CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION
Kerouac presents two worlds: the world of suffering and the world of spiritual pursuits. In fact, both the worlds are concentric and not diametrically opposed to each other, avoiding possible frustrating situations which generally follow inordinate suffering. On the contrary Kerouac's attempt is to see light through insight developed through meditation, touching the very core of existence.

Visions of Gerard and Tristessa are the epitome of suffering and The Dharma Bums and the Desolation Angels represent the spiritual quest which brings in its compass such Buddhist doctrines as Tathata, Tathagata, Bodhisattva, void etc.

Kerouac unmistakably grasps the truth that in American life essential traditional values are dwindling fast and that the Americans have crucified Jesus to install the deity of
"Moneytheism". No quarter of American life is safe: there is sex perversity, there is an absence of family ties for broken marriages have become so very common: love has ceased to be a cementing force and politics is a culprit that lurks to liquidate enemies standing in its arena. Individual freedom is thrown overboard and an utmost precaution is taken by the government to see that no American falls a prey to the wiles of communists, thus bringing about regimentation in thinking. Kerouac's novels are to be viewed on this background. His characters are angels, walking in beatitude, this world of spiritual aridity.

Outside America, these characters watch life, participate in it to the extent their willful participation permits them but then they mostly follow their bohemian way of life. They have seen how the people live in different parts of the world, credulously following their
religion. Soldiers returning home and amicably mixing with the people, communities following superstitions where a man is sacrificed to please some supernatural power: people making money by speculation and betting, and so on. They have seen the church where a young woman with her child and an old man present a gruesome spectacle which can break anybody's heart. Kerouac protest against all that inhuman. His silent protest is pre-eminently vocal. He does not raise his hand in vociferous protest or his pen against it in a portentous or destructive gesture. His protest has vitality and energy of creation that is on par with placid revolution strengthened by religious vigour. It is not an escapist's stance; it is the treatment offered by a physician and this physician is no other than Buddha himself, who has prescribed many remedies for the maladies the world is suffering from. And here lies the significance of the Desolation
Angels. It not only makes diagnosis of the world maladies but it also prescribes a viable treatment, which, if the world follows, is sure to give relief.

Kerouac writes about his satori on the Desolation Peak which he experiences in the form of understanding that "Everything is void". Void or Sunyata is a state where all things lose their separative identity and a Diamond Truth of Absolute Reality is revealed to the seeker. Compassion and Prajna or Transcendental Wisdom are concomitants of void. Prajna helps to understand the true essence of an object or life. Compassion is a strong emotion we feel for the suffering beings. These together can effectively solve the problems of the world for most of the problems are created in the crucible of the thinking mind and if the mind is filled with skilful thoughts, skilful actions will ensue, and these in turn will create an atmosphere where people will live happily and peacefully.
Jack's characters live a life of spontaneity; they leave home and go about which, in fact, is "going forth" and meet their friends who are bums like them, take to drugs and free sex and even visit whore-houses. They indulge in these things not for sense gratification for the world of senses is nothing but illusion and enthrals the subject whereas the object of the dharmas bums is to liberate themselves from ignorance and reach the highest goal in nibbana and to experience the Absolute Truth. Therefore, every experience is valid as an experience and not something that tickles the senses.

In sex the Beats follow Tantric Buddhism which has developed as an independent Buddhist philosophy.

Kerouac's characters form a spiritual brotherhood and in their spiritual quest they look to East. What Ihab Hassan has said about the Beats the same could be said about Kerouac's
characters: "They wanted to reject the Western consciousness and revive the oriental mysticism."¹

His characters are nonconformists and want to 'dig' in the psyche and life for something that will sustain them in their life, rather than seek conciliation with the Church which has ceased to influence the people. They want to go beyond the phenomenal world which is deceptive for Mind-Essence is a result of Transcendental Wisdom. Though these characters indulge in sex, drugs and take to bohemian mode of life, they exhibit transcendental wisdom, which leads them along the Spiral Path or the Inner Path which is a way of Higher Evolution. Seeking purity of a child they want to discover "Original Face" which is innocent, unconditioned. Carolyn Gaiser's statement though made to describe the Beats, can rightly be applied to Jack's characters. She says "It is this tendency to 'dig' everything with which the Beat wants to 'rediscover' the innoncence of the natural man
who lives by instinct rather than reason."^{2}

Jack and his bums attain higher level of consciousness for they know Buddhist scriptures and they meditate and continue their search for love and freedom. They take off their clothes for they symbolise imposition of restriction put on the natural man, and thus they exhibit their liberation from social bondage.

John Tytell writes in this connection:

One of the images that best captures the motivating energy of this search is the nakedness that was expressed aesthetically in Jack Kerouac's idea of the writer Committing himself irrevocably to the original impulses of his imagination, in Ginsberg's relentless self exposure in a poem like "Kaddish", in Burrough's refusal in Naked Lunch to disguise the demonic aspects of his addiction. But for the Beats nakedness did not exist simply as an aesthetic standard, it was to become a symbolic public and private stance, making art
and action inseparable: thus Allen Ginsberg disrobed at poetry readings and Kerouac once wrote that he wanted to be like the medieval Tibetan scholar-monk Milarepa who lived naked in caves – and as a supreme final statement Neal Cassady was found naked and dead near a railroad track in Mediso. This emphasis on baring the body and exposing the soul, was an intuitive reaction to a betrayal the Beats felt because of mass acceptance of demeaning changes in the American idea of self determination. Nakedness signified rebirth, the recovery of identity.

The primary concern of Jack’s characters is exploring their "self". They have nothing to do with the past and in their subconscious mind they know they are what their Karma has made them. They have no future for it involves linkage with some person or group, which he does not want to have outside the beat centre. These characters come together, discuss different aspects of Buddhism and lead their own lives.
accordingly. Gene Feldman and Max Gartenberg observe:

Not capable of the act of faith required by a belief in tomorrow, the Beat Man values relationships only as they tend to reveal the truth of his present existence. For him, individuals and places are means whereby he can trace his own shadow and plumb his own nature. All of his contacts are immediate and intense. He has no future which rests on a connection with some person or group. Therefore no other human being can be important to him outside of the moment, and his relationships with others take on the form of a dialogue with a shifting *dramatis personae*, a dialogue always carried on in the present.

Kerouac's characters exhibit their higher consciousness in their knowledge of various doctrines of Buddhism such as Ten Paramitas, Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path. They strictly follow Ten Paramitas or Ten Perfections:
These perfections are
(1) Perfection of giving (dana-paramita),
(2) the perfection of Morality (sila-paramita),
(3) the perfection of patience (ksanti-paramita)
(4) the perfection of vigour (virya-paramita)
(5) the perfection of meditation (dhyana-paramita)
(6) the Perfection of wisdom (prajna-pramadhan or vow),
(9) Bala-paramita or the perfection of strength or power
(10) Jnana-paramita, or the perfection of knowledge.5

Kerouac's characters have nothing to do with the life of the squares. They shun politics and none of his characters show interest in it but are aware of the happenings in the world. Wherever they go they watchfully move in the midst of the people, and find themselves chested which is the way of the conditioned world. This happens not only in Tristessa in which Jack is relieved of money but in Desolation Angels also.
Kerouac's characters are bubbling with life for they follow virya paramita which makes them shove off stupor and get on in life with vigour. It is impossible for them to withhold themselves from activity for they believe in flux and avoid ennui. Therefore, before them the choice is never between action and inaction but between one action and another and ultimately "between egoistic and non-egoistic or empty actions."

Gerard, the elder brother of Jack, had altruistic attitude, his heart full of compassion for the suffering beings including animals. Himself suffering, his compassionate heart flowes out to other suffering being. Even Jack himself, in spite of his orgiastic life, has a compassionate heart, with which he remembers his mother and at last finds solace with her at home. Japhy Ryder and Ray Smith are other characters who are equally busy in their Zen Lunatic way, possess compassion and Transcendental Wisdom.
They have even Metta Bhavana which they extend to all sentient beings. Gerard has a pet cat and Tristessa has pet birds which become part of the families.

Metta literary means "friendliness" and it is distinguished from premā or Sanskrit premā. The actual practice of metta-bhavana has two aspects. One being the intensification internally, the other the external radiation of love. The chief difference between love and metta is that one is exclusive, the other is inclusive. Love, in the Buddhist sense of the term, is love only when it is felt impartially for all living beings. From this exalted and wholly spiritualized emotion it is obviously only a step to Equanimity. Compassion and sympathetic Joy or Mudita are closer still at hand for the first of these is only Love's response to the sufferings of others, the second, its reaction to their joys. Love may result in attachment and therefore in suffering. The
cultivation of *metta*, *karuna* and *mudita*, either jointly or individually, leads to the third stage of super-consciousness. Kerouac's novels are predominated by male characters and female characters play a very minor role in the development of the novels. These female characters exist flimsily like passing scenes and they are presented as partners in the sexual act. Only Jack's mother is an idealized character who appears toward the end of the *Desolation Angels*. Tristessa is a tragic character, but with the exception of these two, other women characters as they appear and disappear in the *Desolation Angels* and *Dharma Bums* are only partners in the sexual act to which they too readily agree. The male characters meet women characters accidently and have intercourse with them, take fancy for one or another and depart for the bums cannot stay at one place for a long time. The women are the sufferers for they are the targets of unrequited love. In *Dharma bums* we get tantric attitude towards
sex through Princess, a character in the novel.

"Yaah", yelled Princess from the bathtub. I'm telling you, she was actually glad to do all this and told me "You know, I feel like I'm the mother of all things and I have to take care of my little children".7

In this she is a Bodhisattva, with her sanctified sex, symbolizing Tathagata's womb. "—she was sex mad and man mad, so there wasn't much of a problem in persuading her to play Yabâyum."8

The tantra cult of 'yab yum' symbolizes the union of wisdom and compassion which merge into void. The motivation behind this is to attain Buddhahood and realise Buddha who is a combination of wisdom and compassion, which are masculine and feminine principles. The union of man and woman is a fusion of male and female principles.
Therefore, Kerouac's novels are a media through which he teaches the Americans to look at life from the other side. Charles K. Jarvis observes:

It is apparent – that writing was his media for his message and true persona. There is no doubt of the radical perspective and overview he has about the nature of social reality in America as he acts as a visual social documentary focusing on the foreground of specific lives and the larger context to educate us towards the sights, sounds, smells, and everyday existence of Americans in their element.

Jack's characters are prototypes. They are the ones he has created in his own image.

Jarvis rightly observes:

His characters are real, yet in the hands of Kerouac, they become something more than flesh and blood; they become extensions of Kerouac: they become great heroes who walk the Land and make the earth tremble and all the "feats" they perform are Kerouac's.
With the masterly stroke and touch of Jack's hand his characters get transformed into ideal human-beings, as they should, for they have a mission before them to rectify the erring America by placing before her their examples, Jarvis once again observes:

It matters not who the characters are: Neal Cassady the perennial protagonist with the transparent Pseudonyms; Zaza, the French Canadian moron masturbating again and again on Lowell's Moody Street; Gerard, his brother saint, releasing a thrashing mouse from a trap and taking it home to nurse it — Jack Kerouac sculptured them all in his own grand ideal image. By his own admission, Kerouac preferred to look in his books as chapters comprising the Dulux Legend."

The novels bring into focus the character of Jack as a compassionate being, on the way to 'Bodhisattvahood, with his altruistic attitude towards life and beings. He has kept his promise
he has given to his dying father that he would look after his mother. The charge that Jack had Oedipal fixation with his mother is untenable when we look into his relationship with her. Though he went on road temporarily to experience "the fits and bursts" of life and grew as a writer, he always returned dutifully to her, never getting involved with any other person. "This allegiance towards his mother was also based on the stark reality that she worked in shoe factories to support her unemployed son, "the writer", waiting for him to become recognized as a great author. Jack felt he must repay her with kindness."¹²

It should also be remembered that after the death of Gerard, Jack naturally came closer to his mother to relieve her traumatic condition. She had just lost one son and did not want to lose another. This made her to have protective attitude towards him. Jack's father died at fifty seven and at the time his mother was fifty and
Jack was twenty four. Mrs. Kerouac had even more Losses in her childhood. She had never known her mother and lost her father when he was thirty seven. At the age of fifteen she began working in a shoe factory. Therefore, even when Jack ventured too far off the road, he always returned to her unfailingly. Or, if he was tired of the Beat scene, he would regress back to the nostalgic past and rework his lingering childhood and adolescent memories. Visions of Gerard was thus written during the apogee of his Beat years. He considered this book his favourite work, while every one else was responding to the fury and orgy of On the Road.

Barry Gifford and Lawrence Lee note in the Prologue to their book Oral Biography of Jack Kerouac:

Kerouac's novels were fiction, not reportage - It's fascinating to see the way in which real people, places, and events are utilized in the books, which
then feed back to alter
reality, but the technical
leaps and the heart-breaking
beauty of Kerouac's prose
takes his novels into a
realm far beyond that of
the reporter or diarist.
His books are the product of
a genius at recollection.

Jarvis divides Kerouac's novels into two
categories: Beat and Lowell. He includes On
the Road, The Dharma Bums, Big Sur and The
Subterraneans in the first. Jarvis observes:

In this search he created
a new language, a kind of
onomatopoetic glossary of
pain. These novels are
really long essays that
try to record the true
cadence of life. Kerouac
offers some explosive
flashes of life's terror.

Jarvis further observes:

Kerouac's Lowell novels may
be regarded as the other
half of his spiritual
Schizophrenia. Here, his
the romantist. His characters are seen silhouetted against a twilight sky. They move about with a rugged, honest innocence and Kerouac seems to sweep for them because death will sweep them all away. --- They are a microcosm of larger U.S. cities; but because of this smaller dimension, they offered Kerouac a sharper focus of man struggling to put meaning into his life. If they were crude, hard-working people, Kerouac ennobled them because they were not afraid of life.

Although Kerouac obviously contributed monumentally towards the counter-culture movement in the 1950's which found fruition by the end of the 1960's, he could not allow himself to consciously feel a part of it. He was concerned more with the cosmic void rather than the specific, mundane, political issues of the day. He remained a "lonesome Traveller".

As a novelist Kerouac will be remembered for the message he has given to America which
sounds like a warning to the world that materialistic values and non-tolerance towards other political ideologies like communism, will result in medley. Jack stands like a Messiah sounding warning to the society to be on the look out in time before it falls headlong into the abyss of excesses. But it is for this reason only that he had to face the charge like Socrates that he was corrupting the minds of the young people. No doubt, middle American values had begun to be shaken with due cause in the 1950's and Jack was part of the new force. By the 1960's this movement had become a threat to the American Capitalistic system.

There were youths who were branded anti-Americans for not supporting the wars.

The consumers refused to buy clothes and deodorants and refused to get married in the Church and lived in Suburbia like anyone else.

Charles E. Jarvis notes:
It is no mistake that he was perceived as corrupting the values of youth in our society. Had Jack not been revolutionary in challenging the middle class life style, he never would have been branded by the smug upper class intellectual critics as corrupting the youth of the Land by suggesting hedonistic, amoral pursuits in his Beat books. It is clear that it is this elitist group that Jack had contempt for all his life, this group could never really see what it meant to be beat because they are the defenders of it with their intellectual rationalizations. His allegiance was with the beatitude of the working class people.

Jack's contribution to American novel lies in the fact that he has come out in the open with a protest whereas all literature since the Industrial Revolution had moved uneasily in the shadow of that revolution, more or less uncertain of the role to adopt. There had been novels and poems of protest from the inside and from the outside like D.H.Lawrence, Celine
and many others. In his novels *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* Kerouac provides the answers, a bewildering about-face to the earnest nineteenth century. He plumps for sweetness and light; the machine is to run on benevolence, tolerance and love with fill-ups of contemplation to keep the batteries charged by. Instead of rejecting modern life, he uses it. Kerouac is in fact a religious novelist and therefore immediately open to the charge of naivette. But this is unrealistic for the religion of his characters is one of violent movement attenuating with utter stillness. They do not underestimate the odds against them. Everybody knows everything, and there is absence of blame which makes *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums* interesting among his novels of revolt. There is no enemy within oneself.

Kerouac works on an old American vein yearning for the simple life, the great outdoors. Yet he
never contrasts the one with its opposite urban culture. They co-exist.

Kerouac's novels adopt existential form for they conceive that man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. In Buddhism, however, the range of possibilities of conditioned existence open to man by virtue of his 'central' position in the universe is incomparably wider than that envisaged by Existentialism. Moreover, Buddhism vouchsafes the mundane centrality of human life in respect of other forms of sentient existence and is analogous to the transcendental centrality of Buddhahood. This means that man not only makes of himself whatever he wants to be but also cease altogether from making himself anything whatsoever. Buddhism, proclaims that human nature is also a Buddha nature. Man realizes his Buddha nature when the energy of which he is the expression, no longer craves manifestation in any other form of conditioned
existence. Since this happens neither automatically or instantaneously but by pursuing a regular sequence of steps with energy and determination over a certain period, we find ourselves confronted by The Path.

Kerouac's novels which present suffering have no tragic element in them for suffering comes in its transcendental aspect and there is no feeling of 'waste' of human life left in readers, which is contrary to the impression we get of Shakespeare's great tragedies. The death of Gerard combines tragic grandeur with some sort of satisfaction for in Gerard's death we see the death of a boy who was a saint in whose death humanity gained. Tristessa suffers from ignorance and sense gratification, violating the fifth precept in Panch-sheela. Death presents no awe to the characters and for them, in the ultimate analysis, the world of sansara is also the world of nibbana.
Kerouac faced many obstacles but the greatest of them was the establishment that went all out to invalidate his depiction of social injustice. Ironically, even the working class people whom Kerouac felt drawn in sympathy and whom he eulogized in his writings were caught in a bind themselves, certainly aware of these exploitation while at the same time having been successfully socialized not to show anger at the government perse. To do so would be unpatriotic. Yet the outlet for this political frustration all too often was directed to more disadvantaged Lower class people.

Kerouac's personal responsibility and his obligation to his family caused him much guilt and anxiety but this contributed to his empathy and pain for the true Americans. Thus he was successful in presenting us reality about America: facing crisis of values and possible solution for them.
Even though Kerouac sounds heretic in his views, they are very sound and have strength of directives for the future America rolling in affluence. It is to the credit of Kerouac that he warned against America’s becoming the continent of the Cliché. He not only saw the ‘area of darkness’ but also gave the means to escape from it. His message to the world is that we must discard the way of thinking that holds that human progress consists of the unlimited extension of man’s desires. As human beings we must learn to ‘know sufficiency’. This does not mean that we should negate or deny desires, wants and needs but that we must control our desires and put them to good use. We must not discard desires, but rather we should not be bound by them.

The practical and non-metaphysical character of Zen has naturally appealed to Beat Generation. The irrational and antitraditional attitude of some Zen Masters appealed directly to them as a justification of their non-deferential
and eccentric behaviour. The contribution of Jack Kerouac is two-fold. He gave a new substance to the American novel and also a new prose style which is called "automatic prose" or "spontaneous prose" which broke syntax-pattern completely, setting at nought all the traditional English punctuation discipline. His novels are a landmark in the literary history of America and his name will be remembered with William Burroughs'.