticeship), *garhasthya* (householdership), *vanaprastha* (withdrawal), and *sannyas* (renunciation)” (Kakar 43).

However, the ascetic or the *sannyasi* at various junctures is found to have maintained the aspects that were in terms with the past wild culture. He continued to

renounce all material possessions and no longer loaded himself with social and ritual obligations. He started searching for divine knowledge as a free individual on his own terms. He continued to maintain an asocial attitude and style of life. He maintained certain methods of the ascetic ideal, like going through life half naked, alone, wandering, maintaining austerity, penitence, should be celibate, begging, fasting, and lead a silent living in a (secluded residence) an *ashram* and so on.

II

Sankaracharya, who is supposed to have lived during the eight century, is considered to be the first personality to bring all the institutions of asceticism under one umbrella. He is said to have established “four mathas... and established or revitalised ten orders of Saiva ascetics” (Haripada 167). Saivism, regarded as one of the major forms and an important sect of Hindu religion is found to have generated a number of institutions and sub-institutions of asceticism. It becomes clear that Saiva ascetics had established their institutions of asceticism long before the Vaisnava ascetics had even come into existence. However, scholars propose that “it is difficult to say anything definitely on Vaisnava asceticism, whether it existed as a regular practice before Sankara” (Haripada 167). Sankaracharya, as he himself was an ascetic was keen in bringing the whole of Hindu religion under one category. He wanted to bind all the innumerable sects, consisting of theistic and atheistic sects and other major forms of Hinduism into a single entity.

Sankaracharya brought all the individual ascetical institutions together and systematized them. This was achieved through his discourses and the way he

controverted various doctrines by stressing the importance of the Vedas. Sankaracharya is found to have “turned down the views of the Saktas, Pasupatas, Ksapanakas, Kapalikas, Vaisnavas and others like the Vaisesikas and the Buddhists, only to restore Vedism (vaidikam margam raksitum) and to lead men to the path salvation by Advaitism” (Haripada 177). Sankaracharya is known to have systematized the “ten branches of the Advaita school of Saivism, known as the Dasanamis”⁵⁸ (Haripada 178).

Sankaracharya is found to have stressed on the ascetic life and wanted his followers to maintain strict and regular discipline. However, the conflict of ideas about one embracing the life of a sannyasi, or to be aloof from it by maintaining an association with the ‘village-culture’ always has remained a question of debate in India.

The Bhakti movement also emphasized as Bhakti tradition in the medieval period of India can be said is a movement that bridged the gap between the institutions of asceticism that were in function until the eighth century to the later emerging nationalist ascetics who appertained with the colonial rule of the British in India. The use of the term ‘Bhakti’ here indicates not only the Hindu religious traditions, but also the Sufi traditions that were thriving with the latter, side-by-side. This movement displays the saints of different religions following their own Gods. However, the response towards their Gods and social values looked alike. The Bhakti tradition, which can be said as an amalgamation of the Bhakti and Sufi traditions, was a dominant religion of the masses between the ninth and sixteenth century.

⁵⁸ The ten titles, are (Dasa naman) (1) Giri (hill), (2) Puri (city), (3) Bharati (learning), (4) Vana (wood), (5) Aranya (forest), (6) Parvata (mountain), (7) Sagara (ocean), (8) Tirtha (temple), (9) Asrama (hermitage) and (10) Sarasvati (true knowledge)

The personalities who practiced and implemented some of the ideals were configured primarily as saints of this period and as propounders of various social issues. Some saints are known to have abolished the distinction of caste among their followers. The condemnation was found being done of ritualism and formalism in Hinduism and Islam. The performance of idol worship is supposed to have been recriminated by the saints of this period. The ascetics categorized as saints of the bhakti movement era are proposed to have acted as socio-religious reformers. The reformation of religion was found being done with complete absorption, and synthesization of Hinduism and Islam religious faiths.

The ascetic figures belonging to various places of the Indian sub-continent, viz. Chaitanya, Kabir, Namdev, Nanak, Tukaram, Raskhan, Jayadev, Dadu, Ramanuja and Ramananda were trying to establish that the Hindu and Islam devotional traditions were related in appearance and nature, though not identical. The term “bhakti” has been described in the major works of Bhakti literature as one pointed devotion to the one Lord. The path of (Bhakti Marga) meant an indispensable method of experiencing life that merged the religio-metaphysical convictions, socio-moral principles, factual and otherworldly happenings, and state of feelings postulating world-and-life of those who have opted to follow it. The Bhakti or monotheistic devotionalism is presumed to have its roots in certain texts, and Sankaracharya taken as an influence. The revitalization and the decentralization of the brahmanical traditions by the ascetics initiated a stimulus among the people, who reacted against extreme forms of ritualism, casteism and polytheism of the brahmanical institution.

It has also been assumed that the political conditions that were oppressive in nature drove the common man towards an affective religious system for consolation and relief. The Bhakti movement gained its admiration among the masses mainly due to its “openness and all inclusiveness” nature. It has been observed that most of the saints of this period came from the so-called lower castes. The period seems to have generated number of religious sects that were similar, but had and preached their own ideas of God and the relationship of soul with him. However, they congregated into the one tradition known as Bhakti, due to their conception of the “general conceptual framework and world view” which was more or less identical.

Kabir is presumed to have denied not only the differentiation of convictions and caste, but also those, which are supposedly based on merits or demerits. He condemned all the culturally formulated Hindu, Muslim conventional distinctions. Kabir considered that the Almighty being in the heart of the human being meant the complete state of being unrelated to all external rituals. Kabir went to the extent of criticizing the religious rites and codifications formalized by both Hindus and Muslims alike; and since rituals and image worship among Hindus, he reprehended them more. The saints of the bhakti tradition are considered to have reprimanded Hindu religion’s strong emphasis on sacramental integrity and impurity, and its categorization of actions in accordance to a hierarchical system. Further, the aspect of preoccupation with devotion towards one’s God, was considered as an exercise and a process of self disciplinization. The saints of the bhakti movement era conglomerated the ascetical cultures and traditions.

III

The ascetic subject has played a major role in the construction of a national identity in the Indian sub-continent and is found having a confidant association with the revolutionary changes, in Indian social, political, cultural and religious spheres. A spiritual dimension, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century India coincided and significantly merged with the idea of the 'Modern' that prevailed in the West. The ascetic model was being re-invented in terms of a Hindu Nationalist ideology by the Hindu nationalists.⁵⁹ It has been argued that one of the primary and self-assigned tasks of Indian nationalists was to construct a normative Indian. This was a process which involved the codification of a history of the people. As a result, "spiritual" domain emerged as one of the primary nodes of Hindu Indian identity. Partha Chatterjee argues that this allowed the Indian nationalist to counter the material superiority and supremacy of the Colonizer.⁶⁰ But, such a move also forced the Indian nationalists to come to terms with a hoary past in a modern context, a task riddled with difficulties.

The 'Mutiny' of 1857, was an important event that made Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army between 1885 and 1893, to put the theory of differentiation of communities – 'martial' and 'non-martial' – into practice fighting was seen as a practice that defined masculinity. This sort of codification made the British to

⁵⁹ When we start examining, the ambiguities surrounding the ascetic subject in nationalist thought, with special reference to Hindu nationalists, particularly M. K. Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose - which would be done in the following chapters - lead us to proclaim that the 'ascetic ideal' during the nationalist period was indeed structured as a politicized notion, with repercussions that has shown impact on contemporary lives. It can be noted that the codification and re-codification of the ascetic ideals was exercised by various institutions of asceticism from time immemorial. However, a new synthesis of asceticism was formulated pertaining to the aspect of 'body' and it was re-characterized as a mechanism for re-organizing the lost manhood by the Indian Hindu nationalists.

⁶⁰ See, Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World—A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

identify and institutionalize the Bengalis as “effete, unmilitary and cowardly” (Chowdhury 5). The Bengalis on this basis were excluded from the Indian Army, which has led for a “need to transform the effeminate self-image” (5).

The discourse on the body and the issue of masculinity became an important “ideological apparatus” of the British Empire. The ‘body’ of the colonized was structured as a function to legitimize the British rule in the Indian sub-continent. According to James Mill, Indians had a feminine quality in person, which differentiated them from the manly race of the European continent. It becomes clear through Foucauldian terms, that “Mill’s History exemplifies how the ‘effeminate’ Indian/Bengali/Hindu was constructed” “through practices or technologies of power/knowledge.” Chandrima points out that in spite of the contemptuous nature, the “Hindus/Bengalis/Indians accepted their physical and moral ‘weakness’ and thereby their inferior or subordinate masculinity. It resulted in a frenzy of self-creation and self-transformation. Bodily reform, both personal and collective, was seen as the key to the building of national character.”⁶¹ For this reason, the early nineteenth century produced subjects, constituting a state of concern characterizing bodily activities.

The body was subjected to disciplinization through a systematic practice, training and standardization. This was to bring out an emotionally charged personhood of Indian men and their masculinities. This in turn, as the Indian Hindu nationalists seems to have held as a consolidated idea about the male body as the one that would engender the national body politic. The ‘body’ was re-structured with the use of selected elements drawn from the past traditions and the mythical past. These elements became the

⁶¹ Cited from Chandrima Chakraborty, “The Hindu Ascetic as Fitness Instructor: Reviving Faith in Yoga,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24:9 (2007), pp.1172-1186.

techniques that helped in the construction of a new political and social system. The aspect of ‘body’ and its disciplinization by the body politic developed the idea of nationhood in cultural and religious terms.

In 1866, Rajnarayan Basu issued a manifesto titled: “The Prospectus for a society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal.”⁶²

Nabagopal Mitra was patronized and actively encouraged to institute the Hindu Mela. This Hindu Mela was a structure that had a framework of bringing out the idea of “nationalist self-assertion” among the people who had become a part of a colonized culture. One of the primary themes of Rajnarayan Basu’s envisioned National Society was the improvement of physique – ‘a concrete marker of this new indigenous national identity’ (Chowdhury 13).

The “Prospectus” presented by Rajnarayan Basu was considered as the first ‘National Manifesto of India’. It represented the militant nationalistic spirit of Rajnarayan Basu. The prospectus wanted the promotion and establishment of the instruction of Hindu Music, Hindu Gymnastics, Hindu Medicine. The promotion of making the Bengalees learn their mother tongue, before giving them an English education, was considered to be given prominence. The society was to take up such reform, which would initiate in giving the nation a shape and strive not for social reformation but aid in “rousing national feelings in its favour.”⁶³ The prospectus further aimed at, if possible to give a national shape to the already introduced foreign customs, and infuse the national feeling into the minds of the people.

⁶² Refer to, http://www.midnapore.in/people/rishi_rajnarayan_basu_prospectus_of_society.html

⁶³ Cited from “The Prospectus for a society for the Promotion of National Feeling among the Educated Natives of Bengal (1866),” http://www.midnapore.in/people/rishi_rajnarayan_basu_prospectus_of_society.html.

Rajnarayan Basu and the other nationalist leaders had taken up the ‘body’ as a serious issue, which emerged as a powerful symbol of national identity. The ‘body’ was institutionalized through religious, moral and fitness lessons to promote a counter-response. The Indian nationalists took up a proliferated channelling of spirituality, through the ascetic subject, which resulted in the rising of a regenerated phenomenon – the *akharas* (gymnasiums), acting as the key centres for bodily reform and political instruction. The nationalists’ confrontation with the British ideologues generated a responsibility; the integration of the ascetic features into the framework⁶⁴ called ‘nation’. This obligation seems to have led the nationalist ideologues to systemize “the notion of an ‘ideal’ Hindu male translated into the reconstruction of an indigenous masculinity formulated in terms of ascetic principles and the nationalist requirements of the present.”⁶⁵

The aspect of physical weakness was considered, a crime and the culture of physical education become a nationalist agenda. The systematization of *anushilan* or self-cultivation was broached among the body politic. *Anushilan* became the site for spiritualising masculinity. Wakankar notes that the male body we taken up as a bridge

between culture and power, between an ascetics and a politics, and

between what was after all an elitist-Hindu program for national-cultural

regeneration and the dispersed Hindu national-popular itself. It involved a

⁶⁴ The nineteenth century India may be said, saw modernism overlapping the ‘tradition’. The Western idea of Modernity was sweeping the indigenous ‘tradition’. The modern ideas and notions were syndicated with the indigenous ones. There seems to have been the existence of a tension between the ‘modern’ and the ‘tradition’ in various aspects like science, medicine, travel, communication. Using some of the ideals, the nationalist in the form of an ‘ascetic’ had taken up the anti-colonial discourse by projecting the ‘body’ through which the discursive processes were being constituted.

⁶⁵ Cited from Chandrima Chakraborty, “The Hindu Ascetic as Fitness Instructor: Reviving Faith in Yoga,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24:9 (2007), pp.1172-1186.

reading of the *Gita* that appropriated the threefold ethics of “devotion”, “knowledge”, and “duty” (or ‘action’) against the countervailing ethic of renunciation and otherworldliness that coexisted among the heterogeneous themes in that text. *Anushilan* entailed the cultivation of the “innate human faculties,” both physical and mental, as part of a quest for the “perfectibility of man.” (49)

The idea of spiritualizing masculinity was an attempt by the Indian nationalists to decolonize themselves physically. The indigenous practices like meditation and yoga were speculated, affected the soul as well as the body and concretize self-discipline among the body politic. These practices were considered would energize the male body. The ascetic principles are found to have generated “gender as well as homosocial bonds through shared bodily performances, drawing attention to the role of the body in constituting relations of power and domination” (Chandrima 27).

The historical sketches of gymnasiums in various European countries were used by the nationalists to popularize the concept of body-building. Nabagopal Mitra is found to have taken up the course of turning “the tide of current history” (Chowdhury 21). This attempt was initialized through the establishment of “National School where physical education was imparted” (21). By 1868, there were more than six schools instituted in Calcutta alone. The process of making the Bengali like – martial, active, manly and competent was constantly evoked. The idea of claiming nationhood by the Bengali – was thought – could be developed only when he regenerates his lost ‘military element.’

Rajnarayan Basu inspired the people by making them develop, “a preoccupation with manliness and heroism ‘naturally’” (24). With this, the Hindu Mela aimed at

awakening “the whole nation, both physically and morally” (24). The Hindu Mela tried to institutionalize the techniques of gymnasium as Indian origin. This was done through the ‘demonstration of indigenous wrestling, *lathi-kela* or fights with bamboo-staves and pole-vault, exercises with a husking pedal and the enactment of indigenous feats.’

However, there was even an attempt done, which constituted of the European physical exercises. This attempt was an imitation done “in order to claim a likeness to the ‘manly’ colonizer” (25), and fabricate the idea of opposition to colonial power. There was a process of dual nature, which can be interpreted, as a process of – blending of the Eastern and Western cultures by the then Indian nationalists.

The act of self-control over one’s body was expected to produce a specific character or pattern of behaviour. This sort of training was thought would produce moral or mental improvement. One of such major acts was wrestling. Joseph Alter notes that it was considered to offer “a utopian vision of nationalistic reform that takes the body as a primary object of discipline and reform” (*Somatic* 559). It looks as if the early Indian nationalists gave importance to wrestling, due to its complete synthetic nature. Indian wrestling was a combination of “two historical forms, one Hindu the other Muslim. Although Hindu and Muslim wrestlers often train in separate, community based gymnasias, both groups talk about wrestling in terms of a single somatic ideology” (559-560). Alter further points that “*Pahalwani* is an art which cross-cuts communal and caste lines by turning the likes of Gama and Mangala Rai into icons of a kind of nationalism where ‘biology’ supersedes even the most basic form of religious or cultural ideology” (571).

The gymnasium or the *akharas* can be said are places that develop an idea of ‘individuals place in the society’ and discipline the body. The *akharas* expect a regimen that is strict with the actives that you perform with the body like bathing, defecating, resting, sleeping, walking, and talking and other “barman injunctions.” The ascetic features seamlessly are found to have influenced the making of the body. Exercises were considered and moulded into “a larger program of *brahmacharya* (disciplined celibacy) which includes specific injunctions against immoral behaviour” (573). Further, the merging of specific attributes of the *brahmachari*, can be said, was done to construct a nationalist ‘body’.

The participants of the *akharas* and the gymnasiums were to maintain a serious attitude towards gaining knowledge. A strict diet was to be maintained to maintain celibacy. Celibacy was considered as the main cornerstone in maintaining or constructing the disciplined body. One of the main aspects of celibacy for these people was to control the bodies, which are “fueled by the power of this primary fluid” (572). The purpose of “the wrestler’s regimen is to gain access to, develop, and maintain the power of *shakti* in semen”. The wrestlers considered semen, as a fluid that “fuels the internal flame of the body’s life energy” (572), and a lot of operations were undertaken to retain the seminal fluid. These deeds were essentially performed, keeping the basic principle of developing one’s body and maintaining balance. The ascetic principles seamlessly are found to have influenced in the making of a ‘body’ that would face the British imperialistic attitude, in India. Celibacy is found to have played a major role and further acted as the under current in the process of disciplining the ‘nationalist body’.

The disciplined body seems to have represented itself as a powerful example of embodied virtue and a retainer of some of the ideals of an ascetic.

One of the primary concerns of ‘spiritual nationalism,’ was – disciplining the body. The act of controlling the physical body was contemplated as an action – intimately related to socio-political life. This control was concerned would generate power that would directly affect the public and private spheres. The nationalists were concerned and busy with blending the political, moral and religious power. This conglomeration of powers applied on the body was thought would generate radical ideas and aid one to achieve nationalist goals. Alter points out that the nationalism linking itself to the idea of ‘body’ took a cultural shape. He points out that the nationalists considered

the celibate body is regarded as supremely fit, and as such evokes a divine and heroic mystique of epic proportions. What emerges is a kind of medical poetics in which the male body is sexually analyzed, systematically diagnosed and, finally, as rhetoric and theory are put into practice, disciplined according to a rigorous regimen. This regimen is thought to produce a citizen who embodies the essence of national integrity and strength. (*Celibacy* 46)

Celibacy, an important aspect of the ascetic life style, had its own status in religion and rituals – becomes a technical aspect in the nationalist regime. The ascetic ideal of maintaining a celibate life took the shape of a “socio-political power while deriving its authority from the renouncer’s mystical, “other-worldly” spirituality” (48). As *brahmacharya*, was the part of the four-fold *asrama* cycle of life stages, it looks the

nationalists, in the process of reconstructing a history and mythology – took this aspect to instruct and configure a strategic way, to oppose Westernization. The impact of colonial domination is however still lying on the male identity and is regarded “as a form of neocolonial domination” (57).

The technique of reforming the body was conceived as the base for national reform. The methods used for structuring the nationalist body became incontrovertible. Gymnasiums, exercises and other physical and ideological acts performed to refine the body – was mainly done because, body became

the site of nationalism, and *brahmacharya* its agency of reform, the individual is held responsible for embodying such things as freedom, glory, peace, and happiness, as well as more typically physical attributes such as strength and good health. The regimen of celibacy is clearly meant to turn sick men into progressive citizens who could, single-handedly, reform the nation. (59)

Chandrima points out that “British colonialism inscribed difference on the bodies of its subjects to construct its own authority and legitimacy. The somatic also became for the national elite the site for defining and policing the normal and deviant” (*Masculinity*25).

The ascetic subject possessed its own unique power, due to its peculiar characteristic – ‘out of societal control’. The ascetic subject had its own power-centre, was used by the Indian nationalists for carving a national identity. The ascetic model further helped the nationalists to reconstruct the mythical characters as “hyper-males”, heroes – who would inspire the body politic and generate an anti-colonial ideology. Wakankar points that the “Hindu spirituality, reinvested with lofty origins and anchored

in the most hallowed descent of the “nation”, was juxtaposed to and modified by the requirements of post-Enlightenment rationality” (Wakankar 47).

The nineteenth century writer, Bankimchandra Chatterji depicts his heroes (protagonists) – all the main and sub characters – as ascetics in his novel *Anandamath* (1882). The novel depicts the ascetic ideals, which are naturally stern, and implemented by ascetics, becoming canonical for the common man, who is aspiring for freedom. The ascetic ideals are reconfigured according to the needs of the present time. The ideals are made to serve the need by the author. Mahendra, one of the protagonists of the novel, who is married and having children becomes a part and parcel of the ascetic group. He is made to leave all his family ties temporarily for the sake of the motherland.

The Hindu mythical characters’ identities were re-constructed in a nationalist image. The Indian nationalists felt that the Indian people were in need of a leader, a reformer, a righteous person, a super hero with no flaws, who can be considered as an ideal. By using ascetic features and religious texts, viz. the *Bhagavad Gita*,⁶⁶ the Indian

⁶⁶ The *Bhagavad Gita* is one important Hindu text that, according to some interpretations, is found to have mainly focussed on the idea of renunciation. The ascetic has his own importance in the text. However, it has also been interpreted as a text that depicts the asceticism of action. The ‘ascetic self’ becomes the heart of the discourse. The *Gita*, is known to be the most revered book of the Hindus. Krishna, who is known to be giving the sermon to Arjuna is found saying about asceticism – the great one’s consider a person as ascetic when he renounces and gives up all activities that are established on material concerns. And, giving up all the results of all the activities is what the wise call renunciation. The *Gita* conceptualises that “true renunciation does not consist in the physical abstention from activity but in the proper mental attitude toward action. Abandonment of desire for the results of one’s actions is true renunciation, which the *Gita* sees as an inner virtue rather than an external life style” (Gavin D. Flood 67). The *Gita* mainly focuses on the issue of fighting for the sake of *Dharma*. It tries to bridge the chasm between ascetic disciplines and the search for emancipation, on the one hand, and the exigencies of daily life, on the other. The issue of asceticism is expressed in a dual nature, like action to performed for the social good and restricting action for a transcendental goal. The sermon of Krishna to Arjuna about asceticism is about pointing that “true *samnyasa* does not consist *merely* is retiring from the world but in subduing it to the purpose of the soul” (Bhagat 319). The *Gita* is found to have commented and preached the “path of harmony but its lesson shows that it is better to continue Actions desirelessly and for the public welfare” (Haripada 473). The preaching of *Gita* holds the path of “the golden combination of karma, jnana and ‘bhakti’ and asserted that karma-yoga is as good as Renunciation and asserted that the former is superior to the latter (“Karma-yoga visisyate”)) (474-475).

(Hindu) nationalists tamed the public, as a result came out with the fabrication of a docile and obedient subject. The leaders of the nineteenth century India are found authorizing⁶⁷ a “national identity which was different from the one assigned to the ‘native’ by the dominant colonial discourse.” This was done mainly to “theorize culture and civilization” (Chowdhury 11), which would help in bringing the question of self discipline into the foreground of Indian nationalist discourse.

The nineteenth century India witnessed, religiously oriented ‘texts’, being streamlined by nationalist ideologues for constructing and manipulating the pre-notions of the body politic. This can be presumed was performed to concertize the idea of the ‘nation’. The aspect of ‘hero-worship,’ infused into the minds of the people, seems to have been regarded as a great discovery to counter the imperial rule. However, this ‘hero’, to be worshipped, was a re-designed ‘mythical’ character, notably from Hindu epics or history. Bankimchandra was concerned with projecting and making it clear about the “absence of both history and nationhood in Hindu traditions.”⁶⁸

Bankimchandra Chatterji takes the mythical character of Krishna – from the Hindu epic, the *Mahabharata* – to portray and reconstruct it as a human being. Krishna

⁶⁷ The commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* was an important tool, used in the manifestation of ascesis into Indian nationalist discourse. It is found that various Indian Hindu nationalists used the *Gita* as a tool to depict “Hinduism as a religion of action” (*Modern* 42), rather than a religion of pessimism and renunciation. The aspects analyzed in the *Gita*, like duty – *svadharma* (duty of a person in a community) and *nishkama karma* (selfless action) – devotion (*bhakti*) were taken up seriously to establish the idea of nationalism firmly in the Indian sub-continent by the Indian nationalists. Bankimchandra has given a commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*. This commentary mainly focuses on the part of action and karma rather than on the renunciatory part of ascesis. He uses the renunciatory part formulated in the *Gita* for a nationalistic cause. Bankimchandra in his *Srimadbhagavadgita*, an unfinished comment on the *Gita* points out in the introductory part that, though there were a number of commentaries on the *Gita*, the one “along the model of Western argument and logic was necessary” (39). He seems to have believed in formulating an opinion that the ‘interpretations of the past, would not always be applicable to the changing world of the present’. He systematized the perception of *Gita* that it is essential to reinterpret the verses according to the changing ideas in society (42).

⁶⁸ Cited from, Tanika Sarkar, “Imagining a Hindu Nation: Hindu and Muslim in Bankimchandra’s Later Writings,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, (1994), pp. 2553-2561.

is depicted as a super hero, a hyper-male, who can be followed and taken as inspiration to restructure the Hindu male identity. Bankimchandra is nowhere found to have supported the life style of the 'regular' ascetic. He just uses the ideals of an ascetic, and wants the ascetical mode to exist within the framework, called society. Here, the ascetic life style and the ideals are prefigured. Bankimchandra's "Guru", in *Dharmatattva* notes that, "a pious person is he who performs all the deeds, that he should but at the same time brings a sannyasi's detachment to bear on each" (148). Further, the "Guru", is found saying, "what is the essence of sannyas according to Gita? It is this, that sannyas without karma is a low form of sannyas. The spirit of karma, I have told you, is bhakti. Therefore, real sannyas is that which is induced by karma performed in a spirit of bhakti" (149).

Wakankar opines, that there should have been "previous historical formations in different ways, only to be rectified by future deployments" (*Body* 45). The codification and rectification was done to the ascetic ideals, to converge them into "nationalist's body-at-work" (46). Bankimchandra as a Hindu nationalist writer is identified, narrating, representing and groping beneath the traditional histories to "uncover the shifting articulations between the body and history" (47). Wakankar indicates that Bankimchandra wanted the people to be like

Krishna, the mythic hero, "a householder, diplomat, warrior, law-giver, saint and preacher" all at the same time (NT, 70). It was the duty of every practitioner of *anushilan* to cultivate "devotion" (bhakti) towards one's reformed (and reforming) self, to one's country, and to God. But – and this is where one can see the outlines in this discourse of a theory of

action evolving from an ascetics – in order to love oneself and love one's country, one also needed to exercise self-protection, rightful self-defense, just war, the right balance between force and mercy, and (quite crucially for a later Hindu ethic of "tolerance" toward those who must submit to "us") a relationship with those whom one "protected" that no doubt consisted of "subordination", but of a kind which implied "not fear, but respect on their part" (NT, 79)" (50).

Some of the Indian nationalists were keen in observing Krishna in the *Mahabharata* as mortal human being, filled with all the ascetic ideals. He is reconstructed as a "quasi-historical hero". Bankimchandra in his *Krishna Charitra* opines that an ideal character as Sri Krishna has no parallel in human history. His objective was to show why Krishna has been "rated as the greatest of the great Indian heroes" (20). Bankimchandra does not contradict the idea of God incarnating by taking birth as a human being, for giving guidance to his people. However, Bankimchandra believes that God would "act only as a human being, performing only humanly possible activities. He would not demonstrate any superhuman power. This is because God, in His role of a human being, has to be a role-model for other human beings to follow. How can an ordinary person imitate a being who is supremely powerful?" (80).

Bankimchandra uses Sri Krishna's dialogue to defend his proving that the character Sri Krishna in the *Mahabharata* was a human being. "I can try my best to do whatever is humanly possible but I cannot perform anything by any divine power" (81). At a certain point of time, the mythical character Krishna is found saying, "I can engage

myself in greatly human efforts, but I have no power over fate” (112). Further, Bankimchandra tries to prove by noting that,

Thus once more Krishna totally denied possessing any divine power. He did this because, indeed, he was a human being dutifully acting out what he needed to do only with the strength of his humanly capabilities. If God intended to demonstrate his miraculous power, he would not require an agent, or messenger, to do that. Moreover, God’s messenger, if he possessed divine power, would have no validity for ordinary men will not be able to follow him. (112)

Krishna functioning as human being at the hands of Bankimchandra becomes the “master of self-control”, and an agent “above grief and attachment” (131). Further, Krishna from the *Mahabharata*, is concretized into the form of a human being, a hyper-male, manoeuvring through the mortal ‘body,’ for institutionalizing the concepts of duty and devotion in an innovative and modern manner, for the cause of building a nationalist discourse.

Krishna is depicted as a supreme leader possessing all the ideal qualities of an ascetic. But, at the same time, as the one who demonstrates action, as the main aspect to be possessed for attaining the state of renunciation. The aspects of duty, devotion and disciplinising oneself become the mechanisms of power in the hands of Krishna.

Bankimchandra concludes in his *Krishna Charitra* by saying that he finds

Krishna to be a bright example of a complete man. He was unconquered and unconquerable. He was pure hearted, virtuous, loving, kind, dutiful, a follower of *Dharma*, a Vedic scholar, a master of ethics, someone who

had only goodwill for the human race, who was just, merciful, impartial but also one who did not hesitate to punish the punishable. Krishna was not possessive in his attitude. He was humble, disciplined and dedicated like a yogi. Krishna functioned like a human being within the limits of human abilities but his inborn genius raised him to superhuman status.

Through his superhuman abilities, he rose towards godliness” (172).

Dharmatattva (1888) is one another representational work regarding the aspect of spiritualizing masculinity, and disciplining the body, unveiling duty and devotion towards one’s motherland ‘by way of’ the ascetic principles. The “Guru” in Bankim’s *Dharmatattva*, says, “we cannot see God”, and “there is no chance that we shall be able to imitate” Him. The spiritual aspiration is concerned “to be simultaneously “embodied” in ideal men, *adarsh purush*, such as Krishna, for it to serve as the locus of emulation and as the source of inspiration” (Wakankar 50). Bankimchandra’s Krishna, is justified as the one, who can be imitated and finally is presented as the one who has all the qualities that represent the all-round development of a man. However, when the disciple in *Dharmatattva* asks the Guru, “Is it possible for everybody to possess every virtue and every happiness?” the Guru replies,

I do admit that, so far, nobody had reached this pinnacle of perfection.

Neither do I think anybody will in the future. But in the theory of Dharma that I have set out to explain, it is not that attainment of this ultimate ideal that is important; rather, it is the fixing of this ideal as the objective that is; so that, in striving to acquire all virtues and happiness, we may acquire many. (*Dharmatattva* 52)

Through *Dharmatattva*'s Guru, Bankimchandra makes his idea clear that "the Lord says that the performance of Karma and its renunciation are both ways of salvation; but of the two, the performance – that is *karmayoga* – is more elevated" (147).

Bankimchandra formulates his idea through his Guru by saying that he does not want the ascetic to be out of the framework of the society. He does not want the ascetic way of life, but, wants the ascetic ideals to be followed by everyone to reach the stage of perfection. He believes in Duty (action), rather than renunciation. To prove this, he reinterprets, reconstructs the Krishna's sermon, The *Bhagavad Gita*, from the *Mahabharata*.

The ascetic ideals, which were characterized through various interpreters, were conceived "in a style common to modern heterodoxies" (Kaviraj, *Imaginary* 137). The interpreters seem to make a pretension that they are maintaining a continuity. However, applying, (or trying to make) these elements – the ascetic ideals – on the characters brings a change in the narrative axis and a subtle transformation. Sudipta Kaviraj points out that "Krishna, the incomparable warrior of the high tradition, becomes Krishna the incomparable lover" (137). Further, Kaviraj opines that Krishna's construction by Bankimchandra "does not alter the earlier line of texts subtly, surreptitiously, by altering the totality of the image, gradually shifting its centre of narrative gravity" (*The Unhappy* 73).

The ascetic life style and its principles were constantly made to remember and recurred endlessly through a relevant discourse. Spiritualising and disciplining masculinity through various modes did not ensure the ideals to be remembered as they were. The idea of fixing them always seems to have "invited constant interpretative

change” (75). The ideals of an ascetic are represented by various interconnected acts. Bankimchandra’s representational act of Krishna as a historical figure “is not aimed against other Hindu or Indian constructions of ideality, but the rational theology of Christianity, the ideality of Christ as constructed by rationalist Christian discourses of the nineteenth century.” Further, Bankim’s argument “tries to refute westernism by refuting tradition” (88).

The nineteenth century was a period, which saw another personality, who was trying to reconstruct the idea of Hinduism that was lying ‘dead’ in the minds of the Indian Hindu populace. Narendranath, who later took the name of Vivekananda, was identified as Swami. The ascetic ideals were rekindled, were taught in a mode that was completely different. A new approach was taken up by Vivekananda. The reconstruction of the asceticism was however done keeping the motherland in view. Freedom was the keynote – an unbounded freedom was craved for, through utilisation of the principles that were more in terms with the life of an ascetic. An ascetic order was started by Vivekananda. It was to dedicate itself for the work of national regeneration. The ‘ascetic’ was linked to the nationalist self, social and spiritual dimensions. Vivekananda’s view of renunciation had altogether a new meaning. By combining various aspects, he called it ‘practical vedanta’.

Vivekananda, implemented the *ascetic ideals*, and was a sannyasi to the core, believed and preached that, one should not think of setting himself aloof from the societal activities by developing the idea of renunciation, which should not become a means of escape from cultural relations. Vivekananda asks, ““What will you do with individual salvation? That is sheer selfishness.... Does renunciation demand that we all

become ascetics? Who then is to help the other? Renunciation is not asceticism.’ When the *karmayogi* is asked to be a renunciate, it means, according to Vivekananda, that he should work or do his duty without thinking of the fruits of his actions.”⁶⁹

Vivekananda never considered himself a politician, or a political agitator. He was concerned with “the spirit – when that is right everything will be righted by itself.”⁷⁰ He stated that the spiritual and religious spheres were the basis for a vigorous nationalism. Even though, Vivekananda recognized the importance of the political work taken up by the Indian National Congress, “but regarded it a mistake if the awakening of the nation was seen only in political and social reform movements, for the awakening was quite as real in religion” (Gokhale 41). Vivekananda urged for a masculine culture, which he thought would strengthen the nation. He is found saying, “My child, what I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made”, and further remarked, “You will be nearer to God through football than through the *Bhagawad Gita*.”⁷¹ Vivekananda is found to have directly linked one of the ascetic features, celibacy, to “intellectual and virile prowess.” The ‘body’ was considered as a negotiating tool and the donning of saffron robes looks as if, is an attempt undertaken to decolonize the body.⁷²

⁶⁹ Cited from, Chandrima Chakraborty, “The Hindu Ascetic as Fitness Instructor: Reviving Faith in Yoga,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24:9 (2007), pp.1172-1186.

⁷⁰ Cited from Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* vol. 5 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1947).

⁷¹ Cited from, Chandrima Chakraborty, “The Hindu Ascetic as Fitness Instructor: Reviving Faith in Yoga,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 24:9 (2007), pp.1172-1186.

⁷² Vivekananda, may be said, chose his dress, which can be regarded as very specific and concerned on stylizing the body by exercising the act of transformation on the body, through self-designing. He seems to have been very discerning in obtaining a right colour of dress, which can even be thought of as a performance depicting self-identity, and further can be apprehended as a mechanical construction of the self.

Vivekananda's, *The Song of the Sannyasin* (1895), a poem, tries to give a picture of the ascetic subject – its objectives revealing the unbounded freedom and the conquering of the 'self'.

“Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore;
Love, hate – good, bad – and all the dual throng,
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free;
For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to
bind;
Then off with them, Sannyasin bold! Say –
“Om Tat Sat, Om!”

[...]
They know not truth who dream such vacant dreams
As father, mother, children, wife, and friend.
The sexless self! Whose father He? Whose child?
Whose friend, whose foe is He who is but One?
The Self is all in all, none else exists;
And though art That, Sannyasin bold! Say –
“Om Tat Sat, Om!”

[...]
Have thou no home. What home can hold thee,
friend?
The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed; and food
What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.
No food or drink can taint that noble Self
Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free
Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold! Say –
“Om Tat Sat, Om!”⁷³

Vivekananda, chose images from the Hindu range, to spiritualise and reconstruct a different masculinity. This principle was primarily based on the figure and ideals of an ascetic. Vivekananda, seems to have taken, the notion of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) and gave a privilege this stage of life. He considered that celibacy was a way of life and it

⁷³ See, Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* vol. 4 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashram, 1978), p.392.

had its impact on the Indian body politic. Vivekananda was portraying the fusion of “militant virility with the ‘pure’ brahmanical principle of asceticism” (Chowdhury 127), to reformulate asceticism that promoted spiritual freedom. In reconstructing a masculinity that was more in terms with ascetic principles, Vivekananda was synthesizing the passionate and self-denying aspects.

Vivekananda affirmed that ‘spiritual freedom expected a strict discipline and austerity, which was in contrast to the freedom in the secular world – freedom that sanctioned indulgence and excess. By refraining oneself from doing, leads one to cultivate a superior strength. This strength manifests itself spiritually and physically through celibacy’ (127). Vivekananda redefined the Hindu culture and was reconstructing the identity of the sannyasi. He took most of the Hindu cultural representations that were in opposition to the western hedonism. He was constituting an identity by signifying the ascetic practices, like disciplining the body that was in quite opposition to the westerners idolization of the body. He was keen on making his followers pursue the idea of subjectivity. This sort of training to the body was thought would make one manly and turn sexual energy into superior energy. Chowdhury notes that while

Orientalist discourse had constantly associated ‘gloomy religious abnegation’ with Indian asceticism, Vivekananda valorized the heightened spirituality of the ascetic which emanated from his disciplining of the *dhatu* – the prime element or semen. This of course was not a new concept. The loss of semen was perceived in Ayurveda to be enervating and weakening. According to prevalent Hindu belief,

biryapat or ejaculation actually weakened the male unless it impregnated the female and the containment of *birya* or semen produced strength.

Vivekananda's equation of celibacy and strength was based therefore, on a given postulate. His conceptualization of Ojas was also charged with other linguistic connotations of the word *birya*, for in Bengali, apart from denoting the semen which contains the seed of procreation, the word also means bravery, courage, splendour, strength and vitality. The Ojas of the sannyasi which emanated from his state of celibacy also confirmed his bravery and strength. (130)

It looks as if Vivekananda was not much interested in combining politics and religion.⁷⁴

However, it can be said that the actions that he was committed to, aimed at transmuting the social practices that were in a 'state of continued being' among the body politic. It can be argued, that Vivekananda was particular about descriptions that he was making and expected they would represent the identity of and intrinsically bound up with the Hindu religio-ascetical practices. His lectures were constituted of "very little that is 'directly' political" (135).

Vivekananda's ascetic is a reframed subject, who does not apply or implement the traditional ascetic ideals. This reframed ascetic does not get deep into the quality of being religious, and moreover is accessible and functions as a figure, who shapes social

⁷⁴ The sannyasi is attributed, may be said, with an image that would serve a political purpose. However, it should be remembered that Vivekananda was not into the ascertainment of political issues, but was considered about the icon that would confront itself as the vanguard in retaining the cultural aspects that were crushed by the colonial regime.

life and human conduct.⁷⁵ The ascetic subject in colonial India, was made to possess the image of “an intelligible form by compressing its spiritual resonances through style (an ‘Oriental’ style) and colour (signifying renunciation — the motto of a sannyasi).”

Chowdhury further states that “Vivekananda’s reconstruction of the sannyasi icon in its rendering of the ascetic as distinctively and visibly ‘Indian’ was located at this crucial moment of self-definition” (136). The image of the ascetic was structured keeping the specific historical and political conjunctures in consideration.⁷⁶ The ascetic subject became a signifying aspect of Indian spirituality. He was reframed as a personality who inwardly brought into a state of unity the knowledge and wisdom of the sage.

Vivekananda holds that “the Sannyasin, as you all know, is the ideal of Hindu’s life, and everyone by our shastras is compelled to give up... Therefore my friends, the way out is that first and foremost we must keep a firm hold of spirituality – that inestimable gift handed down to us by our ancient forefathers”(137).

Vivekananda believed and alleged that the body was to be disciplined and organized to gain a knowledge of the mechanisms of the soul. He ascertained that one could understand the *Bhagavad Gita* better “with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger... You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when

⁷⁵ Vivekananda, may be said, highlighted the aspect of karmayoga in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which addresses both the ascetic, who is generally attributed not to be having any ties with family and society and the worldly constrained householder. He reframes the concept of karmayoga, so as it would help him in showing the difference between the ascetic ideals that he has conceptualized with the traditional ones. Vivekananda’s ascetic ideals were formulated in accordance to the societal framework. The ascetic was to take up action rather than renouncing from the societal culture. He was to be an active member among the public and serve them.

⁷⁶ The performance of Vivekananda in his maintaining of a particular and desirable state of embodiment can be noted as being the active process that trajected disciplinary power and identity construction. He seems to have been suturing the edges of past and future by being in the present. This synthesizing of the ancient with the modern was accomplished through the ‘body’ of the sannyasi. An icon was created through the use of colour and style of the dress pertaining to the sannyasi.

your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men” (138).

Vivekananda is found to have redefined the role of ascetic in relation to the public sphere, which was actually thought to be constrained to the private and accessible only to a few individuals.

The reconstruction of the ascetic’s space constituted – according to Vivekananda may be understood as a construction done for the social itself – organized in diverse ways within which the ascetic can carry out various range of activities with specific cultural meanings that would enable the body politic to be emotionally charged. In this new role as social worker, the ascetic was formulated with a vital role as the hero capable of reforming the ‘condition of India’. The Vivekananda’s ascetic was a hyper-male. The ascetic was to lead, control and guide. He was to form an identity characterized with masculine prowess, a “discursive-performative construction” that would describe, discipline and represent. The ascetic was to challenge the European’s affirmations and invasions into the sacred realms of Indian Hindu thought.

In this chapter, I have tried to examine the question of the ascetic’s ‘radical’ nature and the transmutations it has undergone in the subcontinent from a very earlier period. The eighth century and Bhakti movement have been considered as crucial, as these phases, have witnessed the ascetic subject undergoing major transfusions. The nationalist ideologues of the early nineteenth century have re-invented the past, the use of agencies like, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Akharas*, fabricated with the qualities of an ascetic, were used as instruments to counter the ‘outsiders’. I will try to develop this argument, in the next chapter, by engaging with the ascetic subject situated in nationalistic discourse.

Chapter Two

THE ASCETIC IN INDIAN NATIONALISTIC DISCOURSE

The religious ascetic subject, restricted and negatively connoted by the British, becomes a cultural hero in the Indian nationalistic discourse. The British administrative system's attempt to meddle with the religious affairs and to conceptualize the indigenous customs into government resolutions, received strong resistance. The defiance by the locals made them to leave the aspect of religion. With this in mind, the indigenous intelligentsia gave a religio-spiritual dimension, by the assistance of the ascetic subject, to the nationalistic discourse. As there was a circulation of the concept of 'modernity' in the form of, railways, sciences, the British advocated the education imperatives and utilitarian ideas, which were used for projecting a negative picture of India. The state of affairs in the nineteenth century India produced socio-religious reform movements, adapting various systems of belief and bringing them under the dome called 'Hinduism'. Through the ascetic subject, the religious aspects became public affairs. Bankimchandra Chatterji as a spokes person enumerated the icon of Bharat Mata (Mother India), a religious form (Kali and Durga), later assigned to the subcontinent – a political self-identity. Bankim's *Anandamath* (1882), particularly the 'fighting ascetics' of the "sannyasi rebellion" acted as an impetus for some of the Indian nationalists.

In this chapter, I try to trace the transformed ascetic's position in the Indian nationalistic discourse. In the first section of this chapter, I examine the forms of knowledge that are constructed and represented by the British. And an attempt of re-inventing a past and concomitantly the construction of a Hindu India, taken up by the

nationalist literary intelligentsia. In the second section, I focus on the concept of modernity circulated among the body politic through English education and other means, which resulted in the emergence of a nationalist thought. In the third section of this chapter, I closely read Bankim's *Anandamath*, instigating a (Hindu) nationalism and popularising the 'fighting ascetics'.

I

"Colonialism in India can be traced to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498, regardless of the different conceptions about when the colonial transition actually took place, Indian society was subject to its impact for more than 400 years"(Panikkar 3). The English East India Company, which was established on 31 December 1600,⁷⁷ started its career as a trader in Asian spices, and is known to have ended its days running Britain's Indian Empire. The nineteenth century was the period when a gradual colonization of India took place and 'an anticolonial nationalism emerged' (Veer, *Imperial* 3).

The colonizing of India by the British was not just done with "the power of superior arms, military organization, political power, or economic wealth – as important as these things were", but it was "sustained and strengthened by cultural technologies of rule" (Cohn ix). The British "had to devise novel, and exceptional, theories of governance (Metcalf, *Ideologies* 3: ix)," as they started making space for themselves as the rulers of India. Further, they started to make their power visible through 'officializing' the process of administration.

⁷⁷ See Nick Robbins, *The Corporation that Changed the World* (India: Orient Longman, 2006).

The British could not justify their governance to themselves, as they had to confront to themselves about the “problem of how to govern this far-flung dependency” (1). As the British started to construct their empire in India, they further had to come to terms with the existence of this new territory. They had to give a concrete shape to a range of ideas “that had for a long time shaped their views of themselves and, more generally, of the world outside their island home” (1). The British extended their hold in establishing and enlarging their empire by conquering the whole of India. And simultaneously started to determine, to what extent the “land was a fundamentally different, ‘Oriental’ society, and to what extent it possessed institutions similar to those of Europe; how far its peoples ought to be transformed in Europe’s image, and how they should be expected to live according to their standards of their own culture” (2).

The *institutionalization* of practices in India, by the British, who represented themselves as imperial people, were codified in various forms like architectural arrangements, regulations, laws, administrative measures, documentation, certification, and representation. These state modalities, which were systematized with the process of time transformed knowledge into power. They further formed into an “intensified surveillance and control mechanism,”⁷⁸ moreover, policed and brought ‘disciplinization’, among the Indian people, which in turn has led to resistance. The classificatory rules, which were seen as fundamental to societal formations by ‘Durkheim and Mauss, and as part of some elemental structure or internal social logic were rather now perceived as

⁷⁸ Cited from, Eric Darier, “Environmental Governmentality: The Case of Canada’s Green Plan,” *Environmental Politics*, 5 (4) (1996), pp. 585-606.

incidents of state power.’⁷⁹ Dirks asserts, “it has not been sufficiently recognized that colonialism was itself a cultural project of control.”⁸⁰

The reconstruction and transformation of cultural forms was performed through the mechanisms of knowledge during the colonial period, which distinguished and created “categories and oppositions between the colonizers and the colonized, European and Asian, modern and traditional, West and East” (Cohn ix). The British who took a painstaking effort to study Indian languages was an essential part of the colonizers venture of working out for accomplishing control and command over the natives. The basis for the formation of building a capacity to govern the Indian state was mainly created by the British with the aid of documentation of a vast amount of information.⁸¹ The Englishman of the eighteenth century believed that he could explore and conquer India through translation. He felt that “establishing correspondence could make the unknown and the strange knowable” (4).

⁷⁹ For further reading, see, Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: P U P, 1996), Foreword, xi.

⁸⁰ Cited from Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁸¹ The British perceived and comprehended the nature and significance of learning the “vernacular” languages. These local languages, they apprehended would establish an indigenous relationship and develop a personal affinity with the Indian society and provide access to possess knowledge of the locals. The command over this knowledge should have made them affirm that it could lead them to invade into other important domains of power. This affirmation made the British to establish educational institutions, which were to impart the knowledge of Indian languages to their own officials. It became indispensable for the British to acquire with effort the knowledge of the language, as they had to “issue commands, collect taxes, maintain law and order – and to create other forms of knowledge about the people they were ruling. This knowledge was to enable the British to classify, categorize, and bound the vast social world that was India so that it could be controlled” (5). The extent of the colonial state was becoming gradually more evident for the British, with their accession of control over the territories. This made them conceive that governing India would be only through systematizing and reinstituting the ruling practices that have been patronized by previous states and rulers. This induced for the British another important tool – land revenue under their control. They sorted about its assessment and collection. The British were feeling succoured with the new confrontations of rules in relation to law, education and revenue. They were especially well-adapted, however, inclined being at a distance and above the Indians. Surveying India from above made them comfortable.

The imperial object of knowledge always wanted the Indian to appear in a prescribed manner. However, there were groups that threatened the prescribed sociological order. The practices of these groups never went under the societal orders or mechanisms. “These were people who appeared by their nature to wander beyond the boundaries of settled civil society: sannyasis, sadhus, fakirs, dacoits, goondas, thags, pastoralists, herders, and entertainers” (10). The wandering attitude of these groups functioned as a reaction that strongly affected the course of events and the nature of things that the British were surveilling. It has been noted that Warren Hastings and his officials were being disturbed by the sannyasis. Hastings writes in one of his letters:

We have lately been much troubled here with hordes of desperate adventurers called Sannyasis, who have overrun the province in great numbers and committed great depredations. The particulars of these disturbances and of our endeavours to repel them you will find in our general letters and consultations, which will acquit the Government of any degree of blame from such a calamity. At this time we have five battalions of Sepoys in pursuit of them, and I have still hopes of exacting ample vengeance for the mischief they have done us as they have no advantage over us, but in the speed with which they fly from us. A minute relation of these adventures cannot amuse you, nor indeed are they of great moment, for which reason give me leave to drop the subject, and lead you to one in which you cannot but be interested, etc.⁸²

⁸² Cited from, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Anandamath*, tr. Sree Aurobindo & Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Appendices, iii, Hastings to Purling – dated, 31st March, 1772 – Gleig’s *Memoirs of Hastings* – Vol. 1.

It evoked the consciousness of fear in them, moreover, questioned the very existence of imperial domination of the state. The various wandering groups, encountered by the British administration, had their own individual practices and ideologies. However, the colonizer associated these groups with one another, due to their nature of wandering beyond the boundaries of the civil society. The very presence of these groups caused a feeling of agitation and anxiety among the British officials.

Warren Hastings in one of his letters asserts about the sannyasis:

You will hear of great disturbances committed by the Sannyasis or wandering Fakeers who annually infest the provinces, about this time of the year in pilgrimages to Jaggernaut, going in bodies of 1,000 and sometimes even 10,000 men. An officer of reputation (Captain Thomas) lost his life in an unequal attack upon a party of these banditti, about 3,000 of them, near Rungpoor with a small party of Purgunnah Sepoys, which has made them more talked of than they deserve. The revenue, however, has felt the effects of their ravages in the northern districts. The new establishment of Sepoys which is now forming on the plan enjoined by the Court of Directors and the distribution of them ordered for the internal protection of the provinces, will, I hope, effectually secure them hereafter from these incursions.⁸³

The British could not determine, the conditions about to occur due to the unpredictable attitude adhered by these groups. This unpredictable nature of the groups made the British to create new techniques of power to bring them under control, as these groups

⁸³ Cited from, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Anandamath*, tr. Sree Aurobindo & Barindra Kumar Ghosh, Appendices, i, Hastings to Sir George Colebrooke – dated, 2nd February, 1773 – Gleig's Memoirs Vol. 1.

were considered to be beyond the 'normal' bounds. The British started to investigate "to provide the criteria by which whole groups would be stigmatized as criminal" (Cohn 10). Cohn asserts that the "conquest of India was a conquest of knowledge."⁸⁴

The British saw to that, the changes in forms of knowledge would benefit and guide them in a course of time to their own ends. The British determined the structural conditions of their commercial ventures and ascertained that these ventures were to be carried out by their functionaries,⁸⁵ who possessed specialized forms of knowledge.

The British perceived and comprehended the nature and significance of the indispensability of command over language. The Persian language enacted as the decisive language of the seventeenth century at various levels of authority in India. Therefore, the English made a conscientious effort to gain knowledge and take command over the language,⁸⁶ through which at least "in a denotative fashion, they could express their requests, queries and thoughts, and through which they could get things done" (278). The British assumed that some of the texts like, 'Halhed's *Gentoo Law* and Wilkins' *Geeta* would unlock the knowledge of Indian law and religion to them.'⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Cited from, Bernard S. Cohn, "The Command of Language and the Language of Command," *Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha vol. 4 (New Delhi: O U P, 1993), pp. 276-329.

⁸⁵ The functionaries had various titles like "Akhund, Banyan, Dalal, Dubashi, Gomastah, Munshi, Pandit, Shroff, and Vakil" (Command 277). These functionaries were specialized in "prices and values of currencies, the sources of specialized products, location of markets, and the networks along which trade goods flowed; others knew about local and imperial governments, diplomatic and political rules, and the personalities of the rulers on whom the British were dependent for protection" (277). The functionaries can be asserted, were establishing and ascertaining the best techniques of power, which were like new devices and processes in the structuring of an imperial empire for the colonizer, as they were multilingual and they had command over specialized languages, which were important at "various levels of communication between foreigners and Indians" (277).

⁸⁶ The process of producing texts from the languages of India into English during the years 1770-85 was a favourable outcome and 'crucial component for the British in constructing a system of rule' (Command 282). This apparatus created a discourse, it "had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into European objects" (283).

⁸⁷ The British retained these texts as a corpus, which signalled "the invasion of an epistemological space occupied by a great number of a diverse variety of Indian scholars, intellectuals, teachers, scribes, priests,

The construction of a Hindu-India can be said was a socio-political process, which took more than a century to be synthesized. The Indian nationalist movement is one of the elements that assisted in determining the best techniques for constructing a Hindu-India. This political process is found to have crystallized nationalist, socialist and strong Hindu revivalist thoughts together to form a political modern Hindu-India. The term 'Hindoo' is considered as "the Persian variant of the Sanskrit *sindhu*, referring to the Indus river, and as such was used by the Persians to denote the people of that region. Al-Hind, therefore, is a term denoting the people of a particular geographical area" (King 98-99). The British who were technologically reconfiguring the territories that were under the imperial control, failed to "transcend a model of religion premised on the monotheistic exclusivism of Western Christianity thereby resulted in the imaginative construction of a single religion called 'Hinduism'. Of course, being able to classify Hindus under a single religion rubric also made colonial control and manipulation easier" (King 105).

The nineteenth century was the period when 'Hinduism' was being restructured, which comprised the systematization of religious laws, moreover, the organization of the Indian populace into large aggregate categories. This process of fabrication involved the codification of religious laws and the disposal of the Indian people into 'Hindus', 'Buddhists', 'Jains', 'Muslims' and so on. This seems to have taken place due to the needs of the governing system of the British colonial rule. However, it cannot be

lawyers, officials, merchants and bankers, whose knowledge, as well as they themselves, were to be converted into instruments of colonial rule. They were now to become part of the army of babus, clerks, interpreters, sub-inspectors, *munshis*, *pundits*, *kazis*, *vakils*, schoolmasters, *amins*, *sharistidars*, *tahsildars*, *desmukhs*, *darogahs*, and *mamalatdars* who, under the scrutiny and supervision of the white sahibs, ran the everyday affairs of the Raj" (Command 283).

claimed as a function that was one-sided. The imperialists and the ‘native’ English educated elites, in particular, the Brahmins, collaborated in formulating a uniform religion. However, the indispensability of considering thoroughly about the depictions lies in the certainty that they have expressed a mismatch between the descriptions of ‘Hinduism’ on the one hand, and the realities of the Indian culture on the other.

The construction of Hinduism is an aspect which is still considered to be unclear and is further being debated on. The issue is still under discussion on

what has been constructed: a concept, an object, or an experiential entity.

Did the Europeans and their informants invent a new concept to describe and classify the religious and social phenomena of India? Or did they actually create a new religion, a real entity in Indian society? Or did they do both? Or does ‘Hinduism’ merely describe a pattern in the western cultural experience of India? Even though most authors try to defend one of these positions, they continue to vacillate between these very different and incompatible options.⁸⁸

A few imperial stratagems and the official enumeration of the population and the collection of demographic information in particular did have impacts on the Indian society. However, these manoeuvres cannot be completely claimed as influences in the re-stratification of a Hindu religion oriented India.

⁸⁸ The flier of Conference on “Rethinking Religion in India” points out that its intention is to examine the above questions on religion in India. Conference on “Rethinking Religion in India”, organized by Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap (Ghent University, Belgium), Centre for the Study of Local Cultures (Kuvempu University, India), Karnataka Academy for Social Sciences and Humanities (Karnataka, India), on 21 - 24 January 2008.

Peter van de Veer asserts that, “with the rise of the nation-state comes an enormous shift in what religion means” (*Imperial* 20). The British were initially in the process of legitimizing the past.⁸⁹ However, the British quickly understood that the territories of ‘India’ (which were under the imperial control) were culturally diverse plural states depending on “the collaboration of Muslim and Hindu elites of a variety of sectarian affiliations” (20-21). These dominated states by the imperialists, followed an ‘established pattern of rule from a long time, where people and the rulers belonged to different religions, and the rulers extended royal patronage to the other religions, which was a historical fact’ (20-21).

Incidents like, the government of Madras, in 1817, taking over the direct responsibility for the administration and upkeep of Hindu temples and rituals, established a direct relation between British rule and Hindu religion. However, the strong protests by the Evangelicals in Britain and the formation of an “Anti-Idolatry Connexion League” (21) demanded the government for a “neutral” attitude towards the native Hindu or Muslim institutions and at best support Christian missionization in India. Moreover, the activists forced the government to accept a new policy of “noninterference”, which was made into law in 1863 (21). The imperialists who were

⁸⁹ The late eighteenth century in India was a period when the quest for a meaning of the past and its relevance to contemporary society, was being undertaken by Indian intellectuals. This quest can be said was happening with the ‘colonial intervention and concomitantly under the concept of ‘progress’ as assumed by the British’ (Panikkar, *Culture* 108). In addition, it has been observed that the concern of the British was also to legitimize an Indian past. The consideration of the British was not for just ‘knowing’, but it was a strategic action undertaken in constructing the past of India. This operation was carried out by a systematic arrangement of reports of the commissions, innumerable histories of India and its regions penned by colonial administrators, the memoirs and travelogues recorded by unofficial Englishmen. The construction of ‘the past by the colonial rulers was substantially different from the past that the ‘natives’ knew of themselves’ (108-109). It seems as if the colonizers were constructing the past to justify and legitimize the present, moreover, linking the past and present mainly for the sake of administrative actions. The ‘reading’ of the past helped the British to institutionalize the administrative practices, which were systematized differently each time to suit the changing needs.

more concerned with the systematisation of the colonial community and its culture, were indirectly impelling the Evangelicals by helping them in the acts of conversion and missionization in British India. The colonial government seemed to have remained involved despite it constituting a law, in managing both the South Indian Hindu temples and North Indian Sikh and Muslim shrines.

With this, a public consciousness among the Hindus in South India was aroused that their religion was under attack and a number of organizations took form to resist the missionary onslaught (21). The new policy which was made into a law

left the administration and upkeep of Hindu temples and rituals to new, emergent elites which used the British legal apparatus to create a new, “corporate Hinduism” that was fully modern. These elites were not only interested in controlling Hindu institutions, which especially in South India were quite powerful and immediately connected to political control, but they also had a reformist agenda concerning religious education, ritual action, and customs that is crucial even today. (21)

The religious institutions and practices seem to have played a significant role in the formation of national identities. The very idea of national identity formation seemed to have taken shape with the British denying the colonisers to participate in the activities of the political institutions that were being institutionalised according to the ways of the British. This should have made the Indians to develop an alternative set of institutions jointly political and religious in nature. The British colonial exercising power and exploitation of India had led to “despondency, loss of self-confidence, and even to an inferiority complex in the whole country. To regenerate self-confidence among the

people Hinduism was adapted in certain aspects to the requirements of the political-ideological struggle against British rule” (*Hinduism Reconsidered* 85).

The nineteenth century was a period in British India, which saw the emergence of a number of movements by reformists, revivalists, leaders and *gurus*. The advent of colonial rule and English education in India brought the English educated Indian elites to the foreground, who considered that India was not progressing due to its orthodox traditional culture and rituals. The movements that were given shape during this period by various Hindu socio-religious reformists arrived in the public sphere to negotiate with the masses with an indigenous ideology that was thoroughly rooted in its culture. These activists were primarily concerned with reconfiguring and reconstituting the newly formed nation-state,⁹⁰ though indirectly, into a Hindu-India. This period is comprised of enormous transformations in the social, religious and political practices. The imperial rule, which deposed most of the indigenous rulers, steadily interfered with the traditional patterns of life of the “natives” and saw to that many of them became part of the technical apparatuses, institutions and practices that were under their governance. This *governmentality*,⁹¹ further, helped in constructing the mechanisms of power that influenced the ideas of the people in various ways, and gave way to a continuous social change. Even though such conditions prevailed, the Hindu activists gradually started

⁹⁰ In British India the nation-state was a ‘product of European socio political and economic developments from the sixteenth century onwards, and the introduction of the nationalist model into Asia is a further legacy of European imperialism in this area’ (King 107).

⁹¹ The imperial rule was being systematized into a form of regulation throughout the social order by which the Indian body politic was becoming subject to the bureaucratic regime and its modes of discipline. The imperialistic institutions, procedures, analyses and calculations were being formed into a specific governmental apparatuses and further into various forms of knowledge which constituted of self-reflective conduct and ethical competencies.

adapting to a new order of things, which however, had a deep impact of the ancient Hindu culture and traditions.

The socio-religious reformers, revivalists, leaders and *gurus*, were consciously advocating deliberate changes in the social and religious attitudes, customs and rituals. They were rescripting the Hindu traditions and culture, and sometimes went to such extremes, like, dichotomizing with the tradition itself. They started to see transformation not as a slow designed process, but as an affirming principle in itself. This was contradicted with the existing patterns consisting of no positive features. These movements started to have a great impact on the nineteenth century India.

The nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements distinguished themselves with elements of new imperatives. Under the governance of British Raj, different religious and reform movements in various parts of British India induced “the cultural representation of the modern nation in its past gathered powerful momentum” (Prakash 91). The search for a Hindu universality was intensified by the Hindu educated elites, some of them who acted as religious reformers as well, who

entailed the valorization of certain ancient texts as Hindu and as the authentic and authoritative heritage of Indians. The intentions and arenas of activities of these intellectuals varied. Religious reformers focused on interpretations of canonical texts and the status of existing beliefs and practices, and they expounded their views through publications and religious discourses ... They published books and pamphlets, delivered public lectures, and formed modern associations in order to convince the emergent Western educated elite ... But regardless of differences in

motives and arenas of action, all of these intellectuals worked in the milieu of revival and reform. There was general agreement that India's past was Hindu, and that Hinduism was more than just a religion. (91-92)

Most of the socio-religious and reform movements in the latter half of the nineteenth century were incited with political objectives, and as a result aspired to carry out their impact on the proposed law, political system, and governance, procured a distinctive nationalist quality. The intensification of political objectives in various movements, may be said, has led to the constitution of an Indian nationalist movement.

The various socio-religious reform movements convoluted and blended the aspects of religious motivation and reform. In addition, it may be said that secular and rationalistic motives played a decisive role. However, a few activists remained completely within the traditional order, but could not manifest a major effect on the period. The British governance, its education imperatives, and literature constituted in rationalising and secularising India. These rational artifices were taken as a challenge by the social activists, who further blended these never before experienced and encountered ideas into the formation and construction of a Hindu-India. Rationalism, as the basis for ethical thinking, and as a presupposition admits the exercise of reason and the idea of human progress and evolution. The concept of natural rights connected with individualism rather than the acceptance of empiricism, authority, or spiritual revelation provides the only valid basis for action or belief and that reason is the prime source of knowledge and of spiritual truth. These concepts sounded foreign to the "native" who assumed that he belonged to a Hindu traditional society that had different sectarian affiliations.

The nineteenth century India saw the emergence of a new social group, who can be called as the English-educated intelligentsia, mostly in connection with the colonial British governance and trade. The colonial techniques of power assisted the colonized in framing several innovative ideas to reconfigure and reform the body politic. This, in one sense, happened due to the continuous interaction and observation of the ‘order of things’ that the British were trying to project in front of the coloniser. These ‘things’ assisted the Indian intelligentsia to objectify some of the social and religious practices and rituals of their own religion with depravity and repugnance.

The birth of ‘neo-Hinduism’⁹² can be asserted, is an ideological expression that confronted the imperial domination as a structure of Hindu mobilization in the nineteenth century. Neo-Hinduism is of its “nature difficult to define; it has neither organization nor dogma. It is the product of reformers over the last one hundred and fifty years in opposition to Islam and Christianity and also to the limiting bonds of caste. A distinctive feature, however, is the repeated claim that it is a universal creed englobing all the truths contained in the other world religions.”⁹³ In Bengal, the Hindu upper castes – the *bhadralok* – were fascinated by the Europeans and manifested themselves as the new elite, “British-trained white-collar workers” (Jaffrelot 7). These ‘native’ English educated elites preferred to reform their traditions along the modern ways. However, it seemed that they did not want to cross the boundaries, which would make them abandon or disown their traditions.

⁹² On neo-Hinduism see, K. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: C U P, 1989); and A. Copley, ed., *Gurus and their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India* (Delhi: O U P, 2000) and S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1947), p.43.

⁹³ Cited from, David F Pocock, ““Difference” in East Africa: A Study of Caste and Religion in Modern Indian Society,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 13, 4 (Winter, 1957), pp. 289-300.

During the nineteenth century, a major transition seems to have taken place within the Hindu milieu from reform to revivalism. It is affirmed that reformists “became revivalists by pretending that, in emulating the West, they were only restoring to pristine purity of their own traditions via eliminating later accretions” (7). Most of the territories, which were under the governance of the British Raj began to perceive the materialisation and the rising of novel religious and reform movements in different periods to purify the religion and also eliminate social evil rituals practised by Hindus. The organizations and socio-religious reform movements,⁹⁴ viz. *Brahmo Samaj*, *Satnami Movement*, *Manav Dharma Sabha Movement*, *Paramahansa Mandali*, *Nirankaris*, *Namdharis*, *Singh Sabhas*, *Radhasoami Satsang*, *Satya Mahima Dharma Movement*, *Prarthana Samaj*, and *Arya Samaj*, set into motion the construction of a public sphere that held aspects like the Secular, Science, Religion and so on.⁹⁵

The imperialist’s customs and religion seemed fascinating to the ‘natives’, in particular to the Bengal educated intelligentsia, and its characteristics, may not be directly, but, influenced the local cultures and religions. A process of reformation and ‘disciplinization’⁹⁶ of religion by using the ‘body’⁹⁷ as a technology was being initiated

⁹⁴ See, K. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: C U P, 1989).

⁹⁵ See Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and the Mystic East* (London: Routledge, 1999).

⁹⁶ It looks as if most of the movements had taken themselves the form of institutions, where the followers were required to train their bodies according to the tasks assigned by the leader, guru. The disciples must have been made to undergo training and bring control over their bodies, a sort of discipline that acted as a means of achieving an end. However, the question of discipline creating a whole new form of individuality for bodies, which enabled the followers to perform their duty within the new forms of socio religious political organisations that have later emerged and are still continuing is to be analysed.

⁹⁷ The Hindu socio religious reform movements must have used the aspect of discipline to create “docile bodies”. This act of creation looks like as if the bodies were to be specifically designed to be ideal for a new political and modern age. The mass gatherings that were ordered by these institutions appear like as if an observation constantly prevailed on the bodies that were to be controlled. The codes of behaviour that were to be internalized by the followers were itself disciplinary acts moulded into correct forms. These acts were to be conceptualised by careful observation and without applying excessive force.

by most of the gurus, leaders, ascetics, who were leading the socio-religious reform movements in British India. These anew socio-religious functions and orders of the movements that were being implemented made to seem as if the ‘teachers’ were systematizing the rituals, customs, and habits that existed until then under the control of the priesthood and which were being followed by the people.

The socio-religious movements, peasant uprisings and other notable rebellions have played their own role in constructing a modern Hindu-India. Moreover, the progress of science and technology and the economic transformation brought a change in the face of Hindu religion. Religion, if assumed as an institution, under the control of priesthood, had to lose its control over law, education and science. The religious movements became a sort of missionaries and although deviously, had been the base for factors like “fundamentalist radicalisation and the political instrumentalization of the potential for violence”.⁹⁸

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Hindu religion seemed to become a strong repercussion in the public sphere and further its relevance took a discursive shape. The private individual was made to attend programmes organised at the centres - established by the gurus and leaders of the movements - where matters of public interest were discussed. However, it is to be kept in mind that as the Indian society was under colonial domination, the formation of the development of the public sphere was qualitatively different from the one that had emerged in Europe. Yet, the Hindu religion in India, under colonial constraints, developed as a caricature of what Europe witnessed during this period. The emergence of contradictions in the traditions

⁹⁸ K. N. Panikkar, “Religion in the Public Sphere,”
<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article16572.ece>.

followed by Hindus and a search for alternatives seemed to happen in the Indian society.

K. N. Panikkar asserts that for various reasons,

the ability of the agencies which contributed to the formation of the public sphere in India — such as the media, voluntary organisations and social and religious movements — to constitute a public sphere was restricted. Unlike in Europe the public sphere in India was not the product of a free bourgeois society; it took shape within the political, social and economic parameters set by the colonial government. Its social base was very weak, consisting of the nascent middle class emerging out of the structures of colonial governance. The media were constantly under the surveillance of colonial rule; the reach of the voluntary organisations was limited and the social and religious movements could not transgress their respective caste and religious boundaries. As a consequence, the public sphere was not vibrant, nor could it acquire a fully democratic and secular character. This in a way emerged out of the ambivalence of the colonial state: its liberal pretensions on the one hand and authoritarian compulsions on the other. As a result, it could not but monitor the transactions within the public sphere.⁹⁹

The late nineteenth century British India witnessed a rapid state of change in the course of action taken up by the Indian intelligentsia in the process of constructing a Hindu-India.

⁹⁹ K. N. Panikkar, "Religion in the Public Sphere," <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article16572.ece>.

The socio-religious institutions played a prominent role in the making of a Hindu-India. However, it may be said that some of the institutions contributed to the heightening of religious tensions, first in the north and then in the south India in nineteenth and twentieth century British India.¹⁰⁰ The development of militant Hindu ideas through various socio-religious reform movements, though indirectly, in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century signifies and seems to give ample evidence about the influence it has generated in the minds of the Hindu nationalists.

II

A Hindu self-awareness is found to have taken shape in the early nineteenth century with the advent of reform initiatives and educational imperatives taken up by the Indian intelligentsia and the British administration. The emergence of a nationalist consciousness, manifested through the educational institutions, imparted modern education. The important aspect of colonial education is that it acted as an agent in emancipating the 'native'. However, it exerted control by the incorporation of hostile evaluation against intrinsic intellectual indigenous traditions and social practices. The colonial education is found to have altered the pre-existing notions of the self, local knowledge and the 'vernacular' languages.

The imperial power seemed to aim at institutionalising the cultural order that existed in the subcontinent. The promulgation of modern ideas was much in association

¹⁰⁰ See, Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2009); Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: C U P, 2003); Jyotirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006); Robert D. Baird, ed., *Religion in Modern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2005), pp. 402-403; K. N. Panikkar, "Religion in the Public Sphere," <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/article16572.ece>.

with the transformation of the educational system. The codification of the English education functioned as a subservient to the colonialists for restructuring the principles of politics and culture. The progression of modernity in the nineteenth and twentieth century British India was inclined and occupied with diverse methodological innovations and different ideological considerations. As an integral constituent of subjection to the colonial administration, the British government introduced modernity to Indians. K. N. Panikkar asserts

One of the channels through which the ideas of modernity were conveyed was colonial historiography, which graphically drew the contrast between the western-modern and the traditional-feudal. Modernity was attributed to whatever the East India Company's administration undertook in the social, economic, and political life, suggesting thereby the transformative power of the colonial rule. The colonial institutions were actively engaged in propagating these notions, which the liberal intelligentsia internalised and in turn disseminated.¹⁰¹

Modernity can be considered as an outcome of the progression and enhancement of practical sciences, which opposed the metaphysics and religious rituals that were performed from generations. The evolution of industrialism and social philosophies in the west was a process that opposed the orthodoxy and brought forth new habits in social behaviour. As, it may be said, that the roots of societal formation in India are governed by the caste system and the basic values of Hindu society determined the social status of

¹⁰¹ K. N. Panikkar, "History as a Site of Struggle," <http://www.hinduonnet.com/af/india60/stories/2007081550641700.html>.

an individual, the British administrative institutions, used the notion of modernity as a technology, to discard the traditional social organization based on caste system.

Science, which was bounded up with colonial and Indian aspects is said to have given a shape and authority to the understanding of modernity.¹⁰² The ‘native’ had to synthesize with colonial modernity, which was fundamentally a set of unaccustomed ideas and modes. An explicit part of British India’s history is filled with the structural changes brought by railroads, public health organizations and regulations, the bureaucracy and its developmentalist routines, educational and technical institutions, media and telecommunications, in which the people have got enmeshed. These aspects seem to constitute into “a coherent strategy of power and identity underpinned by an ideology of modernity that is legitimated in the last instance of science” (Prakash 3). However, the acceptance of modernity as an aspect “partisanly presented by colonial officials, missionaries, educationalists and scientists would always confine Indians to a state of tutelage and subordination, always leave them one step behind, second-best and imperfect copies of a Western ideal” (Arnold 16-17) should have made the larger social consciousness not to become a part of it.

India was being built into a secure and modern colony. The assignment of taming the forces of the rivers by building dams, so, as to, channel water for facilitating irrigation was taken up by the military engineers. The expansion of railways and telecommunication assisted the imperialists to control the vast territory that was colonised. The British bureaucracy saw to that doctors were out to keep a check over the spreading of epidemic diseases and further to “nurture bodies into healthy productivity”

¹⁰² For further reading on science as modernity in colonial India, See, David Arnold, *Science, Technology and Medicine in Colonial India* (Cambridge, C U P, 2000).

(Prakash 4). The British sought to recognize themselves from Indians as authoritarians of knowledge. Therefore, they established museums and exhibitions,¹⁰³ which were depicted as part of the colonial power. Prakash states that the British were in requirement of the displacement of the colonizer/colonized binary, so, they felt that the “Indians had to be conceded the capacity for understanding if they were to be made into modern subjects, and science had to be performed as magic if it was to establish its authority” (8).

The conceptualization of modernity by the British institutions and the drastic changes that it had brought in British India contributed to the emergence of a group of champions who stirred up the aspect of nationalism. Moreover, there were other groups, who stood for a religious communal identity of the nation. As time passed on, it became apparent for the Indian nationalists, socio-religious reformers and revivalists that, if they were intending to construct a modern India, they in the foremost had to consider about liberating their country from the clutches of colonial rule. The British used empirical sciences and the power of reason to extinguish the mythical thought of Indians and disenchant the superstitious beliefs of the ‘natives’. This process, was assumed by the British, would secularize the religious environment that prevailed and rationalize the Indian society.

After the process of codifying laws, the next important aspect in the reformer’s programme of the British “stood education in Western learning” (Metcalf, *Ideologies*

¹⁰³ Gyan Prakash points out in his *Another Reason* (24-25) that a number of significant museums were established, making them ubiquitous. The museums were expanded with collections, which stressed on the existence of natural history, on classification, and re-presenting the order of nature. The predominant concerns were about geological and natural history collections. Exhibitions were also organized with a great deal of pomp, they epitomized the colonial staging of science and technology. Agricultural exhibitions, in particular, became a regular feature of the landscape.

39). The period from the establishment of the East India Company in 1600 to the ‘Great Mutiny’ in 1857, marks the introduction of English education in India. The aspect of education was systematized gradually during this period. The end of eighteenth century saw the propounding of a treatise by Charles Grant as a scheme for the intellectual, moral and social regeneration of the people of India. Charles Grant felt that no force but, reason is to be employed in making the Indians understand about their “criminal habits and practices.”¹⁰⁴

Charles Grant in his treatise proclaims that the “Hindoos err, because they are ignorant” (Mahmood 11) and considers that their errors are to be laid before them. He assumed that the best remedy for the disorders of the Hindus would be “the communication of our light and knowledge to them” (11). He proposes the remedy with a full conviction and feels that if “judiciously and applied, it would have great and happy effects upon them: effects honourable and advantageous for us” (11). The contribution of the knowledge of Nature, Grant supposed, would bring a rupture in the structure of Hindu religion. Grant seems to have been very keen in considering about the communication that the Hindus are to receive should be in English language.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India* (1895), <http://www.archive.org/details/historyofenglish032043mbp>.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Grant supposed that their education would bestow a message, mainly on “the knowledge of our religion, the principles of which are explained in a clear, easy way, in various tracts circulating among us, and are completely contained in the inestimable volume of scripture. Thence they would be instructed in the nature and perfections of the One True God, and in the real history of man: his creation, lapsed state, and the means of his recovery, on all which points they hold false and extravagant opinions; they would see a pure, complete and perfect system of morals and of duty, enforced by the most awful sanctions, and recommended by the most interesting motives; they would learn the accountableness of man, the final judgement he is to undergo, and the Eternal state which is to follow. Wherever this knowledge should be received, Idolatry, with all the rabble of its impure deities, its monsters of wood and stone, its false principles and corrupt practices, its delusive hopes and vain fears, its ridiculous ceremonies and degrading superstitions, its lying legends and fraudulent impositions, would fall. The reasonable service of the only, and the infinitely perfect God, would be established: love to Him, peace and goodwill towards men, would be felt as obligatory principles” (Mahmood 13-14).

However, it has been noted that Grant's scheme faced objections from the authorities, as they regarded that it would lead to a political danger.

The British in the beginning, afraid of political dangers, seemed to have corroborated among themselves and commenced with the founding of institutions which imparted the local languages. 'The Calcutta Madrissa, or Mahomedan College'¹⁰⁶ was established by the Governor-General, Warren Hastings in 1781 "to promote the study of the Arabic and Persian languages, and of the Mahomedan law, with a view, more especially, to the production of well-qualified officers for the Courts of Justice" (18). Further, Jonathan Duncan, a Resident at Benares, projected The Hindoo Sanskrit College at Benares.¹⁰⁷ It was founded in 1791. However, English language was not introduced as one of the subjects of study at both the colleges.

The intentions of the British seemed to have gradually changed with the advent of time and their ruling in India. The advent of new Governor-Generals and the delusion of the English educated Hindu community "seem to have been alive to the expediency and benefit of introducing a knowledge of the English literature and science among their countrymen (25)," assisted the British in fabricating the European education into a significant one. In 1816, the Hindus of Calcutta founded the "Vidyalaya" or Anglo-Indian College with the advocacy of Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mr. David Hare. The institution represented the effort made by Indians themselves for the education of their children in the English language and literature. However, it has been recorded that "the

¹⁰⁶ The principal subjects prescribed for study were: - "Natural Philosophy, Theology, Law, Astronomy, Geometry, Arithmetic, Logic, Rhetoric, Oratory and Grammar" (19).

¹⁰⁷ The subject of study prescribed were "Theology and Ritual, Medicine, including Botany, &c., Music, Mechanics, Arts, Grammar, Prosody, and Sacred Lexicography, Mathematics, Metaphysics, Logic, Law, History, Ethics, Philosophy and Poetry" (19).

Mahomedans seem to have remained completely dormant, and indeed, took up a hostile attitude towards the progress of English education” (27). In the meantime, the British were however taking measures, in the process of educating the ‘natives’ of those territories that were under the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay.¹⁰⁸ The most important educational measure adopted at this time was the foundation of the Hindoo College at Poona, in 1821.

The British were aware of the dissolution of their Empire and the failure of their plans of education, if they planned to introduce Christianity in schools. This made them to implement religious neutrality in education. During this period there were controversies going on among the Members of the Governor’s Council. There were discussions proclaiming that “Government should not be too forward in taking the education of the Natives on itself, nor interfere too much in the institutions that exist in the country, imperfect as they may be” (40) and further missionaries should be indirectly encouraged and helped by the Government. In eighteenth century, the British started to institutionalize the educational system¹⁰⁹ of the ‘natives’. Only when the East India Company became a political power, as part of its ‘tendency towards endearing Her majesty’s Government to the natives, some centres of learning were started and Christian missionaries were allowed to undertake education activities to spread Western light and

¹⁰⁸ The promotion of Christian knowledge was being undertaken by the Protestant Mission. They had schools established at “their several stations, of Madras, Cuddalore, Tanjore and Trichinopoli, in which they instructed the Natives” (Mahmood 35). The Presidency of Bombay, like Madras faced a small and unorganized beginning, in the cause of education. In 1815, a society for promotion of education in Bombay was founded. Under its ‘auspices a Central School was established at Bombay and in 1817, it established schools at Surat, Tannah, and Broach’ (38).

¹⁰⁹ Indians were following their own pattern of education in ‘the *Patashalas*, the *Madrassahs*, the Persian schools called ‘*Maktabas*’ and other schools teaching through modern Indian languages; education in temples, and domestic education too in the *Gurukul* formed the basis of what the British termed as indigenous education almost till the end of the eighteenth century’ (Krishnaswamy 10).

knowledge'. Moreover, their motive appeared to 'instruct the Gentoos who shall be servants or slaves of the same Company or of their agents, in the Protestant religion'.¹¹⁰

The missionaries became active in the eighteenth century.¹¹¹ Their main aim was proselytization, and the means to this end, were the Indian languages, not English. The "father of modern missions",¹¹² William Carey, an English Baptist missionary, "brought out a book on Sanskrit grammar, and an English translation of the Ramayana and started a newspaper in Bengali in 1818" (Krishnaswamy11). The Christian missionaries felt that a 'thousand agencies are to be at work to undermine Hinduism and an extensively fortified and efficiently controlled educational institution is the most powerful instrument to throw the Divine light on every subject in India' (19). It has been noted that the chief architect of a thoroughly equipped and efficiently conducted educational institution was Alexander Duff, an Evangelist who came to India in 1830. Duff is considered to be one of the most pre-eminent among those who attached to education the key role of conversion of Indians to Christianity.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See J. C. Aggarwal, *Landmarks in the History of Modern Indian Education* (Delhi: Vikas, 1984); and K. Kalyan Chatterji, *English Education in India: Issues and Opinions* (India: Macmillan, 1976).

¹¹¹ The irregular materialization of educational institutions, mostly administered by the missionaries, marked the latter half of the eighteenth century, but the medium of instruction was not English. There is no substantiation of English, taught as a subject before 1800, and there did not function any apparent procedure on education until the East India Company was forced to do so by the Charter Act of 1813.

¹¹² See Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day* vol. 2 (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1985), p. 306.

¹¹³ Alexander Duff felt that education in the medium of English was the right technique for fabricating the educated persons in India to the right type of Christianity. Duff's agenda was to augment the inherent idea through a select group embracing Christian education from the urban areas to the rural areas. He conceptualized the organizing of an intellectual class to perceive and recognize the meaning and promulgate the propositions of Christianity. It is for this conviction that Duff and his followers attributed main emphasis on Anglicist education, rather than regulate exertion at conversion. They felt that European education given through the medium of English would manifest the spiritual essence of Christianity. The missionaries considered that Macaulay curriculum was secular and that it should be accompanied by religious instruction.

The ulterior objective of the British seems to have been to create among Indians a conviction of respectful appreciation and affection for the Europeans.¹¹⁴ They perceived it as essential to the permanent interests of the British Empire in India and the dissemination of Christianity among the ‘natives’. Due to this act the English language was referred to as the ‘Christian tongue’ in the early stages of the British Raj.

Krishnaswamy points, Reena Chatterji’s assertion that

the early converts to Christianity came mostly from the lowest stratum of the Hindu society. They were generally illiterate and as reading the Bible was held to be essential for salvation, the Missionaries were required to establish schools in order to teach the new converts to read and write. For the same reason, they had to start the printing press and to print the Bible in Indian languages. They had to start the vocational schools in order to provide them a source of livelihood and also due status in society.... (11)

The British generated a benign, disinterested, and impartial image of themselves, due to the enforcement of “non-interference in religion” (Metcalf 40). This made them to carry out without delay, the implementation of their idea of introducing “English Literature as the central element of school curriculum” in British India at a time when “Professorships of English literature did not even exist in Oxford and Cambridge until the 1870s” (40).

¹¹⁴ As the imperialists entirely attained control over the Indian rulers; as a result English became the language of British administration in the provinces that were taken over by the British Raj. At this stage the accessibility to English education and transformation in the strategies of the imperialists and the opening of the job market increased the superiority of English education and English in India. The elite had better access to English education and for the people, writing petitions in English had turned out to be an indispensable ability. Thus English education and the administrative structure of the British emerged more or less concurrently. The use of English in the administrative domain was the beginning of English in India.

The Macaulay's Minute of 1835, the blue-print for English education in India, designed for disseminating European knowledge and sciences through the medium of English among one section of the people of India was readily accepted by the government of William Bentinck. However, it has been observed that William Bentinck was not in favour of "educating the people of this country, but he was desirous of anglicising them or rather preventing them from forming a homogeneous nation" (Basu 65). The first thing which William Bentinck, as a Governor-General of India did with a particular purpose in view, was to introduce English as the court-language of India.

According to Macaulay, in his Minute to Education, an impression was generated that only through imparting English education, that India could truly be given a shape, which would be similar to that of England's image.¹¹⁵ However, Macaulay's educational enterprise underwent a lot of difficulties and contradictions. The main problem that the enterprise had to face was with the aspect of religion. Metcalf asserts that in "England in the early Victorian period all schooling was religious in nature" (39).

As it appeared that most of the schools were run by Christian sects, teaching Christianity was an integral part of their mission. These mission societies, which started establishing schools in India, conceived the institutions as elements of strategy for religious conversion. However, the British did not dare to introduce the teaching of

¹¹⁵ The often quoted lines by Macaulay depict the process of institutionalization that the colonialists had implemented. "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect; to that class we may leave it to redefine the vernacular dialects to the country to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population." For Macaulay's "Minute on Education", see, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mea/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html

Christianity in the schools that were sponsored by the government. They soon realized that such an act would provoke intense hostility (40).

It is noted by many historians that the revolt of 1857 was one of the major incidents that brought a kind of integrity among the Hindu and Muslim rulers and people to oppose the ways of the British in the Indian subcontinent. This in turn is also considered as the base for the emergence of a nationalist thought among the colonized. However, it is worth mentioning that various peasant uprisings and individual revolts in the territories that were under the British have taken place which were very much in common with each other. It looks as if incidents in relation to the people associated with religious affairs have played a key role in constructing a nationalist thought in the minds of the people of the Indian subcontinent under the British. It seems that from as early as 1771,¹¹⁶ religious affairs have involved in the entire process of socialization, of evolving consciousness. The nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements have also played a major role in bringing the people together to oppose the imperial rule in India. However, this can be said was more of a Hindu nationalist consciousness.

The nineteenth century witnessed a social and cultural awakening in the country, which “led directly to an awakening of national sentiment” (Heehs32). However, it has been noticed that the “cultural revival also had a negative side. It encouraged a habit of looking backward, to the heroic days of old India, rather than forward, towards its still great feature” (45). During the nineteenth century, a form of imaginative identification

¹¹⁶ The year 1771 saw the death of 150 fakirs, considered apparently for no reason, which had lead to a distress leading to violence. The Sannyasi Rebellion was one of the aspects, used as a story line for the novel, *Anandamath*, by Bankimchandra Chatterji. The novel projects the ideals of an ascetic as the major tools for making the ‘Motherland’ free from the clutches of the Muslim rule. However, it might be said that the Indian Hindu nationalists have used the book to fight against the British rule in India. Even though, Bankim projects the British rule as a favourable one for India. The novel is considered to have played a prominent role in the construction of a national consciousness among Indians.

by the “Indian elite” is found being constructed, and constituted as a national identity. This identity is seemed to have been re-produced continually by the formation of systems of cultural representation. The socio-religious movements appear to have designed cultural practices, gave them anew meanings, which have operated as manoeuvres at various social levels. The cultural diversity that existed in the Indian subcontinent appears to have been unified by using the characters – the hyper-male, re-invented and being depicted as an ideal character – from mythological past, which in a sense signified the “consequence of discursive power that covers over difference” (Barker 132).

It is clear that Indians represent divergent cultures and are linguistically divided into different language families, characterising the profound intrinsic gaps and dissimilarities. The reformers, revivalists and the other Indian intelligentsia look as if, have tried to infuse mythical characters to ‘rebuild’ the history and the hoary past. The construction through the narration of India as a “nation” by using “stories, images, symbols and rituals” appears to have represented a common related “meanings of nationhood.” This demonstration of Indian “national identity”, may be said, involved an “identification with representations of shared experiences and history as told through stories, literature,” (132) folk culture and the media.

The concept of an Indian nationhood through the re-invention of a past and its adjustment of traditions and continuity of an emerging ‘nation’ is found to have been done with a “foundational myth of collective origin” (132), historical narratives and through the use of “intrinsically connected to communication processes” (99). In the Indian subcontinent newspapers from 1780 appear to have taken the form of a

“mechanized production and commodification” (99) and later books, which authorized the standardisation and dissemination of the ‘vernacular’ languages. The newspaper was one of the mechanisms that kindled the awakening of national consciousness in India. Bhau Mahajan (1815-90) was one personality from Maharashtra, launched his paper *Prabhakar* in 1841 in which he criticised the political and social wrongs of the British. He is found to have “attacked both the social slavery of the caste-ridden Hindu society and British economic exploitation by criticising both the colonial revenue system and the rack-renting of Khoti-Zamindars. He concluded that ‘Englishmen after coming to India form themselves into a pack of wild rascals’” (Rao 45).

The British, however, controlled the newspapers after the great rebellion of 1857. Nevertheless, there was rapid increase in the number of newspapers published. The newspapers evolved as agencies, passed on the conceptions about the structure and affairs of the British government to the common people. The government policies were reprimanded by the newspapers. Issues on the British governmental discriminations, economical utilization, and, racial shrewdness were brought to the notice of the people. The newspapers opined that the repercussions of the imperial rule led to an intellectual decadence of Indians. This commercial dissemination of printing occurred to have determined Hindi as “*the* ‘national language and in so doing made a new imagined national community possible” (99). Here, it is to be kept in mind that Hindi, becoming the national language, out of all the vernacular languages, is again assumed to have been a political strategy of the Indian Hindu nationalists to subside the Muslims from getting distressed. However, this act of considering Hindi as the national language facilitated

“not just the construction of a common language” that represented the nationhood “but also a common recognition of time” (99).

It has been noted that it was during the nineteenth century that an anti-imperialist movement embarked, which can be considered “as nationalist is from clear, though the influence of western nationalist ideology on their spokesmen and activists is undeniable – as in the case of the Irish influence on Indian nationalism” (Hobsbawm 105). It was classified as a movement of the local educated elites imitating ‘European self-determination’ and was further viewed as a merger of different features of anti-colonial movements taking place in the territories under the British Raj. The nationalist consciousness was one decisive factor contributing to the emergence of alternative ideologies in the imperialist country itself.

In 1851, the formation of British Indian Association in Calcutta was one of the major steps that led to the idea of Indians coming together. Although, it performed a significant task in constructing up a nationalised political consciousness in India, it has been criticised as an association, which had never laid down any structural strategies and has seldom taken up any systematic action for the political advancement of the country. The next important factor that assisted to the emerging aspect of a nationalist thought in the country was the establishment of the Indian National Association, also known as The Indian Association in 1876 by Surendranath Banerjee. The primary concern of association seems, the intellectual and political advancement, and the promotion of nationalistic ideas among the people and freedom from British rule in India. It has been noted that the formation of Indian National Congress in 1885 brought to the common

front, a national form and colour and incited the fragmented political national feeling among the people and gained momentum.

III

Bankimchandra Chatterji's novel *Anandamath* (1882) may be said, established a direct connection between the ascetic subject and nationalism. The narrator presented a course of action for national revival in the form of historical fiction. Bankim depicts ascetics as key players, disciplining a devoted group of nationalists to strive for the liberation of the motherland. So, this shows in Bankim a spiritual dimension of nationalism rather than a political one. Bankim attempts to detail a method for individual perfection, to be achieved through rigorous training under an ascetic figure. Bankim, may be said, enumerated the path for self-perfection could be achieved through the practice of Bhakti (devotion) and the chief structure of Bhakti, exercised is devotion to country.

Bankim's formulation of the ascetic subject as preceptor, teaching the active principle of selfless action, may be said, became a motivating foundation of influence for Indian nationalists. This can be considered as a prime feature of the spiritual aspect of Indian nationalism. *Anandamath*, can be said, created a base on which discourses were formulated and regulated to define a distinct field of national attitude among the people. The articulation, suggesting the expression and representation of the sannyasi rebellion by Bankim in his novel apparently is found creating a "'unity' of identity" that can be understood "as the articulation of different and distinct elements that, under other

historical and cultural circumstances, could be re-articulated in different ways” (Barker 8).

By the time *Anandamath* was published, a racial, cultural and political estrangement between the educated Indian intelligentsia and the British had developed in Bengal. However, this did not mean that the British rule was seen as bad in itself. The idea of establishing the country as Mother appears to be a ‘gendered metaphor playing a significant part in the construction of the nation’ (8). Moreover, the song, *Vande Mataram* – used by both the moderates and extremists in constructing a nationalist ideology, is “characterised variously as one of the most inspiring, threatening, or challenging utterances in the history of India’s birth as a nation” (Lipner 3) – appears to have enabled the ‘nation’ into an unifying concept, has brought a “unique historically specific temporary stabilization of relations and meanings” (Barker 8).

The novel represented itself as an invincible legion. The idea of the country as a mother figure is found to have been taught by the novel *Anandamath*. However, it has been noted that a Bengali prose writer, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay had already symbolised the country as mother in one of his works, *Anguriya Vinimaya* (1857). The concept of nationalism is found in various literatures preceding *Anandamath*. Yet, this nationalism was more centred towards a political ruler. But, Bankimchandra’s *Anandamath*, depicts nationalism as an entirely new thing. ‘The *santans* who have renounced the world for good, or men who have left their families for the time being to serve the country, seek

neither to defend nor to install any king. Free of self-serving motives, they pursue an ideal, that of society free of tyranny and injustice.’¹¹⁷

A nationalist imagination appears to have emerged through the depiction of ascetic characters by Bankim. The ascetics are portrayed as if they are filled with a spontaneity with which they love their country. Here, “the *santans* are motivated not by any political ruler, but by a passion for freedom” (Chitta Ranjan 221). A perspective, which was filled with an “awareness of national selfhood” and a deep commitment was “new in Indian literature” (221). The expectation of having a sense of duty, devotion and discipline for a national cause is presented by Bankim in *Anandamath*. The invariably centred description of the real struggle of ascetics with the British in the novel appears to be a fresh literary instance that kindled patriotism. This ‘struggle with and for the ascetic ideals’ is portrayed and sympathised by Bankim. One another important aspect of the novel – it corroborated and captured the imagination of revolutionaries of Bengal, and kindled the militant nationalism in the country.

Chitta Ranjan points the impact of the novel it had on the revolutionary programmes, in the words of Kerr and Sri Aurobindo. Kerr is found to have written in his confidential report: “...they (Jotin’s Gang) had changed their names and adopted the names of the heroes of Bankimchandra Chatterji’s novel *Anandamath*. Their refuge in the jungle was therefore intended to be the centre of a revolutionary band of children of the Mother” (221). Further, Sri Aurobindo is found to have said:

The *Mantra* (Vande Mataram) had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had

¹¹⁷ Cited from, Chitta Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, “Anandamath,” *Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective*, ed. Bhabatosh Chatterji (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1994), pp. 220-26.

revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no peace, no further slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and the sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again be placed under the feet of the conqueror.

(221)

The novel had to undergo with some changes with successive editions due to the intensity of official hostility. It has been noted that the educated Muslims “have accused *Anandamath* of communal prejudice” (224). This should have happened mainly due to “Bankim’s hatred of Muslims is evident in *Anandamath*, especially in the insulting epithets he has used in many places to describe them,” (224) moreover, “the idolatry of *Anandamath*, of the song *Vande Mataram* in particular” (224) became unacceptable to Muslims. The chief central characters in *Anandamath* are all upper class/caste Hindus. There are no Muslims found among the order of Children of the Mother. However, Bandyopadhyay asserts that an alert reader of the novel will observe that the “Muslims criticized in *Anandamath* are all associated with the administration” (224).

In *Anandamath*, Bankim is found approving and favourable to the British rule in India. One of the incidents, depicted in the novel, where the dedicated militant ascetics, who call themselves as the sons of the motherland, finally afflict a defeat on the troops led by Capt. Thomas, who belonged to the East India Company. The ascetics are found contemplating of taking over the Government from “inept hands and ruling the country themselves” (Ghosal 231). But, Satyananda, the commander of the *santan* fellowship, is asked by the ‘Great Man’, ““Come with me, you’ll understand in time. There’s a temple to the Mother on a crest of the Himalayas, and from there I will show you the form of

the Mother”” (Lipner 230). Bankim mentions through the ‘Great Man’ that the rule of the British would be a benefitting factor for the people of the country, making them aware of the material universe. In the novel, the ‘Great Man’ is found describing that this “defeat of the company’s arms would persuade the British to take up the reins of the administration in their own hands and bring about the rule of law and peace in the country, and do real good to the people” (Ghosal 231).

Bankim is described by some critics as a seer.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, what Bankim expected from the British in the end of the novel, is not what happened, is known to every Indian. The Indian’s attitude towards the British was becoming complex with the coming of the twentieth century. The ambivalence of the British presence “as rulers and as the caretakers of justice was leading to questions that were not reconcilable with their behaviour in the subcontinent and the representations were also altering” (Sengupta 70). Ghosal notes that Bankim had assumed of some aspects that appear to have taken shape during British India. It was presumed by Bankim that

the British would bring the knowledge and science of the West and teach the people of this country the secrets of their mastery over the material universe, and this would be a boon to India, where material knowledge had awfully languished for centuries. As there can be no recovery of *dharma* without a prior command over material knowledge, this British rule over India would ultimately lead to the revival of *Sanatan dharma* or the real Hindu *dharma*. (Ghosal 231)

¹¹⁸ See Hirendranath Datta, “Philosopher and Seer,” *Bankimchandra Chatterjee: Essays in Perspective*, ed. Bhabatosh Chatterji (New Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 1994).

Even though, Bankim's 'Great Man' wanted the British to rule India until the revival of *Sanatan dharma*, which appears like a central message, is not found to be taken as one by the readers and the later, especially, Indian Hindu nationalists. The "central message of his life and work" (Sukhamoy 237) was, rather, *Vande Mataram*. It was established as a perceptive "vision of a prophet of nationalism" (237). It is obvious that the song inspired the freedom fighters and appropriately considered as a "*mantra* or 'religion' of patriotism" (237). It became the national anthem within a span of ten years, after Rabindranath Tagore singing it at the Congress Session of 1896.

Bankim established the concept of nationalist ascetic identity. He is referred to as one of the most prominent constructors of unifying narratives of the self with which the body politic emotionally identified. His *Anandamath* can be regarded as a novel that politically implicated the ascetic figure. It was a culturally constructed – as Bankim was in search of a martial Hindu/Indian and this seems to have made him put his mind into the traditional and religious spheres, where the Hindu fighting ascetics existed – and its nature of description was regulated to an understanding in terms of politics and cultural values. He de-mystified and fabricated the historical fighting ascetics of the monastic orders. Bankim's aim seems to have been to highlight the historical and ideological tropes embedded in the texts in the hope of establishing subject positions representing the Hindu nationalist ascetics through his novel. His novel, may be said fabricated a link between communities, groups and networks, actively involved is social and cultural manifestations during the colonial rule. Bankim, may be said, formulated the fighting character of the ascetic as a part of normative Hindu masculinity.

The novel *Anandamath* depicts that the ascetics are more into action than persevering with transcending the worldly affairs. They are dutiful towards protecting the motherland. Bankim's notion of ascetic nationalism, is said to have been emphasized on *brahmacharya* – celibate dedication – that facilitates a relational construction of masculinity. The ascetic feature – *brahmacharya* was redescribed as one of the most important aspects among all other forms of cultural representation. It became intrinsically 'political' as "the ritual of initiation legitimizes a hierarchy within the indigenous males, and further defines the trajectory that they are to follow"¹¹⁹ and bounds up some, who have performed some sort of sacrifice for the motherland and are legitimized to be leaders.

Some of the narratives by Bankim represent the spiritual identity of India. His use of language made a representation of the social culture and constituted it. This identity, referred to the cultural characteristics, forgotten in his time, is associated with masculinity. By taking the instances from past of the Hindu fighting ascetics, Bankim in his time, seems to have been formulating disciplined bodies, to serve the motherland. In *Anandamath*, Bankim's fictional heroes are found imitating the ascetic features, viz. strength, power, independence, devotion, self-control and selfless action. The protagonists are found to be emotionally identifying themselves as servers of the 'nation', perceived as mother-goddess. Bankim can be presumed to have chosen a sort of description of the aspect of nationalist masculinity. His narratives seem to have legitimized the fighting qualities of an ascetic into one of the ascetic ideals. His

¹¹⁹ Cited from, Chandrima Chakraborty, "Reading Anandamath, Understanding Hindutva: Postcolonial Literatures and the Politics of Canonization," *Postcolonial Text*, 2.1 (2005).

descriptions regulate the traditional Hindu ideology by validating and merging the prototypes the Brahman and the Kshatriya.

Bankim's *Anandamath* and some of the non-fictional works are inclined and regulated to form and define a distinct understanding of Hindu asceticism. Chandrima notes that in *Anandamath*

the narrator recalls that the valiant community of ascetics in the past was “not like the ascetics of today. They stayed in groups, and were well educated, powerful, skilled in combat, and proficient in various other qualities. They were generally hostile to the king in one respect – they live by looting his revenues” (172). Continuing in this “tradition”, the sannyasi rebels (who called themselves *santans* or children of the Motherland) in *Anandamath* intercept and loot the company's taxes...”.
(*Masculinity*, 57)

The protagonists of the novel figure out as representing the idea and practice of ascetic nationalism. They are charged with power and authority and oppose the social and cultural regulating British law. The fictional heroes of *Anandamath* are known as *santans*, who determinate themselves to be ascetics at their own will. The characters are proper subjects, who are in quest for liberation. However, they are made to prefer performing such ascetic practices that regulate them towards the operation of liberating the nation or the motherland from the clutches of the British.

In most of his fictional and non-fictional narratives, Bankim attempts to counter with proper clarifications, the negatively objectified formulations about Hindu ascetical traditions by various European discourses. He symbolizes the ascetic subject as a

genuine descendant of the motherland. One of the characters in *Anandamath*, named Mohendra Singha is at first depicted as a personality who represents the ideal householder (*grihasta*). While in search of his wife, Kalyani, Mohendra unexpectedly meets one of the santans, Bhavananda, and later meets the ascetics at the “Monastery of Bliss”. The latter encounter initiates him to join in the group of ‘Children of the Mother’, nationalist ascetics. By making the householders and especially Mohendra Singha, to take up santanhood, Bankim, may be said, is found acculturating the principles of national ascetics to his readers. The ascetic features are observed by the characters – who are spiritually leading – in the novel by refusing the confirmed doctrines. The ascetic features implemented in the novel, look like reconstructed concepts, which are in accordance to some of the principles laid down in the *Bhagavad Gita*, viz. action without desire (*nishkama karma*).

Bankim is keen on making a note on the issue of controlling the senses, and found to be considering it as self-restraining and an issue of *dharma*. He even expresses his view that refraining from sexual desire by the nationalist ascetic would not lead him to a complete restraining of it. The ascetical characters are made to restrain from household culture and function as celibates for a temporary period until the mission is completed. However, they can go back to the worldly culture and take up their household affairs after the task is completed. The ascetic characters in *Anandamath* are found renouncing the householder life for a temporary period. Through performing this act, they are made to presume with a hope that they can achieve the condition of being liberated from material and sexual desires. They are made to reconstruct the notion of

masculinity by resisting themselves from maintaining any relationship with women, and by abhorring the western material comforts and colonial attitudes.

The notion of *grihasta sannyasi* becomes a metaphor for the temporary journey from material to the spiritual. Bhavananda is found saying to Mohendra, “Do you not see we are Sannyasins? It is for this practice that we have made renunciation. When our work done, when our training is complete, we shall again become householders. We also have wives and daughters.”¹²⁰ Jibananda, one of the meritorious characters in *Anandamath* is a fine example of the nationalist ascetic, who is found engaging with the duty for the nation. His duty for the motherland, his ascetic self-control and his initiation into the *santanhood* dominate the state of his personal satisfaction.¹²¹ The other character, Bhabananda, who commits a sin by breaking the *santan* vow, by falling in love with Mohendra’s wife Kalyani, is also consolidated through his involvement in a deed of courage, where he gets killed. This act defends and constructs the opinion of his loyalty to the mother-nation.

The biological identity – of the nationalist ascetics – constituted through, disciplining the body formulated an iconic figure. However, this figure expressed various forms, viz. beliefs, values and attitudes of the ascetic cultural foundations of the past. This identity, may be said, highlighted the gap¹²² between the one who is initiated in the ascetic nationalist group, and the normatively constructed. Chandrima points out that Bankim through his novel tries to

¹²⁰ Cited from, Bankimchandra Chatterji. *Anandamath*. Trans. Aurobindo Ghose and Barindra Kumar Ghosh. Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir, 1945. p. 36.

¹²¹ See, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Anandamath*, tr. Aurobindo Ghose and Barindra Kumar Ghosh (Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir, 1945), p. 111.

¹²² A space that is formed between the ones, who become leaders by cultivating certain fixed ascetical characteristics of the body and the others who restrain themselves from the privileged sphere

emphasize that martial heroes must have skill, control, and perseverance, thus pointing to the necessity to learn to enact the bodily practices of the new male subject... “A santan’s remark, “we don’t cut off worldly concerns, we keep a vow” (148), suggests that a disciplined body is a body controlled by the will. Sustained anushilan allows the santans and dacoits to affirm the power of controlled sexuality. The fictional ascetic nationalists delay sexual gratification for the nation and spend the energy of sex and procreation in nationalist activities. Purposeful abstention enhances the character and strength of these ordinary men (and reveals the strength of the collective), as opposed to the self-indulgence and public immortality of the irresponsible and licentious British officers represented in both novels”. (66)

Bankim through his *Anandamath* represents that the militant qualities are part and should be maintained by the ascetic nationalist. The narrator seems to be maintaining the aspect of Vaishnavism and militarism as the modes of ‘dharmayuddha’, one of the important aspects of the sermon preached in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The militant quality in the ascetic is regarded to be a must, and observed as a disciplined reaction against the suppressor or the evil doer.

Bankim, in *Anandamath* opines that the ascetics of the past were not like the ascetics of the modern times. The sign of maintaining the fighting aspect among some of the institutions of asceticism for the sake of self-protection, can be said, existed from a

very long time.¹²³ According to some of the available data, it dates back as far as the Buddhists practicing it in and around the fifth century, further, classified by Sankaracharya in and around the eighth century. However, “the Sannyasins of those times were not like the present day Sannyasins. They were organised, learned, strong, trained in the art of warfare, and possessors of other good qualities and accomplishments.”¹²⁴

Even though it has been presumed that violence is not part of the Hindu ascetic legacy, it is notable to say that the assumption is wrong.¹²⁵ Bankim, depicts and narrates the sermon preacher of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna as his ideal hero, the hyper-male. In addition, Bankim fuses the warrior aspect with the Hindu ascetic and justifies the fusion, by saying, that it is an ethical act if performed for the sake of mother-nation. It has been noted that “the representation of disciplined violence as “duty” posits bourgeois Hindu men as agents embodying the message of nationalist praxis” (74). The warrior aspect is coalesced with the ascetic ideals, and is rationalized by Bankim through his narratives. It is formulated as a signifying practice of premeditated and disciplined action. Bankim is however found stating that “he does not expect the masses to accept his concept of anushilan and acquire perfection. If “those with keen minds” accept it, Bankim believes, “the character of the common people can be moulded by them” and thus a national character will be built (Mukherjee and Maddern 188)” (74).

¹²³ Refer to David Lorenzen, “Warrior Ascetics in Indian History,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 98, 1 (Jan. - Mar., 1978), pp. 61-75. See also, J. N. Farquhar, “The Fighting Ascetics in India,” *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 9.2 (July, 1925), pp. 431-452.

¹²⁴ Cited from, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, *Anandamath*, tr. Aurobindo Ghose and Barindra Kumar Ghosh (Calcutta: Basumati Sahitya Mandir, 1945), p. 82.

¹²⁵ See, William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New Delhi: Cambridge UP, 2006).

The assertion and justification of the fighting functionality adopted by the ascetical characters in Bankim's *Anandamath* and other narratives, seems to have sanctified the nationalist ascetic martial qualities. The evolution of leaders among the public, who were considered as liberators of the motherland motivated many young personalities to embrace the martial aspect represented by the *Sannyasins*, which they thought is the correct way to liberate one's nation. However, it has been observed that the British masculine ideals were part of the various aspects employed by Bankim in constructing the conception of Indian nationalist ascetic masculinity. Further, this conception was always in a state of deliberate competence to the British notion of masculinity.

The concept of violence categorized as an institutional practice for liberating the mother-nation, was hoped would structure and produce a masculine identity. It was even thought, would subjectify the political mechanisms. *Anandamath* is found to be the cause for the creation of ascetical militant organisation structures. The song, *Bande Mataram* ("Mother, I bow to thee!") sung by the *Sannyasins* in the novel, which later in a manner became distant from the source functioned as a conscious practice for the products of power – the body- politic – as a political slogan administering the nationalist subjects.

Bankim's narratives can be conceptualized, regulating the nationalist ascetic ideologues to resist the British colonial regime and their constructed ideology of Hindu male strength and courage. Bankim's reconstructed historical and mythical characters, can be said, reframed the nationalist subject to overcome resistance. The ascetic subject was presented to generate and enable social action and order. Bankim contested the

British framed imaginings of Indian masculine characteristics, through the deployment of the ascetic model. Militant asceticism, explored and quantified was regulated to form a distinct field of subjects and was thought would create a social order. It has been noted that the above said aspect in the modern era is configured by “the Hindu Right”, who see “in Bankim’s fictionalization of the santans and dacoits an opportunity to claim authority and authenticity of martial Hindu ascetic practices, which can then be utilized to cultivate angry Hindus” (201).

The process of depicting and the presuppositions about the ascetics and particularly the warrior or militant ascetic category, has played a fanciful, political and social role in the hands of authors and ‘political sannyasis’ of the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The reconstruction of the warrior ascetics as “sadhu patriots” and “defenders of faith and country” by the author, Bankimchandra Chatterji, in particular, in his novel, *Anandamath*, has been traced back to the ‘Sannyasi Rebellion’ that is said to have taken place in the 1770’s. Bankim and the other nationalist ideologues of the nineteenth century merged religion with nationalism. The nationalists transfused the ascetic subject by investigating the mythical and conclusively settled historical situation, to legitimize a religio-spiritual patriotic nationalism.

The Hindu nationalists used the *Bhagavad Gita*, which played a prominent role in giving a concrete spiritual dimension to nationalism. Further, for interpreting and shaping a militant-warrior aspect. This militant-warrior element was fused and portrayed as one among the ascetic ideals. The ascetic subject was revered by the masses, due to its ideal qualities and its presence always felt amidst them. The godmanship, adapted by the

nationalist ideologues in their lifestyles became crucial for the reverence that they sought among the masses.

The existence of the militant, warrior element among the ascetic ideals seems to have existed from the pre-Vedic period itself, and the actual beginnings of it are still unknown. However, the warrior element is not highlighted, and has always been given less credential as an ascetic ideal. It was given a major form during the nineteenth century, but, soon it was disembarked from the nationalist phase with Gandhi emphasizing on the non-violent aspect.

J. N. Farquhar is considered as one of the foremost academicians, discussing on the subject of fighting ascetics of India. He notes that,

the ascetics of India seem to stand by themselves. We think of them as the supreme penitents of the world. This side of Hinduism is usually thought to be, beyond other forms of religious life, characterised by other-worldliness, by a supreme contempt for the pleasures, comforts and shows of the world. The idea of Hindu monks becoming fighting men seems grotesquely absurd” (*The Fighting Ascetics* 433).

Most of the historical, literary and religious works, on Hinduism, in particular, scarcely mention about the “monastic warriors”. If mentioned, or taken to construct a fictional work, it was after the Muslim invasion, on the Indian sub-continent. It is found that there are lot of examples that have been cited about the religious institutions being persecuted and “they demonstrate that such persecution was economic and not religious” (Lorenzen 48). However, it is very clear from the records, that Sankaracharya had formed the *dasnami* sect, which had the *nagas*, (armed) as one of the sect. Primarily, the greatest

sects that existed in the early days were formed by the monastic devotees, who either worshipped Siva or Vishnu. The Siva ascetics were popularly known as *yogis* and the Vaishnava ascetics were known as *bairagis*.

The transformation of these two different sect ascetics into fighting or militant or warrior men is considered to have happened due to the commonest impulse of imitating one's God, so the Shaiva ascetics also known as "the *yogis*, adored Bhairava", a fierce form of Shiva, and "got themselves up so as to be as like the god as possible. The *yogi* went naked, had his hair in a great matted cone on the top of his head, carried a sword in one hand and a cup of liquor in the other, and, if possible, he also wore a garland of human skulls hanging from his neck" (Farquhar 436).

There is a mention of militant *yogis*, in the Sanskrit works, viz. *Harsha-Charita* by Banabhatta, a seventh century scholar and *Malati-Madhava* by Bhavabhuti, an eighth century scholar. Even the chronicles of Rajputana are found to have referred about the existence of warrior, militant elements in the ascetics, who were in one way considered to have been the devotees of Shiva. Farquhar highlights that, "each Rajput chief was glad to gather round him a bodyguard of these men; and many a chief hired large numbers of them, so that they formed a considerable element in his army. They seem to have usually gone naked, thus keeping up their allegiance to the naked god Bhairava" (437).

The religious conflicts between various institutions of asceticism seem to have existed in India as early as the fifth century. It has been noted that a particular sect called the Naga Sannyasis were identified by the Greeks as "Gymno-sophists, which literally means "naked Philosophers"" (Jadunath 118). The sect identified as the *nagas*, naked

ascetics, has “pretero-historic ancestry. It must have been founded when Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were no more than Swamps” (1).

The various ascetic institutions look as if have taken the religious conflicts as the base for maintaining fighting ascetic sects. It has been observed that there were religious debates and contests between various religious institutions, which would lead to conflicts. However, it can be argued that, the fighting aspect by the ascetics was maintained for self-defense, disciplining the body, and enlightenment. The fighting ascetics who maintained military orders are never found to have been in records. This can be thought has happened due to their nature of maintaining things in strictest secrecy. But, it can be verified from some of the scholarly works that ascetics belonging to particular religious sects always carried with them lancers or sabers.¹²⁶

Sankaracharya (and his disciples) – is, are – said to have combined “the scattered atoms of individual asceticism known in India from the Vedic age or even before, and place them together under regular discipline and the control of a central authority”(51). It has been observed that the *Dasnamis* are segregated into two divisions: “the shastradhari, who specialize in sacred lore, and the astradhari, who specialize in arms.... The fighting wing is organised into *akharas*, and, in the past, played a historic role” (3). The fighting ascetics being identified as the *nagas* were considered to be in relation to the *astradhari* sect of the *Dasnami* system instituted by Sankaracharya known to be “the oldest, the biggest and the most effective of our monastic orders” (1).

In this chapter, I have focussed on the religious issues that the British had encountered. The various confrontations linked to the aspect of religion and the ascetic

¹²⁶ See, William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New Delhi: Cambridge UP, 2006).

subject facilitated the indigenous to re-invent a past, for constructing a religio-spiritual national identity. The ascetic subject, metamorphosed for nation-formation is projected by Bankim in his *Anandamath*, and is assigned with a social entity, characterized as a preceptor, a leader, an ideal for the body politic. The ascetical characteristics and his song, “*Vande Mataram*”, soon become nationalist fervours. The impetus created through a body of work during this period, kindled personalities, viz. Aurobindo, and Gandhi, discussed, in the third and fourth chapters.

Chapter 3

AUROBINDO GHOSE TO SRI AUROBINDO: A *KARMAYOGIN*'S JOURNEY

This chapter would proceed in the direction of a study of the Indian nationalist ideologue, Aurobindo Ghose, who was identified as a revolutionary, a contemplative, and a Yogin; synthesizing the spheres of political nationalism and Indian spirituality. The proposition delineated sets down as a stipulation, an assumption for an assessment of Aurobindo's notions and discloses the implications of those principles for both political and religious functions. This inquiry would focus upon that phase of his life in which importance for both extremist political action and spirituality were held at the same time. This phase covers the years from 1893 until 1910; the time he landed in India after being educated in Britain until he withdrew to experience a complete contemplative life at Pondicherry.

The works that have come out in the later years of Sri Aurobindo will not be given prior significance for the precise reason that the study is an earnest try to analyze the conglomeration of politics, nationalism, religion and spirituality undertaken by Aurobindo.

In the first and second sections of this chapter, I will indicate the constitution of Aurobindo's spiritual religio-politics as it amalgamates the general contrasting notions and values to provide an explanation for a spiritual nation. The third section enlarges upon the analysis of Aurobindo Ghose and his politico-spiritual thought and its

concomitance in his activist years. It will mainly focus on his narratives and rhetoric during the years of his involvement with the nationalist movement (1893-1910).

I

The roots of Aurobindo Ackroyd Ghose's political career are found to have taken shape before he came to India. He was drawn to Irish nationalists. While in Cambridge, Aurobindo was dissatisfied with the ways of the British institutions towards India. He felt that India's political aspirations are to be taken up by Indians. This appears to have driven him to take up membership in a revolutionary society – 'The Lotus and Dagger'. By 1891-92, Aurobindo had become clear in his thoughts about employing the mechanics; duty, devotion in politics. He jots down in a notebook that

The patriot who passes judgement on a great movement in an era of change and turmoil, should be very confident that he has something worth saying before he ventures to speak; but if he can really put some new aspect on a momentous question or emphasize any side of it that has not been clearly understood, it [is] his bounden duty however obscure he may be to ventilate [it]... It is time that an Indian who has devoted his best thoughts and aspirations to the service of his country, should have in his turn a patient hearing.... (Aurobindo 6:3)

On 6 February 1893, Aurobindo's landing in Bombay – after a fourteen years stay in London – is noted to have made him feel a spiritual experience; "a vast calm which descended upon him at the moment when he stepped first on Indian soil after his long absence... (this calm surrounded him and remained for long months afterwards)"

(36:110). After two days, he is found to have left to Baroda for the next thirteen years of service under the Maharaja of Baroda. Here, his connections especially with Lieutenant Madhavrao Jadhav, Khasirao Jadhav and Keshavrao G. Deshpande developed and assisted him to enter the active political arena. Aurobindo's stay for about thirteen years in Baroda seems to have made him realise that spirituality would come to his aid for disciplining the common people.

His belief grew stronger that freedom to India can be attained from the clutches of the imperial rule by constitutionalizing 'docile bodies' and setting up a total revolution. During this period, the search, practice and experience of Aurobindo signify his goal, to attain a politico-spiritual freedom for India – an attempt to be undertaken through the synthesization of the aspects; discipline, devotion and duty with Indian nationalism.

Aurobindo appears to have identified an apparatus that would develop and preserve the exercise of power within the social entity. This knowledge structure – was codified into a three-sided activity. First, a mechanism of power was to be strategically regulated for the exercise of a secret revolutionary organisation – a system whose chief objective was the drilling of an armed opposition intended to overthrow authority. Second, the organisation of space in the public sphere for generating a productive idea – the ideal of nation's independence. Third, a movement by the people to take on a united body politic resistance of the imperial rule through strengthening disobedience and passive fighting.

During the last years of his stay at Baroda, Aurobindo is found to be striving for self-realisation – involved with his position and behaviour – so as to be capable to

undergo a radical change of himself, “in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Vintges 102). The concept of spirituality was affiliated to the concept of self and was identified with true religion¹²⁷ by Aurobindo. His process of self-transformation through the mechanics of asceticism looked as if – should be involved with one’s own technique of life. During this period, Aurobindo’s contacts, his lifestyle and literature appear to have made him to draw a structure indicating the knowledge of the self – “an autonomous dimension of life”. Here it can be said that the self-practice of Aurobindo is ‘not something invented by the individual himself, but, a model that is found in one’s own culture, society, and social group’ (104).

During this period, Aurobindo tried completely to get acquainted himself with Indian culture and heritage. This he did through reading extensively about Indian literature. He started to get in touch with the radical political movements in Bengal and

¹²⁷ Aurobindo defines that, “There are two aspects of religion—true religion and religionism. True religion is spiritual religion, that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and ethical and practical being of man, and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in some narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, forms and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system. Not that these things are altogether negligible or that they must be unworthy or unnecessary or that a spiritual religion need disdain the aid of forms, ceremonies, creeds or systems. On the contrary, they are needed by man because the lower members have to be exalted and raised before they can be fully spiritualised, before they can directly feel the spirit and obey its law. An intellectual formula is often needed by the thinking and reasoning mind, form or ceremony by the aesthetic temperament or other parts of the infrarational being, a set moral code by man’s vital nature in their turn towards the inner life. But these things are aids and supports, not the essence; precisely because they belong to the rational and infrarational parts, they can be nothing more and, if too blindly insisted on, may even hamper the suprarational light. Such as they are, they have to be offered to man and used by him, but not to be imposed on him as his sole law by a forced and inflexible domination. In the use of them toleration and free permission of variation is the first rule which should be observed. The spiritual essence of religion is alone the one thing supremely needful, the thing to which we have always to hold and subordinate to it every other element or motive” (25:177-78).

later took membership in the *Anushilan Samiti*.¹²⁸ Gradually, his political strategies were being rooted into the stream of spiritual dimension. Before leaving Baroda, Aurobindo started off to organize Hindu religious issues, which were to become important instruments to politically mobilize the masses for the nationalist movement. In addition, he instigated a theory of spiritual ideology, which was to be synthesized with national politics to gain political support from the masses. This theory of Aurobindo was much derived from his admiration towards the nationalist ideologues; Swami Vivekananda and Bankimchandra Chatterji, who before him had extensively propagated and amalgamated Hinduism and Indian nationalism through their rhetoric and writings.

The novel *Anandamath* by Bankimchandra Chatterji played a major influence on Aurobindo. The novel gave a foundation for the 'Mother' figure¹²⁹ – the Indian sub-continent, taking over the call '*Bande Mataram*', (Hail to the Motherland) – a representation constructed out of the image of the Goddess *Kali*.¹³⁰ It gave further scope for Aurobindo to formulate an idea to construct a militant ascetic revolutionary group. In 1905, through a pamphlet entitled, "*Bhawani Mandir*", he confesses his political spirituality, which was circulated among the secret societies. Barbara Southard emphasizes that

Aurobindo referred to his nationalist ideology as 'political Vedantism'.

Aurobindo's political *Vedanta* was quite similar to Vivekananda's

practical *Vedanta* except that his philosophy was much more explicitly

¹²⁸ The Anushilan Samiti original and main motive has been the improvement of the physique in the race, and there has been no instance in which the Samiti has gone beyond its function as a physical training institution or tried to use the improved physique for any combined purpose.

¹²⁹ See, Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, ed., *Nationalist Movement in India: A Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2009), p. xix.

¹³⁰ Pradip Bhattacharya's article, "The Inspiration of Bankimchandra's *Anand Math*," <http://www.boloji.com/hinduism/068.htm>.

applied to political action. Aurobindo developed Vivekananda's Neo-*Vedanta* concept that God is the sum total of all human souls into a more elaborate theory that God is incarnated in individuals, in humanity in general, and in communities of humanity. Thus, he advanced the concept that the nation itself is an incarnation of God which he identified with the goddess Kali. In *Bhawani Mandir* (Temple of the Mother), pamphlet written in 1905 and widely distributed among secret societies, Aurobindo and his brother, Barindra, wrote that each human soul contains the divine *Sakti* and the nation is a mighty *Sakti* composed of the combined *Saktis* of its people. The great *Sakti* which is the nation is identified with the Goddess Kali, and in this pamphlet Aurobindo called for a new order of *sannyasins* ready to die for the goddess in her modern incarnation as the nation. (364)

The Indian nationalist movement was considered as *Vedantic* nationalist movement¹³¹ and it had a spiritual purpose. Aurobindo shows his spiritual purview by beginning the pamphlet '*Bhawani Mandir*' with an invocation to the *Sakta* cult goddess *Chandikayai*. It looks as if the pamphlet is the summary of the political fiction, *Anandamath*. The main aspects of the novel are taken and are culminated into the form of a pamphlet for a political uprising – a *sanatana* revolution to be taken up by the

¹³¹ Johnson notes that the association of Aurobindo "with the Extremist faction of the Indian National Congress earned him the title of a "religious Extremist". The essays written by Aurobindo are indeed replete with religious terminology as well as revolutionary rhetoric. But it is more the structure of his arguments which betray his fundamentally religious commitment to nationalism rather than his vocabulary. He argues for national autonomy and freedom with evidences from history, economics, politics, and ethics. But all arguments rest upon a prior commitment to a notion of the essential divinity of man and what he conceives to be the goal of human existence. Such a conviction during the period of political activism gets termed by him "political vedanta"". (Johnson 19)

countrymen. In the pamphlet, Aurobindo states that ‘to get strength, one must adore the mother of strength’ and believe that religion is the true path to be followed for acquiring spiritual national mind.

There are three fundamental laws that he wants every Indian to possess. They are; Devotion – should be retained through the worship of the Mother. Duty – performed by “men who have renounced all in order to work for the Mother. Some may, if they choose be complete Sannyasins, most will be Brahmacharins who will return to the *grihasthasram* when their allotted work is finished; but all must accept renunciation” (Aurobindo 6:88), and Knowledge – on which devotion and duty are to be based upon. The pamphlet constructs rules that are to be followed by the “new Order of Sannyasis” (6:90), the essential ones being the observation of *brahmacharya*, maintaining strict discipline and rules.

Aurobindo was encompassing the technologies of ascetic to design a spiritual politics. These mechanics he felt would govern the behaviour of the body politic, and induce them to make significant sacrifices for the ‘Motherland’. The technologies of the ascetic were exercised as discursive resources. These ascetic ideals were to produce docile subjects – understood as discursive constructions – and institutionalize a regime of practice. The nationalist ideology was engraved with traditional Hindu religious symbolism. To an extent, though not secular in its own terms, this ideology propagated that duty towards motherland should be reflective and a voluntary practice. The sons of the Mother were to set themselves rules of conduct, transform and restructure themselves into a disciplined organization.

Devotion, an ingrained nature, a mechanism – “a leaping flame”, cannot sustain without *Shakti*. Bhawani, the mother, ‘sometimes She is Knowledge, sometimes renunciation, and Infinite Energy. She also is Durga, Kali, manifested as the mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti’ (6:79). Aurobindo considers that devotionism has to continue through prayer and *bhakti* and moreover manifests that

the energy of creation at the level of material nature is *sakti*, the divine mother. As the mother of all things of nature, she is also the mother of India’s resurgence. The Mother awakens India. Therefore devotion to the Mother is implied; and the awakening of India is the awakening of the realisation of the “self of selves,” “the God within us,” “the Eternal, Timeless, Absolute.” Nationalism is tied to the metaphysics of traditional Indian religious thought, and work for national freedom receives spiritual valuation. (Johnson 510)

Aurobindo exercises the reconceptualization of freedom in terms of political spirituality, which becomes a creative production of national identity. It confirms the objective of life that is absolutely the cultivation of highest manhood. He exemplifies that the Nation or the mother-country

is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation, just as Bhawani Mahisha-Mardini sprang into being from the Shaktis of all the million of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unity of the Shaktis of three hundred millions of people; but she is

inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of *tamas*, the self-indulgent inertia and ignorance of her sons. (Aurobindo 6:83)

Aurobindo saw that his theory of nationalism would bring freedom to India, not through the practice of arriving at the truth by the exchange of logical arguments and enhancing one's intellectual capacity, but through devotion and strict spiritual discipline. Even though the traditions of past might be great – repeating it is no concern. However, he had set out to achieve the 'recapturing, amplifying and re-living the eternal truths of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the Gita' (Iyengar 61). Aurobindo had become well aware with the changes that had been taking with his physical and mental states – the initiation of *pranayama* practice and yoga.¹³²

The issue of partition of Bengal in 1905 created a massive stir and it became an “approaching Hour of God” (195). The new ‘Order of sannyasis’ were to take up education and political revolution into the country. A spiritual feeling and regeneration were infused within the patriotic work. Aurobindo in one of his letters mentions about his spiritual approach to Indian nationalism and his own inner life. He indicates,

Firstly, it is my faith that whatever virtue, talent, the higher education and knowledge, and the wealth which God has given me belong to him....

The second folly has recently taken hold of me; it is this: by whatever means I must get the direct realization of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then, in praying to him in the presence of everybody and in showing to people

¹³²Refer to, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, *Sri Aurobindo: A Biography and a History* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education, 2009).

how religious one is; I do not want it. If the divine is there, then there must be a way of explaining His existence, of realizing His presence. However hard the path, I have taken a firm resolution to follow it....

The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains, and rivers I look upon my country as the mother, I worship her and adore her as the mother.... I know I have the strength to up-lift this fallen race.... This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow, God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission. (Mc Dermott 17)

Aurobindo through his exercise of yoga and other ascetical practices started to realize that the 'body' should be standardized and executed for the sake of the 'Mother'. A consideration for the body among the 'body politic' was to be manifested by exercise, *lathi*-play and maintaining celibacy. These were to be treated as strategies that symbolize a transformation of the self.

Aurobindo was keen about persuading the masses to take up spiritual disciplinary training in the midst of a political ground. He inclined that we are "Hindus and naturally spiritual in our temperament, because the work which we have to do for humanity is a work which no other nation can accomplish, the spiritualisation of the race; so the men whom we worship are those who have helped the spiritual progress of mankind" (Aurobindo 7:977). The representation of traditional culture as national culture by Aurobindo shows that a national identity was being constructed. The narration of hero-worship and great men – who "insisted only on self-discipline, self-communion, self-

realisation as the only way to escape from the entanglement of the intellect and the senses” (7:977) – became rationales for courses of duty and devotion.

As an acclaimed nationalist leader by 1906, Aurobindo became keen in pursuing the youth of the country towards a militant ascetic ideal, which was slowly followed by the aspects; *Swaraj*, boycott and passive resistance. There was a mixture of the Eastern and Western ideas in the gospel of Aurobindo’s nationalism and had a “cosmopolitan character.” It has been noted that “when he refers to passive resistance, to arbitration in place of the British judicial courts, and to boycott, he is referring to familiar techniques in European political history” (Varma 240). Aurobindo became more concerned with the idea of self-help, rather than becoming angry on the British. He criticized that our enemy is “our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism” (Heehs, *The Lives* 39). He articulated at his best, for attaining complete independence. *Swaraj*, became ‘self-rule’ and was thoroughly systematized with the concerns and values of the society.

II

Political freedom was the first priority on which the other contemplations were based upon. So, Aurobindo took upon the significant duty of amalgamating the traditional spiritual goal, the aspect of *moksha* with *Swaraj*, a political goal. The idea of *Swaraj* was a process to gain complete freedom from the imperial rule. *Swaraj* for Aurobindo was something that had a profound spiritual undertone and had its base in ancient Hindu tradition. It was a spiritual discipline and a qualification to be attained, an

ascetical practice¹³³ – a self-control activity. Aurobindo asserts that Swaraj should not be a sort of European ideal, instead should bring the ancient traditions of India under modern conditions and resume once again its role as “teacher and guide, self-liberation of the people for the final fulfilment of the Vedantic ideal in politics, this is the true Swaraj for India” (Brown 431).

The strategy for reconstituting and rebirth of national life in India became the chief concern of Aurobindo’s essays. Here, the stance and description of a religious dimension is revealed. The constitution of his spiritual reflection in politics is publicized, which can be regarded as his practical production of the regular contrasting fundamentals. He fuses the spiritual objective of *moksha* with the political aspiration of swaraj and “to support such a synthesis he joins two more disparate elements of traditional Indian thought: the Upanishadic ideal of the Absolute as the essence of man and nature with devotionism to the mother as Kali, Durga, or Jagatdhatri” (Johnson 20). The term Swaraj, is structured and entangled with the aspect politico-spirituality. It becomes an aim for the masses – to be comprehended from both the political and spiritual angles. The nationalist’s duty was to be devoted to the vedantic ideal – restructure the Indian nation appropriating it to a spiritual model.

Aurobindo felt that Passive resistance and boycott were subordinate means. However, they were to be marked to produce a social ardent effectiveness of grounding active forms of revolt. The principle for the moment was to present “no control, no

¹³³ The ascetical practice that Aurobindo wanted was that of a Yogin, who does “not believe that the path to salvation lies in selfishness. If the mass of men around us is miserable, fallen, degraded, how can the seeker after God be indifferent to the condition of his brothers? Compassion to all creatures is the condition of sainthood, and the perfect Yogin is he who is *sarvabhutahite ratah*, whose mind is full of the will to do good to all creatures.... Therefore Swaraj has been revealed to us. By our political freedom we shall once more recover our spiritual freedom” (7:875-76).

assistance”” and the ‘method proposed was practical, – boycott’ (6:286). Aurobindo wanted to constitute subjects in accordance to the social structure with an interpretation that involved an emotional narrative. In his *Doctrine of Passive Resistance* he manifests that passive resistance should aspire to make a rule ineffectual by a common structured defiance and subsequently secure its call.

It is therefore the first canon of passive resistance that to break an unjust coercive law is not only justifiable but, under given circumstances, a duty.... The second canon of the doctrine of passive resistance has therefore been accepted by politicians of both schools – that to resist an unjust coercive order or interference is not only justifiable but, under given circumstances, a duty. (Aurobindo 6:290-91)

The third canon of the movement, social boycott was – ‘rightful and essential as against persons guilty of treason to the nation.’ Passive resistance becomes a politico-spiritual duty. Aurobindo describes that passive resistance should have a purpose that holds unity and improvement among the masses and the acceptance of the limits of human condition. However, passive resistance has its limits at the hands of Aurobindo. He declares that as

long as the action of the executive is peaceful and within the rules of the fight, the passive resister scrupulously maintains his attitude of passivity, but he is not bound to do so a moment beyond. To submit to illegal or violent methods of coercion, to accept outrage and hooliganism as part of the legal procedure of the country is to be guilty of cowardice, and, by dwarfing national manhood, to sin against the divinity within ourselves

and the divinity in our motherland. The moment coercion of this kind is attempted, passive resistance ceases and active resistance becomes a duty.

(6:294)

He exercised for a social-change, which he considered would become possible through generating the act of rethinking in the individual and a re-description of the social order. The doctrines, viz. passive resistance, boycott and Swaraj were stylized to represent the culture – fundamentally ‘political’, because they were related with the power that produced a type of indigenous knowledge and identity.

Passive resistance finally became a method of salvation and the only grounding for the ultimate *sadhana*. The aspect of boycott also was framed according to – keeping the concepts of justice and righteousness in view, which in turn were accordant to the Hindu epics and historical incidents.

The sword of the warrior is as necessary to the fulfilment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint. Ramdas is not complete without Shivaji. To maintain justice and prevent the strong from despoiling and the weak from being oppressed is the function for which the Kshatriya was created. Therefore, says Sri Krishna in the Mahabharat, God created battle and armour, the sword, the bow and the dagger. (7:1121)

Spirituality is found to be slowly plastering the idea of nation. Nationalism becomes an *Avatar*, and emancipating it “is a great and holy *yajna*”. The aspects, ‘Boycott, Swadeshi, National Education and all other activities become major or minor parts’ (6:302) in front of the act of freeing the Motherland from the foreign rule. Aurobindo propagated that Vedantism will show the path to spiritual liberty and the realization of

spirituality within one's own self. In addition, he says that nationalism was – to be taken up by the people as – a new religion and its purpose was to bring the people to their Mother – Bhawani Bharati. Srinivasa Iyengar highlights that Aurobindo was systematizing the aspect of national identity through assembling the divine and political in relation to asceticism – religion of patriotism. He notes that “To strive for the country, for India, was work for the Divine, and the Divine would give one the necessary strength to fight on, to persevere, even to sacrifice one's life if that should become necessary” (235).

Aurobindo tries to raise the contemporary history to the level of myth – the Hindu mythological characters are paraphrased for institutionalising the attitude of political Vedantism among the masses. The aspects of mythology are sophisticatedly interwoven into the ‘narration’ of nation building and for achieving liberty. It is as if the supreme heroes – the hyper-male – are enlightening the masses on the issue of liberty, which “is the life-breath of a nation”. *The Life of Nationalism* is entangled with the seasons of life-development of Krishna at Gokul-Kansa-Mathura and finally at Dwaraka. He advocates that “Nationalism is a divinely appointed *shakti* of the Eternal and must do its God-given work before it returns to the bosom of the Universal Energy from which it came” (Aurobindo 7:750). In addition, he manifests that the concept of Swaraj comes down from ages and should be carried on further and

nothing should be allowed to distract us from the mighty ideal of Swaraj, national and pan-Indian. This is no alien or exotic ideal, it is merely the conscious attempt to fulfil the great centripetal tendency which has pervaded the grandiose millenniums of her history, to complete the work which Srikrishna began, which Chandragupta and Asoka and the Gupta

Kings continued, which Akbar almost brought to realisation, for which Shivaji was born and Bajirao fought and planned.... We must make the nation what the village community was of old, self-sufficient, self-centred, autonomous and exclusive – the ideal of national Swaraj. (7:910)

To live Swaraj, according to Aurobindo, is to abandon the idea of the self and replace it by the idea of the nation. It should be like as

Chaitanya ceased to be Nimai Pandit and became Krishna, became Radha, became Balaram, so every one of us must cease to cherish his separate life and live in the nation. The hope of national regeneration must absorb our minds as the idea of salvation absorbs the minds of the *mumukshu*. Our *tyaga* must be as complete as the *tyaga* of the nameless ascetic. Our passion to see the face of our free and glorified Mother must be as devouring a madness as the passion of Chaitanya to see the face of Sri Krishna. Our sacrifice for the country must be as enthusiastic and complete as that of Jagai and Madhai who left the rule of a kingdom to follow the *sankirtan* of Gauranga. (7:1031)

The comparison of Rakshasas with the British – in a symbolic manner is very subtle.

The Hindu epic characters, the supreme heroes manifest themselves, in the narratives of Aurobindo, as the leaders, who are guiding the people to think about the emancipation of the Mother.

Aurobindo was keen about pursuing a national character – which is possible only through the act of unifying the western nation's notion of power of organisation,

practical work, and the emancipated, transforming and indigenous spirituality of India.¹³⁴

Aurobindo has grasped a prophetic accent that had the power to raise the call to action. His art of speaking and the use of figurative language – “was like raining hammer-blow on hammer-blow” with ample effective illustrations from – Vedanta, American Revolution, French Monarchism, Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism and so on – structured “the whole Aurobindonian thesis, a unique amalgam of patriotic fervour and Vedantic idealism” (Iyengar 239). One of the foremost steps essential, according to Aurobindo, for spiritual evolution was to liberate oneself from the slavish simulation of the Western ways. India was asked to look back at the lost Aryan spiritual way of life, which was abolished by the British with the crafty systematization of utilitarian and materialistic ways. Aurobindo believed that the “restoration and resurgence of the Aryan way of life by replacing the English was, for Aurobindo, an important constituent of nationalism and national identity” (Gowda 125-26).

The mechanics of disciplining – formulated in the science of Yoga – oneself had become an important exercise to be recognized and made as a habitual agent, was poured into the minds of the body politic. The “Mother of Strength” was to be drawn into oneself and made secure. This according to Aurobindo could be achieved through an awakening of the religio-spiritual. The race should be infused with a spirit for striding

¹³⁴ Though Aurobindo unified the Western and Eastern aspects, he was particular about not to ape the European’s notions of. He declares, “We say to the nation, “It is God’s will that we should be ourselves and not Europe. We have sought to regain life by following the law of another being than our own. We must return and seek the sources of life and strength within ourselves. We must know our past and recover it for the purposes of our future. Our business is to realise ourselves first and to mould everything to the law of India’s eternal life and nature. It will therefore be the object of the Karmayogin to read the heart of our religion, our society, our philosophy, politics, literature, art, jurisprudence, science, thought, everything that was and is ours, so that we may be able to say to ourselves and our nation, ‘This is our dharma.’ We shall review European civilisation entirely from the standpoint of Indian thought and knowledge and seek to throw off from us the dominating stamp of the Occident; what we have to take from the West we shall take as Indians” (8:27).

forward into the future. He manifests that a new heart and brain to work with thoroughness for the 'Mother' will ensure fulfilment and a modern organization of the old ideals of ancient India would be effective for the cause of the nation building. An intellectual devotion for India and a superhuman discipline of soul and mind, encountered by Aurobindo in Mahabharata, Ramayana, in ancient philosophy, poetry, art, sculpture and architecture were to be revived and structuralized. The secret of the principle on which it was based upon was to be identified. The human psychology was one aspect where he searched for the answer.

Aurobindo bases and necessitates the all-important ascetic ideal; disciplining Brahmacharya, "for the building up of a great intellectual superstructure." Brahmacharya is one of the chief processes, used for storing energy. Aurobindo opines that "the practice of Brahmacharya is the first and most necessary condition of increasing the force within and turning it to such uses as may benefit the possessor or mankind" (Aurobindo 1:372). Moreover, Brahmacharya was considered to raise the physical to the spiritual. However, he postulates that all human energy has a physical basis and further says that

the source of life and energy is not material but spiritual, but the basis, the foundation on which the life and energy stand and work, is physical. The ancient Hindus clearly recognised this distinction between *karana* and *pratistha*, the north pole and the south pole of being. Earth or gross matter is the *pratistha*, Brahman or spirit is the *karana*. To raise up the physical to the spiritual is Brahmacharya, for by the meeting of the two the energy

which starts from one and produces the other is enhanced and fulfils itself. (1:372)

Brahmacharya was appropriated as a source that would perfect the mechanisms of knowledge. It heightens and guides the *sattwic* elements in human nature to ultimate perfection. However, Aurobindo was careful in adding, “this is only possible to the Yogin by a successful prosecution of the discipline of Yoga” (1:375), and is found to have been dependent on the prior existence of discursive subject positions.

Aurobindo’s politico-spiritual narratives in the *Yugantar*, *Bande Mataram*, and *Karmayogin* are found to be strongly manifesting the premeditated fusion of violence and spirituality. These narratives strived to institutionalize the Indian militant ascetic nationalist ideal. The writings mainly undertake the effort of combining, the identity of the nation with the ‘Mother’ figure, the politics with a virile masculine resistance, and spirituality. Moreover, Aurobindo attempts to deconstruct the colonizer’s grip, the imperial attempt in disfiguring, distorting and destroying of the indigenous past and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content.¹³⁵ The reconstruction of an indigenous identity through a *re-telling* of the past is confronted with images, indigenous myths, icons and symbols.

The ascetic ideals as ‘technologies of the self’ were promulgated for systematizing a reunification of the cultural identity. These technologies permitted the

¹³⁵ Aurobindo in his *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* states that “The nineteenth century in India aspired to political emancipation, social renovation, religious vision and rebirth, but it failed because it adopted Western motives and methods, ignored the spirit, history and destiny of our race and thought that by taking over European education, European machinery, European organisation and equipment we should reproduce in ourselves European prosperity, energy and progress. We of the twentieth century reject the aims, ideals and methods of the Anglicised nineteenth precisely because we accept its experience. We refuse to make an idol of the present; we look before and after, backward to the mighty history of our race, forward to the grandiose destiny for which that history has prepared it” (8:25).

‘docile body’ to ‘perform certain operations on their own bodies, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, or perfection.’¹³⁶ Aurobindo, far from binding the ascetic model in the past, subjects it through rhetoric – in a sense to make the indigenous individual to attain specific attitudes – to a constant participation during the times of the imperial rule in India. The disposing and a constant practice of the ascetic principles were thought would produce a politico-spiritual transformation. It has been observed that Aurobindo claimed to have “reconciled the divergent trends of Indian ascetic acosmic transcendental idealism and Western secularistic materialism” (Varma 236). The religious contemplation for the nation, was visualized by Aurobindo, would indeed proliferate the mechanics; duty, discipline and devotion, and thus, the political action and spiritual contemplation could be linked. A symbolic journey into one’s own self and simultaneously identifying oneself with the Mother-nation-land were re-framed as the instantaneous principles of action.

Aurobindo’s idea of ascesis seems to be a situational and structuralized progression.¹³⁷ It had to be confronted through the disciplinization of one’s body; through a rigorous training, sexual abstinence, physical hardship and devotion towards the motherland. A religious intensity was brought into the Indian nationalistic discourse. Peter Heehs notes the charge made by Romila Thapar that Aurobindo’s “use of religious symbolism gave rise to a nationalism based on religious identities. It is undeniable that

¹³⁶See, Luther H Martin, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1988).

¹³⁷Robert Minor identifies that Aurobindo’s one of the interpretative principles “continues to be the stress on an active spirituality as opposed to renunciation of actions and societal concerns. In addition to the quotation of Gita 3.30 on the cover of *Karmayogin*, the centrality of action is emphasized throughout the pages of the two journals” (*Modern* 72).

their allusions to Krishna and the Mother-goddess give some of their utterances a decidedly Hindu air – what Chandra calls the ‘Hindu tinge’” (*Nationalism* 110).

Aurobindo quite well seems to have known that it is difficult for the Mother-nation to dominate the imperial rule – the political sphere, so he is found to have set off with the cultural and spiritual dimensions. He takes the ascetic ‘ideal’ notions, which were culturally and traditionally constructed as outside the public sphere aspects.¹³⁸ Aurobindo, until a particular phase, felt that the only method to break the backbone of the imperialist ideology was – to shape a spiritually dominated revolution – to coalesce the militant aspect with that of the ascetic model. The mythical character, Krishna becomes the man of the people – a nation-builder. Nationalism is manifested as a religion that has come from God and so possesses the strength of God, and so cannot be crushed. It is coloured with immortality and is portrayed as God and cannot die – cannot be killed – cannot be sent to jail. This he thought would crystallize the aspect of “national consciousness” among the body politic.

Aurobindo fastened the idea of nationalism to the traditional Hindu religious notion, and delineated that the struggle for nation’s liberation would facilitate one in acquiring spiritual benefit. The struggle for national liberty was to be accompanied by the religio-spiritual aspect – sannyasis following brahmacharya and to be dedicated for the service of “Bhawani”. However, it should be noted that the question of women and other religious communities are not figured in most of his writings, which is still left

¹³⁸ Aurobindo states that the belief in the ‘high things of Hinduism and its impression that one must remove oneself from a full human activity in order to live the spiritual life’ (Aurobindo 13:9) is contrasted. Spirituality, he says, finds itself in the ordinary life, which is under the guidance of Vedanta. The old ascetic ideals are re-structured for the benefit of the Motherland. The ascetic had to be a part and undertake service for refining the nation. There should be an act performed to congregate the inner life and the outer to lift mankind to become one with the divine.

unanswered. The nationalist intelligentsia were adhered to the religious traditions, as it became essential to oppose the imperialist, but

it is true that the attitude of the native intellectual sometimes takes on the aspect of a cult or of a religion. But if we really wish to analyze this attitude correctly we will come to see that it is symptomatic of the intellectual's realization of the danger that he is running in cutting his last moorings and of breaking adrift from his people. This stated belief in a national culture is in fact an ardent, despairing turning toward anything that will afford him secure anchorage.¹³⁹

It looks as if the task of nation-formation dominated all the other problems, which were safely bypassed. This circumventing act with the employment of “political *Vedanta* idiom combined with lack of attention to secular issues appealing to the rural masses, created a situation conducive to counter-mobilization among Muslims and some lower caste Hindus” (Southard 376).

III

During this particular phase of literary history, it is found that most of the indigenous literary intelligentsia interpreted and channelled the *Bhagavad Gita* into the public sphere. The *Gita* became one of the chief technologies for the militant nationalist ascetics. Robert Minor opines that

up until 1908 Aurobindo invoked the *Gita* once to support active resistance to British rule. Any means to *swaraj* that are necessary must be

¹³⁹ Cited from, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove, 1963), p. 217.

used, even if that means violence. The very battlefield setting of the Gita provided support for his argument.... Aurobindo never accepted a pacifist posture and throughout his life the Gita would provide him with support for his position. In the *Bande Mataram* Aurobindo would also speak of the Nationalist movement as the “spirit of the kshatriya” without specific reference to the Gita, but clearly calling to mind the activist understanding he held at Baroda. (65)

The characters of Arjuna – as a *Kshatriya* warrior and Krishna – as an ascetic warrior, at the war, Kurukshetra is emphasized. Aurobindo, for the sake of revitalizing the people, re-structures the dialogue that happens between the two characters in the middle of the battle ground.

To shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Srikrishna addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal civil slaughter on the field of Kurukshetra. Liberty is the life-breath of a nation; and when the life is attacked, when it is sought to suppress all chance of breathing by violent pressure, any and every means of self preservation becomes right and justifiable, — just as it is lawful for a man who is being strangled to rid himself of the pressure on his throat by any means in his power. It is the nature of the pressure which determines the nature of the resistance.

(Aurobindo 6: 278)

The reading of the *Gita* became a part of the inner discipline and a copy of the *Gita* always had to go hand in hand with the pistol, became the fashion of the day with the

young revolutionary. Aurobindo felt that the structuring of a *karmayogin*¹⁴⁰ had become inevitable for the sake of the nation.

The Alipore prison life (May 1908-May 1909) brought a profound change in the *modus operandi* of Aurobindo. A major drift from the active political arena to the spiritual domain with a tremendous force appears to have taken place during this phase. Until then, the spiritual and political dimensions were superimposed and knotted into one another. However, the political aspect slowly, looks, as if has been subdued by the spiritual landscape. This retreat seems to have occurred chiefly due to Aurobindo's thorough reading of the *Gita* and Upanishads, and his practice of yoga, which in the solitary confinement could be performed for longer periods.

Aurobindo continued to maintain power relations by resisting the British, conversely in an altered manner. He regarded that "the repression, humiliation, and coercion used by the British authorities were also in the plan of the divine dialectic, which was using these methods to train the Indian people in the art of self-discipline" (Varma 237-8). The instrument, 'power' – is good, was taken up by Aurobindo "as a marvellous chance and favourable condition for learning yoga and rising dualities" (*Tales* 21) in the prison. The solitary confinement at the prison "was a unique lesson in love," and further facilitated him to learn "how deep can be the love of man for all created things" (23). At the confinement, Aurobindo declares, his personality was

¹⁴⁰ The *Gita* becomes the manifesto for Aurobindo to re-construct the *Karmayogin*. In one his essays, he represents the mandate that is to be followed by the new order of nationalist ascetics. He elaborates the aspect by using the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna in a symbolic manner; "The recurrent cry of Sri Krishna to Arjuna insists on the struggle; "Fight and overthrow thy opponents!" "Remember me and fight!" "Give up all thy works to me with a heart full of spirituality, and free from craving, free from selfish claims, fight! let the fever of thy soul pass from thee... The Charioteer of Kurukshetra driving the car of Arjuna over that field of ruin is the image and description of Karmayoga; for the body is the chariot and the senses are the horses of the driving and it is through the bloodstained and mire sunk ways of the world that Sri Krishna pilots the soul of man to Vaicuntha". (Aurobindo 13:12)

opening up – his dominant *rajasic* nature was overpowered by “*sattwic* emotions as charity, kindness, *ahimsa*” (47). His spiritual life, *sadhana*, is said to have been in full and rapid pace.

The fundamental teaching of the *Gita* on the Gunas and transcendence is what Aurobindo wants widely to be accepted, moreover, he admits that “there is a great need for the Rajas-force in national life. That is why the attention of the nation has again been drawn to the *Gita*” (96). He asserts that while in prison, he has understood that the mind of the nation was being prepared for the practice of *Gita*’s teaching. Aurobindo’s spiritual consciousness is said to have been heightened to a great level in prison, and was clearly due to the rendering of the *Gita*. The central mandate of *Gita* preached by Aurobindo is that, by fixing oneself in Yoga – the action is to be performed. The synthesization of the conventional ascetic ideal; yoga – with action focussed towards “alleviation of current needs produced by political, economic, and intellectual impoverishment forms the basic synthesis of traditional religious practices and modern political and social activities. The result is the reconception of yoga as a social and politically relevant discipline” (Johnson 78).

Aurobindo declares that an irrepressible eagerness to gain freedom is found in the social, political and individual level, and some of the mechanisms to achieve the goal are Restraint, Asceticism, Vedanta, Yoga, *Gita*, Devotion and Duty. The ascetic ideals, may be said, are reframed by Aurobindo to construct the ‘body’ as an objective of spiritual discipline. He opines that the body is to be conquered and in the process it is found that an “effort at inner freedom lies man’s manhood! This freedom is the chief goal of religion, this is what it calls *mukti*” (79). The ‘body’ becomes an object of care.

Aurobindo declares the ‘realisation of the divine Presence in the human body’. It is treated as an “instrument for the fulfilment of the religious life, a chariot with many horses to pull it, the body-chariot on which we ride across the ways of the world. But, admitting the false importance of the body we give such prominence to the physical mind that we find ourselves wholly entangled in outward activity and superficial good and evil. The result of such ignorance is lifelong slavery and subordination” (77).

The confinement at the Alipore jail made Aurobindo to manifest the truth of his view of national character, which is formulated through ascetic notions; ‘control over the senses, the energy born of askesis, *tapasya*, and non-attachment activity’. He is thankful for the twelve month solitary confinement and confirms it as an opportunity that has made him to think more about the “well-being of the motherland and the human race” (82). A universal notion of human character and spiritual ascendancy is configured in the thoughts of Aurobindo. He is said to have “entered prison as a highly mystical revolutionary; he emerged as a mystic concerned with spiritual and social evolution” (McDermott 16). A gradual metamorphosis from nationalist to a political karmayogin to a mystic visionary is encountered.

The nationalist theory of Aurobindo gradually elevated to the level of spiritual discipline. The elements, viz. national life, confrontation of spirituality and duty, and the evolution of man were crystallized and reordered during the solitary confinement phase. It looks as if at specific junctures, Aurobindo was in similar terms with Bankim’s ideology on (*bhakti*) devotion, and duty¹⁴¹ being reconstructed in terms of *Gita* for the

¹⁴¹ The duty, as one of the mechanics, in the later narratives of Aurobindo is constitutionalized from the *Gita* point of view. The aspect; duty is found to have been interpreted at two levels. First, ‘Pragmatic duty implies one’s relations with others – a father’s duty, for instance, to his children, a lawyer’s duty to his

emancipation of the nation. The idea, principally based upon the *Gita* was “mere knowledge would not create *bhakti*; for that, knowledge would have to be united with duty. Duty meant the performance of acts without the expectation of reward. To eat is duty; so is the defence of one’s country. But these acts had to be performed because they should be performed, not because they might produce beneficial results. This non-possessive, non-utilitarian concept of duty was the core of *dharma* or religion” (Partha Chatterjee 66).

Even though one of the principle bases is *Gita* for Aurobindo’s construction of a new religion called nationalism consisting of *karmayogins*, it is to be remembered that this is not the ‘Hindu’ religion¹⁴² as such, which the Europeans had made up. His religion is more of bounded with spirituality. After his release from the Alipore prison, Aurobindo is found to have confessed the spiritual rhetoric in his Uttarpara speech.¹⁴³ Aurobindo’s ‘Hindu religion’ speech was more of religious than political in its intention. Varma points out that Aurobindo as a mystic, “declared that God was behind Indian

client, or a soldier’s duty to fight for the cause of the country. Here the duty is regulated and governed by external social laws, and the ethicality of the action is determined within the social circumference. Second, Spiritual duty, on the other hand, does not rest upon any social reference. It does not imply social relations; it only signifies an aroused inner perception of man. Here duty is governed by inner law and not external social law, and the external social laws do not, in any way, apply to and affect the spiritual being. The *Gita* uses the concept of duty not in the pragmatic or social sense but in the larger and higher spiritual sense. In fact, Aurobindo felt that the *Gita* certainly rejected non-possessive duty in the social sense for spiritual non-possession, and preferred the latter to the former in case of a conflict between the two. In short, it does not use the term ‘duty’ in the sense of any altruistic utilitarian service but as an inner awakened service to the divine’ (Gowda 133).

¹⁴² Refer to Partha Chatterjee’s *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, p.75-76 which discusses about Bankim’s explanation on Hinduism. Aurobindo regarded Bankim as a *Rishi* and followed his ideology to an extent. Aurobindo considered religion and spirituality to be aspects, differing from each other. He maintained the idea that his spiritual realm was *Sanatana Dharma* and it being under the shadow of Vedantism, and rather not in the guise of ‘Hindu’ religion constructed by the European. Aurobindo being made to realise by ‘Him’, on the central truth of Hindu religion and ‘He’ giving Aurobindo a deeper vision is repeated again and again in the Uttarpara Speech. However, Aurobindo proclaims that “what happened to me during that period I am not impelled to say” (Aurobindo 8:9).

¹⁴³ See, Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches: On Indian Politics and National Education* (Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Publ. Dept., 2010), p. 75-85.

nationalism and was the real leader of the movement” (Varma 237). Aurobindo gives a record of his – to be – ‘mystical experiences’ that he had undergone at the Alipore prison. However, the speech is more inclined towards the *Gita*’s notions of ‘free from repulsion and desire, performing one’s duty without expecting the fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands,’ which sounds more spiritual and Vedantic. According to Aurobindo’s interpretation of the *Gita*, “the hero or the great man is only an instrument of God. He is not the real agent but only the medium of divine action. Realization of God leads to the performance of spiritualized action in consonance with the will of the divine” (238).

Aurobindo declaims that he has “realised what Hindu religion meant. We speak often of the Hindu religion, of the Sanatana Dharma, but few of us really know what that religion is. Other religions are preponderatingly religions of faith and profession, but the Sanatana Dharma is life itself; it is a thing that has not so much to be believed as lived. This is the *dharma* that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this peninsula from of old” (Aurobindo 8:6). Aurobindo confesses that he had living experiences of the truths of Hindu religion. He bases the Hindu religion and Yoga on Vedanta. This spiritual religion is what he preaches and wants the people to acquire it for uplifting the nation. He asserts that “to magnify the religion means to magnify the country” (8:10). This religion is no more blended with nationalism, but, Sanatana Dharma becomes nationalism.

Aurobindo claims that although religion emphasizes the spirituality of man, it cannot accomplish the achievement of the self-motivated change of the collective, “because in the course of its institutional evolution it becomes credal, formalistic, and

even dogmatic. Hence, Aurobindo pointed out the ideal of a spiritualized society which would provide “a simply rich and beautiful life to all” and would rely on the spiritual sources for governance” (Varma 242-3). The aspect of nationalist movement loses its ground in the politico-religious arena and occupies the landscape of Sanatana Dharma. His patriotic fervour and politics were overwhelmed by the Vedantic ideal and the aspect of *Yogin* that had deeply become rooted in him. Everything became meaningless until or otherwise established on the basis and further systematized as a part of the individual’s *sadhana* for the discernment of the Divine. Aurobindo’s rhetoric, political narration, idea of nation, national identity, and the liberation of the ‘Mother’ were immensely engrossed with spirituality. Many a critique points out that the above aspects are poles apart from the aspect of spirituality. But, in the period of the nationalist movement, India, as a nation being under construction, had to witness the nationalist politics being structuralized in an extraordinary manner by its ideologues.

Aurobindo slowly drifted away from the political scenario, and became apolitical, however, by epitomizing the *karmayogin*. The *karmayogin* is structuralised through his reading and understanding of the *Gita*.¹⁴⁴ He describes that the “ideal person of the Gita renounces the desire for the fruit of action and practices active renunciation in the supreme Person, or Purushottama” (*Tales* 80). The idea of amalgamating the political and religious aspects becomes insignificant and in its place the aspect, spiritual-

¹⁴⁴ It has been noted that Aurobindo’s narratives make a scanty reference to the *Gita* before his confinement at the Alipore jail in 1908, “especially since the Gita’s call to the active life of disinterested service sacrificed to the Divine seemed to suit well his active political life, in the thick of the Nationalist battle for India’s Swaraj, ‘own rule,’ and his understanding of the Gita revealed at Baroda” (Robert Minor 65). Minor further points out that Aurobindo’s “discussion of the Gita centres around 3.4-8, 20-26, which, rejecting renunciation of action as a religious path, teaches the impossibility of inaction and the necessity for and method of non-attached action, i.e. action done without personal attachment to the results. Thus, Aurobindo speaks of actions which are accomplished through “an august and selfless disinterestedness”” (Robert Minor 64).

politics¹⁴⁵ becomes a significant factor. Aurobindo claims to have “created a metaphysical synthesis reconciling spirit and matter” (Varma 237), as this integration would suffice for the idea of nationalism, which was spiritual in character. He further initiates the notion of moral training and feels the need of it among the leaders and followers. The political life was to be spiritually oriented and an ideal of inner spiritual freedom was to be ingrained into minds of the people. Aurobindo strongly believed and manifested the idea that “if a man attains spiritual freedom he can also gain social and political freedom” (242).

Aurobindo regards “Karmayoga as the application of Vedanta and Yoga to life” (Aurobindo 13:9). Johnson notes that by

the time of the publication of the *Karmayogin* in 1909-10, Aurobindo is arguing that it is a mistake to assume that yoga is socially irrelevant. The spiritual ideal is not divorced from ordinary life. The yogin is not to be separated and isolated from the affairs of the mundane world. Rather the yogin is to infuse the world with spirituality and power. Thus the yogin is the one who brings together in his own person the affairs of both the spiritual and the mundane world. The disciplines associated with yoga are

¹⁴⁵ Most of the writings of Aurobindo, immediately after his release from the Alipore jail are concerned with *Gita* and Vedanta. It becomes clearly visible that there was a shift in the ideology of Aurobindo from politico-spirituality to spiritual politics. In one of his essays titled “The Ideal of the Karmayogin” we find him preaching the masses that “Materially you are nothing, spiritually you are everything. It is only the Indian who can believe everything, dare everything, sacrifice everything. First therefore become Indians. Recover the patrimony of your forefathers. Recover the Aryan thought, the Aryan discipline, the Aryan character, the Aryan life. Recover the Vedanta, the Gita, the Yoga. Recover them not only in intellect or sentiment but in your lives. Live them and you will be great and strong, mighty, invincible and fearless. Neither life nor death will have any terrors for you. Difficulty and impossibility will vanish from your vocabularies. For it is in the spirit that strength is eternal and you must win back the kingdom of yourselves, the inner Swaraj, before you can win back your outer empire. There the Mother dwells and She waits for worship that She may give strength. Believe in Her, serve Her, lose your wills in Hers, your egoism in the greater ego of the country, your separate selfishness in the service of humanity” (Aurobindo 8:27-28).

a means to such an end (to make yoga a means of dissociation from the world is to confuse the means as an end). Asceticism, therefore, is conceived to be a means toward a higher goal, not an end in itself.

(Johnson 78-79)

India building up as a nation was felt by Aurobindo, and he adverts that this construction was happening according to the lines of divine architecture. A Karmayogin was to put his faith and persist to work. He should refuse 'to be discouraged by difficulties however immense and apparently insuperable and further believe that God is with us and in that faith we shall conquer' (Aurobindo 8:23). The main duty set before the Karmayogin was spiritual, his aim was to shape the nation in a regulated fashion. Here, politics was to become only a part. The devotion was not to be directed towards "politics alone, nor to social questions alone, but we include all these in one entity which we believe to be all-important, the dharma, the national religion which we also believe to be universal" (8:24).

The *Karmayogin* was to treat Sanatana Dharma as the eternal religion, and this religion was to be lived and applied to the whole of life and "its spirit has to enter into and mould our society, our politics, our literature, our science, our individual character, affections and aspirations. To understand the heart of this dharma, to experience it as a truth, to feel the high emotions to which it rises and to express and execute it in life is what we understand by Karmayoga" (8:24). Aurobindo believed and preached the one has to become "free in heart" and spirituality was the only aspect through which the people could attain freedom socially and politically. Karmayoga's basis and inspiration were to be gained from one's own inner spiritual experiences, and the "aim will

therefore be to help in building up India for the sake of humanity — this is the spirit of the Nationalism which we profess and follow” (8:26).

It is obvious that the *Bhagavad Gita* is the most commented upon scriptures of India. The Indian nationalist ideologues have felt the need of it at the time of constructing a nation, is also a well known aspect. However, when we speak keeping Aurobindo in view, he is considered as no exception to the rule. He is found to have been more drawn towards the *Gita* due to its “gospel of action”, – understanding it as a message of virile message, and its preaching of duty to protect the world from injustice. Robert Minor opines that the spiritual experiences of the inner self to Aurobindo’s life in last phase of his active political life, is described in terms of the teaching and vision of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Finally, in the *Karmayogin* itself, Aurobindo’s declaration is pointed out by Minor that the *Gita* is “our chief national heritage, our hope for the future, our great force for the purification of the moral weaknesses that stain and hamper our people” (Minor 61).

Though the *Gita* was structuralized as a technology that promulgated the mechanics, viz. duty, discipline and devotion for one’s nation, it was not the central stance for Aurobindo. His yogic practice and his “own personal experiences were authoritative and dictated the rise and fall of the *Gita*’s influence, as well as the principles by which it was to be interpreted” (61). The self-spiritual position of Aurobindo always treated the *Gita* as a blend of Vedanta and Yoga. Aurobindo like most of his contemporary nationalist ideologues illustrated from the *Gita* at length to reconstruct his perceptions and foundations. The *Karmayogin* was to discipline himself according to the *Gita* and was never to shrink from the battle undertaken for the

emancipation the 'Mother'. Aurobindo believed that the *Gita* institutionalized the ideas; perfects action, makes man great, and gives utter strength. The *Gita*, which in Aurobindo's early political career treated as a "gospel of terrorism"¹⁴⁶ was employed for constituting various revolutionary groups – swear on it¹⁴⁷ to free the Mother from the clutches of the imperial rule had completely restructuralized in the columns of *Karmayogin*.

However, when it comes to the aspect of violence, Aurobindo, from the beginning to the end of his political career seems to have advocated the use of violence and even justified it. He takes the *Gita* for strength and not *ahimsa*. He relies extensively upon the *Gita* for supporting and defending the aspect of violence in the national struggle for freedom. According to Aurobindo, the *Gita* vindicated the act of violence if it was for a morally justifiable reason or in some cases "if it was the law of nature." Aurobindo takes the Kurukshetra, battle ground depicted in the *Gita* to justify his belief in the act of violence. In addition, the battle – the aspect of violence, are symbolically represented

between contending forces were absolutely essential, otherwise the cosmic cycle would cease to exist. Everything in the universe finds its meaning and place only in its relation with the opposite force. There is no good without evil, no higher spirituality without lower egocentric action, no light without darkness and no construction in the universe without

¹⁴⁶ See Sedition Committee 1918 Report under Hon'ble Mr. Justice Rowlatt. reprinted Calcutta: New Age Publishers, 1973. p. 17 & 23.

¹⁴⁷ R. C. Majumdar, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Calcutta: Fimal KLM, Vol. 3, 1988, Vol. 1, p. 408.

destruction. All of them are natural parts of the human cycle. In short, construction is facilitated naturally by destruction. (Gowda 146)

Aurobindo notes that the act of violence was a manoeuvre that leads one ahead to institutionalize non-violence.¹⁴⁸ His theory of spirituality engulfing the nationalist movement with the employment of *Gita* regarded violence as justifiable against the imperialistic rule.¹⁴⁹

Aurobindo justifies the slaughter at Kurukshetra and opines that it is inevitable for Arjuna to perform “the function demanded of him by his *svadharma*, his social duty, the law of his life and the law of his being. This world, this manifestation of the Self in the material universe is not only a cycle of inner development, but a field in which the external circumstances of life have to be accepted as an environment and an occasion for that development” (Aurobindo 19:64). Aurobindo was not only describing about the conditioning and subjection of the materialistic and physical body, to construction and destruction,¹⁵⁰ but also the internal moral intellectual life, which would be deteriorated.

¹⁴⁸ For an elaborate explanation, please refer *Essays on Gita*

¹⁴⁹ Aurobindo in his *Essays on Gita* transcribes the words from the *Gita*, “Thou shalt not conquer except by battle with thy fellows and thy surroundings; thou shalt not even live except by battle and struggle and by absorbing into thyself other life. The first law of this world that I have made is creation and preservation by destruction” (Aurobindo 19:40).

¹⁵⁰ In the *Essays on Gita*, Aurobindo tries to define and justify the relevance of non-violence against evil. Here it is to be remembered that the essays were written after his – active political life – “temporary” retirement to Pondicherry. The *Essays* try to implicate the notion of non-violence and its justification is given using the episode of the battle ground, Kurukshetra and *Gita* by Aurobindo. Some of the *Essays* elaborate the issue of destruction and construction as part of the cosmic cycle. Aurobindo is found transcribing the dialogue of Krishna as, “Look not at thy own pleasure and gain and profit, but above and around, above at the shining summits to which thou climbest, around at this world of battle and trial in which good and evil, progress and retrogression are locked in stern conflict. Men call to thee, their strong man, their hero for help; help then, fight. Destroy when by destruction the world must advance, but hate not that which thou destroyest, neither grieve for all those who perish. Know everywhere the one self, know all to be immortal souls and the body to be but dust. Do thy work with a calm, strong and equal spirit; fight and fall nobly or conquer mightily. For this is the work that God and thy nature have given to thee to accomplish” (19:66-67).

The aspects war, force, nobility, courage are to become one's nature and "protection of the right and an unflinching acceptance of the gage of battle" should become "their virtue and their duty" (19:64). Gowda observes that Aurobindo

felt that as construction is conditioned by destruction, a complete repudiation of violence with non-violence is impossible because non-violence is conditioned naturally by violence. The technique of non-violence can be employed in a perfect world or the perfect world with the highest spiritual harmony can underlie non-violence, but conflicting forces cannot be repelled by any method that is created by human reason – non-violence, soul-force, or self-sacrifice is absurd because one's abstinence from violence will not necessarily be reciprocated by others. Aurobindo read in the *Gita* an acknowledgement that violence and non-violence are part of the divine creation as good and evil are integral to the divine cycle. Complete non-violence in the physical or material sense is impossible as long as evil persists (evil does not merely imply external objects, it also includes internal attributes such as ego, love, hate, pity, compassion). Evil is a part of creation and hence cannot possibly be eliminated. Just as it would continue as a natural part, violence too would continue as a part of the divine creation. (Gowda 147-48)

Aurobindo is advocating that universal peace would come when the human being is ready 'spiritually and socially'. But, until then the duty of man as a fighter has to be accepted and accounted by religion. He says that the *Gita* is speaking to the man of action and whose duty is to fight and protect, "war as a part of government for the

protection of those who are excused from that duty, debarred from protecting themselves and therefore at the mercy of the strong and the violent, war, secondly and by a moral extension of this idea, for the protection of the weak and the oppressed and for the maintenance of right and justice in the world” (Aurobindo 19: 49). Aurobindo, though trying to constitute and justify various aspects, through his own interpretations of the *Gita*, was not exploring the aspect of “physical asceticism, but an inner askesis.”

Aurobindo disembarked from his active political journey in 1910,¹⁵¹ though it can be considered as a ‘temporary’ halt, which cannot be assumed as a suspension of his action of fusing spiritual religion into the political arena, he sets again for a anew journey transfiguring into Sri Aurobindo. Now the questions remain unanswered, if the politico-spiritual journey had abruptly gone adrift. Has the synthesization of politics and spirituality failed? Should India construct a practical and appropriate societal standing by not drifting away from its past inheritance? If not, was Aurobindo’s sudden drop out, – due to mystifying aspects – from the nationalist movement; his internal perception that the merging of spiritual and political apprehensions in India would remain inadequate until and unless a major change in the promotion of spiritual values and system would take place.

Sri Aurobindo settled in Pondicherry for the rest of his life to practice his integral yoga. On the other hand, in 1914, Gandhi leaves South Africa forever and enters into the mainstream politics of British India. Aurobindo and Gandhi are found to be similar in

¹⁵¹ Aurobindo is said to have “suddenly received a command from above in a Voice well known to me, in the three words; “Go to Chandernagore.”” Here he “remained in secret entirely engaged in Sadhana and my active connection with the two newspapers ceased from that time. Afterwards, under the same “sailing orders”, I left Chandernagore and reached Pondicherry on April 4th 1910. See for a complete description on the Departure of Aurobindo at <http://www.sriurobindoashram.org/research/show.php?set=doclife&id=21>

terms of the aspects; spiritual religion and politics, which were never divorced in the hands of these two ideologues even though they changed places and never met or communicated with each other. The aspects were carried together and further synthesised with technologies, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *ashram*, – two important aspects that were deployed in synergising religion and politics in the nationalist phase.

Chapter 4

M. K. GANDHI TO MAHATMA GANDHI: A POLITICAL SANNYASI'S JOURNEY

In this chapter, I propose and confine myself to the analysis of Gandhi's principles – in terms with asceticism and their relation with the development of the religio-political aspect in the Indian nationalist discourse. I will indicate the constitution of Gandhi's asceticism among the body politic. It is obvious that Gandhi is understood and perceived in a multi-faceted angle, viz. 'Political Gandhi', 'Gandhi of the constructive work' and 'Gandhi as a being of relentless spiritual quest'. Gandhi, the most visible figure of Indian nationalism is often hailed as a saint in the political arena. Richard G. Fox comments, "Gandhi was perceived as powerful for his ability to hold back threatened violence from the Indian masses. That power was taken as spiritual."

In the first section a moderate attempt to argue, that the 'controlling' dimension to Gandhi's character has several ramifications in the religio-political history of India has been undertaken. The second and third sections, would proceed in the direction of Gandhi perceiving and practising the "ascetic ideal" during the nationalist phase that has led to a transformation of the socio-religious and economic conditions of the society.

I

It is obvious that Gandhi categorically denied of becoming an ascetic,¹⁵² but he established ashrams, introduced and valorised several ascetic practices like fasting, self-

¹⁵² Refer to, M. K. Gandhi, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)*, from *Mahatma Gandhi: Electronic Book* (CD Rom version of CWMG), Publications Division (New Delhi 1999), p. 239.

discipline, selfless action. By reading his extensive discourses on *brahmacharya* that he wanted to apply on the life of the householder *satyagrahis* including himself, it is proposed to indicate that at the heart of Gandhi's mechanism to restrain and deprave the individual body is a micro-politics of control. It can be contended that, Gandhi's selection of ascetic practices without becoming one¹⁵³ is a political action that manipulated to wrestle the controlling power in the public sphere of India under the imperialistic rule.

Gandhi says that his life is filled of nothing but "experiments with truth." He opposed the Western materialistic ideas and started to idealize India's spirituality. However, before Gandhi entered the Indian nationalist political scene, the religious aspects were already undergoing a process of amalgamation with politics with a pinch of ascetical norms, prominently the warrior ascetic qualities were idealized and the concept of masculinity was rendered with complete force. The strength of the Indian was proposed to be displayed to the imperialist. However, with the advent of Gandhian religio-political strategy, this display of strength took on a new shape and colour. This

¹⁵³ In a speech on January 19, 1921, Gandhi states that "I am always eager to meet sadhus. When I visited the *Kumbhmela* in Hardwar, I tried to go into all *akhadas* of sadhus in search of a sadhu who would gladden my heart. I met every sadhu who had acquired some reputation but I must say I was disappointed. I am convinced that sadhus are an ornament to India and that, if the country lives, it will be thanks to them. But I see very little of the goodness of sadhus today. On the last day in Hardwar, I spent the whole night thinking what I could do so that sadhus in the country would be real sadhus. Finally, I took a hard vow¹. I shall not say what it is, but many believe that it is a difficult one to keep. By God's grace, I have still kept it inviolate. Some friends suggested to me that I should become a sannyasi. However, I have not become one. My conscience did not approve of such a step then and does not do so today. I am sure you will not believe that the reason for my not doing so is love of enjoyments. I am struggling to the best of my ability to conquer the desire for them. But in the very process of struggling, I see that I am not worthy of the ochre robe. I cannot say I always practise truth, non-violence and *brahmacharya* in action, speech and thought. Whether I want or no, I feel attachments and aversions, feel disturbed by desire; I try to control them with an effort of mind and succeed in repressing their physical manifestation. If I could practise them to perfection, I would be in possession today of all the supernatural powers they speak of; humble myself, the world would be at my feet and no one would ever want to laugh me out or treat me with contempt" (CWMG 22:239-40).

strategy contrasted and in a subtle manner merged the ideas of the then contemporary nationalist ideologues, struggling for a national identity.

The embarkment of Mohandas K. Gandhi as a 'political sannyasi' is configured well before his arrival in India in 1915. Gandhi looks as if was clear in his thoughts about implementing the technologies of the ascetic. His deployment of the mechanics, discipline and duty, in religio-politics becomes evident in his *Satyagraha* struggle in South Africa. Gandhi is found to have started experimenting very early in his life with his body, using the 'ascetic ideals' as tools. His active political career in India, can be said, motivated him to mechanize the ascetic principles.

Gandhian asceticism sustained the 'ascetic ideal' throughout the nationalist phase, even though it faced severe contradictions. It is to be remembered as a presumption that the ideal lifestyle preached during the Indian nationalist phase, by some of the Hindu nationalists, was diverse in form. Alter notes Partha Chatterjee's argument that "Indian nationalists in the mid- to late nineteenth century made a distinction between a material sphere of power, regarded as exterior to the individual, where the British were superior, and a spiritual sphere of moral value where "traditional" Hindu beliefs, located within the individual, were regarded as superior to, and somewhat immune from, the Western culture of imperialism" (*Celibacy* 46). Further, it can be stated that there were certain forms of ideal lifestyle in relation to the ascetic ideal practices, as practised and preached, within the Hindu nationalist discourse. It is observed that the nationalist

ascetic figures, by the late nineteenth century “gained some currency of the notion of a political sannyasi.”¹⁵⁴

Gandhi deployed the technologies of an ascetic and elevated politics to the point of an extreme religious quest. The notion of asceticism for Gandhi was the greatest form of art. Asceticism, though rejected in its old form, became the primary concern of Gandhi, who thought that the implementation of prayer, fasting, self-discipline and other ascetic ideals would liberate the nation from the foreign yoke. Moreover, the ascetic ideals were to be drawn upon the body politic for the construction of a disciplined nation. This technology of discipline was to be developed from one’s own self for attaining *purna swaraj*.¹⁵⁵

Gandhi felt that the ascetical mode of attaining God and becoming his instrument was to self-purify oneself. This Gandhi claimed was well prepared and was willing to become an instrument to speak through for God. However, as the belief with him was that God wanted an untainted apparatus to converse through, he was advancing towards perfection without arriving at it. Gandhi made claims that were never distinctive and restricted. As a student of the *Bhagavad Gita*, his conviction was that God conversed through those people who had attained absolute impassiveness. Gandhi supposed that prayer, an act of devotion and fasting had an intimate relationship and were inviolable.

¹⁵⁴ See, William R. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires* (New Delhi: Cambridge UP, 2006), p. 243.

¹⁵⁵ Gandhi replies in one of his interviews that “the root meaning of swaraj is self rule. ‘Swaraj’ may, therefore, be rendered as disciplined rule from within and *purna* means ‘complete’. ‘Independence’ has no such limitation. Independence may mean licence to do as you like. Swaraj is positive. Independence is negative. *Purna swaraj* does not exclude association with any nation, much less with England. But it can only mean association for mutual benefit and at will. Thus, there are countries which are said to be independent but which have no *purna swaraj*, e.g., Nepal. The word swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which ‘independence’ often means.” For the complete interview please see, (CWMG 15:220).

The act of fasting, termed in Sanskrit as *Upavas*, a regular performance of the ascetic, is assumed by Gandhi, would facilitate one to reside closer to Him. Gandhi claimed that there was a difference between denial of food to oneself and a fast as *Upavas*.

The ascetical practice of mortification of the flesh was not taken as a spiritual characteristic by Gandhi and moreover, he believed that it generated no specific sacredness. However, the act was considered by him, would assist and do “some good from a medical point of view and it produced no particular spiritual effect.” Gandhi supposed that there is no prayer without fasting and vice versa. He speculates the relationship in the following terms: “Complete absorption in prayer must mean complete exclusion of physical activities till prayer possesses the whole of our being and we rise superior to, and are completely detached from, all physical functions. That state can only be reached after continual and voluntary crucifixion of the flesh. Thus all fasting, if it is a spiritual act, is an intense prayer or preparation for it” (Suhrud 57-58). The above lines state that Gandhi asserted the idea of violence over one’s own body to discipline it through spiritual devotion, which was a part of the Indian traditional asceticism. The proposal of self-realisation through rigorous self-denial and active self-restraint was emphasized by Gandhi, by embracing even the actions in the political realm. All were said to have been intended for attaining *moksha*, and become one with God.

Gandhi mixed up the Hindu notion of renunciation with political, religious and moral power to achieve nationalist goals. The aspect of self-disciplining oneself through religious devotion was thought, could be altered into public power. The aspect, *brahmacharya*, self-control, according to Gandhi’s observances was to culminate with the ideas of national reform and self-improvement. The experiments were carried out to

formalize and institutionalize the ascetic ideals into the body politic. The ascetic practice by a 'body', viz. abstaining from sexual intercourse was considered to be strong and completely robust. It is said to awaken the divine and superhuman qualities in various dimensions. These ascetical experiments were to be disciplined in a systematic strenuous procedure. Moreover, a systematic application was regarded would generate a body politic with religio-political implications, who would symbolize the spirit of the nation's moral soundness and virility.

It is obvious from the narratives of and on Gandhi, that we find the ascetic ideals functioned differently and were revered. However, it should be remembered that they were contextualized by Gandhi, who ignored the old content and the then declared practices and teachings. He is found interpreting *ascesis* exclusively in terms of the period in which he lived and according to his own experiences and experiments.¹⁵⁶ The

¹⁵⁶ Gandhi declares that "According to my belief, a Hindu is anyone who, born in a Hindu family in India, accepts the Vedas, the *upanishads* and the *puranas* as holy books; who has faith in the five *yamas* of truth, non-violence, etc., and practises them to the best of his ability; who believes in the existence of the *atman* and the *paramatman*... It is my firm belief that I possess in a large measure the characteristics described by me and I have been striving to strengthen them. I do not, therefore, hesitate to call myself with all firmness, though humbly, a strict *sanatani* Hindu and a *Vaishnava*... I believe that the essence of Hinduism is truth and non-violence. I have not seen anyone among those whom I know respecting truth so scrupulously as I have been doing right from my childhood. The active manifestation of non-violence is love—absence of ill will. I firmly believe that I am overflowing with love. I have not felt ill will against anyone even in a dream... Wherever I have seen misery or injustice, I have felt troubled in my soul. The central principle of Hinduism is that of *moksha*. I am ever striving for it. All my activities are for *moksha*. I have as much faith in the existence of the *atman* and in its immortality as I am certain of the existence of my body and its transience. For these reasons, I am happy to declare myself a staunch *sanatani* Hindu. If anybody asks me whether I have made any deep study of the shastras, I would say that I have and I have not. I have not studied them from a scholar's point of view. My knowledge of Sanskrit is almost nil; even of the translations available in modern Indian languages, I have read only a few. I cannot claim to have fully read even a single Veda. Nevertheless, I have understood the shastras from the point of view of dharma. I have grasped their real meaning. I know that one can attain moksha without reading the Vedas. I have found the right method for reading—for understanding the Shastras. If any injunction in a Shastras is opposed to truth, non-violence and brahmacharya, it is unauthentic, whichever the shastra in which it is found. The shastras are not above reason. We can reject any shastras which reason cannot follow. I have read through only the Upanishads. I have also read some among them which my reason could not follow. I did not, therefore, accept them as having any authority. Many poets have told us in their poems that anyone who sticks to the letter of the shastras is a pedant" (CWMG 22:312-13).

interpretations of the ideals were manifested differently from the one's mentioned and practiced from time immemorial in the Indian subcontinent. Gandhi, looked as if was clear about his unconcernedness with what the old ascetic ideals meant, followed and practised historically by ascetics of various religious sects, for he deployed the ascetic ideals as the embodiment of a living truth with which he identified.

The 'ascetic ideals', which became tools for the experiments that he undertook on his 'body practice' allowed Gandhi to decolonize himself from the educated elite of India. Among the body politic, this was taken as a message that Gandhi's 'half nakedness' was close to that of the Hindu *sannyasis* and the Sufi saints. He was idolized as an ascetic: "a saint who had voluntarily accepted a position of powerlessness through his physical identification" (Chandrima 141). This mechanism of physically identifying with the poorest of the poor, assisted in projecting him as a hyper male of the subaltern. He becomes a non-violent ascetic warrior in the loin cloth. By this time of the Indian nationalist phase it was already in the air – projection of *sannyasis* as dangerous figures and described as concomitant with *Thugs* – that the *sannyasi* figure was a dangerous outsider who was penetrating into the society and trying to interrupt the imperialistic administration.¹⁵⁷ Gandhi was keen about his ascetical practices – restricting diet, rejecting sexual activity, maintaining fasts, journeys on foot for moral significance – which derived authority to him.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ The *sannyasi*, for the British administration, was disconcerting, erratic, and a dangerous figure. The British administrator and his narration, esp. the writings of Colonel William Henry Sleeman (1788-1856) put itself on the right side thinking and manifesting that he was protecting the common man from the *sannyasi*.

¹⁵⁸ Pinch notes that "sadhus generally were seen as a potential source of criminal mischief by officials of the Raj is evident in the publication in 1913 of a police handbook in Urdu that described the various religious orders and, in detailed line drawings, examples of representative figures down to the distinctive sandalwood-paste sect marks. Sadhus would soon be considered a fount of outright sedition with the

Gandhi's mechanics immersed quite well into the masses. The reconstruction and demonstration of the ascetic subject – through himself – as a poor village farmer and an ascetic concurrently appealed the masses. The representation of Gandhi as the (house holder-ascetic) *grihasta sannyasi* played a major role in constructing and forming an identity among the masses. This was mainly done through the influence of the *Gita* and a codification of the history of the people of the Indian nation. This was however an act that brought the hoary past and the modern context into juxtaposition. The religio-politics was to generate and become influential in the making of the 'hyper-male', who can be "an idealized masculine iconic hero or the postcolonial non-violent military leader." The ascetic features, viz. *brahmacharya*, and *ashram* life generated the very existence of Gandhi in the political realm. Pinch affirms that this "ethos, and the relentless dedication to truth (*satyagraha*) that sustained it, afforded Gandhi substantial moral influence, for a time, among peasants and monks as *mahatma*, great soul" (*Peasants* 5).

The aspect of asceticism, Gandhi thought, was to be amalgamated with politics and this ideal situation would surpass in obvious excellence, when used for the elevation of a religio-political cause of the nation. Gandhi affirms that "unless our political movement was informed with the spirit of religion, it would be barren" (*CWMG* 16:269). He wanted the ascetics to participate in social life and join various movements that were striving for the cause of nation's emancipation. The aspect of world renunciation, a

emergence of a newer form of resistance to colonial rule: mass nationalism. The colonial distrust of monks can be perceived not only in the early disdain for the Mahatma's political style, but also in the official attitude toward monks in north India who gravitated toward Gandhi in the early 1920s. Such monks were derided in the police fact sheets as "political sadhus," about whom almost no information was provided about monastic affiliations. Indeed, if a common feature can be discerned in the tone of the police reports on "political sadhus," it is the official attempt to dispute and discredit the religious credentials of the individuals under scrutiny" (*Peasants* 9).

classical act and ideal of the ascetics was considered to be futile and an escape into self-centeredness by Gandhi. He expected the *sannyasi* to participate for a selfless act and reformation of the society. Gandhi declares that:

In this age, only political *sannyasis* can fulfil and adorn the ideal of *sannyasa*, others will more likely than not disgrace the *sannyasi's* saffron garb. No Indian who aspires to follow the way of true religion can afford to remain aloof from politics. In other words, one who aspires to a truly religious life cannot fail to undertake public service as his mission, and we are today so much caught up in the political machine that service of the people is impossible without taking part in politics. In olden days, our peasants, though ignorant of who ruled them, led their simple lives free from fear; they can no longer afford to be so unconcerned. In the circumstances that obtain today, in following the path of religion they must take into account the political conditions. If our sadhus, *rishis*, *munis*, maulvis and priests realized the truth of this, we would have a Servants of India Society in every village, the spirit of religion would come to prevail all over India, the political system which has become odious would reform itself, India would regain the spiritual empire which, we know it enjoyed in the days gone by, the bonds which hold India under subjection would be severed in an instant.... (16:269)

The central concern of Gandhi was that he wanted the body politic to accept that showing devotion for one's nation was to participate in the political field. Moreover, they had to spiritualize political life and the institutions of the nation. His ideal, he

declares, is that he was to spiritualize himself, which he narrates that one's "political life must be an echo of private life and that there cannot be any divorce between the two" (14:439).

It can be assumed that Hindu *ascesis* was schematized as a structure that would go in contestation to the aping of the Western factors. The ascetic ideals were incorporated with a motive to manifest a spiritual masculine alternative among the body politic. The aspect of observing a celibate life in the realm of asceticism had its own terms and was quite different from that of Gandhi's observation and his asking to implement it in one's individual life. The ascetic masculine aggressive virile quality was turned into an "androgynous nonviolence."¹⁵⁹ Gandhi endeavoured to re-structure some of the ascetical practices into socio-political powers – effectively transmuted as non-violence and nationalistic vision. They were metamorphosed by the assistance of the features like diet, exercise, prayer and other daily activities and concerns.

Gandhi's struggle with his sexuality was an appearance of his search for truth. His experiments were more concerned with ascetical practices and then politics. The Gandhian politics was more of an ascetic based religious affair. It is obvious that the Gandhian affairs were systematized by the characteristics of the traditional Hindu ascetic thought. However, it should be kept in mind that an addition of Western influence was carried and developed by Gandhi. This re-construction of ascetical conceptions assisted Gandhi to constitute the problems of national identity. He amalgamated and modified his physical aspirations into his religio-political life.

¹⁵⁹ See, Joseph S. Alter, "Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 53, 1 (February, 1994).

The ascetic principle, *yagna* altogether becomes a re-structured epitome at the hands of Gandhi. *Yagna* is defined by Gandhi as an act “directed towards the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature” (Iyer, 379). It becomes a duty that was to be performed for others, which favours not others, but ourselves. This selfless service to the nation is interpreted to be renunciation. However, Gandhi notes and re-interprets the term ‘renunciation’, which in general terms is an ascetical practice – is not abandoning the societal world and retiring to the forest.

The realm of *ascesis* was regarded mostly as not a part of the society. However, the nationalist ideologues who took upon themselves the ‘garb’ of an ascetic for a nationalistic cause wanted it to become the main essence of a religio-political society. Gandhi demonstrated a complete contrasting *ascetics* that was manifested into the society, using the Eastern and the Western doctrines. The disciplined national devotee was to consecrate himself to the service of human welfare without any reservations. Gandhi agrees that there is ‘nothing new that he has put in front of India; I have only presented an ancient thing in a new way. I have tried to utilize it in a new field.’¹⁶⁰ Gandhi re-formulated the ascetic ideals in the form of his ashram observations, experiments and practices with truth.

The *Ashram* – a secluded residence of the ascetic, became an important institution for Gandhian politics. He is one of the nationalist ideologues, who brought the ashram into the midst of the societal plane, by modifying the old principles. The conceptualization was made through a community of people living together with aspects, viz. well-regulated routine of diet, exercise, *seva*, celibacy and devotion. It was

¹⁶⁰ Refer to, Raghavan Iyer, ed., *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), p. 384.

necessitated that the ashramite had to discipline the body and mind in the service of god, in order to become the ideal devotee, who then will be the ideal Indian devoted to the service of the people. Ashram for Gandhi meant “a community of men of religion (*Ashram v*),” and it slowly was looked upon as a “religious institution.” However, in the beginning, Gandhi notes that he never intended to call the settlements as ashrams.¹⁶¹ The influence of the Western thinkers like Tolstoy and Ruskin on Gandhi seems to have made him to synthesize and look at the traditional Indian “past in the light of the present.” However, Gandhi seems to have realized the ‘question of the secular’ and says that “Religious problems confronted us now at every step and the whole institution was managed from a religious standpoint.”¹⁶² The main aim was spiritual progress and to follow one’s own faith in their religion.

The Indian nationalist movement was entangled with the aspect of spirituality to a great extent. Here, the ashram – usually confined as the abode of the ascetic, played an important role in most of the activities that were in conjunction to the nationalist discourse in British India. Gandhi as an important ideologue of the above aspect, following the spiritual and political entanglement with great reverence – from the beginning of his career – established the Satyagraha Ashram at Kochrab on May 25, 1915. As he was not ready to accept that he was leading a life of the *sannyasi* claims that he had “established two ashram-like in South Africa.” Further, it has been noted that the concept “Ashram like, as he steadfastly refused to describe them as ashram or math. One

¹⁶¹ Refer to, M. K. Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, tr. Valji Govindji Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan House, 2006).

¹⁶² Here Gandhi affirms that ‘religion was not to be misunderstood from in a narrow sense, but as a link between different religions’. See, M. K. Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, tr. Valji Govindji Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan House, 2006), p. vi.

was merely a settlement - the Phoenix Settlement - while the other a farm, the Tolstoy Farm. Phoenix was established in 1904 under the 'magic spell' of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* but acquired an ashram-like character only after 1906" (Suhруд 49).

Gandhi's participation in the Boer war, in which he acted as Sergeant Major in the Ambulance Corps, brought him to a determination to take up the "vow of brahmacharya, initially in the limited sense of chastity and celibacy. This particular period had brought drastic changes in the lifestyle of Gandhi. He says; "from this time onward I looked upon Phoenix deliberately as a religious institution." Thus, observance of *Vrata*, which often, inadequately translated as vows, is the defining characteristic of the ashram" (49). The structuring of a celibate life – designing a frame work, was derived more or less from Christian and Hindu doctrines. Gradually, the development of the regimen became intense and peculiar. Moreover, Gandhi through his knowledge of the Hindu scriptures "believed in the power of semen, that there was an intimate connection between the elusive nature of truth and the seductive power of sexuality: to conquer the latter was to realize the former" (Alter, *Celibacy* 61).

It may be said that Gandhi gave his own interpretations to the various aspects of Indian asceticism and its ideals. However, the 'ascetic ideals' though given a different polish retained their existence in the experiments and observations of Gandhi. Ajay Skaria notes that

The nationalist category *ashram* arose from within the interstices of this Orientalist concept. Here too, the ashram came to represent the spirituality of ancient Hindu India, though the institution was presumed to have since degenerated. This was what called for the nationalist project:

that of rejuvenating the ashrams, and through them, India. Gandhi said of the Satyagraha ashram that it was “engaged in the great effort to resuscitate [*punurudvar*] the four ashrams.”” (*Gandhi’s Politics*, 963)

Gandhi tried to amend the basic Hindu ascetic principles from a liberalist level.

However, it is found that the method of disciplining them changed. He tried to link the ashram lifestyle with various aspects of the *ascesis* like; *satyagraha*, *brahmacharya*, fasting, prayer, meditation and further the act of, to possess control over the palate as a part of self-control.¹⁶³ These ideals which sheathed the ashram were the mechanics that were to be used for constituting discipline in the nation. Gandhi notes that “the Ashram set out to remedy what it thought were defects in our national life from the religious, economic and political standpoints” (*Ashram* ix).

Most of the aspects, considered as the observances and the activities of the ashram by Gandhi were ‘ascetic’ in nature, viz. prayer, *brahmacharya*, and non-possession. The ashramites were to adhere to the strict rules that were framed. These rules were re-structured for constitutionalizing self-discipline and spiritual improvement. The mechanics, discipline and devotion were important in the observances and practices of the ashram. They were mechanized to point out to “man the path of duty. Performance of duty and observance of morality are convertible terms. To observe morality is to

¹⁶³ Gandhi was very particular about acquiring self-control. He declares in one of his prayer speeches before coming to India that “I may agree to be some one’s slave, but not that of my mind. There is no sin as base as being the slave to one’s mind. Be wise, therefore, and learn to discipline your mind. So you will be able to live with me. Otherwise I have no need of anyone. Nor am I conceited enough to want to teach you or anyone else. I have a pupil, to train whom is the most difficult task. It is only by training that pupil that I can do some good to you, to India or the world. That pupil is myself, what I call my mind. Only those who thus become their own pupils are fit to stay here. Others who cannot stand such a life had better not stay here. Such a person would do well to leave this place. It is a sin, however, to do anything blindly (without a purpose, mechanically). I want no such thing” (*CWMG* 14:168).

attain mastery over our mind and our passions,”¹⁶⁴ which would lead one to good conduct. The observances at the ashram for disciplining oneself and attaining spiritual improvement can be assumed were more in terms with religious concepts like *tapasya*¹⁶⁵ and *darshan*,¹⁶⁶ which were ascetical in nature.

Gandhi affirmed that one should be devoted to one's duty and cultivate self-discipline to liberate the nation. He drafted that the 'object of the Ashram is that its members should qualify themselves for, and make a constant endeavour towards, the service of the motherland, not inconsistent with the universal welfare' (*Ashram* 65). The ascetic ideals observed by the Ashram were to serve in the nation-building projects. It has been noted that the ashrams “embodied possibilities not only for reconstructing new selves through self-disciplinary technologies, they also aimed to create satyagrahis who could bring about national independence. Gandhi proudly referred to them as perfect training grounds for “right men” and “right Indians” (*Chandrima* 139).

The idea of Gandhian ashram was to produce nationalist ascetic subjects, who by implementing the vows of the ashram in their daily 'bodily' practices could become householder ascetics (*grihasta sannyasis*) and systematize their new spiritual identity and go into the national service. Gandhi constituted that the people

who want to perform national service, or those who want to have glimpse of real religious life, must lead a celibate life, no matter whether married or unmarried. Marriage but brings a woman closer to the man, and they

¹⁶⁴ See, *CWMG* 10:279.

¹⁶⁵ Hardiman notes that, “*tap* or *tapas*—Hindi terms meaning an ascetic and rigorous self-discipline. *Tapas* involved much hard work and sweat, which reflects the Sanskrit root of the term, that of *tap*, or ‘heat’. The devotee was supposed to expose the body to five fires—that of the four seasons and to the sun burning from above. For the ascetic, *tapas* was the path to liberation and spiritual power. (*Gandhi* 26)

¹⁶⁶ Refer, Ajay Skaria, “Gandhi's Politics: Liberalism and the Question of the Ashram,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101, 4 (Fall 2002), pp. 955-986.

become friends in a special sense, never to be parted either in this life or in the lives that are to come. I do not think, that in our conception of marriage, our lust should necessarily enter. Be that as it may, this is what is placed before those who come to the Ashram. (*Ashram* 81)

The ashramite had to first observe the qualities of self-suffering and self-control to observe *ahimsa*. Gandhi observes that India has lost its true spirituality and the vigorous faith of its ancestors in the “absolute efficacy of satya (truth) ahimsa (love) and brahmacharya (self-restraint).” Though Gandhi amended the ascetic ideals according to his own grounds, says that he certainly believes in them to an extent. The spiritual aspect is deviated due to the untrained reason is what Gandhi felt. He wanted his followers to have faith, “though the present outlook seems bleak, if we follow the dictates of truth or love or exercise self restraint, the ultimate result must be sound. Men whose spiritual vision has become blurred mostly look to the present rather than conserve the future good” (*CWMG* 16:195). The act of re-establishing ancient spirituality, according to Gandhi, would generate the idea of performing the greatest social service among the people for the emancipation of the nation.

The aspect of politics was never to be divorced of religion, and if done according to Gandhi, has no meaning. Politics, was regarded as a part of the being, and the individual was to understand the growth of the nation and its institutions. The ashramite was taught, to understand the significance of the institutions that were in terms with politics. However, this aspect was to go hand in hand with religion. A religio-politics was to be constituted, which was “indelibly inscribed on the heart” (*Ashram* 87). The systematization of a religious consciousness was to be established, which in turn was

thought would lead to the other departments of life. The observance was to make the individual know something about God and “the real vigorous independence that comes out of obedience to these laws that I have ventured to place before you” (88).

Gandhi was convinced with the idea that the social and political aspects were in disjuncture. He was more concerned to structuralize a new politics which would be entangled with religion. The religious aspects that were portrayed as weak by the colonialist were taken up for display as the strongest, mainly the notions of passivity and non-violence and self-suffering. The enemy was to be considered as one who facilitated us by making the path clear towards God. The enemy’s thought was to be changed through one’s self-suffering, which would in turn bring passion into politics. Most of the practices that he undertook were drawn from the traditional Hindu ascetic traditions, which were to draw him towards the framing of a larger religio-political vision.

II

Gandhi’s concept of *brahmacharya*, which in a way had similar terms with that of the ascetic features was to be implemented through the observance of duty, as this could assist in achieving mastery over one’s mind and passions. By following this, one could know about himself. This depicts Gandhi’s practise and his preaching, ingrained in the above idea. “His quest is to know himself, to attain moksha that is to see God (truth) face to face. In order to fulfil his quest, he must be an ashramite, a satyagrahi and a seeker after Swaraj” (Suhred 50). Gandhi’s experiments were mainly attempts to attain self-knowledge through the observance of *brahmacharya*, also to be understood as an

attempt to gain mastery over the body and self. Most of his experiments with Truth were possible by the ways of ashram and its observations.

One of the ascetic principles, *brahmacharya* took a prominent position in the hands of Gandhi. He considered it to be a “mode of life which leads to the realization of God. That is realization is impossible without practicing self-restraint. Self-restraint means restraint of all the senses” (*Key to Health* 22). The observance of *brahmacharya* was considered would derive great benefit. Gandhi states that *brahmacharya* is a mode of life which leads one to the God. The aspect was to keep one healthy and help him to save his vital fluid for the sake of performing one’s duty for the nation. He states in a speech that the man of ‘virtue practises *brahmacharya* and tries to conserve to his level best, the crucial resource of energy in the body’ (*CWMG* 16:60). It was more of abstaining from sexual intercourse. However, it should be remembered that Gandhi was specific that “they will have observed *brahmacharya* only if, though possessed of the highest virility, they can master the physical urge. In the same way, our offspring must be strong in physique. If they cannot completely renounce the urge to violence, we may permit them to commit violence, to use their strength to fight and thus make them nonviolent” (17:150).

Gandhi believed that violence would make a person withdraw from his search of the self, which is on par with the search for Truth. Moreover, it would lead a person to self-forgetfulness, and the act of self-realisation would become unaccomplished. Gandhi supposed that one would be lead to *brahmacharya* if one’s, only object is truth, and is faithful to anything but truth. He describes it as a *Mahavrata* and his realization was “that service of the community was not possible without observance of *brahmacharya*.

At the age of 37, in 1906 Gandhi took the vow of brahmacharya” (Suhrud 52). The ascetic practices like fasting, disciplining the body were undertaken by Gandhi as early as a student in England. But, he comprehended the relationship of observing a celibate life and the control of palate much later.

The practicality of *ahimsa* and his experiments with truth, he thought, could be implemented and practiced only if brahmacharya was accomplished in thought, word and deed. Gandhi affirmed that the observation of brahmacharya was important for truth and ahimsa, and this in turn was made fundamental for the execution of satyagraha and search for Swaraj. Suhrud notes that “Satyagraha involves recognition of truth and steadfast adherence to it. It requires self-sacrifice or self suffering and use of pure, that is, non-violent means by a person who is cleansed through self purification. Satyagraha and Swaraj are both modes of self recognition. This understanding allowed Gandhi to expand the conception of brahmacharya itself” (52). Gandhi declares that maintaining chastity and celibacy in marriage were important. The *grihasta* was to maintain *sannyasa*, and behave as if he is not married.

It has been observed that Gandhi was more concerned with subduing the enemies in our body than going out to conquer the worldly enemies. His self-government that was to be attained was not from the British but by conquering one’s own body.¹⁶⁷ This self-conquering of the body, he proclaimed would help the individual to serve the country. There should be self-restraint and self-suffering which he considered would help one to keep the body healthy. These healthy people, he manifested would win

¹⁶⁷ See, The Letter to Shankerlal Banker. (CWMG 17:218-19)

swaraj (self rule).¹⁶⁸ Gandhi proclaims that there was moral drain¹⁶⁹ in the country and wanted the *grihasta* to wish well of the country and if “wanted to see India become a nation of strong and handsome well-formed men and women, would practice self-restraint and cease to procreate for the time being.... it is our duty for the present moment to suspend bringing forth heirs to our slavery” (*Gandhi’s Body* 307).

The act of implementing brahmacharya is considered as the key technique for Gandhi to conquer the passions and bring them under complete subjection. This implementation should be performed so as not to hear “questionable language or obscene songs” and uttering “foul abuse instead of reciting the name of God, and so with the other senses.” Gandhi manifests that “He alone can be considered the true man who having subjected his passions becomes perfectly self-restrained...He alone is fit for *swaraj*. He alone is a seeker after truth. He alone becomes capable of knowing God” (*CWMG* 20:222). The observation of brahmacharya was the key to a healthy body, and essential for acquiring knowledge. It was to bring perfect control over the senses and organs, and the *brahmachari*, considered could attain anything and everything was possible for him. However, Gandhi agrees that it is an ideal state¹⁷⁰ – exists only in imagination state, and has been rarely achieved. The ‘ascetic ideals’ were to be approached for greater perfection. The ideal state of complete abstention from sexual thoughts and activities and speech would generate spiritual perfection. The process of

¹⁶⁸ Refer to, *CWMG* 79:113

¹⁶⁹ Refer to Joseph S. Alter, “Gandhi’s Body, Gandhi’s Truth: Non-violence and the Biomoral Imperative of Public Health,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 55, 2 (May, 1996), p. 307.

¹⁷⁰ Gandhi at a particular point of time replies to a letter about the ideal state. He says that: “Once the ideal is fully realized in practice, it ceases to be an ideal. Still we should go on, clinging to the ideal; else we would stumble and fall. The ideal straight line and the ideal right angle exist in imagination only. And yet, without the ideal line and the ideal right angle, the mason could not build a single house. Similarly, keeping in mind the ideal *swaraj* and the ideal means and trying to employ them, we shall win the right kind of *swaraj* in the shortest possible time” (*CWMG* 17:286-87).

national evolution – was in necessary of men who could perfect themselves in the art of brahmacharya and this alone would help in ‘mobilizing sufficient strength to destroy the British Empire.’

Gandhi is found to have been completely preoccupied with physical details of his ‘daily life because mastering his physical self was part of his program of mastering his spiritual self’ (Mehta 193). Moreover, he preached that the attack against the imperialistic rule was to be through self-suffering. The experiments of self-suffering and self-restraint, Gandhi thought would lead him and the masses towards self-realization, an act of facing God face to face in utter transparency. Gandhi attributed to the concept of brahmacharya, all kinds of virtues and no life seemed to exist beyond the ideal. It became an ideological weapon, which surpassed the structure of sexual denial to thought, word and deed. The Indian masses were to institutionalize brahmacharya, as Gandhi felt that the preservation of the vital fluid would help one in accumulating energy and peacefulness. He proclaims that by signifying

brahmacharya in purely physical terms, we have ceased to regard as guilty those who lose their temper every second. Just as the observance of brahmacharya in its physical aspect is essential for the welfare of the body, so also is spiritual brahmacharya necessary. I am convinced that we have only succeeded in prolonging our movement by getting angry with those who cooperate with the Government and by abusing the police. We would have all power in our hands today if we had, in thought, action and speech, remained peaceful, respectful and humble towards all our opponents. (*CWMG* 24:96)

The conception of brahmacharya¹⁷¹ was to be treated as a duty until the nation attains *swaraj* and further used to raise the moral level of the nation. Gandhi's perception was so deep, intense and confident about non-violence, truth and *brahmacharya*, if were to be completely followed in action, speech and thought, "then we should certainly get *swaraj* this year; we may also get it if someone else from among us can do these things, or if the *tapas* of all of us taken together proves sufficient for the purpose."¹⁷²

Gandhi at various phases of his life accepts that it was impossible – without the constant memorizing of God, to become one with the ideal; *brahmacharya* in word, deed, and thought. Kakar notes that for Gandhi, "celibacy was not only the sine qua non for *moksha*, but also the main spring of his political activities. It is from the repudiation, the ashes of sexual desire, that the weapon of non violence which he used so effectively

¹⁷¹Gandhi suggests that one who strives consistently to adhere to brahmacharya were to follow the rules of 'eating moderately, shun from eating spices, ghee, sweet meat and fried articles. He should never take liquor, but even tea, coffee, and other similar drinks may be taken only for medicinal purposes. He should wash his private parts with cold water twice or thrice [a day] and should pour cold water over them. He should never take heavy meals. He should give up late meals in the evening. His last meal should always be light so that he goes to bed with an empty stomach. He should not read erotic books, should not talk above or listen to such things. He should look upon every woman as his sister and never look at anyone with greedy eyes. He should never allow any such thought in his mind that this woman is good-looking and the other is not. If beauty consisted in shape or colour, we would have gratified our sight by looking at statues. Beauty lies in virtue and this is not a thing which can be perceived by the senses. He should control his passions by reflecting that a man who thinks of his mother or sister as beautiful or not beautiful commits a sin. He should never be alone with a woman. He should always keep his body and mind well occupied. I believe regular spinning to be a great help. This is only a guess. I am not yet in a position to speak from experience. It is my conjecture that the spinning-wheel helps more in acquiring self-control than any other type of physical work. He should ever keep repeating God's name for self purification. A theist believes that God sees the inmost depths of our heart, that He watches our movements even when we sleep. Such a man, therefore, should remain vigilant for all the twenty-four hours. Whatever the work we may be doing, mental or physical, we should never forget to go on repeating God's name. His name delivers us from all our sins. After a little practice, everyone will discover that it is possible to keep repeating God's name while One is doing anything or thinking about anything. Inward repetition of God's name is the only exception to the general rule that a person can think about only one thing at a time because it is spontaneous to the *atman*. Other thoughts are the product of ignorance. For one who knows that God does everything, who is wholly absorbed in thoughts of Him, what remains for such a one to do or to think about? Such a person stops thinking about his separate identity and regards himself only as an instrument in God's hands.

¹⁷² Gandhi mentions in one of his letters about his extreme belief that they would attain *swaraj* if brahmacharya was to be followed in complete terms. See, *CWMG* 25:62.

in his political struggle against the racial oppression of the South African white rulers and later against the British Empire, was phoenix-like born” (Kakar 96).

The disciplinization of the nation, as Gandhi presumed could be attained through *brahmacharya*. He considers the notion as one of the “greatest disciplines without which the mind cannot attain requisite firmness” (Suhred 27). The idea of reforming the nation was to be smothered with the technology — *brahmacharya*, as its central concern.

Hardiman notes that “Gandhi advocated celibacy as the surest means through which the Indian people could sustain their health and decolonise their bodies” (*Gandhi* 28).

Gandhi advocated that the masses of India were to be instructed with disciplinary ideals. He was keen about disciplining the nation in ascetical approaches.¹⁷³ These approaches were to assist him in attacking the imperial administration and not the administrators.

The disciplined nationalist ascetic was to look upon himself as a servant to the society, ‘earn for it sake and spend for its benefit, then purity enters into his earnings and there *ahimsa* in the venture’ (Iyer 390). The ascetic principle ‘celibacy’ according to the interpretations of Gandhi becomes an affair of continuity for *ahimsa*. The aspect of self-control was to lead the body politic towards self-suffering and this in turn towards truth. A religio-politics was to be reconstructed on the ultimate definitions of religion that being in accordance to the law of God. The religious ascetical discipline was to kindle the political structures of the society, without aiming for political power.

The act of disciplining the body was to retreat from violence and generate the true strength of *ahimsa*. Gandhi states that “God is a living Force. Our life is of that Force. That Force resides in the body, but is not the body” (413). *Brahmacharya*, as a

¹⁷³ Refer to CWMG 25:114.

way of disciplining one's body was to constitute the body politic for a national religious-political duty. The masses were to believe in the existence of the great Force and thus remain potent. The effective 'weapons' derived from religious affairs were never to assist religion in divorcing politics, instead go ahead to create a nation which will have "no political institution and therefore no political power...that government is the best which governs the least" (402).

Gandhi's belief in the aspect of non-violence, made him to observe the habits, viz. self-suffering, selfless action, fasting, celibacy, which were to be performed over one's body to achieve godliness and disciplining of the body. One such method that Gandhi followed was *satyagraha*, "not only a method based upon the moral superiority of self-suffering; but is a mode of conduct that leads to self-knowledge" (Suhred 49-50). Gandhi wanted his followers to implement the idea of "Pure means" that he believed are means of non-violence and adopted by pure persons.

The self search process was an act of purifying oneself and aiming to seek Truth. Moreover, *Satyagraha* became a method of self-search process, which in turn was directly linked with *Swaraj*. The idea of *Swaraj* gained its full meaning to Gandhi, "when we learn to rule ourselves. This idea of ruling the self was fundamentally different from self-rule or home-rule. To rule ourselves means to be moral, to be religious, and to have control over our sense" (50). Gandhi's aspect of *satyagraha* was a direct national duty, which was in search of a religious moral-political truth, and was considered would assist in reclaiming the political sphere from the imperial administrative power.

It is observed that Gandhi spoke for a moral political ethics concerning the synthesization of the individual values into a collectivist community values. His notion of *satyagraha* was based on love and self-suffering. The notion was considered a practical duty based on truth and rightness, which makes a person fearless and this state of mind never allows one to any subjective action. Gandhi preached *satyagraha* – an attitude of mind which dealt with practical politics. His primary goal was to constitute a religio-political field, and reveal that truth alone would facilitate to conquer the system of the enemy. Satyagraha was advocated as soul-force, which was manifested as against armed strength by Gandhi. Moreover, it was specifically an ethical weapon, and men structured in accordance to an ethical way of life could use it in a wise manner.

Gandhi asserts that the ascetic features and institutionalizing non-violent resistance were to be emulated by Indians for the sake of the mother nation. They were to equip themselves with *satyagraha* – a permit for an ethical self, courageous strength and compassionate nature. Gandhi defines *satyagraha*

is not physical force. A satyagrahi does not inflict pain on the adversary; he does not seek his destruction. A satyagrahi never resorts to firearms. In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill-will whatever.

Satyagraha is pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called satyagraha. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it burns the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love. “Nonviolence is the supreme dharma” is the proof of this power of love. Non-violence is a

dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. (*CWMG* 16:10-11)

Satyagraha becomes a possession that could be attained only through a disciplined rigorous regimen. The effeminate ‘character’ was assimilated as one who could not perform his duty for the nation and until he is healthy, strong and achieves self-control over his physical and mental elements could endure the hardships of *satyagraha*.

The aspect of *satyagraha* was to be taken up for the fight for freedom from the imperial rule. However, it was a religious aspect that could not be apart from political activity. It was one of the core apparatus’ that would exercise a moral formation on all the other techniques. The constitutionalization of religion and politics was to be formulated upon the aspects – *satya* (truth),¹⁷⁴ *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *tapas* (self-suffering). Here, the aspect of religion was not some customary notion, but that religion that underlies all religions and does not try to displace any religion in particular. The synchronization of religio-politics using Truth and Righteousness is attempted and further embellished with reality. Gandhi affirms that there are spiritual implications to the socio-political life. His experiments, Gandhi notes are formulated with the assistance of the notions truth and non-violence.

The duty to be performed for the sake of the nation was to handle and apply *satyagraha* in a suitable manner. The opponent was to be won through self-suffering i.e., by love. This application was regarded would able one to undergo “every form of bodily

¹⁷⁴ Gandhi defines that the term “*Satya* (Truth) is derived from *Sat*, which means being. And nothing is or exists in reality except Truth. That is why *Sat* or Truth is perhaps the most important name of God. In fact it is more correct to say that Truth is God than to say that God is Truth ... it will be realized that *Sat* or *Satya* is the only correct and fully significant name for God. Please refer to *Young India*, 30 July 1931, p. 196.

suffering so that the soul may be set free and be under no fear from any human being or institution. Once in it there is no looking back. Therefore, there is no conception of defeat in satyagraha. A satyagrahi fights even unto death. It is thus not an easy thing for everybody to enter upon it” (19:328). The practice and behaviour were to signify a complete disarmament of all opposition. *Satyagraha*, the truth-force is used to confront and surmount untruth, subjection and violence. The dutiful individual was to take up *satyagraha* in assistance for reconstructing politics in a truth-centred and non-violent manner. As a *satyagrahi*, the individual was to restructure the relationship with the oppressor into a moral interdependent mutuality. Gandhi wanted the nation to be assured with a pleasing combination of fearless non-violent and moral elements in a whole.

Gandhi states that the duty of the masses for the sake of nation was to hang on to *satyagraha* and never to put down from the “path of justice. That is the only road to happiness. The weapon that has fallen into your hands is invaluable. No one can stand against it. One who has realized the beauty of it would firmly say that there is no other religion but that of truth” (17:31). The people were to follow the course of ascetical practices of maintaining a routine of meditation, restriction over diet and in addition physical labour and spinning. This productivist set of principles of right conduct and moral values among the body politic were said to assert a transformation of social relations and the production of the *satyagrahi*. This Gandhian nationalist ascetic is then established with the idea of having won everything, as ‘satyagraha becomes a celestial weapon, which can be fittingly held as he possesses manliness and courage’ (17:32).

The ‘Gandhian ascetics’ was systematized through the mechanics of fearless duty performed for the nation and sticking oneself to truth. He considers that ‘pure bravery

lies in the power of endurance and this becomes an authoritative *satyagraha*.' This function was to lead the body politic in a moral truthful and self-suffering manner. However, Gandhi emphasizes that this is not cowardice or weakness, but is a higher form of courage. The observation of fasting and devoting oneself to religious contemplation and trying to understand the true nature of *satyagraha* – guided by religious spirit – by recollecting illustrations from holy scriptures, were considered to be aids, for national progress and to the development of the ascetic nationalist ideals. The act of adhering to *satyagraha* was even considered to unite everyone.¹⁷⁵ The selfless action, synchronized with self-discipline was to generate spiritual consciousness in the nationalist ascetic.

Gandhi's idea of *satyagraha* was a practical extension of non-violence and the fundamental principle of the nationalist programme. However, the principle was not to become a political strategy but a realization of inner spirituality. Gandhi seems to have promoted non-violence mainly due to his assumption of it being an effective weapon, and it looked as the right choice. It is obvious that the ascetical traditions were already imbued into the nationalist struggle by the time Gandhi started to establish his ideas. The ascetic ideals, which were more an 'imaginary quest,' became the main source for constituting a religio-political life. The nationalist ascetic was to, according to Gandhi, deploy non-violence into a technology, which moulds passivity, submission, and self-suffering into a discipline.

Gandhi was clear that his action of non-violence would be a protest and persuasion designed to resist the system of the oppressor. It was a symbolic act of

¹⁷⁵ Refer to *CWMG* 18:33.

showing that the body politic was strong in its own traditional way. Gandhi's *satyagraha* was to be a creed, a way of life and only then it was to attack the imperial regime's institutions, and the methods adopted by the administration. The purpose of the struggle was to be a personal sincerity and a positive moral duty favouring the establishment of co-operation with the opponent, but not to support the system. It can be assumed that Gandhi analyzed the structural and fundamental levels of violence that were inherent in the existing Hindu scriptures. He wanted the masses to be trained and made aware of the violence at the religio-political structural level. This was to be extinguished by the use of the same Hindu scriptures, which were to be re-constructed in a passive 'political ascetic' manner.

The 'political sannyasi' was to be constructed through a systematic effort, which mainly aimed at removing the inherent structural violence. Gandhi was well aware of the fact that violence was deeply rooted in the state and is formulated in an organized form. So, Gandhi seems to have re-shaped the ascetic ideals in such a manner that this 'brutal force' was to be re-systematized into 'truth-force'. This 'soul-force' was to aggravate the methods and systems and not the 'enemy'. His ideological manifestation of non-violence was grounded on accepting suffering. The acceptance of suffering, an 'ascetic practice', which Gandhi was quite well aware of, was designed to 'purify' the body politic. Moreover, the 'enemy' was expected, would undergo a transformation of truth conscience. The act of implementing *satyagraha* was considered would bring a change in the opponent's values and a change in his behaviour and an understanding of his self.

Gandhi wanted the *satyagrahi* to be a great ascetic serving in the midst of society by rooting in his heart, self-control and selflessness. He preached that "if things do not

bind us, if we are not attached to things even when they are easily available, that, according to me, is a greater test of our detachment than mere withdrawal to a lonely forest” (Iyer 386). The nature of possessing self-control, self-suffering and detachment inwardly were essential for *satyagraha*, the only force, according to Gandhi, that would assist in re-constructing a religio-political India.

III

It is a well known fact that the first reading and even a personal discovery of the *Gita* for Gandhi came through Edwin Arnold’s translation. Gandhi strongly expected and preached that “there are no politics devoid of religion. They subserve religion. Politics bereft of religion are a death-trap because they kill the soul.”¹⁷⁶ For Gandhi, “the *Gita* is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore there is no question of selection.”¹⁷⁷ It can be assumed that some of the Hindu religious texts are interpolated, ‘misread’ and misinterpreted.¹⁷⁸ Some of the religious texts have been analysed, preached, in such a way that they would circumscribe according to circumstances prevailing at that point of time.

It has been in vogue that Gandhi was a stern follower of truth and ahimsa (non-violence). He claims that he is a follower of Hinduism. Further, he says, “I have, for years past, been swearing by the Bhagawadgita, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my kamadhenu, my guide, my ‘open sesame’, on hundreds of

¹⁷⁶ Cited from *Young India*, 3 April 1924.

¹⁷⁷ Cited from *Harijan*, 5 Dec. 1936.

¹⁷⁸ See, Irawati Karve, *Yuganta* (Hyderabad: Disha, 1991).

moments of doubts and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me” (*What* 38). Gandhi incites, not to take into account such aspects that are against the ways of looking at ahimsa (non- violence) and truth. Moreover, he asserts,

It does not matter that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the Vedas. It is enough for us that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in Vedic scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of Vedic society, it can form no precedent for a votary of ahimsa. (48)

Gandhi was one among the Indian nationalist ideologues who re-structured the *Gita* for a nationalist cause. He was quite aware of the fact that his interpretation of the *Gita* differed from the generally accepted concept. He accepted that his teachings on the *Gita* were reframed. Gandhi was more concerned about formulating the principle of non-violence in the *Gita*. However, he approved that the *Gita* admitted war, but his emphasis was that it was more a kind of metaphorical replication in allegorical characters of the “war going on in our bodies between the forces of Good (Pandavas) and the forces of Evil (Kauravas)” (Jordens 89). He wanted the *Gita* to be looked as a text that would illuminate the spiritual knowledge in one’s inner self, and to be re-constituted in accordance to the period and circumstances. Therefore, according to Gandhi, it becomes a book of ethical and moral devotion, establishing selflessness for a human cause. One of the aims, Gandhi perceived, was that the masses were to acquire the state of self-

realization. It was *Gita*, which of all the scriptures, for Gandhi – the most excellent path that assisted the ‘self’ to endeavour to reach the state of the supreme.

The *Gita* was a model for Gandhi, which was matchless when discussing the issue of renunciation of fruits for action. The “spiritual dictionary” became the manifesto for establishing a nationalist devotion. The observances of the ashram and most of his experiments were based upon “the mother who never let him down.” Gandhi constantly referred to the *Gita*, which did not undergo any further significant changes after his definite articulation of the text in 1925. He believed and preached that the *Gita* saying: “Have devotion, and knowledge will follow.” As already mentioned, the *Gita* was a text to Gandhi that did not discuss the issue of violence.

Gandhi strongly asserted that “the teaching of the *Gita* does not justify war, even if the author of the *Gita* had intended otherwise” (97), and further proclaims that it has changed men’s lives. It was a book for Gandhi, which took up historical personages and issues to poetise the fight between ‘good and evil, spirit and matter, God and Satan’(99). The *Gita* is considered as a praxis for it comments on the aspect of inner and outer control of the self. For Gandhi, the aspects “control and non-attachment as described in the passages of the *Gita* are not just mental and moral preparations for the fullness of religious life; he considers them to be the very essence of religion, and consequently the very essence of the message of the *Gita*” (100).

It is observed that Gandhi followed and proclaimed to take upon the *Gita* as the constant guide to produce desirelessness in one’s heart through a constant devotion towards the goal of attaining freedom. The performance of the national duty itself was to be moralistic and supremely individualistic, which in itself became a concept of religion,

that discussed mainly on self-realization. The *Gita* is epitomized in such a manner as if it is assessing the devotee's qualities to be on par with that of a sage – the ascetic ideals. The aspect of renunciation meant in the *Gita* for Gandhi, is as an action undertaken without expecting the fruit, which is a bitter experiment of faith. The *Gita* was rendered as a text that was discussed about a 'religion', which preached about the renouncer, was to look even at the worldly pursuits. Gandhi states that the religious aspects that are preached by the *Gita* are concerned about everyday's practical life.

It is a well known fact that most of the Gandhi's ideas of the nationalist discourse were inspired from the *Gita*. His solutions for religio-political aspirations were derived from the *Gita*. The aspect of detachment is found as the most highlighted issue in the *Gita* for Gandhi, and the other aspects are considered to be revolving around this central theme. It has been noted that

it was through the concept of anasakti that Gandhi evolved two important notions in his nationalist discourse: the satyagraha and non-cooperation. Although, Gandhi applied the principles of satyagraha widely in various situations, in the context of anasakti it meant performance of dispassionate, ceaseless, and intense activity by a Karmayogi by strictly adhering to ahimsa and truth and ultimately attaining self-realization. Similarly, the notion of non-cooperation meant non-engagement in others' duty. Satyagraha is the positive form of anasakti and non-cooperation is its negative aspect. (Gowda 176)

The mechanics, duty and devotion were to become selfless and devoid of connection to its result. The individual to become a perfect devotee for the nationalist cause was to

realize himself. The perfect devotion was to assist and attend the aspect duty for the practical concerns of everyday life. The aspect of *anasakti* was linked to *ahimsa* and truth.

Gandhi aspired for a nation that was to be found not merely on historical equations but on ethical and moral foundations. In this regard, the aspects, *tapasya*, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha*, *anasakti*, and devotion with non-attachment were qualified as central. The *anasaktiyogin* was never to take *sannyasa* or self-centredness as an alternative, instead take the doctrine as a strong bond, which would establish the thought of caring the welfare and selfless service for others. This aspect of duty becomes a religious devotion or service rendered to God. Gandhi considered that the “*anasakti* ethic would consolidate communal solidarity and *varna* since it was tied to universal welfare. *Anasakti* regarded striving for public good and God-realization as identical. Further, *anasaktiyoga* places human beings at a much deeper level of equality than mere consideration of material possessions or vocation” (197). The body politic was to structuralize by putting the aspect of *anasaktiyoga* into practice for a universal goal.

The *Gita* was ascribed with qualities, by Gandhi, which would constitute a Gandhian nationalist ‘ascetics’. The body was to be affirmed with devotional duty towards an ascetic nationalist foundation. The devotion for the nation was to be maintained by being selfless, ever forgiving, fearless, pure, and disciplined. The *Gita* was taken up as a manual by Gandhi and his followers to liberate the nation through selfless action. The *Gita* on its own stand was regarded as a religion of active revitalization and the moral proposition of the Indian nation. However, the traditional institution of *asceticism* can be counted to be underplaying in the engagement of the masses

in their performance of duty towards the nation. The religio-political situation that was meant to be stabilized was more in tune with an ascetic moral spirit, which was never to be accepted by Gandhi. Gandhi's nationalist discourse, rather than just Indian, was more in tune with a universal goal and the liberation of the 'self' at the same time. Gandhi's concept of freedom was universal and 'internal' in nature.

The religio-political synthesis that Gandhi tried through his technique of *ascesis* was already a structuralized movement in the hands of the nationalist ideologues like Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. It is obvious that Gandhi was different in his approaches to reach the above said goal. However, "it is possible to detect remarkable similarities between their thought patterns and teachings; so much so that it appears as if it was Gandhi's historic role to carry forward the work for reform and revitalization of Hinduism, which Vivekananda left unfinished" (Nanda 68).

For Gandhi, the ascetic ideals had become measuring principles of his own sense of self. Gandhi characterized and categorized the conception of *ascesis* by acclimatizing it to his own ideological production of a category that is constituted as religio-politics. Gandhi interpreted concepts according to requirements of the time like "fasting was not merely a necessary ritual for the pious; it could be used as a tool of social action. An ashram was not merely a place for prayer and meditation, but also for training workers for service of the country" (68).

The Gandhian praxes inscribed the 'ascetic ideals' as, *satyagraha*, *ahimsa*, *darshan*, and *tapasya* in a distinct religio-political undertone for a nationalist cause and emphasized itself with a reconstructed self-image through the ideal of a moral self-definition. The Gandhian analysis attempted to standardize and incorporate the 'ascetic

ideals' as disciplined moral values in everyday life. This, Gandhi considered, could be constituted by maintaining a good and healthy body. Gandhi wanted the body to be trained for the sake of being immune to societal things but remain in the society and move through it by enveloping the ascetic values. The structuring of disciplinary practices was more in tune with social terms.

Gandhi's conception was that the masses were to engage in revolutionizing themselves into self-controlled bodies, a construction, as if, which did not exist before. The past was to be acclimatized, slogans to be borrowed, so as to create a new action by draping oneself in the guise of the ascetic and not becoming one. Gandhi's notion of celibacy was brought into everyday practical situations and was never to become abstruse in its observances. It was constituted as a step towards self-realization.

The body politic were to discipline the 'body' without becoming worldly renouncers, even though the disciplinization was very much ascetic-like. The notions devotional discipline and *brahmacharya* were considered as effective agencies of action when ascribed with an encompassed religiosity. Gandhi characterized his notions, are a means to be of service, submissive and celibate, which are spiritual and moral virtues. He brought out the *grihasta-sannyasi* image; who earns, is part of the societal affairs, and is a celibate.

CONCLUSION

The ascetic subject in Indian nationalistic discourse is often understood as something, which is everything, but nothing at the same time. However, I have argued that the nineteenth century India witnessed the reconfiguration of the 'ascetic' as someone who involves in political actions as well. The act of spiritualizing patriotism was affiliated with ascetic features, namely, the disciplining one's 'self' and the formulation of a devotion to the mother-nation with a duty mindedness. The synthesis of a twofold ideology – religio-politics, was initiated with the help of ascetic practices. This fusion, it was thought, would generate a bond between the self and nation-formation, further, it was considered that it would 'renew one's potency'. The devotion towards mother-nation, it was thought, would engage in constructing the male self.

While the 'Indian (Hindu) nationalist' thought reorganised the ascetic subject to produce an idealized masculine iconic hero, it also led to the construction of internal 'Others', whereby non-Hindus were emphasized as 'internal enemies'. Often this attitude was justified as nationalist and counter-imperialist in intention. But the politicization of the religio-ascetic is undergoing a paradigm shift in the recent socio-political landscape of independent India, with the Hindutva movement crystallising into a Hindu majoritarian politics, necessitating a re-reading of the nineteenth century reconfiguration of the ascetic figure. Some aspects of Hindu nationalism have been manipulated to promote and organize culture, leading to friction in Hindu-Muslim relations, already fraught with the trauma of partition.

In this work, I have tried to delineate the ascetic subject in its transition by the Indian nationalist ideologues as a politico-spiritual figure, read Hindu. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that the ascetic subject is a reconstructed and reconfigured authoritative figure who intervenes in immanent life of the nation, a translation effected during the nineteenth century India. The ascetic subject was thereafter reinterpreted as an ideal who no more espoused renunciation as the sole and prime objective. Rather, the ascetic became involved in almost all socio-cultural issues. In general, therefore, it seems that a conscious schematization to metamorphose the ascetic subject was part of the Indian nationalist agenda in the nineteenth century.

The present study, hence, attempted to delineate this aspect of the ascetic subject in Indian nationalist discourse. It explained the central importance of Aurobindo Ghose and M.K. Gandhi, in particular, who, wittingly or not, were major influences in synthesising, if not in systemisation, of ascetic principles with Indian nationalism.

In conclusion, the main arguments of the four preceding chapters can be thus summarized: In the first chapter, entitled “Towards a Genealogy of the Ascetic,” in three separate sections, I have detailed the history and development of the ascetic model in Indian traditions, starting from the earliest recorded times till the early nineteenth century. I have shown that the ascetic subject has undergone several changes through the period and its transmutation has often led to the identification of the ascetic with divinity. At a later stage, Sankaracharya morphed the ascetic as a spiritual personality synthesized with the figure of the intellectual.

As we shift to the Bhakti movement this recognition became even more outstanding and ultimately progressed towards an ascetic cult, when the ascetic was

regularly thought of as the ambassador of the Absolute. However, it can be claimed, that the authority of the ascetic figures in the Bhakti movement was not restricted to the religious features of their followers' lives, but stretched to a larger societal plane. This period witnessed the ascetic figure becoming more and more imbricated with the wider social structure. Moreover, a communicative fusion with the 'Muslim' was a significant element leading to the development of a new concept of the existing belief structure in the subcontinent. Further, acquaintance with the European, almost exclusively through colonial rule, helped to create an analytical and religious infusing that subsequently led the religio-ascetic subject to be located with the socio-political arena of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The second chapter entitled, "The Ascetic in Indian Nationalistic Discourse", shows the translated ascetic's stance in nation-formation. As the structuring of Indian social relations by the British through the codification of various forms of knowledge contributed to the imperialist's hegemonic and political command on India – particularly, the notion of modernity then in circulation among the Indian populace through English education – resulted in the schematization for a nationalist thought. Hence, a schema focused on chiselling the past through the re-invention of mythological 'hyper-males' as iconic figures, and idealizing them for anti-colonial nationalism was undertaken. This however, can be stated, has led to the fabrication of an 'India' that has to an extent, slanted towards a Hindu-India. A close reading of Bankim's *Anandamath* designates the beginning of a (Hindu) nationalism and creating a fashion for the 'fighting ascetics'. The establishment of a direct connection between the spiritual authority and

nationalist thought by means of the ascetic features is the main argument of my second chapter.

In the third and fourth chapters, I have confined myself to the ascetic features in two Indian ideologues, viz. Aurobindo Ghose and M. K. Gandhi. Despite various similarities and the common intention of both were to spiritualize politics, a vivid contrast is observed in their amalgamation of politics and spirituality through religio-asceticism and reliance on discipline, devotion and duty. In their own individual perspectives, Aurobindo and Gandhi regarded politico-nationalist manoeuvres as emblems of spiritual consciousness – a path directing towards divine perception. Aurobindo and Gandhi are shown in the respective chapters as conceptualizing religion as experiential, paving ways for understanding politics as religious duty. In addition, they are shown to have engaged with certain outlooks that are compared and contrasted, viz. the transfusion of religion with politics and a constant exploration of the idea of religio-political nationalism. It is also observed that they appear as if they were not purely Hindu-oriented in that they tried to influence the adherents of Hinduism to observe the ‘true spirit’, though they helped in concretizing discourses on spiritual life as fundamental to nationalistic thought.

Aurobindo, influenced by the spiritual preceptors, embellished by Bankimchandra, propelled the Indian populace to refigure nationalist thought by giving a spiritual dimension to it and proclaimed that it is “not a mere political movement”. He advocated that nationalism is “a religion, a creed” coming from God and India is in need of its own schema of nationalism. He preached that the failure to procure desired results by the nineteenth century social reform movements was due to a blind imitation of

western ideas and trying to build national ideals on rationalist basis. Instead, he suggests that an emotional approach modelled on religious ideas, by dismantling conventional religion, would raise the spirit of nationalism to religio-patriotism.¹⁷⁹

I have tried to describe and examine Gandhian ascetics, its envisaged role within the body politic, in connection with the progression of a religio-political aspect in the Indian nationalistic discourse. Gandhi is understood and perceived as constructive, political, and a relentless spiritual advocate, in substantiation of him being lauded as a ‘political sannyasi’. Gandhi, considered by some critiques as a staunch follower of Hindu religion, defines religion as, “Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion which I certainly prize above all other religions, but the religion which transcends Hinduism, which enlarges one’s very nature, which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and whichever purifies”.¹⁸⁰ One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that Gandhi perceived and practised the “ascetic ideal”, which was more prone to Hindu religious notions, during the nationalist phase, leading to the transformation of the socio-religious conditions of India. His various experiments that codified ascetic features reinforce the argument that the Hindu ascetic was thereafter firmly yoked to Indian nationalistic discourse.

¹⁷⁹ My inquiry has been limited to that phase of his life, the years from 1893 until 1910, a time-space in which Aurobindo held importance for both extremist political action and spirituality at the same time. his arrival at Pondicherry (1910) is the period when Aurobindo dived completely into Yoga-sadhana. Aurobindo devoted his pursuits totally towards his spiritual work and his sadhana. He dedicated himself to reach a “Supramental” yogic state, which he asserted would make “know the ultimate secret of the world. The riddle of the world cannot be solved without it”. See, <http://sasp.collaboration.org/Nov24.html>. Though, Aurobindo maintained constant touch with the issues happening in British India, he had cut off connection with politics. After 1914, a series of Aurobindo’s works that were in tune with his yogic practices came up. Some of them are, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Secret of the Veda*, *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*, *The Upanishads*, *The Renaissance in India*, *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Future Poetry*.

¹⁸⁰ Cited from Mahatma Gandhi, *All Men Are Brothers: Autobiographical Reflections*, comp and ed. Krishna Kripalani (New York: Continuum, 1980), p. 51.

The ascetic ideal, closely associated with the notions of discipline, devotion and duty, were supposedly drawn from transcendence, but, in actual terms, were immanently political in that they were religious, but also strategic. The religio-ascetic features observed by Aurobindo and Gandhi taken up in this study depict that the ascetic and nationalistic features were synthesized and with time influenced each other and have become indistinguishable. The marriage of asceticism and nationalism was a strategy for some to popularize patriotism, while Aurobindo and Gandhi, as corroborated by their writings, seem to have actually believed in it, though with contradictory compulsions for our contemporary lives.

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