Chapter—III

The Rhetoric of *Karma Yoga*

This chapter examines the rhetoric of *karma yoga* in Mahatma Gandhi's *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) which also embodies his idea of nationalism. The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section seeks to establish the relevance of examining this text in this study particularly in the light of Gandhiji's understanding of the term "religion" which is inextricably linked with his idea of the nation. The second section outlines the discursive pattern of the text while the remaining four sections are analyses of the text in detail.

I

Spiritual Quest as Nationalism

The autobiography is a narration of Gandhiji's lived experience in which his quest for the nation and national character is not different from his quest for self-realisation. The narrative style further reinforces the inextricable link between the spiritual and the social in his quest for truth. The style is quite interestingly, a confluence of the confessional and the inspirational modes of narration. The confessional mode is reminiscent of the rhetoric in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. The inspirational trope is quite similar to Benjamin Franklin's mode of addressing his audience in his autobiography in which he sets examples of ways of living for the citizens of the United States. A combination of these two tropes in Gandhiji's autobiography further indicates the link between the social or political and the spiritual in Gandhiji's life. ¹ Gandhiji construed the term "religion" and practised it "in its broadest sense meaning thereby self-realisation or knowledge of self (Gandhi 1927: 27).
However, this definition and practice of religion was premised upon his struggle for India's independence and the service of India: "I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realised only through service. And service for me was the service of India" (132). The autobiography, thus, is so imbued with the spirit of what is termed as *karma yoga* (which means action with detachment or active inaction that yokes the *Jivatman* with *Paramatman*), that it is virtually possible to perceive Gandhiji's nationalist zeal as the path of his spiritual quest.² Hence, this study will specifically explore the spiritual dimensions of the text particularly the spirit of *karma yoga* that will contribute to our understanding of Gandhiji's vision of the nation.

However, while the language and the form of the autobiographies are decisive factors of this study, the inclusion of this text in my study requires some justification. The reason is that the autobiography was originally written in Gujarati and was later translated into English by Mahadev Desai (under Gandhiji's direct guidance and supervision) in the form in which it is now available to us.³ Second, the autobiography was not originally written in book form, but in instalments for the columns of *Navjivan*: "The Swami [Swami Anand] wanted me to write it separately for publication as a book. But I have no spare time. I could only write a chapter week by week.... Why should it not be the autobiography?" (ix) However the very fact that Gandhiji wrote an autobiography and that it was translated into English in the 1920's helps one to recognise the fact that the text served as a document of resistance to British imperialism and that it generated discourses on spiritual life as integral to nationalist thought. Moreover this analysis is also based on the insights derived from his other important work viz., *Hind Swaraj* which has helped me to pick up the nuances of his characteristic literary style and rhetoric. Also as R.C.P. Sinha points out in defence of his study of Gandhiji in his *Indian Autobiographies in English*, Gandhiji's autobiography is an outstanding contribution to the genre and a study of Indian autobiography will indeed remain incomplete without
attention to it. Moreover the text was translated into English under the direct supervision of Gandhi who was after all a master of English prose (Sinha 1978: 3). Prof. K. Srinivasa Iyengar cites the instance of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* to justify the inclusion of Gandhiji in his study of Indian writing in English: "If I have erred in including an appreciation of *My Experiments with Truth* in my book, I am at least in very good and honourable company" (4). I had these precedents in mind in including Gandhiji's autobiography in my study.

The dialogic imperatives in the narration enable us to examine the text not just as a "self-life-sketch" but as a mediation on discourses and counter discourses that went into the shaping of events to come at crucial points of time in the history of the nation. In this study I have detached Gandhiji as an individual and elevated him as a contrapuntal representation of a *way of life*. Paramahansa Yogananda in his autobiography views Gandhiji as "Innocent artist he was in all ways of his life, Gandhi became a supreme artist at the moment of his death" (Yogananda 1974: 446). Sunil Khilnani, in his Introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Gandhiji's autobiography views Gandhiji as an "artful choreographer of his doings" (Khilnani 2001: 1). Needless to say, Gandhiji's *performance* is intimately bound up with nation building, resistance to imperialism and the decolonisation of the mind.

The autobiography constantly challenges us to clarify our understanding of terms like culture, education, religion, secularism, spirituality and modernity. In this respect Gandhiji's autobiography echoes his seminal work *Hind Swaraj* published in 1910. The autobiography also reads as a mellowed version of the spiritual and *nationalist* verve found in the *Hind Swaraj*. *Hind Swaraj* is an explicit dialogue between the reader and the editor while *An Autobiography* is an implicit dialogue. Anthony J. Parel points out the advantage of the dialogue form in his Introduction to *Hind Swaraj*:
Dialogues, especially those on 'difficult subjects', remain open-ended affairs, requiring an attitude of give and take from the participants. There is little room for dogmatism, and this should be kept in mind when interpreting the controversial issues in the book, including the topic of modern civilisation. Even when the argument seems conclusive, it is open to further discussion by other people at other times. Being open to each other's point of view is of course the hallmark of a satyagrahi (Parel 1997: xli).

_Hind Swaraj_ both in form and content, documents the spirit and thought of Gandhiji in his formative years while _An Autobiography_ is a sublime, mellowed rendition of the lived experience of the ideas and thought expounded in _Hind Swaraj_. The autobiography like _Hind Swaraj_ manifests its dialogic proportions when it generates a flux of discourses and dialogues at every fresh reading of the text in any cultural moment. A close look at the introduction to the autobiography reveals the dialogic tendencies in the text. At the outset, in the introduction, the author addresses through the voice of his "God-fearing friend" the feasibility of attempting "anything like an autobiography" and on the consistency of utterances made in the autobiography:

But a God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. "What has set you on this adventure?" he asked. "Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence. And what will you write? Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today, or supposing you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your word, spoken or written, may be misled? Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet?" (Gandhi 1927:ix).
The passage is not merely the reservations of an individual. It highlights a problematic cultural difference between the East and the West and the consequent scepticism and resistance of a native consciousness to a literary practice peculiar to an alien imperialist culture. At this point it is this sense of cultural difference that resists the autobiographical act. Second, we find the genre itself subjected to interrogation on grounds of human infirmities through the passage of time when the friend asks: "Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today...",

A third dimension is also brought out when Gandhiji turns his attention to the reader and engages in a dialogue with her on questions of the form and the content of his narrative. A wonderful amalgamation of the form and the content takes place here:

But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. But I should certainly like to narrate my experiments in the spiritual field which are known only to myself, and from which I have derived such power as I possess for working in the political field. If the experiments are really spiritual, then there can be no room for self-praise (ix-x).

A bargain between “attempt[ing] a real autobiography" in the Western sense and "tell[ing] the story of my experiments" reminiscent of the indigenous oral tradition-is taking place. There is spontaneity in the rhetoric of the bargain. The tendency to narrate one's own life objectively as a "story" is interesting. A deal struck, the result is synthesis. Since the narrator's life is full of experiments, note that the story is said to take only the shape of an autobiography. The precondition is that if the content is nothing but spiritual experiments, which he
shall not mind at any rate, then there is no room for self-praise. Thus though the text is autobiography in shape, it is the story of his performance of spiritual experiments in content and hence not a real autobiography. It is possible to see the entire text as a negotiation between the Western form and the Indian content particularly when he uses the rhetoric of science to convey the spirit of his quest:

I claim for them nothing more than does a scientist who, though he conducts his experiments with the utmost accuracy, forethought and minuteness, never claims any finality about his conclusions, but keeps an open mind regarding them. I have gone through deep self-introspection, searched myself through and through, and examined and analysed every psychological situation. Yet I am far from claiming any finality or infallibility about my conclusions. One claim I do indeed make and it is this. For me they appear to be absolutely correct, and seem for the time being to be final (x-xi)

I hope and pray that no one will regard the advice interspersed in the following chapters as authoritative. The experiments narrated should be regarded as illustrations, in the light of which everyone may carry on his own inclination and capacity (xii).

Such an idea of the phrase "experiments with truth" also interestingly rejects the claims of science as "truths" and also the anthropomorphic notion of God. The experiment is a middle path that accommodates scientific temperament and fills which dismantles the science/religion dichotomy. Truth for Gandhiji is God that manifests itself in human beings through acts of virtue. The passage also anticipates the conversational effects of his experiments on the reader. 5

As though intuitively apprehending critical pronouncements on the questions of veracity, authenticity and consistency pertaining to generic
considerations, Gandhiji devotes one chapter in between to address these issues in the chapter titled "Intimate European contacts-Part I". Gandhiji holds that he is not writing the autobiography to please critics. It is here that he expressly mentions that writing itself is one of the experiments with truth. Moreover he started writing it in compliance with his co-workers' wishes (234). Further he problematises an author's predicament in his choice and evasion of events and names of people in the narrative:

I understand more clearly today what I read long ago about the inadequacy of all autobiography as history. I know that I do not set down in this story all that I remember. Who can say how much I must give and how much omit in the interests of truth? (234).

Gandhiji's belief that a man of truth must be a man of caution manifests itself in his strong awareness of his audience and of the possibilities of the audience interpreting his utterances:

Only those matters of religion that can be comprehended as much by children as by older people, will be included in this story. If I can narrate them in a dispassionate and humble spirit, many other experimenters will find in them provision for their onward march (x).

Also in the chapter on intimate European contacts, his predicament on what to mention and what to omit is expressed; for "If things that are relevant are omitted truth will be dimmed" (234). The same predicament urges him to stop his narration at a certain point:

And my principal experiments during the past seven years have all been made through the Congress. A reference to my relations with the leaders would therefore be unavoidable, if I set about describing my experiments further. And this may not do, at any
rate for the present, if only from a sense of propriety (419).

When Gandhiji treats autobiography writing itself as one of the experiments with truth (234), he is providing interesting theoretical insights into autobiography writing as a spiritual, nationalist enterprise. These preliminary remarks hopefully place in perspective the linkages between spirituality, nationalism and the autobiographical act in Gandhiji. The following sections try to show Gandhiji representing ‘ways of living’ in which spirituality and nationalism amalgamate.

II
Gandhiji’s ‘Ways of Living’

Judith Brown in her study *Gandhi - Prisoner of Hope* (1990) holds that Gandhiji’s own attempt to trace his spiritual pilgrimage is erratic in the autobiography and often confusing if the reader is seeking some clear chronological development or reasoned analysis:

In Gandhi’s case the difficulties are compounded by the fact that there is no ‘conversion experience’ as a landmark, as is so often the case in a Christian context. Although there were in his South African years certain times and experiences crucial in his inner development - his first year of religious ferment, reading a seminal book, the vow of celibacy, the writing of *Hind Swaraj* - his experience was more a process of deepening enlightenment and discovery, influenced by a multiplicity of sources which reinforced each other (Brown 1990: 74).

One may agree with Brown’s view that Gandhiji’s spiritual experience was more a process of deepening enlightenment and discovery. But the narrative is not so erratic as Brown points it out to be. It is erratic, if one were to place it in
the Christian context and then look for a 'conversion experience' as the turning point in his life. Brown's predicament comes from using Western theoretical paradigms to understand a text deeply rooted in another culture. The following analysis demonstrates that it is possible to trace a clear chronological development or reasoned analysis of spirituality in Gandhiji's autobiography if one were to look at the narrative from the point of view of Hindu religious tradition particularly in its concept of the four *ashrama dharmas*:

A clear discursive pattern based on the *ashrama dharmas* emerges in the autobiography itself. *An Autobiography* is divided into five parts. It can be seen that every part narrates a particular way of living that dominates Gandhiji's lifestyle during that particular period and points to significant transition from one *ashrama* to the next. Part one and two show Gandhiji's travails as a householder and also the re-orientations in the Gandhi household brought about by the onset of modernity through English education. Part three shows Gandhiji's increasing inclination towards control of the senses. This culminates in his taking the vow of celibacy and the practice of it. Part four focuses on his life away from the country in South Africa, rigorously practising the ideals of dispossession and self-help. Part five marks his active entry into the Indian political arena and is notable for his initiation into the life of an ascetic. These life patterns narrated in the autobiography are analysed as Gandhiji's own version of the four stages in the *ashrama dharma* mentioned in the Hindu scriptures as *brahmacharya* (celibacy, studenthood) *garhastya* (householderhood) *vanaprastha* (mendicanthood) and *sannyasa* (asceticism). A conscious pursuit or a strict observance of the life style prescribed for each of these stages facilitates spiritual awakening and evolution of consciousness, thereby ensuring freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Since Gandhiji married as a child, the only deviation from the usual order set forth by the Scriptures is in his starting with *garhastya* and then moving on to *brahmacharya* and the subsequent stages. There is no indication in the narrative that Gandhiji set forth to follow these patterns
consciously though there are indications that he was strongly aware of these stages. Gandhiji re-interprets *ashrama dharma* in order to strike a balance between tradition and modernity.

III
Dynamics of *Garhastya*

The stage of householderhood in Gandhiji's life can be divided into three phases. The first phase portrays an almost idyllic picture of an erstwhile traditional Indian family, with vignettes of its members as active in the then political, social and religious spheres in which Gandhiji's parents also figure. The second phase reveals the role of certain colonial cultural practices in causing re-orientations to the Indian system of the household. Here we notice Gandhiji's encounter with the period of transition effected by the onset of modernity through Western education. Here the individual rebels and his interests clash with the community's interests and prevail over them. He even counters their ambivalence towards any affiliation with Western cultural practices. Changes take place in the configuration of his family setup due to the demands of a modern professional practice like the law. Part one and part two of the autobiography mark these two phases. Now the third phase marks a reconstitution of the family setup that ascribes a broader definition to the term "householder". The analysis will explore how this way of living extends to the concept of community living and broadens the space of the household, breaks the class/caste distinctions and makes *garhastya* synonymous with nationhood and spiritual living.

Part one and two of the autobiography sketch Gandhiji's formative years. Here we see that it is not the experiences as such but his response to the experiences which go into making Gandhiji's ways of living truly spiritual. These formative years are punctuated with conflicts at various levels, some of
which would represent the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. Here the narrative style is akin to that of Christian confessions. We have at the outset the individual interests and societal interests clashing at various levels. We encounter these expressions of conflicts, both inner and outer, rendered through various rhetorical devices. Humour is one such device employed here.

Depicting one's own innate passion for truth in an autobiography, but in defiance to any possibility of sounding self-righteous, is a challenging exercise. Gandhi achieves this by letting his characteristic sense of humour permeate the narrative. This is incidentally a major premise of dialogism. For instance, recollecting his initial school days, he modestly reports in chapter I-

It was with some difficulty that I got through the multiplication tables. The fact that I recollect nothing more of those days than having learnt, in company with other boys, to call our teacher all kinds of names, would strongly suggest that my intellect must have been sluggish, and my memory raw (5).

In chapter II, we have the oft-quoted 'kettle' incident which is an instance of the most powerful dialogic rendition of an episode through humour:

The teacher tried to prompt me with the point of his boot, but I would not be prompted. It was beyond me to see that he wanted me to copy the spelling from my neighbour's slate, for I had thought that the teacher was there to supervise us against copying. The result was that all the boys, except myself, were found to have spelt every word correctly. Only I had been stupid. The teacher tried later to bring this stupidity home to me, but without effect. I never could learn the art of 'copying' (5-6).
"Honesty" here is depicted as "stupidity" from another's point of view. What is depicted is not a contrasting picture of honesty and dishonesty but of one through the other.

For an individual, striking a balance between one's own contending interests in a traditional Indian household was no easy job. Gandhiji focuses on the inner conflict between his "devotion" to parents and "lustful love" towards his wife. This also is a metaphor of the conflict between the flesh and the spirit:

I was devoted to my parents. But no less was I devoted to the passions that flesh is heir to. I had yet to learn that all happiness and pleasure should be sacrificed in devoted service to my parents. "Renunciation of objects, without the renunciation of desires, is short lived, however hard you may try." Whenever I sing this song or hear it sung, this bitter untoward incident rushes to my memory and fill me with shame (8-9).

A series of incidents that point to the conflict between the flesh and the spirit follow, the most important of them being his experiments with vice which his friend initiates him into. Gandhiji befriends this friend in a reformatory zeal but in turn falls prey to his counter reformatory zeal. The context was "the wave of 'reform' sweeping over Rajkot" (17). The bait was the friend's explanation that "the English are able to rule over us, because they are meat-eaters. We are a weak people because we do not eat meat. Our teachers and other distinguished people who eat meat are no fools. They know its virtues. You should do likewise..." (17). The vice comes in the garb of virtue, reminiscent of Satan's strategies employed to deflect those from their search for Truth. Also note that this is the first" reference made in the text to the movements in the country on self-empowerment to counter the mighty Englishman. The "wave of reform" was to strengthen the weak Indian's physical prowess that would make him mentally fearless. Gandhiji unable to
savour this path of "reform" searched for alternatives. He worked on spiritual methods to attain physical, mental and spiritual prowess that would serve to decolonise the mind, strengthen the body and the spirit and through this decolonise the country. The decolonisation of the outer world was to be achieved by first decolonising the inner world. In this chapter Gandhiji makes a passing reference to the popularity of a doggerel by the Gujarati poet Narmad which was popular among the school boys:

Behold the mighty Englishman
He rules the Indian small
Because being a meat-eater
He is five cubits tall (18)

By quoting this doggerel Gandhiji is of course underlining his own understanding of the English power as having more to do with cultural, legal and political systems than with physical prowess as popularly understood.

In his experiments with meat-eating, brothel visits, smoking, stealing and suicide attempts, a teenager's characteristic tendency to break the rules of the household is seen. But Gandhiji was one in whom the voice of the conflict between the spirit and the flesh was too loud to be ignored. For instance, on the meat-eating experience, Gandhiji describes his inner struggle:

The goat's meat was as tough as leather. I simply could not eat it. I was sick and had to leave off eating.

I had a very bad night afterwards. A horrible nightmare haunted me. Every time I dropped off to sleep it would seem as though a live goat were bleating inside me and I would jump up full of remorse. But then I would remind myself that meat-eating was a duty and so became more cheerful (19)

One can see that the nature of the conflict is complex. Meat-eating was carried out on account of patriotism much against familial norms and against
one's own conscience. It is not surprising therefore if Gandhiji should have searched for alternative measures to decolonise the nation.

Two incidents, one narrated in chapter VIII "Stealing and Atonement" and the second in chapter IX, "My Father's Death and Double Shame" mark a denouement in his involvement with such experiments. The first gave him a lesson in *ahimsa*. The second, as Erik H. Erikson points out in his psychoanalytical study *Gandhi's Truth*, had a major impact on his mind and was instrumental in his taking the *brahmacharya* vow in later years. A third re-orientation in his householderhood is in his leaving for England for higher studies. The suggestion from their well wisher that Gandhiji should go to England to study law is received with ambivalence in the Gandhi household. On the one hand we see Gandhiji's mother's apprehensions in sending a young man to England and on the other we see Gandhiji's brother's sense of sacrifice in helping him against all odds to make the trip. Nevertheless Gandhiji is made to take the vow that he will not touch wine, woman and meat.

Another hurdle awaited him in Bombay and that was the objection of his caste people. This clash of interests between the individual and the community and tradition and modernity is portrayed quite dramatically in chapter XII titled "Outcaste". Between the contending claims of tradition and modernity, Gandhiji strikes a wonderful balance in this incident. His resistance, in the course of his balancing act, is to the baseless apprehension of his caste people on the one hand and to the negative influence of modernity on the other. It is important to note that Gandhiji narrates this encounter in a dialogue form:

In the opinion of the caste, your proposal to go to England is not proper. Our religion forbids voyages abroad. We have also heard that it is not possible to live there without compromising our religion. One is obliged to eat and drink with Europeans!
To which I replied: 'I do not think it is at all against our religion to go to England. I intend going there for further studies. And I have solemnly promised to my mother to abstain from the three things you fear most. I am sure the vow will keep me safe.'

'But we tell you, rejoined the Sheth, 'that it is not possible to keep our religion there. You know my relations with your father and you ought to listen to my advice.'

'I know these relations, said I, 'and you are as an elder to me. But I am helpless in this matter. I cannot alter my resolve to go to England. My father's friend and adviser, who is a learned Brahman, sees no objection to my going to England, and my mother and my brother have also given me their permission'

'But will you disregard the orders of the caste?'

'I am really helpless. I think the caste should not interfere in the matter.' This incensed the Sheth. He swore at me. I sat unmoved. So the Sheth pronounced his order: 'This boy shall be treated as an outcaste from today. Whoever helps him or goes to see him off at the dock shall be punishable with a fine of one rupee four annas' (34-35).

Through this résistance and balance, Gandhiji ventures into experiments in dietetics and becomes a champion of vegetarianism during his stay in England. This marks the first unconscious step towards the challenging and arduous path of the quest for self-realisation. He notes in chapter XVII "Experiments in Dietetics" that,

My experiments in England were conducted from the point of view of economy and hygiene. The religious aspect of the question was not considered until I went to South Africa where I undertook strenuous experiments which will be narrated later. The seed, however, for all of them was sown in England (50).
However Gandhiji points out that experiments in plain living had a positive impact on his body and mind:

> Let not the reader think that this living made my life by any means a dreary affair. On the contrary the change harmonized my inward and outward life. It was also more in keeping with the means of my family. My life was certainly more truthful and my soul knew no bounds of joy (47).

Scriptures hold that food habits play a major role in controlling one's senses and any fresh initiate into spiritual practice must observe dietary restrictions as the first step towards gaining control over his senses. Moreover fasting was to become Gandhiji's non-violent weapon against colonisers and communal forces.

The influence of Salt's *Plea for Vegetarianism* on Gandhiji is significant:

> From the date of reading this book, I may claim to have become a vegetarian by choice.... I had all 'along abstained from meat in the interests of truth and of the vow I had taken, but had wished at the same time that every Indian should be a meat-eater, and had looked forward to being one myself freely and openly some day, and to enlisting others in the cause. The choice was now made in favour of vegetarianism, the spread of which henceforward became my mission (41).

A number of such books by the English were instrumental in convincing Gandhiji of the positive aspects of vegetarianism. These books seem to have given him logical explanations for what originally began as a religious taboo attached to non-vegetarian food. The explanation as Gandhiji points out in "Experiments in Dietetics" was based on religious, scientific, practical and medical aspects. This appealed to Gandhiji's reasoning spirit. Vegetarianism
also contributed to deepening Gandhiji’s sense of morality in action during his stay in England. We also see another instance in which Oriental studies brought the colonial subject closer to one’s own scriptures and also to Western thought. This as we can see in Gandhiji resulted in the comparative study of religions. Chapter X "Glimpses of Religion", and chapter XX "Acquaintance with Religions" in part one and chapter one "Raychandbhai", chapter XI "Christian Contacts", chapter XV "Religious Ferment" and chapter XXII "Comparative Study of Religions" in part two should be read together in order to get a full picture of the way in which exposure to scriptures and sectarian practices both Eastern and Western in his formative years in England and South Africa became significant. "Glimpses of Religion", as the title suggests is a chapter on Gandhiji’s preliminary, but significant encounters, with most of the world religions in the Gandhi household in India. The chapter is also a critique of Hindu methods of worship and Christian missionary enterprise. For instance when Gandhiji says that he had to often go to the Haveli,

...it never appealed to me. I did not like its glitter and pomp. Also I heard rumours of immorality practised there, and lost all interest in it (27).

He is in fact pointing to a moral decadence in Hinduism as it was practised in those days, in some parts of the country. The second instance is more significant in the colonial context because it refers to activities of the Christian missionaries in India:

In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their gods I could not endure this... I heard of a well-known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that, when he was baptized, he had to eat beef and drink liquor, that he also had to change his clothes, and that thenceforth he began to go about
in European costume including a hat. I also heard that the new convert had already begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created in me a dislike for Christianity (28-29, emphasis mine).

In Gandhiji's dialogic narration, the "country" is objectively perceived from the point of view of the convert — "their country". Note that for the new convert it ceases to be his country and the customs cease to be his anymore. It is to be noted that Gandhiji criticises not Christianity as such but the way it is practised and its disruptive force. Even in South Africa, Gandhiji recollects instances of Indian Christians alienating themselves from other Indians and owing allegiance to the English. Gandhiji painfully interrogates Christianity and critiques the proselytisation policy of Christian missionaries that effaces one's sense of identity with one's nation: "Was this the meaning of Christianity? Did they cease to be Indians because they had become Christians?" (116). Gandhiji is not alone in his resentment. The rise of Hindu fundamentalism is an effect of proselytisation, the divide and rule policy of the British and of colonial cultural hegemonic practices. It goes without saying that these remarks should not be mistaken to be Gandhiji's final word on Christianity as such.

"Acquaintance with Religions" documents his first encounter with the Holy Bible and his special attraction for the Sermon on the Mount. By then he had also started a careful study of Hindu scriptures, the Bhagavad Gita in particular. It was through the Theosophists that Gandhiji gained a wider and deeper perspective on Hinduism. Their works also served to dispel Gandhiji's several wrong notions about Hinduism which had almost made him an atheist. Madame Blavatsky's Key to Theosophy "stimulated in me the desire to read books on Hinduism, and disabused me of the notion fostered by the missionaries that Hinduism was rife with superstition" (58). Moreover, Mrs. Besant's book How I Became a Theosophist in turn strengthened his aversion to atheism. It is significant that Gandhiji's first encounter with the Bhagavad Gita, the text that was to
influence him and guide his experiments with ways of living, took place in England at the instance of the Theosophists. The age was noted for its Orientalism in the West and of revivalism in India. This, as has been noted earlier, facilitated the circulation of a number of Eastern religious texts in the West. For the English educated Indian the re-discovery of religious practices and scriptures took place in the context of socio-cultural cross-currents. For Gandhiji too such contexts became instrumental in his devising new ways of living for formulating a new sense of national identity and nationhood.

Chapter One of Part Two marks the entry of Raychandbhai, to whom Gandhiji ascribed the status of his spiritual mentor, into his life. We can infer from Gandhiji’s description that Raychandbhai was a true karma yogi (74). Interestingly, this anticipates Gandhiji’s later role as a karma yogi for it is said that one’s spiritual aptitude determines one’s spiritual guide. Gandhiji himself points out in this chapter that "one gets the Guru that one deserves" (74). Though Gandhiji could not place Raychandbhai "on the throne of (his) heart as guru", as a mentor, Raychandbhai was a constant source of inspiration in his spiritual quest.

It is important that though Gandhiji’s first encounter with Christianity in India was unpleasant, he spared no chances to mend this dislike during his stay in England and South Africa. Chapters like "First Day in Pretoria", "Christian Contacts", "Religious Ferment" and "Comparative Study of Religions" show that Gandhiji had kept an open mind in his interactions with Christian missionaries and Christian friends on matters relating to Christianity. These chapters also provide, through Gandhiji’s characteristic humour, a critique of Christianity as it was interpreted, preached and practised in England and in India, as a part of colonial policy. Gandhiji with latent sharpness and humour attacks the rhetoric of persuasion in Christian preachings. He challenges their notion that Jesus was the only incarnate son of God, and that only he who believed in Him, would have everlasting life. "If God could have sons, all of us
were his sons. My reason was not ready to believe literally that Jesus by his death and by his blood redeemed the sins of the world. Metaphorically there must be some truth in it” (113). Gandhiji felt that philosophically there was nothing extraordinary in Christian principles. Even after years of maintaining contacts with Christians, discussions, participation in prayer services and careful study of books on Christianity, what repelled him perhaps was the Christian stance that Christianity was "a perfect religion" or the greatest of all religions”. He was not entirely satisfied with the Bible and its accepted interpretation (104). However Edward Maitland's *The Perfect Way* and *The New Interpretation of the Bible* seemed to satisfy Gandhiji; he says "they seemed to support Hinduism”(114). Gandhiji was equally critical of Hinduism, particularly in his denunciation of untouchability. Islam also influenced him:

As Christian friends were endeavouring to convert me, even so were Musalman friends. Abdullah Sheth had kept on inducing me to study Islam, and of course he had always something to say regarding its beauty. I purchased Sale's translation of the Koran and began reading it. I also obtained other books on Islam (114).

However Gandhiji nowhere in these chapters critiques Islam the way he critiques Christianity and Hinduism. Under Raychandbhai's constant guidance Gandhi undertakes a wider and deeper study of a number of Hindu sacred texts. Special mention, however, must be made of Tolstoy's influence on Gandhiji:

Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* overwhelmed me. It left an abiding impression on me. Before the independent thinking, profound morality, and the truthfulness of this book, all the books given me by Mr. Coates seemed to pale into insignificance (114-15).
The lasting impact of Tolstoy's life and thought on Gandhiji can be seen percolating through the lifestyle he adopted in his later years in South Africa and then in India. The chapter “Comparative Study of Religions” shows Gandhiji's path of spiritual quest well-defined:

I had made the religion of service my own, as I felt that God could be realised only through service. And service for me was the service of India, because it came to me without my seeking, because I had an aptitude for it. I had gone to South Africa for travel, for finding an escape from Kathiawad intrigues and for gaining my own livelihood. But as I have said, I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realisation (132).

As we read Gandhiji's reports of his encounters with a number of religious texts we realise that he was also acquiring jnana, through reading and studying scriptures and contemplation:

The study stimulated my self-introspection and fostered in me the habit of putting into practice whatever appealed to me in my studies. Thus I began some of the Yogi practices, as well as I could understand them from a reading of the Hindu books. But I could not get on very far, and decided to follow them with the help of some expert when I returned to India. The desire has never been fulfilled (133).

Nevertheless this desire was fulfilled years later in Wardha ashram when Swami Paramahansa Yogananda visited Gandhi in the year 1935. Yogananda initiated him into kriya yoga practice. Yogananda devotes one entire chapter of his autobiography to this meeting and initiation:

On the previous night Gandhi had expressed a wish to receive the Kriya Yoga of Lahiri Mahasaya. I was
touched by the Mahatma's open-mindedness and spirit of enquiry. He is childlike in his divine quest, revealing that pure receptivity which Jesus praised in children, of such is the Kingdom of heaven (Yogananda 1946: 437).

These instances show that Gandhiji never left any stone unturned in his quest for self-realisation. Though the path of *karma* was his primary concern, Gandhiji did attempt to practice *yoga*, gain *jnana* and feel *bhakti*. Further Tolstoy's books prompted him to explore the unending potentiality of universal love (Gandhi 1927: 133).

In the light of the above instances one can easily infer that Gandhiji's religious temperament was marked by receptivity to various ideas while at the same time he adopted a selective approach in implementing these ideas to conduct his experiments with his ways of living. Margaret Chatterjee in her insightful study *Gandhi's Religious Thought* aptly describes this aspect of Gandhiji "if not as concordant discord (within the scope of his new person) then as contrapuntal in a way which challenges new listening" (Chatterjee 1983: 9). This also partly explains Gandhiji's unfulfilled quest for a *Guru*. Gandhiji was not one who could easily have aligned himself with a specific method, approach or doctrine propounded by a spiritual head. He himself was independent, sceptical, experimental, selective and consistently inconsistent in his methods. He chose to model and remodel, process, revise and re-interpret all the religious principles he encountered, assimilated and implemented in his life-long experiments. Thus his *Guru*, his master, was his own self. He followed the dictates of the inner voice of the self in the course of his experiments. Margaret Chatterjee is also right in pointing out that Gandhiji was "no eclectic, if by eclecticism we mean a patchwork of ideas culled from here and there, guided by the whim of the moment and the chance influences that may come one's way.... But the man and his thought reveal far more than eclecticism."
What emerges is a personal testament which is strangely moving” (9). Chatterjee's recognition of Gandhiji's "contrapuntality" strikes me as similar to my reading of the autobiography as a contrapuntal rendition of Gandhiji's way of living in the context of socio-cultural transitions. The apparent dichotomies of tradition and modernity, simplicity and sophistication, layperson's living and sublime thinking all melted and merged into Gandhiji's ways of living as he zealously worked towards reducing himself to a "zero" (Gandhi 1927: 420). This in fact, Gandhiji recognised, is the be-all and end-all of self-realisation. Gandhiji's life was consistently guided by this awareness.

We will briefly survey the re-orientations in the Gandhi household on Gandhiji's return from England and then his subsequent settling in South Africa. Gandhiji self-critically depicts the influence of Western education on a traditional Indian household. For instance, on his return from England, the expenses in the Gandhi household mounted on account of Gandhiji's as well as his brother's attempts at Europeanising their lifestyle. The cultural imperatives a modern profession would engender and their impact on the traditional family setup, life and manners are narrated self-critically and with characteristic humour. When Gandhiji's self-less service and concern for the rights of Indians in South Africa demanded a longer stay in South Africa, Gandhiji moved in with his wife, nephew and children. Gandhiji looks back to see how he laboured to impose changes in his family's lifestyle in order to cater to the demands of his professional and social identity in South Africa:

So I had to think out the details of the dress to be adopted by my wife and children, the food they were to eat, and the manners which would be suited to their new surroundings.... I believed, at the time of which I am writing, that in order to look civilised, our dress and manners had, as far as possible, to approximate to the European standard. Because, I thought, only then could we have some influence
and without influence it would not be possible to serve the community.

I therefore determined the style of dress for my wife and children. How could I like them to be known as Kathiawad Banias? (155)

Gandhiji draws a connection between "civilised looks" a "European standard" and his ability and "influence to serve the community". Also note how Gandhiji decides to adopt the Parsi dress code:

The Parsi used then to be regarded as the most civilised people amongst Indians, and so, when the complete European style seemed to be unsuited, we adopted the Parsi style (155).

Note how "civilization" is made synonymous with "Europeanisation". These remarks subtly record some of the very many ways in which colonial culture seeped into an average English educated Indian's life. Colonisation was more of the mind than of the body. As Gandhiji explicitly states in Hind Swaraj, we ourselves are to be blamed for consciously or unconsciously facilitating colonialism. The chapter "Education of Children" in the autobiography reveals two aspects of Gandhiji's formative years. He identifies a connection between liberty and learning. He realised, though not entirely clear to himself at that time, that English education will not serve to liberate the young Indian minds but will bind them to the negative aspects of Western civilisation. He greatly feels the need for the children to stay with the parents in their youth. Also Gandhiji begins to experience the merging of the public and the private. Inevitably, it was causing mild tensions in the home front, especially with his children, and in matters concerning their education and raising. This chapter is significant for its revelation of a number of his tensions regarding his eldest son, their differences of opinion:
... though I have not been able to give them a literary education either to their or to my satisfaction, I am not quite sure, as I look back on my past years, that I have not done my duty to them to the best of my capacity. Nor do I regret not having sent them to public schools. I have always felt that the undesirable traits I see today in my eldest son are an echo of my own undisciplined and unformulated early life. I regard that time as a period of half-baked knowledge and indulgence. It coincided with the most impressionable years of my eldest son, and naturally he has refused to regard it as my time of indulgence and inexperience. He has on the contrary believed that that was the brightest period of my life, and the changes, effected later, have been done due to delusion, miscalled enlightenment. And well he might (167-68).

The proliferation of negatives in the above sentences is worthy of note. The narrative follows as though the thought and the language guide each other. Gandhiji attains to a rhetoric which matches his intention directly. The contemplative, moody tone and the unwieldy nature of the situation make the thought and the narrative reinforce each other, thereby creating form out of content and content out of form. This chapter should be seen as narrating one of the most crucial phases in the life of a karma yogi and shows the path of a seeker as problematic. Here not only the seeker but also his dependants suffer. This is clear from the way Kasturba, much against her will is asked to join him in the "service" of emptying the chamber pot used by Gandhiji's companion. On the other hand, the chapter "Spirit of Service" is one of the most enlightening for a householder. Gandhiji, by depicting the nature of his own relationship with his wife, discusses the possibilities of striking a balance between the material and the spiritual as a gruhasta. His participation in parenting is a case in point:
I read Dr. Tribhuvandas' book, *Ma-ne Shikhaman* 'Advice to a Mother' — and I nursed both my children according to the instructions given in the book, tempered here and there by such experiments as I had gained elsewhere .... The birth of the last child put me to the severest test I had to see through the safe delivery of the baby. My careful study of the subject in Dr. Tribhuvandas' work was of inestimable help. I was not nervous (170).

Significantly, Gandhiji's participation in parenting and his assumption of feminine roles, anticipates his recognition of woman power in nation building and their role in the non-violent struggle for independence. Ketu H. Katrak's views may be invoked at this point to understand this observation in a better light:

...Gandhi enjoined Indian men and women to engage in acts of passive resistance which feminized the usually masculinist struggle against the colonizer; who more than women, used to maneuvering patiently through patriarchal authority, could offer better models of passive resistance. . . . Gandhi represented himself as "female", performing "feminine" roles like Spinning. His own feminization in this type of political iconography — the image of the "Mahatma" sitting before the "charkha" patiently spinning "khadi" — was effective particularly in mobilizing women and men for *satyagraha* work (Katrak 1992: 395, 397).

Also relevant to our concerns in this study are Gandhiji’s views on the spiritual dimensions of the man-woman relationship and of sexuality. Gandhiji, like the spiritual masters, held that sexual union should not be for the fulfilment of lust, but only for the purposes of bearing children. He also holds that the physical and mental states of the parents at the moment of conception had an impact on the baby (Gandhi 1927: 170). It was perhaps for this reason that Gandhiji stressed the need to control lust during sexual union. Gandhiji as
a nation builder, throws light on the fact that to ensure a healthy minded future generation for the country, parents have to practise abstinence and maintain sound mental health:

...during the period of pregnancy it [the child] continues to be affected by the mother's moods desires and temperament, as also by her ways of life. After birth the child imitates the parents, and for a considerable number of years entirely depends on them for its growth (170).

Gandhiji also sensitises the readers to the deeper meanings of existence and procreation. The chapter also touches on the brahmacharya vow which is the central concern in the subsequent chapters of the autobiography:

The world depends for its existence on the act of generation, and as the world is the playground of God and a reflection of His glory, the act of generation should be controlled for the ordered growth of the world. He who realizes this will control his lust at any cost, equip himself with the knowledge necessary for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of his progeny, and give the benefit of that knowledge to posterity (170-71).

IV

Potency of Brahmacharya

Gandhi was seeking a transformation of Indian, and ultimately human, society. This he felt could only come about through a change at the level of the individual's body and soul, as well as in his or her relations with others. He realized that in this process, sexuality had to be redefined, and male-female relations transformed before other changes could take place. Why he chose to solve this problem through an advocacy of celibacy can be explained
partly by his own personal circumstances, and partly through the influence of strands of thought emanating from both Hinduism and Victorian England. (Caplan 1987: 272).

_Brahmacharya_ or celibacy is regarded as the first phase in a human being's _ashramadharma_, according to Hindu scriptures. Studenthood is synonymous with _brahmacharya_, for the seeker of knowledge should lead a life free of responsibilities, worldly desires and lust and thus develop the power of concentration in order to pursue knowledge. But in Gandhiji's time the practice of child marriage was in vogue and thus, one often embarked on one's life's journey with the responsibility and practices of a _gruhasta_, the householder. Young girls were prepared by elders to assume the role of a wife at a very tender age. It was not surprising if _brahmacharya_ were to be observed at a later stage in one's life in such social circumstances. But _brahmacharya_ would prove its potency and effect if it were consciously pursued and practised during a stage in one's life when its practice would mean rigorous effort - when one was still young and married. Gandhiji, receptive to various religious discourses and austerities that circulated around him in that period also embarked upon this major step in his spiritual pursuit. As we have seen, Gandhiji's South African experiences moulded him politically and spiritually. Significantly, the _brahmacharya_ vow was also taken during his service in South Africa:

I had been wedded to a monogamous ideal ever since my marriage, _faithfulness_ to my wife being part of the love of truth. But it was in South Africa that I came to realize the importance of observing _brahmacharya_ even with respect to my wife (Gandhi 1927: 171).

It is interesting to note that Gandhiji discusses the significance of _brahmacharya_ in two chapters of Part Three of the autobiography. Thereafter he narrates several social and spiritual experiments he carried out which ultimately
led him to take the *brahmacharya* vow. He takes up the issue only in Chapter XXV, "Heart Searchings" in Part IV of the text. Hence one needs to understand the importance of Gandhiji broaching this topic well ahead in Part III, Chapter VII of the autobiography. Gandhiji's idea must have been to sensitise the reader to the circumstances that worked towards his taking the vow, the slow invasion of the private by the public life, of the material by the spiritual. Gandhiji also believed with Nishkulanand that "renunciation without aversion is not lasting" and he wanted to show the ways in which "aversion" took place and how aversion facilitated renunciation. Gandhiji himself admits that his main object in this venture was to escape having more children. But the fact that he began to strive for self-control instead of using contraceptives shows that he had succeeded in checking his desires. Gandhiji's experiments with the regulation of the body and sublimation of its *instinct* is germane to his idea of the way of life as an individual who belongs to a nation should adopt. *Brahmacharya* thus not only means the seeker's control over lust physically but also over the senses in thought, word and deed. Simple living is but a step towards achieving the highest ideal of gaining complete freedom from lust. To that end, Gandhiji's attempts at self-help in washing his own clothes, in cutting his hair prove to be significant. The chapter on the Boer war re-asserts his role in public life as a *karma yogi* while "Sanitary Reform and Famine Relief has both microcosmic and macrocosmic significance — in identifying and eradicating impurities that plague both the inner and the outer world. In Gandhiji's case one must say that the cleansing of the outer facilitated the cleansing of the inner and in South Africa under his initiative, Indians recognised the need for keeping the environment clean and worked towards it. This led to the authorities becoming sympathetic to assertion of their rights by Indians. There is a statement in this chapter which reveals that for Gandhiji, sanitary reforms means purification of not only the outer world, but also of the inner world: "...though I had made it my business to ventilate grievances and
press for rights, I was no less keen and insistent upon self-purification” (182, emphasis mine).

"Self should be read here as carrying two meanings — the Indian self and one's own self. Here again, the fact that Gandhiji attributes 'self to mean Indian shows his growing identification with the community and the service of it, the eradication of egoism thereby to reduce oneself to a "zero". Here was also sown the seeds of his ideal of self-help which he will advocate with great zeal in times to come. Sanitary reform measures were also a gesture of getting rid of the shortcomings that plagued the Indian being for, "an aspirant after brahmacharya will always be conscious of his shortcomings, will seek out the passions lingering in the innermost recesses of his heart and will incessantly strive to get rid of them" (176). On his visit to India, he identifies such shortcomings in the Indian life-style and attempts to rectify them. Incidentally, brahmacharya also manifests itself as his non-acceptance of the gifts showered on him and his family on his departure to India. Also important to note is the point that instead of directly returning the gifts to those who made them, he creates a trust of these gifts in favour of the community, to be used in times of need. Gandhiji concludes his chapter "Return to India" by saying that "I am definitely of the opinion that a public worker should accept no costly gifts" (185).

The chapters that narrate his experiences in India during this trip viz., "In India Again", "Clerk and Bearer", "In the Congress", "Lord Curzon's Darbar", “A Month with Gokhale" (in three parts) and "In Benares" show that Gandhi looks at his experiences through a different eye altogether. This also explains the reasons for his deliberations on brahmacharya earlier. The narrative is from the point of view of a fresh initiate into brahmacharya. One cannot miss Gandhiji's aversion towards and subsequent criticism of the opulence of the Congress leaders, the indifference of the members and social and religious exploitation of the masses. The fact that Gandhiji chooses to narrate these
experiences after his discussion on *brahmacharya* is significant because he sees these experiences through the eyes of a *brahmachari*. More importantly, the critical eye is turned towards himself, towards his own countrymen and their lifestyle before criticising the colonisers. The following instances reveal the formative years of certain ways of living he was to adopt as a Congressman later. In the chapter "In India Again", Gandhiji mentions in passing Pherozshah Mehta's lifestyle: "I knew the kingly style in which he lived" (186), "The president was taken to his camp with great *eclat* by the reception committee"(186) and on Tilak: "And as was natural, *Lokamanya* would never be without his *darbar*. Were I a painter, I could paint him as I saw him seated on his bed…”(186-87). Gandhiji criticises the lack of discipline in Congress. They were instances more of disorganization and confusion, disunity and discrimination than of meetings:

You asked one of them to do something. He delegated it to another, and in his turn to a third and so on; and as for the delegates, they were *neither* here nor there…The Congress would meet *three* days every year and then go to sleep__And the delegates were of a piece with the volunteers. They had no better or longer training. They would do nothing themselves. ‘Volunteer do this’, ‘Volunteer do that’, were their constant orders... To the Tamil delegates even the sight of others, whilst they were dining, meant pollution…There was no limit to insanitation….I pointed it out to the volunteers. They said point-blank: ‘That is not our work, it is the scavenger's work’. I asked for a broom… I saw that, if the Congress session were to be prolonged, conditions would be quite favourable for the outbreak of an epidemic (187-88).

Gandhiji realised that these meetings lacked a sense of common goal, a plan of action, an agenda and a spirit of unity. The prerequisites for nationhood were to be built up and instilled. The superfluity in the functioning of Congress
is further brought out quite dramatically in the chapter titled "In the Congress". Gandhiji also shows how these meetings are informed by the patronising attitude of the leaders like Pherozshah Mehta while he himself comes through as passive and feminine. Clearly there is a connection between Gandhiji's femininity and the nationalist movement. The following is an instructive passage:

‘So we have done?’ said Sir Pherozshah Mehta.
‘No, there is still the resolution on South Africa. Mr. Gandhi has been waiting long,’ cried out Gokhale.
‘Have you seen the resolution?’ Asked Sir Pherozshah.
‘Of course’.
‘Do you like it?’
‘It is quite good’.
‘Well then, let us have it, Gandhi’.
I read it trembling.
Gokhale supported it.
‘Unanimously passed’, cried out everyone.
‘You will have five minutes to speak on it, Gandhi’, said Mr. Wacha.
The procedure was far from pleasing to me. No one had troubled to understand the resolution, everyone was in a hurry to go and, because Gokhale had seen the resolution, it was not thought necessary for the rest to see it or understand it! (190-91).

Gandhiji, in a pained way, points out the prominence English enjoys as the language of their discourse. The influence of English lifestyle too on Congress leaders does not escape Gandhiji's piercing eye. In the chapter, "Lord Curzon's Darbar", he says: "Gokhale frequently went to this club [the India club] to play billiards" (192) an English game. The chapter also throws light on the other extreme of the Maharajas attending Lord Curzon's Durbar bedecked
in their traditional attire. The chapter also furnishes much information on the political bankruptcy of the period:

'Do you see any difference between Khansamas and us?...they are our Khansamas, we are Lord Curzon's Khansamas. If I were to be absent from the levee, I should have to suffer the consequences. If I were to attend it in my usual dress, it would be an offence. And do you think I am going to get any opportunity there of talking to Lord Curzon? Not a bit of it!' (192).

In the course of his stay with Gokhale, he also meets Sr. Nivedita:

I was taken aback by the splendour that surrounded her, and even in our conversation there was not much meeting ground....In spite of my failure to find any agreement with her, I could not but notice and admire her overflowing love for Hinduism (198).

The chapter "In Benares" reminds us of the travails of an itinerant seeker. The plight of the third class passengers, the unhygienic practices of the passengers themselves that made it worse, the exploitation of the devotees by the temple priests, the unhygienic conditions even in the temple cities are all portrayed scrupulously by Gandhiji. Gokhale in his own ways had paved way for Gandhiji's entry into Congress politics. However Gandhiji was not yet destined to settle in India. He was called to South Africa again. This again called for, as Gandhiji points out, "the breaking up of a settled establishment, and the going from the certain to the uncertain" (209). Though separation from the family brought momentary pain, Gandhiji had by then inured [himself] to an uncertain life (209). Part IV of the autobiography shows how brahmacharya was growing upon him with experience (174) and how he happened to nurture the virtue of non-possession, a pre-requisite for vanaprasthasrama, the third stage. This part of the autobiography also shows that spiritual ascent if
consciously followed would unveil newer and newer experiences. Part IV hence should be regarded as the most complex part of the text for this is where the dynamics of garhastya, the potency of brahmacharya, the freedom of vanaprastha and the sublimity of sannyasa in Gandhiji’s life become completely manifest in myriad ways.

The chapter "Faith on Trial" in part three of the autobiography reveals Gandhiji as a bhaktd who prays for the speedy recovery of his ailing son while the chapter "Result of Introspection" reveals Gandhiji as a jnana yogi, contemplative and in pursuit of scriptural knowledge. This chapter is an example of narration as contemplation. His study of the Bhagavadgita reveals to him the secret of vanaprastha and he takes no time to implement what his heart prompts.

Gandhiji’s narrative shows that one stage or path of spiritual pursuit permeates the other. The narrative in itself is a slow but steady graduation from one stage to the other. For instance, in the chapters on brahmacharya Gandhiji emerges as one who realises mat brahmacharya is not something that can be achieved as soon as one takes the vow. He takes the vow when the need to observe celibacy grows out of his aversion for sensual pleasures. He thereafter continues to strive all through his life, as the narrative progresses, to fulfill the vow. One has to experiment with dietary habits, keep watch over one's speech and deeds in order to fulfill the demands of celibacy. Brahmacarya or for that matter every stage of the ashrama dharma emerges in the narrative as both the means and the end. There is no end to one’s striving for perfection, for Truth is not shown as something which exists out there. Spirituality is an endless experience of bliss, revealing newer and sublimer truths. Truth, as the narrative reveals at every point, exists and defines itself in various manifestations. Spirituality is a constant realisation of this. The striving for brahmacharya leads him to the profundity of non-possession. However before
going into the aspects of *vanaprastha* as Gandhiji practised it, we will examine the conditions under which Gandhi undertook the *brahmacharya* vow.

The chapter titled "Heart Searchings" in part IV should be read as an extension of the chapters "*Brahmacharya I*" and "*Brahmacharya II*" of part III in order to understand Gandhiji’s pursuit of celibacy as a way of life. For Gandhiji, celibacy was not just a matter of personal choice but a discovery of its inextricable link with social life and the life of a nation.

Gandhiji has a revelation of the link between spirituality and nationhood during his service at the Zulu rebellion. While nursing the wounded Zulus he realized that if one were to be devoted to service, indulgence in the pleasures of family life ought to be given up: "In a word, I could not live both after the flesh and the spirit — Without the observance of *brahmachatya* service of the family would be inconsistent with service of the community. With *brahmacharya* they would be perfectly consistent" (264). Moreover he also realizes that "procreation and the consequent care of children were inconsistent with public service" (172). The chapter "*Brahmacharya II*" and "Heart Searchings" are Gandhiji’s invaluable discourses on the beauty of self-restraint, on the means to achieve endless rewards of *brahmacharya*. It is self-restraint that elevates man from animal passion to higher consciousness:

"Life without *brahmacharya* appears to me to be insipid and animal-like. The brute by nature knows no self-restraint. Man is man because, he is capable of, and only in so far as he exercises, self-restraint" (265).

Most importantly, Gandhiji owed the birth of *Satyagraha* to the potency of *brahmacharya*. The autobiography testifies to the fact that Gandhiji regarded *brahmacharya* as a potent way of life which facilitated spiritual ascent and an awakened consciousness even for a *gruhasta*. Here we see the spiritual life, the social life and the political life reinforcing each other. As Margaret Chatterjee
rightly puts it, Gandhiji sees *brahmacharya,* "as a necessary part of the self-purification required of a servant of society, a renunciation which was the prerequisite for the total involvement in the affairs of men which was to be his destiny" (Chatterjee 1983: 141). As pointed out earlier in this chapter, Gandhi viewed *brahmacharya* as contributing to "change the nature of relationship between sexes" (Caplan 1987: 278). Thus through the practice of *brahmacharya,* Gandhiji perceived the participatory role women were to play in the nationalist movement as two pronged. The practice of *brahmacharya* empowered them to put up resistance to foreign power through *satyagraha* and also enabled them to resist sexual exploitation and patriarchal power structures. For Gandhiji *brahmacharya* was a means of freeing women from male domination and facilitating social visibility and mobility. In fact Gandhiji opened a whole new paradigm of active female participation in the practice of *brahmacharya.* In this respect he dispelled the stereotype of woman as "temptress." Gandhiji was not thinking of "empowerment" of women. On the other hand he was recognising their equality with their male counterparts. Gandhiji's own feelings towards Kasturba dramatises this. In his younger days he felt jealousy, possessiveness and a desire to control Kasturba's movements. As he experimented with truth, Gandhiji's attitude towards his wife proved to be liberating. Their common acceptance of brahmacharya sublimated them and channelised their energies to creative purposes.

V

Redefining *Vanaprastha*

This section examines Gandhiji's experiments in the Phoenix settlement and in *Tolstoy* Farm in South Africa. These experiments constitute a redefinition of the third *ashramadharma* viz., *vanaprastha.* According to the scriptures, *vanaprastha* is a way of life to be adopted when one retires from
household cares in order to pursue self-realisation. Taken in a literal sense, *vanaprastha* means leaving one’s possessions behind and heading towards the forest to settle there and to practise austerities and penance as a preparation for *sannyasa*, the fourth and final stage of the *ashramadharma*. *Aparigraha* (non-possession) and simple living are to be adopted by a *vanaprastha* as a preparation for *sannyasa*. Self-help is a pre-requisite for *vanaprastha*. Part IV of the text shows that Gandhiji understood the spirit of *vanaprastha* both in its literal and figurative sense. Though Gandhiji was in exile in South Africa, that by itself marks the stage of his *vanaprasthashrama*. It is his reading of Ruskin’s *Unto this Last* which gives a fillip to *vanaprasthashrama*. He founded the Phoenix settlement under the influence of Ruskin. Ruskin himself reinforced what Gandhiji learnt from the *Bhagavad Gita* about simple living. Gandhiji acknowledges this in one of the revealing passages in the text:

> I believe that I discovered some of my deepest convictions reflected in this great book of Ruskin, and that is why it so captured me and made me transform my life. A poet is one who can call forth the good latent in the human breast. Poets do not influence all alike, for everyone is not evolved in an equal measure (250).

If we were chronologically to examine the evolutionary aspects of the fruition of *vanaprastha* in Gandhiji’s life, we would trace it to his inclination towards *brahmacharya*, to the influence of the *Bhagavad Gita* and insights of Jurisprudence and to the spirit of service that culminated in his medical services during the Zulu rebellion. The aspiration for perfection in observing celibacy permeates the text. The *Bhagavad Gita* influenced his day to day activities greatly. The spirit of the text came home to him with greater force because of his understanding of the doctrines of “*aparigraha*” (non-possession) and “*samabhava*” (equability) from Jurisprudence. He practised this lesson in daily life and he pondered ways and means to practise them. Gandhi records his
views on this matter in "Result of Introspection" Chapter V in Part IV, reminiscent of the characteristic style of Christian confessional literature. The chapter reveals the essence of *vanaprastha* as Gandhiji understood it, redefined and practised it:

How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had. My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly in the light of the *Gita* teaching the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude (221-22).

The role here of a number of knowledge systems in spiritual evolution is important. The passage unfolds the experience of inner life facilitated by scriptural dialogues within one's consciousness. The narrative also portrays spiritual enlightenment as a progressive recognition of the meeting and crossing of "consciousnesses". The distinction between the East and the West, between the personal and the public is blurred in this meeting of consciousnesses. The text is an ordered and discursive portrayal of the vying of these voices with each other. The narrative is but a patterning of the inner dialogues between
Eastern scriptural knowledge and Western Jurisprudence. This helps him to redefine *vanaprastha*. The narrative depicts Gandhiji's re-definition and practice of *vanaprastha* in a modern social system. In Gandhiji, tradition and modernity become part of the meeting of consciousnesses.

The spirit of non-possession leads Gandhiji to allow an insurance policy to lapse and to utilise his savings for the benefit of the community, his extended family. Here, the concept of "family" is re-defined in Gandhiji's *vanaprastha* way of life. In resolving to give up all future savings for the benefit of the community in South Africa, Gandhiji gave wider dimension to the concept of *garhastya*.

...I was doing exactly what our father had done. The meaning of 'family' had but to be slightly widened and the wisdom of my step would become clear (222).

The act of voluntary dispossession of savings is symbolised in his letter to his brother:

To my brother, who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future savings, if any, would be utilised for the benefit of the community (222).

The widening of the sense of 'family' takes place through a literal and figurative "breaking up" of the narrow sense of 'family':

I had to break up my household at Johannesburg to be able to serve during the 'Rebellion'. Within one month of offering my services, I had to give up the house I had so carefully furnished. I took my wife and children to Phoenix and led the Indian ambulance corps attached to the Natal forces. During the difficult marches that had then to be
performed, the idea flashed upon me that, if I wanted to devote myself to the service of community in this manner I must relinquish the desire for children and wealth and live the life of a vanaprastha — of one retired from household cares (172-73).

The need to practise brahmacharya followed by non-possession and equability arises out of the demands of the life of service Gandhiji had already started leading. The Phoenix settlement is one phase in vanaprasthasrama that manifests the confluence of Eastern and Western thought in Gandhiji's vision. Anthony J. Parel throws light on the extent of the influence of Ruskin's Unto this Last on Gandhiji. Parel views the Phoenix settlement as the prototype of the three other communities or ashrams he founded later in his life, the Tolstoy Farm outside Johannesburg, the Sabarmati Ashram outside Ahmedabad, and Sevagram outside Wardha (Parel 1997: xl). Gandhiji also translated Ruskin's Unto this Last into Gujarati for the sake of Indians who did not know English. Parel points out that Gandhiji understood Ruskin's 'social affection' in terms of the Hindu concept of daya (compassion) "and Gandhi understood honour in terms not of obligations of status. But of equality and of satya (truth). Finally Ruskin saw the value of handicrafts even in an industrial society; Gandhi saw the value of the spinning wheel and handicrafts for the whole of India" (xli).

Partlia Chatterjee in his appraisal of Gandhiji's vision in the Hind Swaraj shows that Gandhiji in his adaptation of Eastern or Western thought was far more than merely eclectic, romantic, or idealist as it was often thought to be:

Quite unlike any of the European romantics, Gandhi is not torn between the conflicting demands of Reason and Morality, Progress and Happiness, Historical Necessity and Human will. His ideal of a peaceful, non-competitive just and happy Indian society of the past could not have been 'a romantic longing for the lost harmony of the archaic world',
because unlike romanticism, Gandhi's problem is not conceived at all within the thematic bounds of post-Enlightenment thought. He was not, for instance, seriously troubled by the problems of reconciling individuality with Universalism, of being oneself and at the same time feeling at one with the infinite variety of the world. Nor was his solution one in which the individual without merging into the world, wants to embrace the rich diversity of the world in himself. Indeed, these were concerns which affected many 'modernists' of Gandhi's time, perhaps the most illustrious of them being Rabindranath Tagore. Gandhi shared neither the spiritual anguish nor indeed the aestheticism of these literary romantics of his time. Instead his moral beliefs never seemed to lose mat almost obdurate certitude which men like Tagore, or even Jawaharlal Nehru, found so exasperating. The critique of civil society which forms such a central element of Gandhi's moral and political thinking is one which arises from an epistemic standpoint situated outside the thematic of post-Enlightenment thought (Chatterjee 1996: 99-100).

Chatterjee's observation that Gandhi's critique of civil society arises from an epistemic standpoint situated outside the thematic of Post-Enlightenment thought to a great extent explains the "tremendous power Gandhian principles acquired in the history of nationalism in India" (Chatterjee: 100). An ideal propagated for enabling decolonisation could not have emerged from inside the thematic of Post-Enlightenment thought but would have emerged from inside the thematic of philosophical principles which were indigenous to India. Gandhiji imbibed its spirit from the Gita, and saw it in other religions and viewpoints of Western thinkers. Thoreau sought to practise vanaprasthashrama literally in Walden while Gandhiji practised it both literally and metaphorically in the Phoenix settlement. Quite interestingly, Gandhiji's experiments with naturopathy, particularly with earth and water treatment and with dietary habits should be seen as another aspect of
in action. Gandhiji's experiments with fruit diet reminds one of the life of a vanaprastha in the forest:

The fruit diet turned out to be very convenient also. Cooking was practically done away with. Raw groundnuts, bananas, dates, lemons, and olive oil composed our usual diet (Gandhi 1927: 275).

The significance of fasting dawned upon him during this period, as a means of self-restraint. This period also facilitated his experiments with truth in the field of education, and in the practise of law. The chapters titled "As Schoolmaster", "Literary Training", "Training of the Spirit", "Tares among the Wheat", and "Fasting as Penance" are about Gandhiji's views on education. "Some Reminiscences of the Bar", "Sharp Practice", "Clients Turned Co-workers" and "How a Client was Saved" show Gandhiji's role as a lawyer in South Africa. Instinctively and consciously Gandhiji sought to integrate teaching and learning with spirituality as also professional life with spirituality. The chapters also record Gandhiji's reservations about "modern" tools and methods of educating young people. It is important to note that even in this attempt he resorted to indigenous methods and found them effective:

Of textbooks, about which we hear so much, I never felt the want...I did not find it at all necessary to load the boys with quantities of books. I have always felt that the true textbook for the pupil is his teacher. It was laborious for them to remember what they learnt from books, but what I imparted to them by word of mouth, they could repeat with the greatest case. Reading was a task for them, but listening to me was a pleasure (281-82)

In the chapter "Training of the Spirit" Gandhiji subverts the common notion that sannyasa (renunciation) is possible only in the fourth stage of life. Gandhiji's emphasis was on character building as a means to nationhood, to
self-realization. He stresses the necessity of pursuing the ideals of sannyasa right from one's childhood. His experiments with ways of imparting spiritual training at Phoenix can be seen as a manifestation of this conviction. Gandhiji opines that a teacher's spiritual ways of living is one method of imparting training to children. In the course of his experiments he realises that teaching is learning and that a teacher should be a learner. His views convey the inextricable link between education, nationhood and spirituality:

Just as physical training was to be imparted through physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise, even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit. And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher. It is possible for a teacher situated miles away to affect the spirit of the pupils by his ways of living. It would be idle for me, if I were a liar, to teach boys to tell the truth. A cowardly teacher would never succeed in making his boys valiant, and a stranger to self-restraint could never teach his pupil the value of self-restraint. I saw, therefore, that I must be an eternal object-lesson to the boys and girls living with me. They thus became my teachers, and I learnt I must be good and live straight, if only for their sakes (283).

Gandhiji's views on education transcend parochial concerns of building to a particular national character through education. However they do question subtly and at certain points explicitly, modern methods of teaching introduced by the British. His reservation about using textbooks (also extendable to the proliferation of the print media as a product of modernity) in class is a case in point. Instead he appreciates learning through listening — close to the oral tradition of teaching followed in ancient India. Gandhiji saw this as a potent method of imparting spiritual knowledge to students.
The chapters on his reminiscences of the bar should be recognised as a critique of a profession introduced by colonial masters. The chapters are invaluable contributions to legal discourse, to Jurisprudence in particular. The inherent contradiction that ethics and truthfulness posed in his experience as practising lawyer is well brought out in the following lines:

I was confirmed in my conviction that it was not impossible to practise law without compromising truth. Let the reader, however, remember that even truthfulness in the practice of the profession cannot cure it of the fundamental defect that vitiates it (305).

Two things are conveyed at this point. First that there is a fundamental defect that vitiates legal profession. Second, truth alone can sustain one even in such a profession. Truth helps one to see the "immorality" and the "temptations" the professional demands may breed (Gandhi 1997: 59).

I have attempted in this section to view the South African period as the period of vanaprasthashrama in the course of Gandhiji’s spiritual evolution. I have also tried to show that he was also sharpening his vision of the nation. As has been widely recognised, Gandhiji's South African experiences served as a preparation for his decolonisation strategies. His life as a vanaprastha comes through his experiments in community living in Phoenix and Tolstoy farm, the practice of the ideal of trusteeship, his role as an educator, self-help, dietetics, service, and practice of brahmacharya even when he led the life of a ghnabasta. What remains to be examined is how this way of living extended to the professional, the social, the public and ultimately the nationalist sphere as a poser to colonial hegemony.

In the third, fourth and fifth parts of the autobiography we see that Gandhiji’s experiments with ways of living in his professional, public and private life helped him to identify the colonisation processes in South Africa
and India. Gandhiji identified two major aspects of the colonisation process. The first was the mighty English legal system that legitimised colonial policies in the British colonies. The second was the "modern" cultural system that percolated into Indian soil through political and economic policies facilitated by the English law. Gandhi reacted to both these forces by employing the same jurisprudential rhetoric to challenge their legitimacy and legality. As Gandhiji himself put it, "The main key to British power is the law court, and the key to the law court is the lawyer" (Gandhi 1997: 61). *An Autobiography* shows how this recognition was crucial in Gandhiji's struggle with the British. Gandhiji employed the same persuasive rhetoric of the English legal discourse to make Indian voices heard in their portals. Gandhiji's letter to the Viceroy quoted in the autobiography and references to many a legal battle fought particularly in South Africa show this. The British realised that Indians were fast recognising their democratic, political, social, economic and legal rights. *Satyagraha* that inspired Indians as a spiritual non-violent weapon in fact functioned as a double edged sword. Violence is crime against an individual and the State under Common Law. *Satyagraha* due to its non-violent character limits and blunts persecutions or sanctions under English Law against agitating Indians. Even when persecutions took place or atrocities were committed against *Satyagrahis* for agitating non-violently, the onus fell on the British. It brought out dramatically the discrepancy between the laws that governed the British in their homeland and the Indians in the colonies. Whenever Gandhiji bowed before the English law he was also questioning the legitimacy of oppressive laws: *Satyagraha* thus owes its birth to the jurist in Gandhiji.

The seed of this approach can be traced back to the Pretoria train incident which was a turning point in Gandhiji's life. Looked at from a legal angle, this incident is interesting. That Gandhiji was a lawyer made him acutely sensitive to his legal right to travel first class. He found this right being violated by the same British system that preached equality before the law. This personal
experience made him recognize the need for creating legal awareness among South African Indians and for exposing discriminatory colonial policies:

It is my duty to place before the people all the legitimate remedies for grievances. A nation that wants to come into its own ought to know all the ways and means to freedom. Usually they include violence as the last remedy. Satyagraha, on the other hand, is an absolutely non-violent weapon. I regard it as my duty to explain its practice and its limitations. I have no doubt that the British Government is a powerful Government, but I have no doubt also that Satyagraha is a sovereign remedy (Gandhi 1927: 316-17).

Gandhiji’s experiments with ways of living were also directed towards countering the channel of the "modern" cultural system. Judith Brown, in her insightful study paraphrases Gandhi’s apprehensions about and solutions to the debilitating influence of modernity:

...he had abandoned any notion that there was a distinctive Western or European civilization; rather there was a 'modern civilization' and it was purely material, based on industrial production in factories and the rise of large cities, and its standards were determined by the accumulation of wealth. He believed that such a civilization threatened man's true nature and goal, by inculcating false wants generated by the capacity for excessive consumption; and furthermore, through the unequal distribution of wealth and the factory system of production inevitably led to competition and violence between man and his fellows. It was truly the reign of the devil and unrighteousness, as opposed to the reign of truth and morality; it had the West in its grip and through Western influence threatened to strangle the life out of India.... But the point is that Gandhi believed passionately in what he perceived as the Indian way of life before the spread of Western
influence, and built much of his social and political programme upon that belief (Brown 1990: 87-88).

However for Gandhiji it was not just a going back to the Indian way of life that preceded the advent of Western influence. His attacks on the evils of various customary practices in his writings prove that he never believed in or bemoaned the erasure of a "glorious past". The attempt was to decolonise the mind not just by propagating the evils of colonisation and modernity but also by devising alternative ways of living that would in practical ways counter the evils of modernity. So Gandhiji's ways of living were of course rooted in Indian soil but were certainly not a going back to the past.

Gandhiji's alternatives challenged the influences of modernity viz., destabilisation, disunity, centralisation of power, class based distinctions and so on. Such experiments with alternatives seemed to spring from Gandhiji's recognition that even if the British were physically ousted from Indian soil, the retention of their administrative paraphernalia would only mean the transfer of power from the white masters to the brown masters. The system would continue to serve those in power and oppress the masses. Hence he relied on the vanaprastha way of life that would slowly render British administrative system vestigial. Thus decolonisation was to be a two-way process. Decolonisation of the nation was to be achieved by decolonising the mind and vice versa. Gandhiji's ways of living demonstrated this process.

IV

Inflections of Sannyasa

This section will analyse the fifth and last part of Gandhiji's autobiography as describing the period of sannyasa (asceticism). Two factors are responsible for identifying this part as the period of asceticism in the author's life. The first is the number of pilgrimages that Gandhiji undertook in India
and the second is the establishment of *ashrams* first in Ahmedabad and later in Wardha. *Sannyasa* is the fourth and final stage in the *ashramadharma* and as noted earlier, Gandhiji was one who seriously believed that the spirit of asceticism should be understood at a much earlier stage in one's life. Asceticism ought to permeate one's day to day activities in order to achieve perfection. The qualities of all the previous three *ashramadharmas*, viz., the purity of a celibate, the spirit of service of a householder which helps one to see humanity as one's own extended family and the spirit of *non-*possession, detachment and austerity of a *vanaprastha*, help one to attain the final stage of complete renunciation. The spirit of asceticism if imbibed even while living in the midst of responsibilities leads one to material and spiritual fulfillment. The pilgrimages that Gandhiji undertook with special reference to part V of the text have the spirit of asceticism.

**Pilgrimage:**

This section will examine the socio-spiritual implications of pilgrimage in general and of Gandhiji's pilgrimage in particular with special reference to the journeys described in part V of the autobiography. The term 'pilgrimage' according to *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* is "a journey of a pilgrim; esp; one to a shrine or a sacred place" and a pilgrim is a person "who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee". Gandhiji attaches a great deal of importance to pilgrimage as a socio-spiritual activity for he holds that places of pilgrimage contribute greatly towards forging a common national identity (Gandhi 1997: 48n). In *Hind Swaraj* he challenges the common notion that the introduction of the railways kindled a new spirit of nationalism in India. He points out that nationalism was not a new idea for the very fact that our ancestors established a number of pilgrimage centres all over the country and brought people together 'as one nation':

You will admit they were no fools. They knew that worship of God could have been performed just as well at home. They taught us that those whose hearts were aglow with righteousness had the Ganges in their own homes. But they saw that India was one 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 (48-49).

It is with the same spiritual-nationalist zeal that we see Gandhiji undertaking pilgrimages in India travelling third class. Here we need to identify the nature of the course and destination as well as the intention behind such pilgrimages undertaken by Gandhiji. It throws light on Gandhiji's ideas of religion. Gandhiji undertook his pilgrimages as a seeker first and as a benefactor later. His destinations were holy places like Benares, the Kumbh Mela and Lakshman Jhula. However his intentions for undertaking what he calls as a "tour" in part III of the autobiography, "through India travelling third class" was to acquaint himself with the hardships of the third class passengers (Gandhi 1927: 199). Here we see Gandhiji travelling as a seeker. As he travels third class, he is touched by the travails of Indians on the one hand and is disillusioned by the hypocrisy, irreligion and unhygienic conditions at religious centres on the other. This trip parallels the brahmachari's pilgrimage as a fresh initiate into spirituality. Incidentally, this first tour was conducted during his brahmacharya phase.

The rhetoric of his narrative of the pilgrimage to Kumbh Mela and Lakshman Jhula in part V (chapters VII and VIII) informs us that Gandhiji had already become known as the benefactor of Indians. People kept streaming in to seek his “darshan”: "My business was mostly to keep sitting in the tent giving darshan and holding religious and other discussion with numerous pilgrims who
called on me” (324). Now Gandhiji’s response to this trip is subversive of the conventional role of a pilgrim. He notes about the *Kumbh Mela* of 1915:

> It proved a red letter day for me. I had not gone to Hardwar with the sentiments of a pilgrim. I have never thought of frequenting places of pilgrimage in search of piety. But the seventeen lakhs of men that were reported to be there could not all be hypocrites or mere sight-seers. I had no doubt that countless people amongst them had gone there to earn merit and for self-purification (325).

Chris C. Park in his *Sacred Worlds* points out that pilgrimages usually entail social, economic and physical difficulties or sacrifices for the pilgrims, who usually accept them with resignation as part of the special nature of pilgrimage (Park 1994: 259). Gandhiji of course faced nothing but physical difficulties. The woe of the third class passengers and the unhygienic conditions and exploitation prevailing in the country including in religious places, made him realise that Indians have to fight the enemy within to enable themselves to oust the foreign enemy. One immediate effect of this trip was an act of self-denial on his part, in atonement for the iniquity prevailing at the *Kumbh Mela*. He began following dietary restrictions. His visits to Rishikesh and Lakshman Jhula are not spiritually exhilarating, but they serve to show us a picture of the Indian social conditions of the period.

However Gandhiji’s trips to Champaran, *Kheda*, *Viramgam*, etc. should also be seen as pilgrimages of a different kind. By fighting for the rights of the workers, he served as their social and spiritual benefactor. These trips marked the beginning of a number of such trips Gandhiji would make all over India to create awareness among people of their legal, social, economic and political rights as also their duties in terms of sanitation and healthy living. These trips thus should be seen as a pilgrimage of an itinerant *Sannyasi*. Park’s view that “in pilgrimage it is the journey itself that really matters, perhaps just as much as
arrival at the destination" (260) is true in the case of Gandhiji. For Gandhiji, pilgrimage meant more of travelling in third class compartments, seeing rural India, identifying the problems of the masses and fighting for their rights. He thus gave a whole new dimension to the idea of pilgrimage in redressing the difficulties of his fellow ‘pilgrims’ through legal battles. It was difficult for Gandhiji to find God in pilgrimage centres but he did find Him in the teeming masses of India. In so doing Gandhiji deconstructs the sacred/profane dichotomy.

Ashram Life:
As pointed out earlier, the rhetoric of part V of the text reveals a number of aspects of the ascetic life style of Gandhiji. The establishment of ashrams is one aspect of it. It is important to note that in South Africa, two centres of community living established by Gandhiji were called Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm. There is no reference to anything like an ashram at that point. The idea of establishing an ashram as he arrives in India with the Phoenix party is discussed only in the fifth part of the autobiography. However, people would not have been able to recognise the spirit of community living and service had he not termed his experiment as ashrams, for community living is not alien to Indian lifestyle. By calling it "settlement" or a “farm” in alien terms or anything other than ashram Gandhiji would not have been able to make it a point. Gandhiji gives us an insight into the experiment that went into naming the ashram. In the chapter "Founding of the Ashram" he discusses this aspect:

Our creed was devotion to truth, and our business was the search for and insistence on truth. I wanted to acquaint India with the method I had tried in South Africa, and I desire to test in India the extent to which its application might be possible. So my companions and I selected the name ‘Satyagraha
Ashram’ as conveying both our goal and our method of service (Gandhi 1927: 330).

However the greatest challenge was the people's hostility towards the "untouchables" and the ambivalence of the ashram inmates themselves towards housing them. Gandhiji was of course making a statement by housing an "untouchable" family. However the gesture did contribute to shaking the foundations of untouchability:

The fact that it is mostly the real or orthodox Hindus who have met the daily growing expenses of the Ashram is perhaps a clear indication that untouchability is shaken to its foundation. There are indeed many other proofs of this, but the fact that good Hindus do not scruple to help an Ashram where we go to the length of dining with the untouchables is no small proof (333).

Another instance that reiterates the rhetoric of sannyasa is when people who did not recognize him took him for an ascetic:

My fellow passengers had taken me to be a sadhu or a fakir. When they saw that I was being molested at every station, they were exasperated and swore at the detectives. 'Why are you worrying the poor sadhu for nothing?' they protested. 'Don't you show these scoundrels your ticket', they said, addressing me (335).

Most of Gandhiji's references to train journeys have parallels with Swami Ramdas's narrative of his spiritual quest and his experiences during train journeys in India. I shall discuss this in Chapter Four.

Gandhiji’s Karma sannyasa thus extends from scavenging to educating the masses and fighting legal battles. Though Gandhiji does not claim any metaphysical experiences, one can see that the coining of the expression
“satyagraha”, the launching of civil disobedience, non-violence, non-co-operation, hartal, etc. are described as revelations or results of intuition at various stages of his spiritual advancement. He could also foresee the detrimental effects of the Hindu-Muslim conflicts on the country. He urged the young Muslims in the country to become fakirs for the service of the motherland:

But my South African experiences had convinced me that it would be on the question of Hindu-Muslim unity that my Ahimsa would be put to its severest test, and that the question presented the widest field for my experiments in Ahimsa. The conviction is still there. Every moment of my life I realize that God is putting me on my trial (368).

Gandhiji blends the rhetoric of law, nationalism, service and religion into a harmonious whole in his day to day activities including most importantly the letters sent to the representatives of the British Raj. For instance, in his letter to the Viceroy assuring him that India would serve British during war shows not only his power of persuasive rhetoric and logical reasoning characteristic of a lawyer, but also his conviction that the law of love was service and religion:

Thus Champaran and Kheda affairs are my direct, definite and special contribution to the war. Ask me to suspend my activities in that direction and you ask me to suspend my life. If I could popularize the use of soul-force, which is but another name for love-force, in place of brute force, I know that I could present you with an India that could defy the whole world to do its worst. In season and out of season, therefore, I shall discipline myself to express in my life this eternal law of suffering, and present it for acceptance to those who care, and if I take part in any other activity, the motive is to show the matchless superiority of that law (374).
This humanisation, the spiritualisation or in Justice Krishna Iyer's words "jurisconscience" (law with a conscience) was Gandhiji's greatest contribution to legal discourse and was also the very basis of his struggle. He showed the potentiality of Jurisprudence not just in theory but in practice. Every petition or letter drafted to the English showed the way Gandhiji recognised the possibilities of persuasive language and logical reasoning.

The Mantra.

Gandhiji popularised the spinning wheel. It added a dimension to Gandhiji's spiritual pursuit. For him it stood for self-help that would lead India to freedom. A country/geographical entity could become a nation only when it became free and true freedom would come only when the mind was decolonised. His mission in life was endless striving for decolonisation and initiating Indians into this enterprise. While ascetics told their beads and chanted their mantras, Gandhiji adopted the act of spinning as the mantra for achieving freedom. Gandhiji's reference to the "hum" of the spinning wheel reminds us of the "hum" of the mantra and its healing effects:

The wheel began to merrily hum in my room, and I may say without exaggeration that its hum had no small share in restoring me to health. I am prepared to admit that its effect was more psychological than physical. But then it only shows how powerfully the physical in man reacts to the psychological (411).

Gandhiji's ways of living were both profoundly God-centred and man-oriented, as Judith Brown has pointed out (Brown 1990: 80). Martin Green's definition of religion in his study of Gandhi and Tolstoy will sum up the link between Gandhiji's spirituality and his nationalism:

What I mean by religion here is, in effect, the opposite of Empire: that which binds people
together and motivates the group not at or from the peak of its pyramid, but from its base; not for conquest, but for resistance; not in pride of greatness but in solidarity of faith. This definition is obviously not objective or value-free, but partisan and tendentious. I would not in other arguments deny the name of "religion" to the kind of vision that inspired the crusades or militant Islam, but here I mean something quite different from that. Empire here means a complex of technology and ideology (the rationalism, democracy, and economic enterprise of the West) which often offers itself as anti-imperialist, but can be seen by underdeveloped peoples as domineering. And so religion, as the opposite and the opponent of empire, means the resistance to all those things (Green 1986: 7).

We may recall that Gandhiji's vision of local self-government in the post-independent Ramrajya was an indigenous form of democracy. Adoption of the "modern" notion of nationhood through democratic and constitutional systems has resulted in corruption, power-play, partition and violence. Gandhiji's vision of decentralisation of power was an indigenous concept and practice of nationalism. This, the English educated policy making brown masters perhaps did not choose or dare to perceive. What remains of his vision of ramrajya is our indulgence in dubbing him a "philosophical anarchist" (yet another borrowed term) and in questioning the "seculanty" in ramrajya. Gandhiji, like Tolstoy, rightly identified the sources and roots of the Empire outside politics (15). This will explain Gandhiji's assertion in the last chapter that "those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means" (Gandhi 1927: 420).

Gandhiji foresees these tendencies when he decides to refrain from venturing further with his narrative. One the one hand he mentions that the public and the private have merged in such a manner in his life that there is nothing left that is made to be known: "My life from this point onward has
been so public that there is hardly anything about it that people do not know" (419). On the other hand he also wishes to refrain from creating unpleasantness between himself and his co-workers: “A reference to my relations with the leaders would therefore be unavoidable, if I set about describing my experiments further” (419). The author's decision to share a dialogic silence with the readers in terms of "you and I know" throws light on an important function of autobiography writing. It is the merging point of the narrative of a political visionary with a silence which is eloquent.
Notes

1 Martin Green also identifies the Franklin mode in Gandhiji’s methods of self-help and hard work. Green points out that both Tolstoy and Gandhi were "prodigiously hard workers in the Franklin mode" (Green 1986: 10). The rhetoric of conversion seems to be integral to these narratives. Franklin and Gandhi through their autobiographies continue to inspire their readers to follow suit. As regards the confessional mode, Margaret Chatterjee also refers to the confessional character of Gandhiji’s religious thinking that blended with a "splendid vision which he believed could be a beacon light for all men everywhere" (Chatterjee 1983: 9-10).

2 The Bhagavad Gita details how selfless action is "always already present" in "inaction" and vice-versa — to realise this in real life and to practise this is karma yoga.

3 Hence any reader is likely to feel the frustration of having missed, "the subdued passion, the significant poignancy and the gentle humour which often characterise Gandhiji's Gujarati, as well as his use of English" (Erikson 1970: 60).

4 Secondly, note that the term used is “East” and not “India”. A particular cultural practice is seen as peculiar to the West as against the East and not to India. This leads us to throw light on one of the many divergent dialogues on the Indian concept of the nation. Here one sees the Indian psyche's idea of the nation in fact extending more to cultural memories that created an East as distinct from the West than narrowly to an “India”, the geographical boundaries of which are often subjected to frequent re-definitions through repeated invasions.

5 Hence the caveat that comes through the use of the auxiliary "should" while admitting the reader's power of discretion by the use of "may".

6 Margaret Chatterjee sees this as a Gandhji’s "technique of spiritual instruction" (1). She adds that "For Gandhi godliness...was a fragrance which expressed itself in human, in kindly acts, in stubborn self-questioning, in courage, and in humility — a strange amalgam of elements" (Chatterjee 1983: 94).

7 This throws open the whole question of the relevance of dialogue in a genre like autobiography. One may argue with William L. Andrews that "dialogue in autobiography... is a feature of what Bakhtin has called the "novelisation" of
the narrative, a phenomenon that helps to keep any genre in "a living contact with unfinished, still evolving contemporary reality" (Andrews 1988: 91). Moreover, adapting William L. Andrews' viewpoint on the relevance of dialogue it may be held that Gandhi as an autobiographer who dialogises his narrative functions as a dramatiser of basic socio-cultural dynamics between the Indians themselves and between the Indians and Europeans in the colonial context.

8 Pat Caplan perceives Gandhiji's experiments with self-control by sharing his bed with young women as consonant with Tantrism. It is true that Tantrism, through a positive channelisation or sublimation of sexual energy seeks to increase the aspirant's spiritual power. But this would not mean that as some critics point out, for Gandhi women "are merely a means to an end (just as were Gandhi's great nieces)" (Caplan 1987: 278). This was practised with the active participation and consent of his nieces. Our criticism of this practise seems to spring from our stereotypical notion of woman as being at the receiving end. The paradigm of male domination in a practice like Tantrism needs to be addressed at another level.

9 Moreover as Erikson points out in his psychoanalytical study of Gandhiji in Gandhi's Truth, his aversion towards sex slowly developed from feeling guilty about being with his wife when his father was dying. He saw brahmacharya as a great liberating and potential force that sublimated the urge for sensory pleasures and channelised it for creative purposes. In Gandhi's case it was service. However Gandhi strongly believed in saving grace and emphasised the need to practise devotion. "...His name and His grace are the last resources of the aspirant after Moksha"(Gandhi 1948: 177).

10 Joan V. Bondurant in the chapter titled "Hindu Tradition and Satyagraha: The Significance of Gandhian Innovations" in her study, Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict identifies the syncretisation of the traditional and the modern in Gandhian elements of Satyagraha (Bondurant 1988: 105-145).

11 The rhetoric of the narrative is so persuasive that it continues to influence its readers' ways of living. As Margaret Chatterjee points out, one cannot not really call this 'conversion' in the narrow sense of the term, but to mean that "the opponent is to be converted, to undergo a change of heart when he sees that the Satyagrahis are willing to stake their all for what they believe to be true" (Chatterjee 1983: 80).