Chapter - IV

The Rhetoric of Bhakti Yoga- Dasya and Putra Bhava

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

Swami Ramdas, whose name was Vittal Rao before he embraced sannyas, was born at Hosdurg, Kanhangad, North Kerala on 10th April 1884. His taste for literature was remarkable and this "enabled him to acquire even at so early an age a remarkable fineness and facility in his English style" (Ramdas 1991: viii). He had a great flair for Fine Arts and acting. He pursued a course in Textile Engineering and received his diploma in Textile Manufacture. He worked as Spinning Master in a cotton mill at Gulbarga and was married to Rukmabai in 1908 and a daughter Ramabai was born to him in 1913. Subsequently he faced numerous vicissitudes in his career and this streamlined his spiritual temperament. In In Quest of God, Ramdas points out that it was in 1920, when he was 36 years old, that a keen desire to realise God developed. To put it in Ramdas’s own words, “It was about two years ago that Ram first kindled in the heart of His humble slave, Ramdas, a keen desire to realise His Infinite Love”(1). Incessantly chanting the Ram mantra he embarked on his spiritual quest. The trials and tribulations during the course of the quest are narrated in In Quest of God which was first published in 1925. Following the period of itinerant life, the sense of spiritual liberation set him off on a mission
of serving humankind. To that end he established an ashram at Kanhangad, Kerala. He established a school, vocational training centre and a dispensary particularly for the benefit of the marginalised sections in the society. *In the Vision of God* first published in 1935, chronicles his experience of God vision in everything that he cognised in this world. Lovingly called as "Papa" by devotees, he travelled world-wide extending spiritual bonhomie to people irrespective of class, caste, religion and nationality. The Anandashram at Kanhangad continues to generate the spirit of service and the bliss of "Papa's" God vision to this day. His autobiography is thus a text that portrays the spiritual way of life of a people that is integral to their national identity. The path of *bhakti*, as we can see is the path of the common masses and Swami Ramdas represents in this text the simple devout life of common people in the "nation" that is India. The text also shows how the idea of "nation" in the eyes of the self-realised grows beyond mere parochial concerns and how the spiritual way of life in a modern civil society will further the spirit of secularism. The influence of Gandhi's ideas on Ramdas and his special regard for Gandhi (which other autobiographers *viz.* Purohit Swami, and Yogananda shared) traceable in the autobiography show how they shared a vision during that period. Swami Ramdas attained *mahanirvana* in July 1963.

When Swami Ramdas recounts numerous experiences as a seeker and as a visionary in his autobiography, he is not narrating from a vacuum. Firstly, the choice of the form and language in itself shows that he is in dynamic interaction with the society of a significant period in the history of the nation. Secondly, the representation of his *bhakti*, of his social choices as a visionary and of his resistance to adverse forces in the autobiography project certain characteristic features of a nation's ethos. The following sections tided "Bhakti ~ the Rasa", "Bhakti — its Bhava, and "The Railways — the Colonial Prop" identify certain interesting links between devotion and the nation. The following section, "Bhakti — the Rasa", analyses the scriptural representation of
bhakti and identifies the varying bhava (moods/emotional fervour) of bhakti as a rasa (sentiment).²

I

Bhakti- the Rasa

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

"Sravanam, kaerthanam, vishnorsmaranam, padasevanam, Archanam, vandanam, dasyam, sakhyam, atmanivedanam"⁴

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

These are the nine types of bhakti (navavidhabhakti) as enunciated by Sage Vyasa in his composition, Srimad Bhagavata. The above quote is from "Prahladacharita" of this text and the context is Prahlada's answer to Hiranyakashipu, his tyrant father, who challenges his son's devotion for Lord Vishnu. Moreover, though bhakti is "eka" — one — Sage Narada identifies that bhakti in sagunopasana manifests itself in myriad ways. Accordingly he too identifies eleven manifestations of bhakti in Naradabahaktisutra:
From the above we may infer that the devotee, according to his/her disposition choose to look upon God as his/her beloved (anuraga bhakti) as manifested in paramavirahaasakti, as husband (madhura bhakti) as in kaantaasakti, as friend (sakhyaa bhakti), as master (dasya bhakti), as mother/father (matru/pitru bhakti), as son (vatsalya bhakti) or in a neutral manner (santa bhakti) as in tanmayataasakti.

Thus, bhakti marga usually involves the incessant chanting of a chosen divine name and subsequent meditation upon the divine by attributing or without attributing a form. This intense sadhana (spiritual discipline) ultimately evokes divine fervour and a consistent intense longing for the divine presence. The various bhava of bhakti rasa are always characterised by complete self-surrender to and intimacy with the divine will. Saranagati or complete surrender is not an easy state of mind to be achieved since it involves complete dissolution of the ego. In Quest of God, the first volume of Swami Ramdas’s autobiography, reveals both in form and content this spiritual process he experienced. Then God is realised as the self itself — the nirgunaabrahman. At this stage, God is realised as nirguna, without attributes but as all pervading and as the essence of all attributes that one perceives in the world. However, there are devotees who prefer to experience God-communion by retaining a sense of duality even after realising their non-dual nature, the Absolute oneness. As Swami Ramdas himself points out in one of his speeches: "Beyond duality there is Absolute Oneness. Remaining on the highest peak of Advaita, namely non-duality, you should still be acting on the dual plane and living playfully like a blissful child" (Ramdas 1996: 99). He also gives a culinary analogy to drive the point home: "Realising him, you must remain His child. There is joy in this. It is not that
one should simply lose oneself in Him. . . . There is no joy in merely becoming sugar. You must also become like an ant, and enjoy the taste of it” (112).

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

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

II

Bhakti- its Bhava

Unlike most other spiritual autobiographies that are examined, Swami Ramdas's narrative begins at the stage of his entry into the fourth ashramadharma i.e., sannyas. The autobiography details various stages of God-experience encountered by the narrator in this fourth and the last asrama. The first stage is marked by the adoption of a new name and assuming sannyas formally by wearing ochre robe. The next stage is the chanting of the holy name and undertaking pilgrimages as a seeker. The third stage is his pilgrimage as a self-realised soul. The fourth stage is the establishment of an asrama. In Quest of God, the first volume of Swami Ramdas's autobiography narrates his renunciation, the adoption of sannyas and his pilgrimage as an itinerant seeker. In the Vision of God chronicles his expanding God-consciousness in his pilgrimage as a self-realised being and the activities undertaken by the asram he established to serve humanity.
This two-volume autobiography is a fine expression of the various stages of God-experience, of what the *Kathopanishad* terms as “aparokshanttbhuti”, not only in content but also in form. Written in the third person, the narrative mode is conspicuous by the absence of the narrating subject "I" and is, dissolved into "some timeless pattern of spiritual biography" (Peterson 1988: 214). The narrating subject is referred to as “Ramdas” and all the others - animate and inanimate as reflections of "Ram". Hence what needs to be addressed at the outset is the impulse behind the narrator's choice of writing the autobiography in the third person. The introductory chapter of the autobiography informs us of the "happy synchronisation" of Swami Ramdas's birthday with *Hanuman Jayanti*. Hanumanji, the greatest devotee of Sri Rama is the embodiment of *dasya bhakti*. The beginning of the narrative on this note, informs the reader of the tone of his *bhakti*. For, when he embarks on his quest for self-realisation he flings himself at the feet of God in *dasya bhava*, as his slave. The narrative begins by invoking God as his master and addressing himself as his slave: "It was about two years ago [in 1920] that Ram first kindled in the heart of His humble slave, Ramdas, a keen desire to realise His infinite Love" (Ramdas 1991: 1). At this point it is to be noted that Swami Ramdas attributes a name to the divine while it is almost clear from all his writings that he did not attribute him a form. He perceives God — Ram — as "the only Truth — the only reality," as "a subtle and mysterious power that pervades and sustains the whole universe" (1). The expressions, to "submit ourselves to the will of and working of that Infinite Power" (1), to "completely surrender" (2) and to "humble ourselves to such a degree as to subdue our egoism, our self-assertion as a separate individual existence" (2) set the tone of his *bhakti* and serve to establish the master-slave relationship between God and the narrating subject. The complete effacement of self-assertion and individuality is not only manifested through the deeds of the slave but also through his words particularly while consciously addressing oneself in the third person and not as "I". Thus addressing oneself in the third
person in this context should be seen as a direct outcome of his attempts at dissolving ego-consciousness. It is interesting to note that this has a direct impact on the very form of the autobiography. The narrating subject distances himself from or dissolves his sense of the "I" and the text becomes an exemplification of this exalted state of human consciousness. This narrative about oneself in the third person thus works so much like an oxymoron in the sense that it conveys the author's conscious ego-effacement on the one hand and reiterates personal experience of God-communion on the other. At this point it is important to recount the context in which he wrote the autobiography. In Quest of God was written during his stay in a cave after he achieved *sahaja samadhi* (a trance-like state which is natural and ever-present) as a culmination of his one year itinerant life in quest of God. The first chapter of *In the Vision of God* mentions how and when he started writing his autobiography: "It was during this time that Ramdas as willed by the Lord, devoted two hours past midnight to the work of writing the book "In Quest of God"" (Ramdas 1992: 8). The text thus is a product of inspiration, of the will of God. It is to be noted that it is after he entered into *sahaja samadhi* that Ramdas could not say "I". This is particularly felt during his stay in the cave after his wandering in India for a year. Though the autobiography does not reveal this transitional phase, at a later stage in his life, in one of his addresses he points this out, perhaps as an answer to a query:

It was from this time that Ramdas could not say "I". Me strangely started referring to himself as Ramdas. After that Ramdas began to see the world before him as the manifestation of the divine spirit. Ramdas tried to say "I" again but it did not come. Somehow, he dropped it and could not pick it up (Ramdas 1996: 86)
So one may gather from this that though Ramdas must have referred to himself as "I" during his early itinerant years, in the autobiography all such instances of self-reference have been transcribed as "Ramdas".

Having examined this aspect of Ramdas's bhakti, we shall proceed to examine how the narrative engagingly captures his initiation into God consciousness and the evolution of his bhakti bhava in In Quest of God and the exalted manifestation of bhakti rasa in In the Vision of God. As mentioned earlier, In Quest of God does not dwell in detail upon his early struggle and initiation. In a few paragraphs, he effectively captures the gradual but steady replacement of the anxieties of the world by the blissful presence of Ram. The first chapter titled "Struggle and Initiation" depicts how every worldly activity was pleasantly affected by God-related thoughts. It starts with a cry for and response from God: "Where is relief? Where is rest?" was the heart's cry of Ramdas. The cry was heard, and from the Great Void came the voice "Despair not! Trust Me and thou shalt be free!" and this was the voice of Ram (Ramdas 1991: 3). (The use of expressions like "thou" and "shalt" while quoting God's response is of special interest here. This use of archaic language establishes an other worldly quality to a happening in modern times.) Ramdas mentions that "a part of the time that was formerly totally devoted to worldly affairs was taken up for the meditation of Ram" (3). "Devotion" here is towards worldly affairs and only a part of that time is "taken up" for meditation initially. But in course of time, nights are "utilised" for Rambhajan. When God starts reciprocating by coming to his aid, "...whenever free from worldly duties...he would meditate on Ram and utter His name" (4). The slow invasion of his world by the divine does not stop mere. With careful choice of words Ramdas conveys this invasion most effectively. We notice Ramdas's interest in sensory pleasures diminishing when he says, "No taste but for Ram..."(4). Meditation, he says, "encroached upon the hours of the day and the so-called worldly duties" (4, emphasis mine) too. Further, his initiation into the Ram mantra, “Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram”,
by his father, streamlined the spiritual progress. Moreover acquaintance with scriptures, both Christian and Hindu, and with Gandhiji's writings electrified his bhakti (5). Now the spiritual progress is marked by a gradual development from aversion towards sense pleasures to aversion towards mental attachments. It is interesting to note how the rhetoric effectively participates to convey the pace and force with which Ram was conjuring up Ramdas's world:

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

Note the underlined verbs that convey the pace of spiritual change in Ramdas. As it slowly dawned upon his mind that Ram was the only reality, desires for worldly pleasures were "fast falling off. "Me" and "mine" were wearing out while the sense of possession and relationship was vanishing. In the sixth line, the repeated use of "all" four times, the use of expressions like "concentrated on", "covering up", and "absorbing" and the consecutive repetition of "Ram" twice create a rhythm that conveys the force, the intensity and the power of concentration in spiritual awakening. To quote the last line again, "All thought, all mind, all heart, all soul was concentrated on Ram, Ram covering up and absorbing everything" (5). This line creates a powerful three-dimensional impact on the reader - just as a powerful visual image is zoomed before a viewer's eyes. The impact of the line is such that a reader tends to feel she is almost engulfed by that powerful force of that moment of man's tryst with God - the awakening of the human into higher states of consciousness. Moreover since this is also the last line of the first chapter the impact is conspicuous.
The first line of chapter two tided "Renunciation" clearly carries the deluged, swamped, inundated feeling, this tryst has on the narrator. The sense of transformation of consciousness is conveyed by the use of contrasting images — "pond" and "ocean": "Now from the narrow pond of a worldly life Ram had lifted up his slave to throw him into the extensive ocean of a Universal Life" (6). His expression of bhakti in dasya bhava is first noticed here. After the introductory chapter, the expression "slave" is used for the second time here. He calls himself "Thy slave". It is clear that the dissolution of ego-consciousness is both a pre-requisite for and effect of the assumption of dasya bhava. We are exposed to an interesting spiritual paradox when we see that dasya or slavery here does not bring or mean 'bondage, but absolute freedom, ineffable bliss and eternal peace. Man thus becomes God's slave in order to become free — free from the taunting cares, worries, fleeting pleasures and nagging pains of the world — yet another paradox of the God-human relationship. However one is led to wonder whether it is self-surrender that brings about self-effacement or it is self-effacement that causes self-surrender; the following lines make it difficult for us to distinguish one from the other:

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

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

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

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

The rhetoric of renunciation is well captured in the above words. He "gives up", "leaves", "bids farewell", "loses attraction" and "finds nothing". All that he is left with is his body, mind and soul and those are laid at the feet of Ram. The following lines show the effect of surrendering body, mind and soul at the feet of God:
The morning train carried Ramdas away from Mangalore and dropped him in the evening at Erode - a railway junction. He did not know where he was being led by Ram. A Tamilian inquired of him regarding his movements. Ramdas was unable to say anything in reply. Ram alone could determine his future (9-10).

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

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

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

Ramdas is a child of the Divine Mother. For him the whole universe stands as an expression or the embodiment of the Divine Mother and you are all to him the veritable forms of the Mother who has accepted Ramdas as Her confiding child. From the very beginning Ramdas has been looking upon God in these three aspects: the Divine Mother, the Master and the Purushottama beyond. As servant of the Master, he used to obey Him. As Divine Master he was guiding Ramdas. As Divine Mother, He was protecting the child in all conditions of life (Ramdas 1996:4).
This in fact becomes the very basis of the dissolution of the "I" (86). In *In the Vision of God*, the second volume of the autobiography, Ramdas portrays himself in *putra bhava*. The "Preamble" to this volume depicts Ramdas as "His new born offspring". *Putra bhava* sets the tone of *In the Vision of God*:

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

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

A further new dimension to his *bhakti bhava* is added in the dramatically narrated episode, "God assumes all forms" in *In the Vision of God*. Here the boundary between the stranger who dispossesses Ramdas of all his belongings as a man and as God is hazy or almost disappears. The stranger asks him *
give even the kaupin that Ramdas was wearing. As Ramdas is about to willingly part with it, the stranger stops him and instead asks if Ramdas can follow him. The ensuing dialogue depicts the stranger as an intermediary between God and man. The reader along with Ramdas is left wondering if it was God himself who came in human form or if it was just another human being. His strange behaviour that makes one feel that God has come to test man. Ultimately Ramdas's narration of this episode conveys the point that duality between man and God, at a certain point of spiritual evolution, does not exist. After divesting Ramdas of every possession, the "stranger" asks him:

"Can you follow me?"
Ramdas lost no time in replying "By all means".
"Not now, some other time," he said and prepared to start. It was now raining in torrents. In one hand he held the lantern and in the other the umbrella, and the palm pole flung across his shoulder with the bundle suspended on it, at his back.

Standing on the landing steps he flashed a parting shot. "What do you think of me? I am not mad. I am not," he said with great emphasis.
"You are He, you are He," gasped out Ramdas — his throat fully choked with emotion.
The friend descended the steps and walked away.
Ramdas returned to the room and the moment he sat down on the floor, he was lost in a deep trance (22-23)

Ramdas leaves the episode at this point of suspense. Quite unlike a vision which explicitly conveys a direct spiritual intervention, this episode occupies a grey area of "man in God and God in man" which subverts the God-human dichotomy. This may also convey Ramdas's state of spiritual consciousness poised to enter the exalted realm of divinity. In the expression, "you are He" the use of the letter "y" in lower case and the letter "H" in capitals is an
excellent example of the interplay between the meaning and the signifier. Bhakti here becomes the means and the end. This aspect gains a significant proportion in another instance as well. The reader's sense of distinction between the rational and the non-rational is challenged in this episode. Here attuning the reader as though into a "willing suspension of disbelief, Ramdas narrates an episode of an intimate moment with the divine; this time not in any physical external form but from within his own consciousness. It is to be noted that the narrative does not leave any explanation of the source of the Divine voice. Is it the voice from within? Or from without? Or is it that these questions are not relevant for the saints in their exalted moments of consciousness that transcend the sense of within and without - "Ramdas' chat with Ram" is one such dramatic moment:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ramdas was considering himself as a servant of God. Later he realised that servant and God are one. Then he did not know how to refer to himself. He sometimes speaks now as T and sometimes as 'he'. You see in his writings, he now uses the first person
T. It is all the same whether he uses T or 'he' because all these are He, the one Truth. Formerly there was to him the division. World and God. Now world is God. Whatever he talks about is of God. His impulses, thoughts, words, everything is God. He talks, moves, lives and has his being in God; everything is God, everywhere it is God. Manifest, unmanifest, moving, not moving, changing, not changing, with name and form, without name and form — everything is HE. He is all inclusive, all pervading, all-transcendent Divine. There is nothing besides HIM.

This T is beyond first, second and third person. It is not the individual T. This 'I' is equated with God...

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

This vision explains the use of "we" in the concluding sections of In the Vision of God which narrates activities pertaining to the development at the Anandashram he established at Kanhangad in Kerala. The use of "we" instead of "they", may be referred to the above explanation that indicates another stage in Ramdas' spiritual evolution in which the distinction between "we" and "they" or "I" and "Ramdas" wears off. Also, Ramdas's state of consciousness in In the Vision of God in particular is "Eke enjoying the taste of sugar being separate from it, and the same time becoming sugar yourself. Ramdas is one with the divine parent Ram, and still he is the child of Ram" (Ramdas 1996: 102). In In the Vision of God he uses another analogy to convey this state of consciousness: "His position is this...he is like the river Ganges which, having reached the ocean and become one with it, still continues running towards it" (Ramdas 1992: 153). A stage comes in which bhakti, the bhakta, and bhagavan all become one. The implication of his chat with Ram will be made clear when we
comprehend this analogy. Another spiritual vision conveyed through figurative expression is his perception of the world as God's lila, a play, quite similar to Yogananda's perception of the world as a motion picture: "All of you are Gods. Ramdas is the servant of God. Suddenly God becomes the servant. Master is God. Servant is God. He plays all parts. This is his lila. It is not Maya. Ramdas remembers Shakespeare's words 'All the world is a stage....' " (Ramdas 1996: 124). In In the Vision of God, the allusion to drama also clarifies Ramdas's response to the "stranger's" behaviour: "... the world is His manifestation in which He expresses himself in a multitude of forms, assuming various characters. Ramdas looks on all with the same unclouded vision and his love for all is alike, be they saints or sinners. He does not see any difference. It is the Lord who plays all the parts in the world-drama" (Ramdas 1992: 132). He refers to healing and bi-location which are looked upon as miracles or as God's "mysterious ways" and attributes all to "Ram's glory". Ramdas sees himself as a medium through which God operates to help his devotees or to manifest himself before them. The case of Ramdas's bilocation is one such: "Ramdas asked him[a devotee] what the matter was. It was then that Ramdas heard from his lips the whole story of the double personality. While Ramdas listened his hairs stood on his end, eyes were filled with tears, and his entire frame thrilled with indescribable ecstasy. He only muttered: "It is all Ram's glory. His ways are inscrutable" (98). The depiction of freedom he enjoys both inwardly and outwardly through the use of animal imagery shows another dimension of his bhakti bhava. "Ramdas was, during the day time, like a frisky monkey. He could not stand quiet. He would either dance or run. When he was not engaged in dance he would run up the surrounding tall hills like a squirrel" (192). The use of imagery shows that the bliss of God-communion charges up his frame to such an extent that it attains a remarkable agility that can outwit the most agile of human beings. For instance: "The friends were quick trampers accustomed to hill climbing. So they thought it would be as well to make Ramdas walk
before them so that he might not lag behind. But the power of God was tingling in Ramdas' veins. He skipped, danced and ran... He was running up like a squirrel" (244). But when he is forced to follow them, "the gallop was now reduced to a trot, and when close to their back he would jump like an India rubber ball. The play of *shakti* in him was irresistible" (244). He records one more instance of this overflowing power coursing down his frame: "Ramdas ran, danced and skipped in the cool shade beneath the chenar trees for sometime, and suddenly climbed up a slim and tall giant among them with Ramcharandas in close pursuit. While Ramdas was going up the tree at incredible speed like a monkey, the members of the party gazed on the performance agape with amazement..."(332). *Naradabhaktisutra* also recognises similar behaviour as an expression of bhakti and self-realisation in the first chapter tided "Parabhaktiswarupam": “*yajnaatwa matho bhavathi, sthabdho bhavathi, atmaramo bhavathi*”(1.6) which when translated means "The self-realised person becomes intoxicated and stunned for he is absorbed in the bliss of self-realisation". *Srimad Bhagavatha* also mentions that such souls due to God-intoxication may even behave like animals even though adept at the *vedas*.

Moreover the use of expressions like "tingling", play of *shakti*" and "power of God" and the frequent reference to his body gaining lightness and remarkable agility point to the awakening of the *kundalini* and its ascension described in the *raja yoga*. Though Ramdas does not make a direct reference to it in the autobiography, we can infer from his highly active state in the second stage of his itinerant life as a self-realised being. The arousal of this Inner Energy is considered a pre-requisite for, a means to and sign of one's evolution of consciousness.

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

... for Ramdas there is none impure or sinful, although he might mention the particular purity and greatness of the persons he came across. His task is merely to chronicle his experiences with regard to events that befell him and to people who came under his observation. He presents the history from the standpoint of a dispassionate witness of God's lila. For, the world is His manifestation in which He expresses Himself in multitude of forms, assuming various characters. Ramdas looks on all with the same unclouded vision and his love for all is alike, be they saints or sinners. He does not see any
difference. It is the Lord who plays all the parts in the world-drama (Ramdas 1992: 132).

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

III

The Railways -- The Colonial Prop

This section will examine the tension between modernity and the indigenous travel ethos against the backdrop of pilgrimage in colonial India, resistance to fundamentalism and subversion of social hierarchy and patriarchy in the autobiography of Ramdas. Ramdas, as is evident in In Quest of God and In the Vision of God commences his quest for God in a state of God-intoxication going on pilgrimage from one place of worship to another covering the Indian sub-continent of the 1920's and 1930's. The entire autobiography foregrounds his experiences during his pilgrimage by train and on foot as a seeker and as a
self-realised person. This serves to identify the social dynamics of the period. The narrative also serves to prove that the social and the spiritual are not dichotomous entities but reinforce each other. The Ramdas-God relationship gains a whole new dimension as his narrative of pilgrimage progresses. Here we are impelled to look at pilgrimage as an ancient symbol that stands for the realisation of the macrocosm in the microcosm. Pilgrimage charts sacred spaces in the geography of nations and in the geography of minds simultaneously. Ramdas puts this in simple words: "God is everywhere but he wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere" (Ramdas 1991: 41). Thus not only the destination but also the course towards destination is considered a holy experience that chastises the pilgrim through adversities and challenges, physically and mentally. Therefore pilgrimages become important not only for the sanctity attached to the destination points but also for the chastening effect of the journey on the pilgrim. More often for Ramdas social experiences demonstrate spiritual truth. The dichotomy is once again blurred at such instances. Pilgrimages serve to redefine one's pre-meditation of a nation's socio-cultural and geographical patterning, to identify the underlying unity of the apparently diverse human traits and to accept or deliberate over differences created by the geographical, political, cultural or social forces. Pilgrimages thus spiritually charter the human mindscape and geographically reiterate national consciousness. Pilgrimage centres were the earlier yardsticks of our sense of nationality and signified our earliest concept of national consciousness and national character by virtue of their locations sprawled across the length and breadth of a particular geographical area. Mahatma Gandhi for instance in his Hind Swaraj points out that the establishment of pilgrimage centres by our ancestors presupposed their vision of India as an undivided land, "so made by nature. They, therefore, argued that it must be one nation. Arguing thus, they established holy places in
various parts of India, and fired the people with an idea of nationality in a manner unknown in other parts of the world" (Gandhi 1997:133).

It goes without saying that there were several in-built mechanisms like the ubiquitous dharmashalas and anna/eshetras established by solicitous affluent people, eager to serve renunciates; and concessions and consideration in case of their journey by horse damage, bullock carts or boats. It was well-known that real sadhus had no concern for and never carried money. Such indigenous means of transport, accommodation and food in the India of those times treated the ubiquitous sadhus most favourably. But the introduction of railways by the colonisers seems to have transformed the very nature of social interactions in the course of a journey. Pandit Sivanath Sastri in his History of Brahmo Samaj first published in 1911, points out that "railways takes no account of caste, but rather helps in breaking it down by promoting the intercourse of races" (Sastri 1974: 6). Swami Ramdas's autobiography shows that this view cannot be accepted in toto. The text shows how the railways and such manifestations of modernity not only created a class division in travel but also rendered an indigenous travel ethos effete. Railways failed to accommodate and provide concessions for the economically disadvantaged, the sadhu race being one of them. It further created divisions between the Indians on the basis of class acutely felt, (whose division on the basis of caste and religion was already glaring) through this means of transport. Tickedess travelling was to be treated as "unlawful" since the "law" was a colonial prop. The 'space', the concession and the solicitude mat were characteristic of various indigenous transport systems and rest houses were absent in the way in which this prop of modernity operated. Therefore towards a renunciate who was free from want and care and never believed in carrying money, this modern means of transport was indifferent. Ramdas dramatises these in In Quest of God:
Ramdas threw himself more completely than ever on the support of Ram with only two clothes and a few books - all his possessions in the world. He started with the Sadhuram whom Ram had sent as a guide. He led him to the railway station and both got into a train running to Rameshwaram. No ticket - Ram was ticket and all in all...a ticket inspector came into the compartment in which Ramdas and his kind guide were seated. After checking the tickets of other passengers, he approached the sadhus and cried, "Tickets - Tickets".

"No tickets, brother, we are Sadhus", was the reply. "Without tickets you cannot travel any farther. You have to get down here", said the Inspector. At once getting up, Ramdas told the Sadhuram that it was Ram's wish that they should alight at that place....the Sadhuram grumbled over the action of the Inspector. To this Ramdas said:

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

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

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

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

The Ticket Inspector replied: "You can speak English. Educated as you are, you cannot travel without a ticket. I have to ask you both to get down" (40).
The knowledge that Ramdas is an English educated man travelling as a sadhu makes the Inspector open a conversation with them. He in fact questions Ramdas on his God quest through pilgrimage since it is widely accepted that God is everywhere. The very purpose of pilgrimage is questioned through this conversation. Ramdas replies that,

"God is everywhere but he wants to have this fact actually proved by going to all places and realising His presence everywhere."
"Well then," continued the Inspector, "if you are discovering God where ever you go, you must be seeing Him here, on this spot, where you stand."

"Behold, He is here, standing in front of me!" exclaimed Ramdas enthusiastically.
"Where, where?" cried the Inspector impatiently.
"Here, here!" pointed out Ramdas smiling, and patted on the broad chest of the Inspector himself. "In the tall figure standing in front, that is, in yourself, Ramdas clearly sees God who is everywhere."
For a time, the inspector looked confused. Then he broke into a hearty fit of laughter. Opening the door of the compartment from which he had asked the Sadhus to get down, he requested them to get in again, and then did so, followed by him. He sat in the train with the Sadhus for sometime.
"I cannot disturb you, friends, I wish you all success in your quest of God" (41-42).

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

The tension between modernity and the indigenous travel ethos surfaces significantly in another episode. Ramdas quotes an instance of an Indian policeman breaking the law of the railways to allow the sadhus to travel without
ticket. Resisting the remonstrations of the other Indian railway officials, he speaks in defence of the sadhus: "You see, these Sannyasis, deserve to be allowed to get into the train. As regards tickets, they cannot be expected to carry money since money is not their quest, as in the case of worldly people" (44). Thus In Quest of God provides glimpses of the travails and unsettling experiences this colonial prop caused to the sadhus who unassumingly or oblivious of colonial rules travelled third class, ticketless, and were often thrown out on account of this "misconduct". Ramdas's experiences show how a sadhu's felicity in the English language elicited favourable responses from various agnostic quarters in the course of his journey and dispelled stereotypical notions of sadhuism even among the Hindus. "Two English educated Hindu youths" (note that Ramdas makes it a point to mention to which religion they belong to here as well) pass adverse remarks about Ramdas in English during another train journey:

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

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

Ramdas expressing perfect agreement with these remarks, gently retorts:

"...But one thing more you discover in him and that is, he is mad of Ram and every moment he cries out to him to make him pure and only live for Ram's sake...."
This speech surprised both the friends, not so much on account of its import as the knowledge it brought them that the vagrant sannyasi could understand English and therefore had grasped the purport of their remarks, which were never intended to be known to him. A sudden change came over them and both fell at his feet and sought his pardon for their “thoughtless remarks” as they termed them (26).

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

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

"What have you to do with this book?"
"Everything, brother." replied Ramdas.
"Do you believe in Christ?" asked he.
"Why not? Christ is also a messenger of God — come for the salvation of mankind."
This reply at once touched the heart of the friend. Coming close to Ramdas, he said: "Master, kindly pardon your servant who gave you a good deal of trouble without knowing you" (53).

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

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

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

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

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

In Ajmere, his Muslim guide asks him to enlist himself as the chela of Muhammad: "At once Ramdas knelt as bidden by him, in all reverence. Then looking up to the kind friend, he said: ‘Brother, there is no need of this enlisting himself here as Muhammad's chela because he has already been a chela of Muhammad' " (117). This eclectic spirit also seems to work as a defence against or as a resistance to any forced conversion to another faith. In fact such
challenges existed not only in terms of inter-religious encounters but also in intra-religious discourses. For instance, whenever followers of other paths of God-realisation viz., jnana and raja yoga accost him questioning the efficacy of bhakti as an 'emotional' path to attain God, Ramdas wards off such accusations on the basis of his direct felt experience of God-communion through the path of bhakti. It is this conviction that makes Ramdas's autobiography a discourse of "conversion" — conversion of readers from a contentment felt through indirect experience to an intense urge to directly feel God. Ramdas also maintains throughout the autobiography that verbal battle on God, communal disharmony and discrimination of human beings on the basis of race, caste and creed are against the spirit of God quest. In this vein the text addresses the existence of differences and demonstrates his way of promoting harmony within these differences. Ramdas's autobiography is a contribution to nationalism in the twenty-first century for these reasons. The various encounters with proselytising forces and his way of accepting every prophet as a votary of truth and himself as a chela of that prophet or believer avoids friction and disharmony. Ramdas demonstrates at his individual level without sermonising that considering one prophet as the only prophet can cause bigotry, fundamentalism and intolerance. These precepts have been preached and practised by saints and sages of all religious faiths. The autobiography provides a lived experience of this truth and is a record of the positive effects of cultivating the eclectic spirit necessary for citizens who live in a multi-cultural society. One need not become a sadhu to understand this. But Ramdas practised a sophisticated form of secularism. What is interesting is that our modern secularists seem to equate religion with fundamentalism thereby divorcing religion from social and political life. This leaves the law to deliberate or debate over issues on morality and ethics in public life. As pointed out earlier, this is perhaps what is different about Indian spiritual autobiographies from Western spiritual autobiographies. Western spiritual narratives are
intensely personal while Indian spiritual narratives are intricately linked with myriad social issues and conflicts. They grapple with the question of faith in a painful and violent backdrop of socio-cultural differences and demonstrate that God-quest cannot be divorced from these concerns. In fact the text is not only the autobiography of Ramdas but also is a chronicle of the experiences of the sadhu race that quietly faced the transitions modernity brought about in India. He also critiques sadhuism. The autobiography depicts sadhus of varying temperament and spirit, shows that not all sadhus are self-realised people. Because though some are sincere seekers, they often succumb to weaknesses of their own. "Through independence alone does a sadhu learn the secrets of life and Truth. Hanging on always to an external prop in spiritual matters hampers his progress, because his vision lacks then the flexibility for expansion and universalization. The centre of interest becomes cramped and localised, while his aim should be to comprehend and realize the infinite nature of Truth" (Ramdas 1992: 288-89). Ramdas is seen as one who never let his own ego take the upper hand. This in fact prevents friction and disharmony during his encounter with people who challenged his belief:

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

"Mother, Ramdas cannot be one with you there," he told her. "He holds Sri Krishna and Buddha in the same high estimation as, if not higher than, Jesus. You are speaking of them as you do, because you have not understood them. Similarly, there are Hindus who speak disparagingly of Christ without knowing him."
The mother combated his view and started attacking it by arguments. But Ramdas remained silent (132).

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

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

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

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

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

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

The autobiography dispels the notion that spiritual quest and serving sadhus are the business of the affluent. In fact it also shows that sadhusm is "not a joke" for it entails disregard for material comforts, temerity in the face of difficulties of any kind and freedom from want and care. As Ramdas points out, "Through independence alone does a sadhu learn the secrets of life and Truth" (288).
The autobiography reveals the early twentieth century India as a highly caste-conscious society. People are identified by the caste they belong to. Those who are, in Ramdas's words, "the so-called untouchables" are very conscious of the status attributed to them. In the Vision of God has an instance in which Ramdas reprimands Dwarakadas for insulting Kanda who offers him some plantains. Ramdas collects the images of God that Dwarakadas worshipped, flings them into a ditch and says: "...your devotions have been taking decidedly a wrong turn. That devotee before you...came to you with a heart full of love and reverence...Now you chose to discard him. That means you have discarded the very love of God. Therefore, get up and prostrate before Kanda whom you have wantonly insulted. He is your Ram, God and all. This is the vision that you need. Worshipping brass images and conceiving hatred for man is not devotion..." (Ramdas 1992: 395-96). Dwarakadas undergoes a change of heart and prostrates before Kanda, "the so-called untouchable", and thereafter treats every one with the same vision. However it is Ramdas's status and attitude as a sadhu that enables him to undermine such caste-distinctions. This even invites hostility from the members of the higher echelons of the caste-based society. The life of a true sadhu in this autobiography emerges as that of a radical, 'free from caste-based distinctions, wants and worries. In the Vision of God has a paragraph that subverts caste hierarchies at a congregation:

As he entered the place the people of the cobbler caste also freely made their way inside and mingled with the Brahmans by taking their seat in between them. He was watching from his seat the wonderful work of God which brought a people who were despised as untouchables in close touch with the intolerant brahmans, and that too within a temple... Suddenly stillness and peace pervaded the place...What peace and bliss, what freedom can man enjoy when he attains the vision of God in all creatures and things! But as it is he is a slave to false
traditions that breed hatred and strife between man and man (408)

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

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

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

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

Note the use of imperatives like "must" and "should" that indicate vehemence. Ramdas' special affinity for Gandhian ideals and regard for Gandhiji is quite
explicit in the text. During the researcher's interview with Swami Satchidananda, a direct disciple of Swami Ramdas, he pointed out that Swami Ramdas was a great admirer of Gandhiji and was influenced by him. Chandrashekhar in Passage to Divinity, a biographical sketch of Swami Ramdas also points out that he was in his purvashrama, "an ardent nationalist. He became a great admirer of Gandhiji and took to wearing khaddar" (Chandrashekhar 1988: 105). This is also clear from the activities undertaken by Ramdas when he established Anandashram. Ramdas refers to Gandhiji as one among the prophets of the world on more than one occasion in In Quest of God. In the above quoted passage, his emphasis on self-reliance also shows his perfect agreement with Gandhiji on self-help, and that sovereignty stems from self-reliance. In the course of this conversation Ramdas also points out to the American lady who held "a prejudiced view about the Mahatma and his principles of public action" that she was welcome to differ from Gandhi. "But to ascribe to him a deliberate aim at fame and self-importance as she did was wrong" (362-63). Ramdas also adds that he may not agree with all that Mahatmaji said but he has a deep regard and love for him. The last part of In the Vision of God reflects Gandhiji's influence on the humanitarian activities that Ramdas initiated in Anandashram. He established a vocational training school, and also an elementary school for children of all classes and castes "including Harijans and Muslims" from near by villages. The curriculum also had training in hand-spinning (Ramdas gave great importance to the spinning-wheel), basket weaving, clay modelling and coir work. The children were trained in gardening and vegetable growing (446-7). In commemoration of the ending of Gandhiji's twenty-one day fast on 7th May 1933, a bodhi tree was planted in front of the ashram (441). Vehemence can be seen in the manner in which he reacts to communal riots between Hindus and Muslims that plagued the country during the period:
The friction between these communities, breaking off at random in several parts of India, has been creating a perplexing and grievous problem for the leaders of both the communities to tackle with. What is needed on the part of both is an attitude of respect for each other’s faith. Both the Moslems and the Hindus have at their back equally brilliant traditions, and that they should fight each other exhibits their ignorance or willful forgetfulness of their glorious past (415).

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

Ramdas also emerges as a sannyasin who defied conventional taboos attached to women in the Hindu society of the period. For instance disregarding conventional practices observed even by a sannyasin, Ramdas allows a woman who was going through her monthly periods to touch his feet. He unobtrusively takes care of Rukmabai, his wife in his grahasta period, and allows her to stay in the ashram. 'Mother Krishna Bai, his direct disciple, was spiritually initiated under his supervision. In the Vision of God has an episode in which Swami Ramdas had to pounce on an intruder who attacked Krishna Bai. Swami Ramdas rightly recognises that empowerment of women releases them from sexual exploitation and social oppression. This can be seen in the way in which Swami Ramdas leaves all initiative in the hands of Mother Krishna Bai in ashram activities and attributes all developments to the dynamism of Mother Krishna Bai. We realise that the issue of empowerment of women even within a spiritual space in a society is important when we also read Mother Krishna Bai’s autobiography which was published much later. She mentions how before meeting Swami Ramdas, when she was in quest of a true spiritual master,
attempts at sexual exploitation by the so-called spiritual men were rampant in various ashrams. Krishna Bai had to literally flee from such situations until she found a true master in Swami Ramdas. Ramdas seems to have felt that even in an ashram a woman’s empowerment was her protection. Ramdas empowers her both as a spiritual disciple and as a woman in society. Some of the speeches by Ramdas shows that though this did invite opposition and criticism from various quarters, Ramdas chose to ignore them. He is perhaps casting a critical glance at oppressive systems like the purdah when he quotes the Rani who observed the Purdah in the State of Rajasthan: "Look at his magnificent vairagya! How I wish I were a man instead of a woman, hopelessly caught in a golden cage! If I were a man I could have a life like his - free and blissful. The words were addressed to the Dewan Saheb. In her tone there was a marked tinge of anguish" (121). The Rani's remark and the experience of mother Krishna Bai show that even in the world of spirituality the male-female difference can interfere with an individual's quest for inner freedom and bliss. Ramdas realised that serving humanity is service to God. To that end, he established a school, vocational training centre and dispensary for the benefit of the socially and economically disadvantaged people in particular. The ashram under the initiative of mother Krishna Bai undertook activities that provided means of living for people who were long deprived of their basic human rights. The autobiography thus engages the readers in a dialogue with various social issues particularly those to do with gender, class, religion and caste in an intensely religious nation. As Roy Pascal in his book Design and Truth in Autobiography points out, it is not so much the author's capacity to evoke the past that significantly distinguishes types of autobiography but "much rather a differing appreciation of what is desirable to be recalled…the presentation of the past is controlled by the character of the man writing" (Pascal 1960: 14).

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

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

O man,
where is sweetness — it is in thee
where is bitterness- it is in thee
where is happiness — it is in thee
where is misery — it is in thee
where is light — it is in thee
where is darkness — it is in thee
where is love — it is in thee
where is hate — it is in thee
where is heat — it is in thee
where is cold — it is in thee
where is good — it is in thee
where is evil — it is in thee
where is truth — it is in thee
where is untruth — it is in thee
where is wisdom — it is in thee
where is ignorance — it is in thee
where is heaven - it is in thee
where is hell — it is in thee
where is God — it is in thee
where is illusion — it is in thee
Notes

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

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

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

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

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

6 One cannot resist mentioning in passing that Derrida's concepts of the "endless play of *signifiers*" and the "deferral of meaning" are not very far removed from the saints' vision of the world as "*lila*" in their quest for the meaning of life. The ultimate realisation, as it comes to us through these narratives, is that meaning or God is not something that exists out there. It is everywhere manifesting itself in its endless play. Some one asked Yogananda
why did he refer to God as "he" or "she"? Did God have gender? Yogananda said it was only because one might find it difficult to comprehend God as "it"!

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

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

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

Dear Sister,

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

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

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

Yours affectionately,

27-12-22

- P. Vittalrao

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