Conclusion

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present', for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism. The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words au-delà — here and there, on all sides, fort à fa, hither and thither, back and forth (Bhabha 1994: 1).

Autobiographies by saints and spiritual aspirants who followed the path of karma, bhakti, jnana and raja yoga for self-realisation during the colonial period have consciously and unconsciously documented their moments of encounter with colonial culture. The colonial encounter in these contexts as we have seen in the foregoing chapters has been diverse, sometimes indirect and discreet. The texts placed at a significant moment in colonial history show that 'resistance' has been a protracted discourse. Resistance has manifested itself as violence, defiance, eclecticism, alternative worship methods, narratives that construct or re-interpret cultural identity, synthesis, satyagraha and quest for balance through ways of living. Spirituality is a quest for permanent balance. In the process, these texts in diverse modes explore a level of national resistance which is higher than physical or political resistance. These texts demonstrate that self-realisation is the act of balancing between self-abnegation and self-assertion and assert that national self-realisation is the act of balancing between internationalism and national sovereignty. This study has shown that Purohit
Swami, Swami Ramdas and Paramahansa Yogananda as contemporaries of Gandhiji explicitly accepted Gandhiji’s nationalism. Further, all these texts transcend the post-Enlightenment dilemma of the nationalist elite, tackle modernity through bold interpretations of tradition, and effectively respond to cultural demoralisation. As texts written and published in the dusk of the British Empire and the dawn of India’s freedom, they not only foreground grave social problems based on inequality but also foresee the problems and prospects of post-colonial India. Their discourses are pioneering attempts at fighting cultural amnesia while uneasy over the role of the self in the context of a given new identity called nation. They show that the idea of the nation is not confined to strategies of governance and geographical boundaries but ought to be based on a unifying spiritual vision and internationalism. Though spirituality per se does not emerge as a resistance strategy, the documentation of spiritual pursuit in the English language and the choice of events, apparently conforming to the then predominant Western standards of the autobiographical act convey a strong message. Far from being a documentation of an individual’s life, the texts address and negotiate ways of life in a colonial society. They also draw our serious attention to the extinction of a certain cultural ethos which had promoted good will among people. The autobiographies also show that discrimination based on community, gender, class and caste exists independent of the colonial challenge. The depiction of the railway system in a way shows the colonial enterprise as supplementing class-based discrimination. Self-realisation is empowering and challenging since it insists more on practice and direct experience than on mere verbalising of an ideology. Spirituality is therefore a challenging factor because it is a way of life based on the understanding of the self as the other. The negotiation between the self and the other in spiritual life parallels the negotiation of one citizen with the other in a vibrant democracy. These texts demonstrate how mutual appreciation of religious and cultural differences can empower a people.
Indian spiritual autobiographies in English demonstrate that our marking of *difference* from the culture of the coloniser was not a monologic exercise to keep out the "colonizer from that inner domain of national life and to proclaim its sovereignty over it" (Chatterjee 1993: 26). Here, the *generic* and *linguistic* choices of the *authors* provide a dialogic and hermeneutic twist to nationalist discourse. They are dialogic because as self-life-sketches of aspirants, they address the ubiquitous, yet unique and uncognisable *experiences* of the human consciousness. They are dialogic also due to the *orchestration* of various literary forms, languages, scriptural interpretations, colonial encounters, ambivalence and the dynamic tension between the seen and the unseen in their utterances. Consequently, this study has dramatised the dialogic experience of *reading* spiritual texts written in the colonial period. The encounter between these texts and the reader can result in an upsurge of multitudinous voices networking among themselves while addressing one another. These voices are linguistic, religious, political, cultural, literary and *generic*. Further, the representation of the self in these texts provides interesting possibilities for an engaged literary criticism. It is a fact though that this kind of engagement with spiritual autobiographies in English has been infrequent. The foregoing chapters have only provided an entry point and are a proof of how much has been left undone in the field of Indian writing in English, particularly autobiography studies. Criticism of Western spiritual autobiographies has been numerous while studies of Indian spiritual autobiographies has been limited. One possible reason perhaps is that religion and spirituality are considered matters of the inner domain divorced from the outer. These texts clearly deconstruct that view. Criticism cannot assume that spirituality is merely the domain of the inner. ¹ An engaged criticism shows how the private and the public, the inner and the outer, the personal and the political, the private and the historical have a symbiotic relationship. This kind of study is clearly vital for an understanding of modern Indian culture.
I wish to point out that the paradigms of *karma, bhakti, jnana* and *raja yoga* and of *rasa* and *bhava* provided me an indigenous method of analysis. Just as a knowledge of the *Holy Bible* is integral for a critical understanding of Western literary, philosophical or historical texts so also this study has sought to demonstrate that an employment of nativist paradigms can provide an exciting entry for literary criticism into the world of Indian spiritual autobiographies. This study has confined itself to Hindu texts. But it is clear that researches on modern Indian autobiographies by Muslim and Christian men and women of religion would yield great rewards as well. Also this study has confined itself to male writers and it is obvious that the study of women writers would provide important insights too. The example of studies in the West of Christian women saints should inspire similar studies in India.

The texts demonstrate Homi Bhabha's recognition of border lives as the art of the present, as the epigraph to this chapter shows. These texts in their several ways guide us through the borderline existence between the past, the present and the future; between tradition, modernity and post-modernity between the seen, the seeing and the unseen. Paramahansa Yogananda's early twentieth century anticipations of the progress of science show how the space and time between the past, the present and the future will finally be narrowed. The role of texts like his in futurology is tremendous.

The spiritual autobiographies of those examined in the previous chapters carve a niche in the trajectory of dialogic imagination. Our notions of the spiritual have suffered amnesia due to the demoralising influences of colonial culture, particularly the *monologic* status ascribed to Orientalism in the West. Following suit, we are quick to accept and apply Western philosophical theory in our reading of Western or Indian texts, while we are reluctant to see what Eastern philosophical positions can contribute to our gaining insights into these texts. As a woman reader trained in Western literary and critical tradition but brought up in a traditional Hindu household, I felt during the course of this
analysis that insights from indigenous literatures came to me spontaneously while those from Western theories came with struggle. One contribution of these texts to nationalist thought is their role in triggering off a dialogue between the reader herself and her society and in seeing the ambivalence that the colonial encounter generated in the Hindu psyche. I would like to assert that studying these texts makes for a secular discourse. That these texts are concerned with categories like caste, gender, class and nation and demonstrate ways of living that appreciate cultural differences make them important contributions to nationalist discourse. The authors of these texts are nationalists also because their accounts throw light on the daily lives of common people in India. They demonstrate that secularism is not refraining from addressing religious issues or defying them, but is an informed, open, on-going and non-hypocritical dialogue between religions. Fanaticism of any kind springs from a blissful ignorance of the true meaning of religion. The scriptures are not prescriptions but descriptions that from time to time debated, critiqued and deliberated on these differences. Religious fanaticism is basically born of ignorance, illiteracy, deprivation and insecurity bred by pseudo-secular rhetoric and a monolithic concept of culture forced on the human psyche. This is another form of cultural amnesia. The role of saints in providing a universal vision is dramatised in these spiritual autobiographies. An enlightened dialogue between religious traditions of the kind which Gandhiji initiated will alone help us to survive. The spiritual autobiographies I have studied contribute vastly to this notion of a secular democratic polity.
Notes

1 I am reminded of Said's observation in his work, *The World, The Text and The Critic* on the scope of literary criticism and the role of the critic: "Criticism cannot assume that its province is merely the text, not even the great literary text. It must see itself, with other discourse, inhabiting a much contested cultural space, in which what has counted in the continuity and transmission of knowledge has been the signifier, as an event that has left lasting traces upon the human subject. Once we take that view, then literature as an isolated paddock in the broad cultural field disappears, and with it too the harmless rhetoric of self-delighting humanism. Instead we will be able, I think, to read and write with a sense of the greater stake in historical and political effectiveness that literary as well as all other texts have had" (Said 1991:225).

2 Swami Ramdas speaking on the role of saints points out that "Saints, incarnations and prophets come from age to age in different lands to deliver the message of unity, harmony and peace for the regeneration of mankind. They sow the precious seeds of universal love and brotherhood...this high ideal cannot be achieved by the efforts of statesmen, diplomats and politicians who lack spiritual experience of the highest Truth and whose vision is warped by considerations of personal, national or racial self-interest. The transformation can be brought about only by the divinely inspired and illumined saints with pure love for all. Their vision is truly universal, as they have gone beyond all barriers of race, religion, and nationality and their loyalty is solely to Truth or God" (Ramdas n.d: 14).