INTRODUCTION

The self is Brahman.¹

The self ... is a God-
image, or at least cannot
be distinguished from one.²

The quest for Self is as ancient as man. Or,
to shift metaphor, quest is embodied in the psyche
of human race from the time it acquired conscious-
ness. In common literary parlance, the Self is used
variously and, as such, it has variable connotations.
In this dissertation, however, the concept of the
Self is being applied in the sense that the protago-
nists not only survive the shocks of the circumstances
but transcend their ego state, or the personal core.
It does not imply, however, that the protagonists
attain divine status and afflatus but that in the
matrix of their being, they register a substantial
growth both psychically and existentially. Or to
adopt a phrase from Karl Jaspers, the protagonists
reach a stage of "being-in-itself" which is an all-
embracing experience of the minuscule and the
absolute.

The above statements on the Self were made with
a few thousand years of human thought between them.
The first is the voice of a Hindu sage speaking to
his chosen disciples; the second is the voice of
Carl Gustav Jung whose originality and audacity of
thinking have been phenomenal and no less than a
legend. If the Upanishadic concept of the Self
has religious connotations, Jung's conceptualisation
of the term has also a religious undercurrent, but
the process of reaching this stage is the conscious
evaluation of an individual's psyche and the trans-
formation thereof. The Mandukya Upanishad describes
the fourth and the highest condition of the Self as
"the awakened life of supreme consciousness. It is
neither outer nor inner-consciousness, neither semi-
consciousness, nor sleeping consciousness nor
unconsciousness ... it is above all distinction,
beyond thought and inseparable." Jungian formulations
are no different. For Jung, the Self "is, in part,
and potentially empirical ... it is a transcendent-
al concept, for it presupposes the existence of
unconscious factors on empirical grounds and thus
characterises an entity that can be described only
in part but, for the other part, remains at present
unmoveable and illimitable." The Buddhists speak
about the Means of Attaining the Other Shore of
Wisdom, the Buddha Essence or the Great Symbol.
Thus the Self signifies the evolving of human
consciousness into its highest expression. It is
the Ideal to which all human ideas and thoughts
aspire, the ultimate consummation the human desire
endeavours for. Not the efforts of a Sisyphus, but
the determined enquiry by a Nekhiketa becomes the archetype of human search for the ultimate ideal, the Self.

Of old, the quest signified man's maiden effort to carve security for himself in the caves and seek means to satiate his hunger. The individual consciousness gained with the expansion in general consciousness and hence the routes of man's quest were revolutionised, reloaded in accordance with his appetites. Be it Jason's Golden Fleece, the Holy Grail for the knights of King Arthur, the discovery of a new land by Columbus, the spiritual odyssey of Dante or St. Augustine, or Gilgamesh's quest for the plants of Immortality, or Nekhiketa's determination to pluck the heart of the mystery called death - the nodal point in all these is man's quest for something which is beyond his conscious sense of reality and the endeavour strengthens, broadens, alters and refines his consciousness.

At this juncture, it would be worthwhile to ascertain the different manifestations which spring from the basic concept of the Self. Just as the ego is the centre of conscious personality, the Self is the supreme deity in human psyche. It is the ordering and the unifying centre of the total
psyche. Hence, the ego is subordinate to it, evolves from it, confronts it, is supplemented and compensated by its encounters and reconciliation with the seat of objective psyche, the Self. Edward F. Edinger has mentioned certain themes as those which peculiarly refer to the Self: themes of wholeness, totality, the union of opposites, the creative point where God and Man meet, the point where transpersonal energies flow into personal life, eternity as opposed to temporal flux, capable structures bringing order out of chaos, etc.

With the coming of twentieth century, in the wake of anthropology, comparative religions, psychology, especially depth archetypal psychology of Jung and his followers, the notion of Self came to be conceptualised in rigorous, intelligible and munificent terms. The process which leads to a more comprehensive recognition of one's total personality, the Self, is the process of individuation. In Jungian terms, individuation leads to a more complete and better realisation of the collective qualities of human being. Divesting oneself of the persona and the parental images and the recognition and assimilation of one's shadow must precede the
realization of anima/animus. The quaternio which signifies the transcendental state is completed by the presence of the wise old man figure in case of man and the chthonic mother in case of a woman.

In this dissertation, the psychological approach to the Self has been used primarily without pre-empting the knowledge and the perspectives available to us on Self in general, however diffused they may be. This author has also used perspectives of Joseph Campbell in order to elucidate further the parameters of Self. Joseph Campbell describes the quest of a hero as a nuclear unit of the monomyth and divides it into three stages: separation, initiation, return. The core of the analysis of the dissertation is, however, grounded in Jungian conceptual system which is persona, ego, shadow, anima/animus and archetype. Persona is the archetype of adaptation to the external reality. In literal terms, persona represents the role one plays on the worldly stage. It is that part of the ego which is turned towards the outside world. The ego is the centre of consciousness and all conscious contents are related to it. It is not to be related with the totality of the psyche which is the Self. It is acquired during one’s life time and
goes on developing. Shadow refers to the repressed side of personality, be it dark or bright. In many times, Shadow may mean the positive side of personality which remains ignored because a person identifies with negative qualities. Between the persona and the shadow there is a tension, a gap that the ego has to mediate. For example, a puritan may be a vicarious sensualist somewhere, and a prude may be a peeping Tom. Anima reflects the image of the feminine; it is the eternal image of a definite feminine that a man carries with him. Anima has the same place in the psyche of a woman. Just as shadow is experienced through projections on to others, similarly we experience contra-sexual components through others. Archetype is the sum total of collective unconscious which moves with us in life through actions, deeds, reactions, etc. The deeper implications of these concepts will become clear in the course of the body of the analysis.

The American novel is replete with different treatments of the quest for the Self. The quest is triggered by the experience of the numinous or various other reasons signal the start of the journey, culminating, at times, in the experience that exudes the rare aroma of the Self. At times, the protagonist
finds that he is riding a train that does not stop at any of the terminals he thought he would get down. Getting into the train is not always a conscious decision; he just finds himself there, but then he is bothered time and again to bridge the gap between the necessity and the wish, the facticity and the possibilities. The moment he is able to pace across that bridge with poise and power, he is no longer the Sisyphus who stands gnashing his teeth, looking in desperate rage at the stone rolling down-hill. In fact, he is the one who has come to terms with the narration of myth in his life; his insight helps him to bring down the structural complexes of emotion and ideas with which a civilized man populates his ego-consciousness.

The ultimate destination apart, the quest in each case is of a peculiar kind. Due to the Karma, the tendencies after the previous births, or due to the long tell-tale history of the genes and the variable social milieu, the quest in case of each individual is conditioned differently, and hence the steps in his progress and the processes involved are as well at variance. In one-shot mortality, as we see somebody in a work of fiction, no one can expect to reach the stage where one
breathes out: I am Brahma, the Self is I. The last stage in the quest for Self in case of any protagonist in literature cannot be this ultimate one, which goes beyond the dimensions of oral assertion. The knower and the known become one; the river melts in the oceanic embrace. No doubt, to apprehend

The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

(The Dry Salvages,
Four Quartets, T.S. Eliot)

What really happens in a novel is that the protagonist goes through a classical quest, classical in the sense that he embarks on the search consciously and reaches the portals of the Self, if not the inner-most sanctuary. Many questers collapse midway, don't reach the level of speech or articulation, but just struggle to utter what they dimly perceive. Jung writes, "The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual." How far it evolves and manifests itself depends on the individual psyche. When the conscious and the unconscious
diverge too greatly, a tension, neurosis, panic
or split occurs in the personality. According to
Jung, man must "pay continual attention to the
symptomatology of unconscious contents and processes,
for the good reason that the conscious mind is always
in danger of becoming one-sided, of keeping to well-
vorn paths and getting stuck in blind alleys."\(^8\)
This drive for psychic hygiene involves an individual
in his quest for the Self. The journey to perfect
psychic health is the journey to the Self. Charles
Citrine in Saul Bellow's *Humboldt's Gift* realises
that he just got 'head stuff' about mysticism and
that his efforts in that direction are not so
virile as to help him verify empirically those
mystic truths. He admits, "My misery comes,
maybe, from ignoring my own metaphysical hunches."\(^9\)
The conscious mind, thus, has to apply caution and
ready attention to such hints. When the unconscious
manifests through archetypal activity of dreams,
visions, etc., the ego, at times, fails to cope
with the implications, for it never knew this to
be its part. Then the individual does have the
experience, but lacks the competence to absorb and
assimilate the kernel of the experience. In the
great Indian epic *Mahabharata*, both Arjuna and
Duryodhana look at the cosmic aspect of Lord Krishna, but while Arjuna recognises and learns, Duryodhana fails to apprehend the divinity and calls it sheer magic. Incidentally, Arjuna and Krishna become a veritable paradigm to illustrate the ego-self axis or the encounter between the two.

The purpose of this dissertation is to trace the quest motif, or to speak more specifically, questers in the representative authors of American fiction. It is with this intention that this dissertation has focussed itself on major American novelists in order to cover a wide spectrum of the American novel as such. The ten novels are Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Henry James' *Portrait of a Lady* (1881), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930), John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), J.D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey* (1961), Saul Bellow's * Herzog* (1964) and Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* (1966).

In the analysis, an attempt is being made to X-ray the growth and evolution of a psychic order in the major protagonists in all these novels. Reasons
that trigger off the quest vary and so does the quest-graph as well; though the destined end is the same, the accomplished goal and the dynamics of accomplishment do vary in degrees of achievement. If Buck, Franny and Jemseg finally breathe in the quiet, holy zones of wider consciousness, Gatsby and Jake Barnes have to keep adjusting their psychic reflexes to cope with the external reality. Yakov Bok and Tom Joad identify with the common cause and exult in an healthy inflation of their ego consciousness, evading pure consciousness of universal brotherhood. Within their existential limitations, Invisible Man and Isabel Archer also reach the threshold of Self, though the latter has to make a compromise on the persona level, yet her inner world is shaken to its very foundation to the extent that she has learnt her lesson and will certainly abandon the feigned security of an illusion. Faulkner's Dunbar family flounders on the way to Self, but its so called cop-out Darl helps the reader to discover the very insanity that plagues human existence vis-a-vis its encounter with eternity.

The above mentioned ten novels have been divided into four chapters. "The Nightmare of History" is the first chapter. Mankind moves on
under the hypnotic eye of history, and at times, the negative components of this inheritance haunt man, disabling him to carve out a viable role and authentic relationships. Racial prejudice, the aftermath of industrial changes, etc. have threatened, at times, the dignity and identity of the individual. But, man has been able to penetrate this historical veil with a daring, a concentrated effort which, at the same time, restores the psychic hygiene to the individual concerned. In this chapter four novels are taken up: The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, The Sense of Death, Invisible Man and The Miser.

In the second chapter "The Vitality of Illusion", three novels - Portrait of a Lady, Franny and Zooey and Howarng - have been analysed. Some times, man's psychic reactions and emotionally-toned projections are regulated by a certain illusion. A proven image of the unreality of reality is nurtured by imagination. The illusion can envelop an individual psyche at the stage of radical innocence. Or, a state of inflated ego can also strengthen an illusory perception of life as the ego arrogates to itself the powers which are embodied in an ideal construction or personality. More than often, a person needs
the help of a psychotherapist or a Guru, who
can clear the dark web of illusions which blur
the vision.

The third chapter “Swing of the Pendulum”
has two novels – The Great Gatsby and The Sun
Also Rises. An experience of great miniscuteness,
at times, enters man’s common existence, and then
onwards his attempt is to recapture that vision,
th rough often he is denied the physical substratum.
Hence, his attempts are guided by his eyes fixed
on that pedestal of adoration. Instead of finding
new avenues to recast his measurements, a person is
fixed and keeps swinging between the moments of
happiness and desperate gloom.

“The Encounter with Eternity” is the fourth
chapter which attempts to trace the quest motif in
Faulkner’s As I Lay Dying. With Addie’s inability
to play the mother in the Bundren family, the
family dynamics collapses and in a bid to fulfill
Addie’s wish to be buried among her people, the
Bundrens encounter the fury of the very elements
which form this cosmos. In fact, an unhealthy
visitation of the unconscious in the person of
Addie Bundren contaminates the dynamics of
familial relationships of the Bundrens. The
journey to Jefferson could mean a progress from
the pathological state to a state of discovery, of illumination, to a psychological set-up of healthy and purposeful character. But for Jezal who emerges in the heroic mold, the rest of the Bundrens' experience is marked by more of heat than light. Like the 'divine idiot' of Dostoievsky, Darl contributes most to the sober over-view of human existence vis-a-vis its encounter with the cosmic elements or the terrible feminine.

It will be apparent in the analysis that a quester's illuminated figure is accompanied by his shadow figure. Mythically, an assistant or auxiliary presence is inevitably there along the quester on the road to an experience of an Ideal or the Self. Even in Cervantes, the ridiculous figure of Don Quixote has Sancho Panza. At times, the dishevelled figure of Hamlet is juxtaposed with a Horatio who in suffering all suffers not. In the Indian epic RamaYana, Rama does not go to the forest alone but takes Laxmana with him, in the preordained quest into the fortress of evil and retrieves security for the good and the noble. Huck Finn and Jim, Nick Carraway and Gatsby, Tom Joad and Casey and to a lesser degree, Isabel and Benedicta, etc. are some of such examples from the
novels this dissertation will examine.

After the analysis of the ten novels, I presume certain patterns will emerge regarding the recurrent theme of quest for the Self in the American Novel. To support and expound the logic of the evolving psychic order in the consciousness of the protagonists, the easy access to the Buddhist and the Hindu scriptures has also been availed of. Eros is the archetype of relationship and symbolises the force that keys relationships, from sexual compulsions to yearning for the unattainable. This term has been used in the thesis in its wider meaning. All the protagonists, discussed in the dissertation, do make a claim to an increment of consciousness at the end of their career in the novel, but all of them do not partake of the blessed food, or the added exultations of thriving ahead in the valley of transformation. So, the achievement in certain cases is interim, though it does not underwrite their prospective, potential advance into an awareness of the Self.
REFERENCES


6 The story of Bechiketa is found in Katha Upanishad. He was the son of Vaajasrevasa. The Upanishad records Bechiketa's dialogue with the god of death. He rejects all temptations of wealth and worldly pleasures and asks the god, "When a man dies, this doubt arises: some say 'he is' and some say 'he is not'. Teach me the truth." See Juan R. Mascaró, trans., The Upanishads, op. cit., pp.55-66.


8 Ibid., p.159.