Chapter V

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

This chapter identifies certain paradigms of nationalist discourse the rhetoric of bhakti offers in *Autobiography of an Indian Monk* (1932) by Purohit Swami. Shankar Gajanan Purohit, was born in Badnára near Amraoti in Berar on 12th October 1882 in an affluent and pious family. He studied philosophy for his B.A. at Morris College, Nagpur followed by Law at Deccan College, Pune and at Bombay University. In 1908 he was married to Godavari, or Godu Bai who also joined her husband in his spiritual practices. Two daughters, Indumati and Sumati were born to them and a son as well who died early. Following the birth of the son, Purohit Swami adopted sannyas and practised rigorous austerities. He was enlightened in the course of his pilgrimage to Mt. Girnar, the abode of Lord Dattatreya. His Guru, Sri Natekar known as Hamsa Swami encouraged him to carry India's message to the West. Subsequently on reaching London in February 1931, he met W.B. Yeats whose interest in Indian spirituality led to a number of collaborative works like the translation of the *Ten Principal Upanishads*. Yeats also encouraged him to write an autobiography. Purohit Swami also founded the London Institute of Indian Mysticism. News of his Guru's failing health hurried him back to India in 1936. Purohit Swami did not show any inclination to establish an ashram or initiate disciples after his Guru's mahanirvana in 1937. The Swami entered mahasamadhi in 1939. Research proves that Purolit Swami was a prolific writer. His published works include *The Holy Mountain* (1934), a translation of Hamsa Swami’s travelogue, *The Geeta* (1935), *The Ten Principal Upanishads* (1937) and Patanjali's *Aphorisms of Yoga*. The autobiography was initially published under the title *An Indian Monk, His Life and Adventures* in 1932. The present 1992 edition edited by Prof. Vino<5 Sena with a detailed introduction to Purohit Swami is re-entitled *The Autobiography of*
Besides there are less known works of the Swami like Song of Silence (n.d), a spiritual poem of 108 stanzas, a number of unpublished devotional poems like "The Honey Comb" (n.d), "At Thy Lotus Feet" (n.d), "The Harbinger of Love" (1914) and "In Quest of Myself" (1914) of 108 stanzas each. Other unpublished works of Purohit Swami include two plays' Sarojini (1914-15) and Sanyasini (1923) in Marathi, Tales from Indian Mysticism (n.d), in English, Kathas from 'Gyan, Bhakti and Prem' (n.d) and their interpretations and Spiritual Tales (n.d) in Marathi. The close association of W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot with Purohit Swami will be of interest to those studying the mystical strain in their poetry.

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

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section analyses the bhakti rasa in Purohit Swami's autobiography as a subversion of patriarchy and a reversal of the colonial male gaze. The second section analyses the representation of various socio-spiritual experiences in the autobiography that reflect the author's cultural resistance and nationalist thought.
A close reading of the author's spiritual struggle narrated in the text reveals that he was temperamentally inclined towards pursuing the path of bhakti for self-realisation. The senior members of his family, particularly his grandmother and his father conditioned his spiritual temperament and fostered a sense of self-restraint early in his life. In fact as we can see in the analysis, Purohit Swami experienced a constant battle between his mind that threatened to break loose at any moment and the values inculcated by social and familial conditioning. This is related to the two distinct but intricately linked bhavas of the author's bhakti. They are (1) anuraga bhava and (2) madhura bhava. Before identifying these moods in the text per se, we will examine what entails anuraga bhava and madhura bhava respectively. Anuraga bhava dramatises what can be termed as the "romantic" love between a lover and his beloved while madhura bhava is the "conjugal" love — that dramatises the husband-wife relationship. The similarities and differences between the two can be explained through examples. The anuraga between the legendary Radha and Lord Krishna is basically understood as the figurative depiction of the nature of the relationship between the Jivatman and the Paramatman. That is to say, God's intense love for his creation and conversely the creation's aspiration to realise and to become one with God. The Gita Govinda of Jayadeva beautifully captures the anuraga between Radha and Krishna by dramatising their playfulness, wooing, quarrel, reconciliation, teasing and such other attributes of "romantic" love. These are construed as figurative expressions of the Jivatman's experiences in the course of its ascent to attain God-consciousness, like the overcoming of various obstacles the ego consciousness poses, particularly the sense of possession and attachment. Anuraga bhava thus features the soul's intense struggle for realising God's unconditional love through complete self-surrender, non-possession and
non-attachment. *Madhura bhava*, the mood of conjugal love (also known as bridal mysticism) may be treated as a mood that is subsequent to the infirmities of romance. Living manifestations of *madhura bhakti* were Andal and Mirabai who meditated upon God as their consort. As is clear from *Mirabhai jans*, the uninterrupted exchange of love between the *Jivatman* and the *Paramatman* subsequent to their union or self-realisation is featured in *madhura bhakti*. As we have already seen in Swami Ramdas's autobiography, *bhakti* takes you to God-experience and becomes the end in itself. However *bhakti marga* in *anuraga bhava* and *madhura bhava* were pursued not by women alone. Purohit Swami's *bhakti* can essentially be seen as manifesting itself in both these *bhavas* in the autobiography. The essence of this *bhakti bhava* can be captured in a chapter of his autobiography significantly titled "My Lord Shrikrishna". In this chapter Purohit Swami quotes an instance from Mirabai's life that throws light on a significant social dimension in this form of the God-devotee relationship:

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

These lines show how intricately linked is the spiritual with gender questions. Mirabai *does not* challenge the subordinate position ascribed to women in the social hierarchy. Instead she reiterates it. By 'reducing' the Sadhu to the status of a woman when compared to God, Mirabai severely criticises the patriarchal attitude prevalent even among the male saints towards women which sees them as temptresses and as causing deviation from spiritual pursuit. She thereby undermines man's sense of power over woman in the social hierarchy and challenges their tendency to monopolise even the spiritual pursuit. Other instances of subversion through the body and *bhakti* can be observed among
Western women saints like Terese Neumann who experienced the passion of Christ and manifested Christ's stigmata on her body. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, during his moments of samadhi used to manifest behavioural and physical traits characteristic of the Divine Mother.

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

My reading of these equations, it may be noted, is to be understood as radically different from the way Parama Roy reads Ramakrishna Paramahamsa's mysticism in her book, Indian Traffic. Parama Roy reads the "femininity' of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and the "masculinity" of Swami Vivekananda from a Western perspective imbued with the jargon of postcolonial studies and as a consequence the essence of their spiritual aspirations, as the Indian psyche
understands these is totally lost sight of. In fact the significance of Mother Sarada Devi's femininity and Swami Vivekananda's masculinity and Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual persona as a perfect combination of the two (Sailaja 2001: 253) is something which Roy fails to notice. A contemporary well-known instance of a saint assuming both the feminine and masculine traits of the divine is Mata Amritanandamayi of Vallikkavu, Kerala. This aspect in itself can be taken up for independent study.

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

Critics who have affinity for the path of self-realisation through reasoning tend to decry bhakti as an "emotional" path for knowing God. However votaries of the bhakti path endorse its exoteric nature as the basic advantage of this path. In fact as the autobiography shows, Purohit Swami himself starts identifying bhakti as his margā after various casual and serious encounters and experiments with other paths. A psycho-analytical approach will prove that temperament and social conditioning facilitate a person's choice of his way to God. The author portrays himself as quite emotional, demanding and assertive as a child and extremely passionate as a youth - aspects of his character which he started struggling to overcome once his vocation became clear to him. The Swami's inherent spiritual temperament was fine-tuned by the rigorous religious disciplines practised in the household under the stewardship of the Swami's illustrious and saint-like grandmother. This is particularly brought out in the earlier chapters of the autobiography viz., "How the Soil had been Prepared", "Grandmother and Nursing Mothers" and "I am not to be a Landlord". The
reader however cannot rule out the role of grandmother's influence in shaping the *bhakti bhava* in him. For instance, in chapter two, the author remarks: "She [Swami's grandmother] and Shri Mahalakshmi were at one. She had visions of her, consulted her face to face, and was consoled by her. In every deed her whole life was spiritualised. Though a woman moving through this world, she was in it, not of it" (Swami 1992: 4). It was the religious grooming by his father that led him closer to Lord Dattatreya who ultimately became his *aradhananuriti*. His father asked him to read the *Guru-Charitra* regularly. Purohit Swami was thus initiated into attributing a particular name and form to God and that was of Lord Dattatreya. Purohit Swami learnt his first lesson in *bhakti* when he realised that God was not to be simply approached only for the sake of fulfillment of small earthly desires. Here is an example: "Of course when my father learnt that I was disappointed because the Lord did not solve the problems of geometry for me, he insisted on a better understanding. Then at last the idea dawned on me that devotion ought to be pure and simple, and that love ought to be unselfish, and that prayer was no bargain" (21). Developing unselfish love, he understands, is the first stage if one has to elicit a response from God. He says that he "tried to love Him in the fullness of my heart" (21).

Other major *conversional* influences were the saints and poets of Maharashtra who he met, read or heard about. All these influences, as is clear from the narrative, start working on his receptive mind and make him fancy that it is possible to realise divine life, "before doing anything else. But it was not so easy, as I found out later" (23). The intense yearning for response from God starts striking deep roots in him and encouragement of course came with rewards like the vision of the Goddess Jagadamba after an intense appeal (24). Like Paramahansa Yogananda he never misses a chance to speak to *mahatmas* and *yogis* whenever he came across them. The next stage in the course of his spiritual development is the encounter with his own self. The transition from boyhood to youth brings with it the infirmities of age that poses a serious
challenge to anyone determined to practice celibacy both in thought and deed. His encounter is first with the body and then with the mind as he becomes increasingly conscious and cautious of his sexuality and passionate nature. It is perhaps this sensitivity and caution and what seems to be an inherent sense of self-restraint that helps him to proceed further in his sadhana. The narrative shows how watchful he is over the mind-body nexus: "The stronger I became the more passionate I was. The books which deal with sexual love inflamed me. There were many temptations, and I needed constant self-control. Shame burned within me and made my mind weaker everyday. I felt drawn towards woman, and could very well understand that I was drifting backwards" (29).

He wages his first spiritual battle with the body:

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

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

Whenever my mind went astray, I used to take a cold bath, then run straight into the worship-room to pray and weep ....It was comparatively easy to control the physical, but what about the mind? It wavered and revolted inspite of my strenuous efforts. Unmarried, a strict celibate, I knew that unless my mind were under control all my professions would prove false. My thoughts made me angry; I would scold them, then coax them with spiritual texts into observance of the laws of religion.
It was an incessant fight, which used up all my strength (29-30).

He is conscious of the connection between the body and the mind when he says "the stronger I became the more passionate I was". This remark shows the effect of the body on the mind. The next line, "the books which deal with sexual love inflamed me" shows conversely the effect of the mind on the body. On realising this, he attempts to control the body by forgoing things that caused physical attraction. Attempts at controlling the infirmities of the mind are done through the mind. It is the mind that chides the mind, it is the same mind that attempts to control itself. As is clear from the passage quoted above the attempt of the author was to perhaps suppress his sexuality not to control it. Control of course is the next phase in his spiritual pursuit and that is by observing dietary restrictions and practise of yoga. Meditation and diet help him to sublimate his passions: "My conscience became very sensitive, and made me aware of my defects. I knew I had to climb the heights of the Himalayas and tried to equip myself with my whole strength in order to qualify myself for the heavy task that lay before me" (32). The same chapter indicates his loss of interest and faith in the path of reasoning to attain self-realisation. As a student of philosophy he used to engage himself in debates on philosophical reasoning. Jnana yoga was not beyond his reach. But it did not appeal to him because it did not help him to gain mastery over his senses. He remarks in the same chapter that "with all my philosophy I had gained nothing which could be valued in terms of peace" (29). He strictly follows the path of raja yoga and simultaneously has no dearth of exposure to various miracles performed by yogis. He reaches the fifth stage vinyoga called the "pratyahara". At this point the author informs us of a significant advance in his sadhana which marks his transition from faith to experience: "But the question before me was not faith, but actual experience. Faith carried me to a certain point, but when my patience began to tire, actual experience came to my aid, and thus I could successfully combat the various
difficulties that stood in the way, and attain the stage which I have attained today, whatever its value may be" (38). Direct experience could have easily led him to get carried away by demonstrations of miraculous feats with the power attained through raja yoga. However like all true saints he too realises at various points of time in his spiritual pursuit that such powers are not to be misused. In a chapter titled "The Engine Refuses to Move" he narrates how the demonstration of the power of yoga by a sadhu in a railway station gains popularity. He himself had experienced the power of a mantra to control prosperity. However he realises that these powers delay the realisation of the divine: "But 'Does this talk help them towards realisation of the Divine?' was my thought, since I was striving more and more for Bhakti Yoga (union with God through the love of Him) and I knew that I was tempted by a lower aim when asked to admire the powers displayed in such feats" (39). Here Purohit Swami translates bhakti as the "love of Him" and not as "devotion". This marks the turning point in his spiritual pursuit — the pursuit of the path of bhakti. He beholds the visions of various forms of God and one of the forms is of Lord Dattatreya and he identifies that "he was the god whom I worshipped pre-eminently" (43). He realises another great truth that "all gods are one" (44). The author records the effect of this knowledge on him: "My worship changed with my psychology. But the truth remained that God, in whatever form you worship him, is willing to manifest himself according to the wishes of the devotee. Men find the good they seek with pure love" (44). The author enters another significant phase in his pursuit on meeting his spiritual master. Greatly encouraged by his insightful assurances in terms of his success in God-realisation, his sadhana becomes more intense. A time comes, a point of "crisis" as he calls it, when all the sacred books are thrown away because realisation dawns on him that his need is not knowledge, but wisdom: "Learning could not give me control. My soul was sick and was not helped by medicine administered to the intellect, since they were two separate things. I must
prescribe for my soul; success in self-control, that would cure it. This plain and simple philosophy appealed to me” (47). His days of intense \textit{sadhana} culminates in his vision of Lord Dattatreya and the hearing of a divine message on his pilgrimage to Mt. Girnar. The first phase of a direct relationship with God begins with \textit{dasya bhava}, when he realises that "I was definitely accepted by the Master of all Masters, though not as a disciple, yet as a servant. I must strive hard to \textit{deserve} to be a disciple, but first I wanted to serve and wished to see my service accepted, however humble and wayward it might be" (58). Another significant ‘encounter’ with the Lord at a temple in Mahur marks a departure from his status as a servant to that of the beloved. The chapter which narrates this direct experience with God is significantly titled "The God’s Bed". Legend goes that Lord Dattatreya comes to take rest every night at the temple at Mahur. The priest in the temple had the vision of the Lord who told him that his "beloved child", Purohit Swami would come. The priest prepared the bed for the Lord and left the place and assured the Swami that he may be lucky enough to behold Him. The author's experience of God narrated in the chapter definitely shows the pace at which the intimacy between the \textit{bhakta} and God increases. On the first night,

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

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

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

Though the author uses the words "watched with rapt attention" all the experiences are listened to. Also, he had bedecked the bed for the night and the same night he gets to hear the Lord "enjoying his rest", a sign of the Lord's
acceptance of his act of love. Moreover he not only gets to hear this but also gets to see the Lord's response the next morning:

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

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

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

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

One may digress at this point to examine similar strains in the poems he wrote subsequent to his self-realisation. He wrote poems at the behest of Lord Dattatreya who appeared in his dreams thrice and asked him to "write for my
sake". The poems written in English are "In Quest of Myself, "The Harbinger of Love", "The Song of Silence", "The Honey-Comb" and "At Thy Lotus Feet". These poems express the author's deep sense of unselfish love as the touchstone of self-realisation. Stanza 49 of "The Honey-Comb" for instance presents the image of the devotee as one who has received the love of the Lord. The metaphor of the erotic conveys a subtle relation between the body and the bhakti.

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

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

Before we met, he used to whisper loving words
Every now and then,
But since the meeting is over,
He never opens his lips!
Before we met, there was that love, and he used to
Send for me day and night,
And since the meeting is over
He never even cares to remember me!
Before we met, he was full of mercy and used to
Give me whatever my want,
But since the meeting is over
Nothing can be had at all!
Before we met, he always felt anxious for me
And used to give me lessons in every art,
But since the meeting is over
He never deigns to teach!
Before we met, he was always pleased and used to
Pour his mind into that of mine,
But since the meeting is over
He never shows himself!
Before we met he used to
Command and see the act was done
But since the meeting is over
He neither asks me to do, nor not to do
Before we met there was the veil and he used to
Keep me beyond with respect
But since the meeting is over
There is no love and no darling!
Before we met, there was darkness and he used to
Pour light at intervals,
But since the meeting is over
I know not where he is gone!

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

I would like to be the humble ant and taste the sugar sweet,
I would never be the sugar itself where both the taste and sweetness meet.
I would feign be the truant child, and suck my mother's divine milk,
I would never be the mother herself
And would not barter my bliss for her grace benign.
I would gladly be the sweet consort, and serve my Lord
day and night. I would never be the Lord himself
And lose the honor of kissing his hallowed feet.
I would with pleasure be his bosom-friend
And throw my arms round his neck,
But I would never break the tie itself
And merge myself in the universal Self.9

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

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

This passage reads like a beloved recollecting the lover's earlier rendezvous while she awaits his arrival and their subsequent union. The last chapter of the autobiography also employs the erotic to inform the reader that language fails
to convey the human-divine union. The simile he draws is the consummation of conjugal love:

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

The focus is on the woman's experience. Her surrender to her husband is made clear when the author uses the expression, "as a woman gives herself to her husband." Though this may strike the reader as the language of patriarchy, it highlights man's sub-ordinate role in the spiritual quest which is akin to woman's role in the patriarchal structure. The above passage conveys two socio-spiritual messages as did Mirabai's. The first, as stated above, underscores the need for that complete surrender of one's ego in order to approach the Divine. The second is that words cannot communicate the bliss of Divine union. The text comes close to the post-modernist view that words as signifiers stand for endless deferral of meaning. Deconstruction in other words seems to
be a version of a saint's view of the world as signifiers (which we also saw in Ramdas), as manifestations of God, the "ultimate meaning out there" which in fact exists in various forms we see around. God, in deconstructionist language, exists as endless play of signifiers, as all that we perceive around. Though each signifier appears complete in itself it is yet not the essence because one can only be described in relation to the other. Though the Hindu religious code strongly revolves around the concept of a "centre", the ultimate experience defies the sense of the "centre", duality and dichotomy. As most of the texts we examine show, self-realised souls however choose to get back and remain on the dual plane of the taster i.e the rasika, enjoying the taste (embodied in the thing tasted--as in the ant-sugar analogy) i.e the rasa itself. For we can talk about the rasa only in relation to the rasika. This is the essence of bhakti. Purohit Swami's autobiography like Swami Ramdas's, thus represents a paradigm of the bhakti culture in India.

II

Critique of Culture as Nationalist Thought

The text serves as a document of cultural resistance to modernity in a variety of ways. First, it is significant that the autobiography was written at the instance of W.B.Yeats who conveyed to Purohit Swami the necessity to share with them the experience of God-realisation and not merely abstract philosophy. The text is thus a product of the Indo-British encounter that took place not in India but in England between a "Hindu missionary" and the English elite. Yeats was ready to promote him the way he did Tagore by getting his publishers to bring out the autobiography. Yeats' letter to Sturge Moore written on 9th Feb 1932 bears ample testimony to it:
Lady Gregory read the MSS and said she thought it would make a sensation. I can't imagine a book more appropriate to the moment—I know nothing like the book, so far as I know there does not exist in any language such a record of the life of a saintly man growing up under circumstances that may have existed over half or all the world. I assure you of course that it goes on as it starts—it is a record that may change, or rather should change man's conception of primitive history. Will you write to Macmillan yourself giving your own opinion and if you care to giving mine...He should listen to us for after all we launched Tagore.¹⁰

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

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

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

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

The introduction, verily, conveys a strong sense of the cultural difference, processes of cultural dialogue in which an Eastern theme and ethos is made to be perceived from a Western perspective and then fitted into a Western
language and form. It is not surprising therefore if Sturge Moore, as Vinod Sena points out in his introduction to the Indian edition of the text, came to see himself increasingly more as a collaborator than as an editorial adviser. However it became a text that Yeats wanted to read, thanks to Sturge Moore.

The knowledge that Sturge Moore participated in the Swami's literary enterprise somehow interferes with our own reading of the autobiography. If one goes by the tone and tenor of Yeats's introduction to the autobiography one cannot help but see Yeats (notwithstanding the fact that he was an anti-colonial Irish patriot) and Sturge Moore as dominating Western patrons. One instance is Yeats's depiction of the Swami's modest disposition as a spiritual man from India. Yeats "Introduction" becomes a typical example of the Western gaze when he 'represents' the Swami as a person who had come to Europe "that he might interpret the religious life of India, but had no fixed plan. Perhaps he should publish his poems, perhaps, like Vivekananda go to America" (xii). He was not received, says Yeats, by Rome's Holy Father. It needs to be noted that Yeats's introduction of the Swami takes off on a negative, uncertain note. Yeats takes the credit when he says, "Then he had come to England and called upon the Poet Laureate, who entertained him" (xii). The inevitable Western male gaze falls on him as he describes his physique: "A man of fifty, broken in health by the austerities of his religious life; he must have been a stalwart man and he is still handsome" (xii). Yeats presents himself as one who is not "startled" by the Swami's ideas but as one who is "interested" because "I had heard the like from other Indians" (xiii). Instead Yeats finds the Swami "startled and shocked" with the suggestion that he write his autobiography because it contradicts all tradition (xiii). When the autobiography finally came through, it thoroughly fitted into what Yeats was looking forward to, "a philosophy that satisfied the intellect, I found all 7 wanted" (xiv, emphasis mine). Section III of his introduction has an expression that conveys more of a sense of possession than endearment: "My Indian monk's habitual diet is milk and fruit..."(xv,
emphasis mine) which sounds more like the rhetoric of marketing. Yeats however sees Western receptivity to Eastern religious enterprise as the beginning of the "converse impregnation" with the East as male (xvi). The equations, one need not say, were however not the same as the Western impregnation of the East and the effects were certainly not the same. On completion of the autobiography and on Yeats reading it, he writes to Purohit Swami in a letter dated 29 March 1932:

...It is a form of experience of which we have had previously no record and it is described with admirable simplicity...You have done quite right in keeping back your own personality, your own opinions, they would interfere however admirable in themselves with the vividness of the record. You must not think there is any lack of spirituality, your struggles, your long sacrifice, your occasional visions, turn the mind towards spiritual things in a new and unique way.1

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

__In few books in fact, is this eternal consciousness of the inevitable approach of the Moment when material calls merge into the Unknown, this constant pre-occupation of spirituality, or the urge to realise divinity, portrayed with such intimacy....But very seldom indeed can one hope to find a Hindu Yogi • writing his own autobiography. If for nothing else, therefore this autobiography of an Indian Monk should be attractive, as it conducts us through the mental conflicts, reveals the austerities, the penances and the reactions that are experienced by the yogi....Strange things happen in India, and this book helps in some measure in the understanding of
the cravings, the penances and the powers of at least some of the more genuine sadhus and fakirs.\textsuperscript{12}

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

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

The reviewer finds "the intellectual vigour which is so characteristic of the great teachers of India" missing in the writer. For this, one should hold W.B. Yeats himself responsible. As Yeats's introduction and Purohit Swami's preface to the text show, Yeats had urged the Swami to keep "abstract philosophy" out: "Dr. W.B. Yeats said he wanted from me a \textit{concrete} life, not an abstract philosophy'; here is the result. Had it not been for him, I do not think I would ever have persuaded myself to attempt this autobiography. If any readers find enlightenment in the following pages, let them join me in \textit{thanking} the greatest living Irish poet" (Purohit Swami 1992: xi). The Swami distances himself from this end product and credits Yeats with the accomplishment of this task. The reviewer also wonders how far these experiences would work out practically for a European desirous of following the path of \textit{Yoga}. It may be recalled that the Swami did run a School of Mysticism in London during his stay there and had a large following. The "East London Advertisers" reviewing the book on
27 May 1933 found it interesting for the "descriptions of the contacts of mysticism with this practical world" (n. pag). Another fragment found in the reviews file of Purohit Swami Papers held that the reference to visions and appearances of God and invocation of Upanishadic vakyas incompatible in the text. The latter, according to the review, is belief in Pure Advaitism while the former is "Theism with an Anthropomorphic God". This inconsistency and half-understanding of the precepts by readers could have been avoided if Yeats had not insisted on keeping out abstract philosophy in the autobiography. Gwyneth Foden’s review of the book in The Hindustan Times of 23 October 1932 is a well informed one. She throws light on the author’s reference to Hindu life and social customs and their underlying spirituality. She finds the author’s simplicity and sincerity in the narrative striking:

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

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

Was not the service of mankind the service of God? I seriously pondered over this idea and met those who believed in philanthropy and asked them whether they had seen God, and they dared not say
that they had no one convinced me. I thought there must be something often [read "rotten"] in such a philosophy, or else in the way they worked it out, and was not satisfied with their results.... I came to the conclusion that it was sheer ignorance and egoism when men talked about helping God or helping mankind. When you begin to do good to this world, you presuppose that you are sufficiently wise to understand it, and powerful enough to help it out of its difficulties. Such men profess too much (Swami 1992: 76).

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

That Purohit Swami's autobiography did create an impact on literary circles and that it initiated a cross-cultural dialogue in London is clear from the various newspaper reports of the time. The reviewer could have had the precedent of Vivekananda's influence on Indian politics in mind while critiquing the "White man's burden" theory of the British. This would inevitably lead us to examine the political affinities of Purohit Swami. As Vinod Sena points out in his editorial introduction to the text and also during the researcher's interview with him, Purohit Swami was a fiery revolutionary and was "an active lieutenant of Lokmanya Tilak until his arrest and trial. He publicly spoke in Tilak's defence, and such was the tenor of his speeches that when they were published, the pamphlet was promptly proscribed and all copies seized and destroyed" (Swami 1992: xxxii). These aspects do not find mention in the autobiography. Nevertheless the spirit of nationalism can be traced in it. The concept of national identity and culture does not conform to the idea of the nation as a
political unity and as a mono cultural entity. The representation of the *bhakti* culture in India, and instances of class, caste, community, *gender*, racial, cultural and social interactions in the context of the spiritual quest show the role of the author as a spiritual aspirant and as a national subject Our attempt now will be to see how the text represents the latter. For the sake of analysis we can broadly categorise them into three. The first is based on what can be termed as the author's inward gaze, the second on the author's social gaze and the third on the author's reversal of the Western gaze.

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

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

Purohit was now faced with a paradox which has confronted many a spiritual seeker in our country -- the paradox so unforgottably embodied in the life of Prince Siddhartha, the Buddha. The Indian way of life presents liberation from the wheel of birth and death as our supreme goal and parents often help to instill this into the consciousness of the child in a thousand different ways. Yet if the child responds sensitively to such teachings, and on growing up resolves to renounce ordinary living in order to
pursue his spiritual quest, for the family it is as though the world itself threatens to dissolve. Seeing the direction of Purohit's inclinations, his parents sought to bind him down to the common human condition (xxv).

Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* also reveals the challenges the author had to face under the patriarchal roving eye of his elder brother Ananta who was keen on reverting Yogananda's interest in spiritual matters to that of a householder. Even modern saints like Mata Amritanandamayi had to face the threat of familial and social ostracism during the early years of her *sadhana*. Saints, like children, enjoy an inner sense of freedom and become unmindful of the social constraints, inhibitions and hierarchies which basically control human behaviour. It is not surprising that the agents of these forces of oppression in the family or in the society react abnormally to a man or woman who enjoy this inherent sense of freedom and become different from the rest of the world that conforms to social conditioning. Writings by these saints, autobiographies, *bhajans*, sayings, etc., reflect their critical gaze on such oppressive forces. Sometimes this gaze is oblique. As we observed in the case of Bahina Bai, even as they describe these oppressions they tend to see them as trials of their faith as willed by the Almighty. Nevertheless a socially sensitive reader cannot help but see these experiences of the saints as "cracks" through which issues relating to religion versus spirituality are addressed. Purohit Swami's chapter on "Religion versus Spirituality" in the autobiography casts a decidedly critical social gaze on the imperatives woven by a social framework to the extent of patriarchal oppression in the name of religious duty. Advocates of such a social framework as the writings of these saints show, comfortably pose themselves to be "religious". When someone among them, as Vinod Sena points out, seeks to *experience* God, to really *believe*, "the world itself threatens to dissolve" (xxv).
The writings of Swami Ramdas and Purohit Swami bring to the fore the clash between religion and spirituality particularly in terms of the demanding duties of a male as a householder even after one chooses to become a Sannyasi. For instance, the plight of the wife and children in terms of their financial and social security is a definite cause of concern. Though physically and psychologically a male renounced the world, during a time when economic independence for women was unimaginable, a transition from *Gruhastharama* to *Vanaprastha* was not a very smooth one. We see this in Gautama Buddha, Gandhi, Ramdas and Purohit Swami who were all *Gruhastas* before entering into the *Vanaprasthashrama*. Moreover as we find in Swami Ramdas, if a Sannyasi continues to take care of his family even after his initiation into the life of the ochre-robed one, he is again severely criticised by the same society that glorifies religion. Like Kasturba Gandhi we also find Rukma Bai, wife of Ramdas and Godu Bai, wife of Purohit Swami laudably adapting themselves to their roles as wives of Sannyasis. Purohit Swami shares his inner conflicts in this connection: "At our first meeting I gave her my promise before the sacred fire, the Brahmins and God. Thenceforward, in spite of the urge of renunciation that swelled in my breast, I was in duty bound to keep it" (73). The conflict is again to be on guard against the sway of physical passion: "I loved her dearly, though determined that our love should never come under the sway of engrossing physical passion. I tried to coach her in my ideals, and being a lady bred in Hindu culture, she earnestly tried to assimilate them" (73). The contending claims of religion and spirituality is brought out when he points out how the "religious code of married life" dragged him to a direction opposite to the life of a spiritual aspirant who would have the least concern for money and would prefer celibacy as the way of life:

No money, no life, is the order of this world. When I told my wife that I did not intend to earn money
and that I would rather lead the life of a recluse, she was surprised, but tried to assimilate my spirit. Money was the tap-root of all misery, said the Mahatmas. And passion for woman the next longest. I was convinced of the efficacy of strict continence, and knew it helped concentration....

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

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

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

My parents were very glad that my marriage bound me to my home with golden chains. They had forged those chains, and only through filial duty had they been able to enthrall me with them. They knew that I still clung to my ideal, and was trying hard to realise it. They had full faith in my strength of purpose and knew that I would rather die in the attempt than give it up. At the same time my heart knew that my difficulties would be added to by the indulgence of
my senses. But he knew all, and I had firm faith in Him (77).

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

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

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

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

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

Swami *Ramdas*’ autobiography depicts a similar picture of the sub-continent. Also worthy of note is the role played by the author himself in spreading God's message to everyone in a period of remarkable cultural transition. The Swami’s sensitivity to the dynamics of spiritual rhetoric and social transition is remarkable:
I studied the varied modes of living in order to convey my message to everyone in a style that would suit his ways of thinking. This was no easy task, but success in it would realise the full significance of the title "Swami". Old-fashioned people, used to the language of the Vedas and Upanishads, failed to grasp the new thought and style, and the half-Westernised failed to understand those of the sacred books (111).

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

A great spiritual wave was passing through the minds of Indians at that time. Everybody was on the lookout for the next avatar.... All sane people thought that He must incarnate Himself and put new life into the Indians and re-establish the great eternal truths of religion...Lord ShriKrishna has given them a promise in the Geeta to that effect...Indians have always believed that great promise...for had not India always been saved by spirituality? But where to find the new "avatar perplexed them all. Only the great sages understood, but they kept silence. The way to understand a Mahatma is to serve him and love, and to draw him out in privacy. He will never reveal himself until the psychological moment arrives, and mere is no power on earth which can force him against his will. I was so sure of this that I took the safe way and found out the secret, kept it, and repeated in the recesses of my heart. "Not yet" (92-93).
This passage is significant for various reasons. First he shares with the readers the fact that a Mahatma will reveal himself, but who it is he does not reveal. However one can only infer that he must have referred to Gandhiji in this context. Prof. Vinod Sena in the course of my interview with him pointed out that the Swami was able to detect Gandhiji's potential as a politician right at the moment he entered Indian politics. The references to Gandhiji in great veneration in the autobiographies of Swami Ramdas and Paramahansa Yogananda also serve to buttress this point. Moreover an article by Purohit Swami himself titled "The Philosophy of Present Politics" signed as "A Fakir from Mount Girnar" that appeared in The Bombay Chronicle of 11 December 1920 re-affirms our convictions. In the article Purohit Swami severely criticises not only the colonial policy of the British but also the Westernised political and anti-colonial stance of the then leaders at the helm of affairs. Being a lawyer, he sharply criticises the British Legal System and the Britain-bred Indian lawyers:

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

The article addresses the issues relating to the Hindu-Muslim conflict and the role of the British in creating this disunity. Non-cooperation, the author elucidates in complete agreement with Gandhi, is a mild form of that
renunciation which occupies so prominent a part in the realisation of the Self. He also uses the expression "Self Co-operation" in order to throw light on the spirit of non co-operation. The author in the article rightly identifies the necessity to do away completely with the systems introduced by the colonisers "making our own way for the emancipation of the nation in the immediate future. There is the chance that Sri Gandhi who is leading the nation today is consciously or unconsciously following the dictates of the law of our National Karma through which alone the manifestation of universal will is being asserted" (ibidem).

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 I have followed the 1992 edition of the autobiography

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

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

7 May 1937

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

T.S. Eliot.


4 See the "Author's Preface" to the autobiography and W.B. Yeats' introduction to the autobiography that throw light on the making of the text. The participation and resonance of "many voices" in the making of the text is examined in my analysis. See the "Author's Preface" to the autobiography and W.B. Yeats' introduction to the autobiography that throw light on the making of the text. The participation and resonance of "many voices" in the making of the text is examined in my analysis.
5 I have gained insights from "Andal's Tirupavai" by Mohan Ramanan and "Mirabai" by Santa Subba Rao in Poet Saints of India (193-203 & 111-122) in my discussions on eroticism in the expression of bbakti. That Andal's and Mirabai's bbakti has madhura bhava when compared to Radha's anuraga bhava is purely my inference. Andal and Mirabai envisaged themselves more as God's consort while Radha's was sakhya oriented romance.

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


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

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