PREFACE

The following pages seek to describe and critically evaluate the nature of the theocentric life, with special reference to its experiential aspect, as it manifested itself in Samuna and Nirguna Schools of Hindi Poetry (up to 1600 A.D. [circa]).

I have taken care not to step far beyond the chronological limit. The limit has been exceeded by a few years in the case of Tulsi in order to take a rounded view of the mystical life as it emerges from his works.

I have found it difficult to disagree with the following remarks of Warren and Rene Wellek on the nature of the doctoral thesis:

"The doctoral thesis should be conceived of as flexibly as we conceive of professional literary distinction. It is the most individual part of a man's professional training; it should give the reader a real sample of its author's intellectual quality. Length and documentation—or degree of documentation—should be flexible. Every topic has its own logic and its own length. Mere industry and endurance are not intellectual virtues; and the fiches—the three-by-five cards—should not—even though pasted together—constitute a book."

(THOERY OF LITERATURE, Pp. 294-95)

The authors are evidently of the opinion that, while heaped-up quotations and facts are evidence of "industry and endurance," they are by no means synonymous with real "intellectual virtue." Industry and endurance are essential but they cannot do duty for the hard intellectual core which such a work should have.

This core consists, in my opinion, in the interpretation of facts and the determination of their significance. It is not for me to
pronounce on the labour that has gone into this work, but I believe that the intellectual aspect has not been ignored. A good deal has been written on the biographies of mystics falling within this period. I have, therefore, avoided going into biographical detail. There is, besides, another reason. All biography is a probe into the details of the empirical life. It is this egoistic time-bound existence that the mystics seek to transcend. This transcendence is the sine qua non of spiritual adulthood. The greater the number of so-called facts we can pile up about these practitioners of Life Immortal (and not life temporal), the farther we move from the nature of this transcendence.

It is thus that the anonymity of many of our sacred writings becomes intelligible. The mystics do not take time seriously. They are therefore chary of furnishing details of what according to them is the husk and shell of real life. It is their spiritual experience which is the kernel within the husk, the pearl within the shell. For the rest, as they themselves would put it, they ate and slept and enjoyed and suffered life like most of us.

I do not seek to belittle the labours of those scholars who tried to unbury the records of the lives of these saints and to piece together details wrested with difficulty from the unwilling hands of oblivion. These have their own value in the world of scholarship and, may be, in the world of Sadhana also. There is a type of consciousness which seeks a foothold in what it regards as the concrete facts of the Guru's biography. This adherence to biographical detail may, like idolatry, be legitimately regarded as one of the avenues leading to the Divine. Biographical detail stands on par with idolatry in this respect. Both of
them can become means as well as ends. When these become ends in themselves we get spiritual blindness, fanaticism, the cult of "my prophet, my saint".

When we realize their character as means we no longer rest content with surfaces. In the case of biography we seek to discover and assimilate that aspiration of which the details of biography are but the vehicle.

In the present case the above approach would have provided a case of misplaced emphasis. Not the historical accidents of the personal life, but the super-historical Reality as what engaged their energies. That is why I have tried to lay emphasis on their "magnum opus", the discovery and incarnation of the Divine in their lives.

A point or two about the way the theme has been approached here. The Sagunites are more in contact with the Divine as Actor. It is the dynamics of Divine Lila both in its grave (as in the Killers of Āvāna) and gay (as in the Dancer of Vṛndāvana) moods that they seek to portray.

What the Divine does is necessarily expressed through myth and symbol. While, therefore, the Nirgunit experience is expressed in the first person, the Sagunite experience can be grasped only by an analysis of the nature of symbolism. Not that the Sagunites don't approach the Divine in the manner the Nirgunites do. Both Sura and Tulsi are full of passages where the Sadhaka comes to the Lord in all his aching or exultant subjectivity. Most of these passages, however relate to Vinaya or Dasya attitude which ordinarily lies on the hither side of
the full authentic experience. On account of this difference in approach there is greater emphasis on the nature of myth and symbolism in the treatment ofsamt experience than in that of the Nirgunite.

The use of the term 'Nirgunite' has been restricted to the saints as distinguished from the Sufis. Hence the word "Studies" in the title, which carries the suggestion that aspects of the field chosen have been dealt withmax and surveyed from deliberately selected perspectives.

It has, however, been my endeavor that there should be nothing perfunctory about the treatment of themes selected for study. I have also tried to find out how far this mediaeval mysticism can be integrated with other aspects of human consciousness-pragmatic, moral, and aesthetic. In order to see how far their approach is "modern", that is, relevant to present-day conditions, I have instituted a comparison between these mystics and some of the representatives of this tradition in the India of today. The various schools of Hindi mysticism have been compared with each other in order to find out their relative contribution to the rich tradition of Indian spirituality.

It is my pleasant duty to express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, for his guidance and appreciation.