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Passages through India

Indian Gurus, Western Disciples and the Politics of Indophilia

1890-1940

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abbreviations

CWMG: Complete Works of Mahatma Gandhi

LSN – Letters of Sister Nivedita

LSV – Letters of Swami Vivekananda

CFA – Charles Freer Andrews

RBVB: Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati

LKE Leonard K Elmhirst Papers

SWV: Swami Vivekananda in the West

IOR: India Office Records

NMML: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library

Acknowledgements

This is admittedly the most pleasant part of writing a thesis.

Fours ago, this thesis began under a spell of enchantment. I was enchanted by a small handful of exceedingly rare western figures whose work seemed worship in the service of a lofty India. Growing up within the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition, I was almost completely consumed by the canonical stature of its figures. It was not easy to come out of that spell. That early enchantment slowly turned into dismay and later disillusionment as my deepening engagement with its figures and networks revealed the extremely problematic axes of their love for India. Their fixation to represent and re/produce a certain kind of good and bad Indians bear uncanny similarity to the debates on religious violence and immigration in today's world. My own shifting trajectory from Deoghar to Delhi and finally to Warwick has been essential in understanding the complexities of their politics.

To Sarah Hodges, my supervisor, I owe the foremost debt for gently but firmly prodding me to go beyond the obvious. Her intellectual generosity and sharpness of insight has moulded this thesis into its current state. It has been my privilege to be her protégé. Support came from unexpected places: the delightful Anne Gerritsen, for being the diligent mentor, funny friend and employer extraordinaire. Aditya has been a warm friend; though more so after my viva. The History and Sociology Departments have been very indulgent of my doings; I cannot thank Virinder Kalra, Rebecca Earle and David Anderson enough for their patience and support. It has been a pleasure to be part of the Global History Centre, where I learnt to make my first forays in organising events (the trick is getting the food right, as someone advised). The Centre for the Study of Women and Gender has been equally kind in supporting my interests and indulgences; thanks to Maria do Mar Pereira and Aya Nassar for the wonderful Feminist pedagogy group. With the Queer History group, I found a way to way to merge my interests and identities, much to my satisfaction.

Several close friends and family supported me through these years. My parents, aunts and cousins have been bewildered but supportive of my persistence in what they thought was a never-ending saga of unemployed studenthood. My brother Sayak has seen me through times good, bad and ugly. Andrew, Poorva and Cheri has been astute readers of my work. Saba's generosity has made living in Coventry so much more bearable; big shout out to the Hussain family and my darling baby

Zayed. Anjali has indulgently smiled and sneered at my wicked ideas. Mantra and Martin have been patient in their dealings, doling out great banter, music and company as PhD life rolled to a finish. Paloma and David, I will miss our rather hegemonic fourth four rule; the last days until our eviction was a period of pure pleasure. Sara became a friend in the last year; I only wish it were earlier. Procrastination took new meanings in our shared banter and walks; the precarity of our profession made somewhat bearable. I must thank Sourit and Shrikant for being such great company and making my early Warwick days tolerable, forlorn as I was away from home. Martin and Andrew undertook the thankless task of proofreading most of my chapters. Matteo came at the very end but survived the year. It has been my pleasure to inflict my 'delightful' wit on him every single day of the quarantine.

Librarians and archivists across three different countries/continents provided me with the invaluable material help that made this thesis possible. In India: NMML, National Archives of India, Shantiniketan, Sabarmati; in Britain: Bodleian, Oxford Devon Heritage Centre, University of Edinburgh and the British Library; in the U.S: Kislak Special Collections, UPENN and the Swarthmore College archives. Archival dust is a real thing. It imbues meaning in the way we read sources; digitising feels dry.

My alma mater Jawaharlal Nehru University has been the most significant influence in my adult life. Thanks to the teachers who taught me history, it was entering a world of sheer joy and fierce intellect. The late MSS Pandian, despite his other faults, was the first scholar who taught us pride in our Dalit identity; that is a lesson for life. I wish I had made more efforts at listening to Radhika Singha, woke as she made us in her own unassuming way. Tanika Sarkar, my former supervisor at JNU, has been inspiring as ever. Through thick and thin, she has always found the time to go through my work. At a time when India is almost completely gripped by the frenzy of Hindu right wing politics, JNU teachers and students offer some collective hope in the world.

Finishing this thesis under a particularly dark political time has been a challenge. As the U.K finally makes me feel like a 'familiar stranger', it is perhaps apropos that a presentist despair creeps into my conclusion. But then, as they say, if the times are dark, the songs will be of dark times. Why should our history writing be any different?

Abstract/Summary

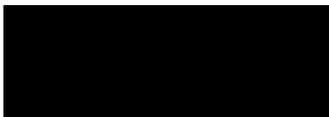
This thesis analyses the phenomenon of Indophilia, a romanticised affection and engagement by westerners for an idealised (largely Hindu) India. Three major mentor figures – Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore – and their close western disciples are taken up in this study to show the complex mobilisations made possible by the negotiation of personal intimacies and public political projects. It foregrounds a study of the spatial, material and affective aspects that surround the experience of discipleship. I argue that these discipleships, produced through a series of complex affective practices between themselves and the guru, were inevitably inflected by the upper caste/middle class presumptions that informed them. I suggest how epistolary practices, ashrams and spiritual domesticity were interbraided in a language of intimate discipleship that produced the forms and fantasy of Indophilia. I study the excess produced through the experience of relating to the world of the guru. Being and becoming came together through a wide set of practices, politics and performances.

The five decades between 1890 and 1940 provide the chronological context – of high imperialism, fin- de-siècle heterodoxy, an expansive Indian nationalist discourse and an increased mobility and migration from the subcontinent – that made the presence of Indophiles a seemingly transgressive phenomenon. Bringing themes such as intimacy, discipleship and migration together, this thesis argues that Indophile deployments around transnational projects were in itself not emancipatory. Rooted in a politics of respectability, they insistently sought to produce and normalise an idea of India that was often itself hegemonic in its formation. I argue that these Indophile intimacies were instrumentalised for a set of ‘worlding’ projects that sought to settle an idea of India and Indians for a largely western set of audiences and geographies. In this, they often reproduced the very hierarchies of race, class and caste that they were supposedly seeking to transgress. It is this profoundly ambivalent politics of intimacy that this thesis seeks to problematise.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted, either in the same or different form, to this or any other University for a degree.

Signature:

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Somak Biswas

Chapter 1

Introduction

Indophilia and its Wider Worlds

1890-1940

Gurus are forever.

A lock of Tagore's silvery-grey (beard) hair fell out from within a sheaf of papers I was working on. An attached note detailed that on his death it was cut from his body and sent by (unknown) Indian disciples to Leonard Elmhirst, a close associate and English disciple of Tagore residing in Devon.¹ Inspired by the Indian poet's educational and agricultural ideas, Elmhirst had founded the Dartington Hall Trust in England in the 1920s, an experiment that advocated unconventional ideas of utopian communitarianism.²

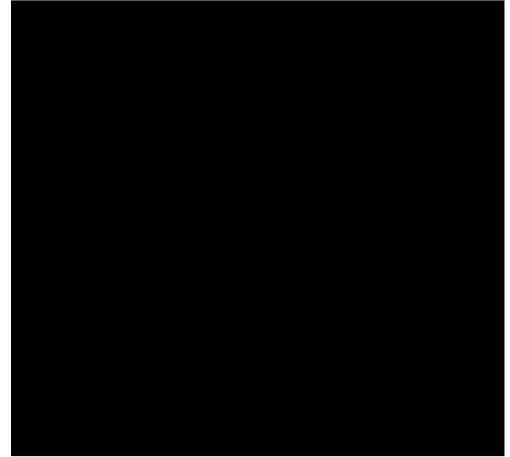


Figure 1: Tagore's Beard Hair Source: LKE Tagore 3 – LKE/TAG/3/A, Dartington Hall Records, Devon Heritage Centre

The hair was part of a larger enactment of material-cultural practices that constituted deep discipleship. This thesis will argue how such intimate discipleships came to be constituted and why they matter in the multi-sited national and transnational contexts they connect and complicate. Focusing on western discipleships allow us to rethink and recast familiar themes such as indenture, Hinduism and diaspora and the larger implications of their movements in the history of imperialism, mobility and migration.

1.1 Framing Indophilia

This thesis builds on a series of relationships between key Indian figures and their western disciples to explore a larger politics of Indophilia. I define Indophilia as westerners' romanticised attachments to idealised ideas of India mediated by a set of (generally upper caste/ class) Hindu Indian actors, geographies and discourses.

¹Papers of Leonard K Elmhirst, Dartington Hall Trust Collection, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter.

² Michael Young, *The Elmhirsts of Dartington: The Creation of an Utopian Community* (New York, 1982).

This is illustrated through three important and occasionally intersecting networks around three major figures of colonial and modern India: the Hindu monk and missionary Swami Vivekananda, the poet and educationist Rabindranath Tagore and the iconic nationalist leader Mohandas K Gandhi. Together their career broadly span the decades between 1890 and 1940. Unless otherwise stated, these Indophiles are generally western subjects, largely British and American (occasionally European) men and women who made definitive passages to/through India. Indophiles belong to that important category of western actors that refuse to fit neatly within either official colonial discourse or anti-colonial nationalist narratives. Not Orientalist in the influential Saidian sense, they fit more closely within what the historian Richard Fox identifies as ‘affirmative Orientalists’, who were apologists of Indian culture.³ Their passages to India were initially made in non-official, if not necessarily anti-colonial, capacities. However, their trajectories diverged significantly from the dominant narrative of imperial careering represented by British officialdom, merchants and military men.⁴

As western actors who ultimately refused to own up to the racial privilege afforded by the nexus of imperial mobility and migration, their personhoods fragment our understanding of European agency, demonstrating the dissonances that expose the serious limitations of the colonial project in action.⁵ The empire or imperial geographies, however, remained an important category or field to substantiate their work. In this, they were similar to other European men and women who sought (and often found) in the empire a space for multiple possibilities- missionaries, feminists, Theosophists – in ways that may not have been possible within Britain itself.⁶ Living and being in imperial locations also exposed them first hand to empire’s violence; such experiences were essential in eroding their belief in the munificence of empire. The desire for alternative languages of affection and alliance for particular Indians and India was no less produced out of a great despair at their

³ Richard G. Fox, ‘East of Said’, in Michael Sprinker (ed.), *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1992), p. 152.

⁴ David Lambert and Alan Lester (eds), *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2006).

⁵ Fred Cooper and Ann Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997), p. 21

⁶ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (London, 1992), p. 120. Ware shows how white women found new fields of work through empire and the expansion opportunities afforded by it of female independence and employment, p 126.

own nation's betrayal of its enlightened civilising mission. Yet, as this thesis will show and argue, this was not the only reason for the making of such discipleships. Disillusionment with Britain's manifest destiny was framed by a disenchantment with forms of industrial and colonial modernity; Indophilia was an expression of that wider disquiet.⁷ These were actors who desired to opt out of the techno-modernist vision of western society, leading them to seek alternative models of transcendence and living in non-modern societies such as India and around forms such as the ashram.⁸ This dissertation therefore, through a study of these figures and their networks, seeks to intervene in a wider set of debates linked to questions of interiority, trans/nationalism and migration and more interestingly on modernity and religion.

The networks these figures constituted formed a major traffic of 'white solidarity' that consolidated some of the 'global' opinion on India. An extensive literature already exists on each of these figures, given their importance in the national pantheon.⁹ Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore have a proliferating body of dedicated scholars and scholarship that have examined those figures and their disciples/collaborators in numerous cultural, political and intellectual histories. Yet, few have analysed the affective as an important site to produce the discursive. This thesis asks: What was at stake in these disciples' constant attempts to seek and produce affective intimacy with their Indian gurus? I argue that a focus on this elusive and uncertain intimacy is important; it determines the fraught-ness of their doings around specific public political projects that often derive from their mentors. These cannot be simply tucked away into 'friendships of largeness and freedom' mode,¹⁰ where western disciples seem star-struck by the greatness of big Indian

⁷ See for instance Charles F. Andrews, *The Relation of Christianity to the Conflict between Capital and Labour*, (London, 1896) for his take on capitalist modernity and Christian Socialism. Andrews regarded Trade Unions as timely outlets of labour grievance but also effective instruments of social and political control, p. 62. Ashis Nandy has noted how Enlightenment project had subordinated the feminine aspects of Western culture, whose qualities were projected on to the Orient. See Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism* (New Delhi, 1983).

⁸ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, p. 36. Nandy has noted how Enlightenment project had subordinated the feminine aspects of Western culture, whose qualities were projected on to the Orient.

⁹ I have engaged with some of this scholarship in various chapters more substantially instead of here.

¹⁰ Uma Dasgupta, *Friendships of Largeness and Freedom: Andrews, Tagore, and Gandhi: An Epistolary Account, 1912-1940* (Oxford, 2018); Susan Visvanathan, 'S.K. Rudra, C.F Andrews and M.K. Gandhi; Friendship, Dialogue and Interiority in the Question of Indian Nationalism', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37 (2002).

icons. By analysing how aspects such as space, emotions and embodiment were fundamental in producing and sustaining that relationship, I problematize the experience of Indophile discipleship and its wider uses.

Several historians have grappled with integrating the small scale of the biographical with the big scale of global history.¹¹ These are, however, not histories of 'feeling' per se even as they interweave the ways in which a sense of the 'global' inflect and pervade the biographical everyday. The contributions of scholars such as Margrit Pernau have been slowly opening up the history of emotions in South Asia.¹² Pernau et al's important volume on *Civilising Emotions* elucidate how the emergence of a high imperial order in the nineteenth century reordered the control and management of a set of emotions around the categories of civility and civilisation in different parts of Asia and Europe.¹³ It is, however, still very much a 'limited inroad', yet to fully integrate and account for South Asian theories that do not often apply on binaries of mind and body or experience and articulation.¹⁴ This work does not address that specific lack, but points to ways in which aspects of this larger history of interiority and its unique South Asian modes can be harnessed to narrate the cultural entanglements of Indophile intimacy.

Scholarship on intimacy and transnational networks generally do not converge. Macro processes of commodification, migration and other large scale factors tend to overwrite more micro, personal exchanges.¹⁵ Given that Indophiles' archives are shot through with what might be conceived as uncertain attempts to create intimacy with their gurus, what did these transnational networks produce? I argue that these relationships, even as they were invoked and sanctified in the name of (spiritual, cultural, political) freedom, they were also mobilised by an upper class/caste nationalist elite anxious to settle an idea of respectable India that

¹¹ Francesca Trivellato, 'Is There a Future for Italian Microhistory in the Age of Global History?', *California Italian Studies*, 2 (2011); Brice Cossart, "Global lives": Writing Global History with a Biographical Approach', *Entremons, UPF Journal of World History*, 5 (2013). Maxine Berg has outlined the challenges posed by global microhistory in Maxine Berg, 'Introduction', in Maxine Berg (ed.), *Writing the History: of the Global Challenges for the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 11-12.

¹² Margrit Pernau, 'Feeling Communities: Introduction', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 54 (2017).

¹³ Margrit Pernau, Helge Jordheim, Orit Bashkin et al., Eds. *Civilizing Emotions: Concepts in Nineteenth Century Asia and Europe*, (Oxford, 2015).

¹⁴ Elizabeth Chatterjee, Megan Robb and Sneha Krishnan, 'Feeling Modern: The History of Emotions in Urban South Asia', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 27 (2017), p. 541.

¹⁵ Ruth Harris, 'Rolland, Gandhi and Madeleine Slade: Spiritual Politics, France and the Wider World', *French History*, 27 (2013), p. 580.

inherited in the representations of Vivekananda, Gandhi or Tagore. Inasmuch as this intimacy was guided by a profound sense of love, longing and loss for their gurus, often inspired by a shared anti-colonial ethos, that in itself did not make their investments emancipatory or radical. Instead, we need to interrogate the shifting meanings of radicalism as they travel in time and place.

English disciples of Gandhi and Tagore such as C.F. Andrews, William Pearson and Henry Polak are celebrated figures in the history of the abolition of indenture (1917). Scholars have noted how the abolitionist movement was fundamentally tied to a more middle class, bourgeois Indian desire for respectability against an immoralised labour community.¹⁶ Yet, as I show, a study of Indophile interiority exposes how notions of respectability were crucially inflected by their extended experience of the modern ashram, an experimental space that nevertheless privileged certain upper class/caste forms of Hindu living as ideal. We need to grapple with the ambiguity of these intimacies, without which the scope and limits of their politics do not become apparent. Nationalist or hagiographic practices of memorialisation frequently occlude the larger politics of their doings, rooted as they were in anxieties of affective practice. Margaret Noble, the Irish disciple of Vivekananda, gets portrayed as a ‘Celtic lioness’;¹⁷ Andrews as the ‘rebel-saint’.¹⁸ Even the otherwise admirable biography of Andrews by historian Hugh Tinker sees him as ‘a man abounding in the love for all humanity’.¹⁹ That all these figures have commemorative stamps, roads, statues or projects in their name sponsored by postcolonial Indian governments, attests to this celebratory mode. Allusions of homoeroticism or (sexual) sublimation are carefully read away or left untouched, even in scholarly work, leaving behind a smoothed narrative of ‘pure’ discipleship.

Institutionalised discourses of race and gender certainly mattered in the making of Indophile subjectivity, but I strongly foreground the emotional experience of discipleship as essential in approaching Indophile cultural politics; race, class, caste

¹⁶ The recent work of Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the Empire: Indentured Indians in the Sugar Colonies, 1830–1920* (Cambridge, 2017), gives an excellent overview of this.

¹⁷ Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated: A Biography of Nivedita* (New York, 1953); Barbara Foxe, *Long Journey Home: A Biography Of Margaret Noble (Nivedita)* (London, 1975).

¹⁸ Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *C.F. Andrews: A Narrative* (London, 1949); Nicol Macnicol, *C.F. Andrews: Friend of India* (London, 1944); Daniel O'Connor, *A Clear Star: C. F. Andrews and India 1904–1914*, (Delhi, 2015).

¹⁹ Hugh Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love: C. F. Andrews and India* (Oxford, 1998).

and gender being important intersections in mediating that. The chapters consequently move from the affective to the discursive, suggesting how personal enchantments conditioned their political investments, the attachment to a critical mass of Indians providing an impetus for their self-transformations. This dissertation follows the tension in sublime friendship: that it was always partial, necessarily instrumentalised and transactional, and regularly produced forms of Indophile performance that arguably undermined Indophiles' stated aims of universal moral and material uplift.

A history of interiority is rare in South Asian historiography,²⁰ and a history of discipleship that is not largely bound in intellectual history even more. Recent interventions in South Asian intellectual history²¹ –for instance that of Shruti Kapila, Chris Bayly and Andrew Sartori – have 'sought to position themselves in a larger ecumene of global intellectual history'.²² I accept this 'larger ecumene' but suggest that this is not merely the preserve of intellectual history. In an attempt to overcome the problem of methodological nationalism, Indophile movements are consistently framed within a transnational scale. This is important to trace the implications and limitations of Indophile politics, which may not be evident immediately within India itself but visible across other contexts. The Hinduism deployed in the U.S by Vivekananda and his western disciples was very different from that popularised within India, yet western discipleships were instrumental in its moulding as a transnational discourse, manifest in its dual cultural nationalist and universalist registers.

Western disciples, through an essential 'whiteness', evidenced the arrival of a putative 'world' that affirmed Indianist projects. Tagore's 'habit' of English secretaries – Andrews, Elmhirst, Pearson – (noted in a sarcastic aside by the spurned translator Edward J Thomspson) during his many travels post 1913 was arguably a visible demonstration of that 'world' around him. This 'world' entered

²⁰ Notable exceptions have been from literary studies scholars: Udaya Kumar, *Writing the First Person: Literature, History, and Autobiography in Modern Kerala*, Ranikhet and Shimla, (Ranikhet and Shimla, 2016); also Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Invention of Private Life, Literature and Ideas*, (New York, 2015).

²¹ Such as Shruti Kapila, *An Intellectual History for India* (Cambridge, 2010); Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (Chicago, 2008) is a masterful analysis of the emergence of cultural nationalism in a time of capitalist decline in Bengal; Christopher A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge, 2012).

²² Christopher A. Bayly, Afterword, Shruti Kapila, Ed., *An Intellectual History ...*, p 150

forms of Indian public discourse, evoking and validating Indian cultural and civilizational superiority to Indians themselves. The various chapters in this thesis map the scale of this Indophilia and its expansive cultural geographies, even as India remained a focal point of their investments. The best evidence of the effect of this cumulative Indophilia is perhaps found in Romain Rolland, the French pacifist and litterateur, whose passion for Indian religion and philosophy made him an esteemed figure in Indian nationalist circles. His diary accounts list the many overlaps and broader effects of these disciples and their mentors outside of India,²³ and in what ways they came together even as they often remained divergent within India itself.

1.2 Intersections: The Late Nineteenth Century

The latter half of the nineteenth century forms an important setting for this story. 1857 catalysed key changes in the nature of British rule in India. British official and unofficial discourses on India saw a gradual consolidation of racial hierarchies and stereotypes.²⁴ These limits were more or less considered final, with little transgressions allowed of the type that abounded in the earlier centuries.²⁵ The divisions between the colonizing British and the colonized Indian were never absolute, but instances of intermixing became rare and less prominent after the Mutiny. (Racial) difference was now strictly policed, ordered and regulated in colonial law and everyday governance.²⁶ Liberal forms of Indian nationalism that emerged around this time appealed and advocated for equal rights of India and Indians within an enlightened imperial framework.²⁷ The spread of print culture and circulation made possible an increased awareness of the outside world, notions

²³ Romain Rolland, *Inde: Journal, 1915-1943* (Paris, 1960). A systematic scholarly study of his journals, written in French, is yet to be undertaken. Separate studies, though largely within a nationalist or hagiographical framework, exists on Rolland and Gandhi; Rolland and Vivekananda; Rolland and Tagore.

²⁴ See Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire: Henry Maine and the Ends of Liberal Imperialism* (New Delhi, 2010).

²⁵ For the fluidity of early modern Indo-Western encounters see Jonathan G. Harris, *The First Firangis: Remarkable Stories of Heroes, Healers, Charlatans, Courtesans & other Foreigners who Became Indian* (Delhi, 2014) and William Dalrymple, *White Mughals: Love and Betrayal in Eighteenth-Century India* (Delhi, 2002).

²⁶ Thomas Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Delhi, 1994).

²⁷ Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*.

of boundedness shifted and moved; liberty of communication became a refrain for liberty of trade.²⁸

By the late nineteenth century, the naval superiority, financial reach and near-absolute hegemony in trade, commerce and territorial expansion of Britain confirmed the formidable magnitude of an Anglocentric world order.²⁹ The gradual economic subordination of India as a colonial dominion within global capital networks catalysed the emergence of an ambivalent colonial intelligentsia in various provinces of British India. They sought in indigenist categories of thought an inspiration for culturalist politics that explained away India's material subordination by refiguring India as an ancient repository of religious/spiritual/ethical values. This essential, spiritually whole India, part of a larger 'Orient', was in sharp contradiction to a grossly materialist and unethical West.³⁰ For Westerners disenchanted with the onslaught of capitalist modernity and what they felt was a decline of ethical living, the positioning of India as a site of age-old spiritual wisdom and religious repository carried a viable ethical appeal. In adopting various public Indian figures as their master, mentor or friend, they made substantive investments in numerous ethical projects undertaken by these figures. Yet, despite being largely ethical in their imperatives, these investments were also deeply inflected and informed by contemporary political discourses of imperialism and anti-colonialism.

Figures like Annie Besant and Henry Ollcott and organisations such as the Theosophical Society (founded 1875) powerfully projected the idea of a spiritually advanced Indic civilisation, towards which a materialist west should turn to for enlightenment, guidance and truth. India, and sometimes a larger Asia, came to embody a spiritual repository of ancient truths, mysticism and knowledge for interested westerners disenchanted with forms of industrial modernity and what many saw as a profound moment of 'crisis of faith' in the western civilisation itself. In such a telling, Indophilia came to represent a nostalgic pursuit for an idealised world whose spatial and temporal frames intimated a world outside of modernity,

²⁸ Bayly, Afterword, *Ibid*, p. 154.

²⁹ Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglements: German and Indian Intellectuals across Empire* (Harvard, 2014).

³⁰ For a nuanced understanding of how this binary played out, see Edward Said's classic book 'Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient' (New York, 1978).

but accessible by those inside it. This modernity rested on 'rupture'³¹ but this rupture also produced the desire for an idealised 'lost world', a point the chapter on ashram takes up in fuller detail.

The vibrant cosmos of fin-de-siècle England/Europe and the many movements that populated its subcultures became a fertile ground to produce and perform this Indophilia that found embodiment in forms of Indian culture and religion.

Movements such as feminism, vegetarianism, social utopianism or non-conformism as well as figures connected with them derived and cherished alternative traditions that had an 'Eastern' origin. Direct and indirect encounters with these movements also supplied most of the western followers of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore.

Several scholars have already pointed to the fluid, fertile ground this nexus provided in the emergence of anti-colonial politics.³² The intersections between the British (and European) anti-imperial tradition and other radical discourses such as vegetarianism, animal welfare rights, feminism, theosophy, homosexuality and socialism are hard to miss. These intersections enabled contrarian engagements in Britain with alternative, utopian forms of community that challenged the sway of liberal imperialism, scientific racism and laissez-faire economism.³³ Indian religious and cultural formulations provided critical ways to explore, if not escape, closures wrought by capitalist modernity. These formulations generally did not displace popular Orientalist typologies of a spiritual, mystical India. Yet, such cultural appropriation was not necessarily one way, as figures like Vivekananda or Gandhi can demonstrate. They themselves mobilised important western resources and networks in stabilising their own projects.

Western individuals and institutions attracted to these personalities and their causes saw a fulfilment of their own personal and spiritual interests. Their identification with India, even as it may have been influenced by spiritual motifs, never remained limited to that solely. Women followers such as Besant or Noble, coming from within a suffragist tradition, found in certain emanations of Hinduism

³¹ Saurabh Dube, 'Introduction', in Saurabh Dube (ed.), *Enchantments of Modernity* (London, 2009), p 1.

³² In her recent book, the literary scholar Priyamvada Gopal has argued that a history of the British empire is also a history of its own dissidence. Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London, 2019).

³³ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought and the Politics of Friendship* (New Delhi, 2006).

and Buddhism an opening to the closures foisted by high Anglican Christianity and an arrogant imperial order that was insistently patriarchal.³⁴ To be sure, a love for certain kinds of India or Indians did not necessarily yoke them to the cause of anti-colonialism. Indeed, for a very long time, the belief in imperial munificence remained intact in these curious seekers and sympathisers, their politics framed by the liberal aspiration of India as an essential and equal partner within the British empire. In such circles, Indian preachers, politicians and artists were eagerly avowed and listened to. The desire for a closer connection with these charismatic figures and through them, a closer access to their idea of India produced determinate forms of Indophilia.

The rapid proliferation of transnational political networks such as abolitionism, socialism, pacifism and revolutionary terrorism or religious networks such as Theosophy, pan-Buddhism, and pan-Islamism, among others, fostered remarkable overlaps in which emergent forms of anti-colonial and cultural nationalism found easy solidarities. Love for India and Indians was embedded within this matrix of ideologies, inspiration and interest. The involvement of Tagore, Gandhi and Vivekananda's western followers in multiple non/anti colonial investments around India attest to this continuous overlap, an aspect that several of the chapters showcase and argue.

Indophiles who declared their love and longing to be at the side of their Indian mentors and what they conceived of as India could not – and generally did not – escape the bind nationalist politics placed on them. They saw their political endeavours for India as integral to a larger 'service of love' for which they had dedicated themselves to their respective gurus. A process of self-reflection and change was consequent upon their coming closer to the world of their mentors. Anti-colonial identifications with India and Indians came at a cost. While gurus and in general nationalist politics regularly instrumentalised the racial privilege provided by their western disciples' whiteness, official and popular imperial narratives criticised them bitterly, as people who were always wont on seeing the faults of their own race rather than of others. These disciples in their turn variously

³⁴ Several historians of British feminism have studied the importance of alternative religiosities and suffragists. See Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (London, 2001); for a more secular feminist engagement, see Laura Schwartz, *Infidel Feminism: Secularism, Religion and Women's Emancipation in England, 1830-1914* (Manchester, 2013).

courted arrest for criticising British rule in India, get beaten up by white settler mobs, wrote incendiary literature, and aided civil disobedience and revolutionary terrorist movements for the cause of Indian freedom.

1.3 Accessing Intimacy: Affects, Objects, Spaces

The material turn in history has demonstrated how objects derive, impart and produce meaning when bound within other human or material relationships. Objects are however not ‘simply props of history’ but are actively present in creating, sustaining and transforming meanings.³⁵ Material culture history has prompted a ‘renewed interest in understanding experience, the senses and emotions in history’.³⁶ The world of gurus and disciples, holy mothers and brothers was replete with such sights, sensations and sounds that mediated the experience of discipleship. A series of cultural-material artefacts were embedded in this experience of deep discipleship. Discipleship and its intimacy was produced through everyday spatial and material practice. Monique Scheer, the historical and cultural anthropologist, in a Bourdieuan reading of emotions, argues for ‘emotions as not only cognitively rooted but also equally material, embodied and embedded in practice.’³⁷ The discussion of space, however, is absent in Scheer’s otherwise valuable formulation. Spatializing emotional practices, as chapters two and four on the experience of discipleship will show, suggests how intimacy is contingent on disciples’ inhabitation and desire to enter certain (spiritualised) spaces. Ashrams and spiritual geographies provided western disciples with a special frame to experience intimate-ness as also Indian-ness with their gurus and their wider worlds. The desire to relate to this space produced a range of practices that made them feel closer and connected to their mentors by inhabiting and investing in that space.³⁸ Barbara Rosenwein’s influential concept of an ‘emotional community’³⁹ provides an apt way to describe aspirational spaces such as ashrams that are also deeply utopian, providing a site for intensive self-reflection and transformation.

³⁵ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello (eds), *Writing Material Culture History* (London, 2014), p. 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁷ Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion’, *History and Theory*, 2012.

³⁸ The two influential contributions of Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London, 1989), and David Harvey, *The condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1990) have informed my understanding of space and practices of spatiality.

³⁹ Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell, 2006).

Yet, there are also limits to accessing this experience. The emotional experience of discipleship comes to us only through its textual expression, not otherwise.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, as an archive of affects, they reveal how self-making practices are indelibly crossed with the dominant cultural presumptions of the habitus disciples seek to world themselves in. A focus on letters and a larger epistolarity that operates and drives the emotional subjectivity of Indophile actors becomes significant in such a recuperative move. The act of writing letters sustained an interiorising effect, imagining a self remade in relation to significant others.⁴¹

The experience of discipleship was premised on an emotional regime that depended on a regular enactment of literary, physical and material practices. These practices were embedded within a hierarchy of race, caste, gender that rendered specific acts of inversion, subversion or immersion meaningful. Under what circumstances did the act of 'feet-touching' become transgressive?⁴² What value did the 'dust' of their Indian mentors' feet hold for western disciples? The dust that pervade the archival everyday is not merely a figurative presence,⁴³ but has deep material significance. Intimacy comes to us through these artefacts in their fragmented being. They engulf and settle, never fully, only to become mobile again. Unlike dust, they are not 'perfectly circular',⁴⁴ they perpetually seek and often fail to reach their objects, and in their failure create a complex language of longing, love and loss that makes possible a rich history of interiority. Without these narratives of ambivalence, affection and anxiety, archives become only a rehearsal of the big-discursive, never illuminating the micropolitics of gestures, affects and place-making that informs them.

The study of emotions as practice - that circulates and are relational - makes possible a 'processual understanding of identity', as Sara Ahmed argues.⁴⁵ Self-

⁴⁰ Scheer, *Ibid*, p. 196.

⁴¹ I draw this insight from William Reddy from his discussion of diary writing practices. William M. Reddy, 'Sentimentalism and Its Erasure: The Role of Emotions in the Era of the French Revolution', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (2000), pp. 109-152.

⁴² There are of course, deep Christian overtones of Christ washing his disciples' feet and modern parallels of that in different Christian dispensations; but this is not the same as its everyday performance between disciples touching the guru's feet, not the other way round, often multiple times within the same day.

⁴³ Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*, (Manchester, 2002), p.160.

⁴⁴ Marijn Nieuwenhuis and Aya Nassar, 'Dust: Perfect Circularity', *Cultural Geographies*, 25 (2017), p. 501.

⁴⁵ Sara Ahmed, 'Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21 (2004).

making occurs in the crevices of such affective and affectivised spaces, reflecting the ambiguities attendant to ‘worlding’ processes. New Materialist interventions have reflected on how such ‘worlds’ are produced – and made sense of – through a range of human practices in relating to that world.⁴⁶ This ‘world’ – the aspirational spaces and places that Indophiles seek to be a part of – produces the form and fantasy of their Indophilia; the habitus of that world insistently naturalising a set of cultural values as normative.

Reading intimacy is always a fraught proposition, for, ‘unused to pushing the affective up against the political,’ we tend to dismiss emotive negotiations as more elusive.⁴⁷ Anne Stoler’s work has been pioneering in opening up the study of intimacy and its different imbrications in imperial history. Her work on colonial Indonesian plantations has shown how sexual arrangements and affective attachments have been key in the production of colonial categories for its control and management.⁴⁸ Stoler, over several important volumes, has deftly indexed the ‘tense and tender ties’⁴⁹ that govern the education of racialised desire.⁵⁰ The anxieties of contact and contagion around interracial relationships provided much impetus for sexual control and policing of racial, cultural and moral borders.⁵¹ It also produced the curious ellipses, silences and ordering logics of the colonial archive through which certain kinds of sexuality (or sexual difference) registered their elusive presence. The chapter on indenture draws on this insight to show the convergence of race, caste, class and religion in *The Fiji Report* drawn up by C.F. Andrews and William W. Pearson (and supported by Gandhi and pre-eminent Hindu nationalist Madan Mohan Malaviya) that was central to arguing for an abolition of indenture.⁵² Written on the basis of their investigation of the indentured sugar plantations, the report abounds in the language of sexual immorality and ‘moral panic’ around a fallen purity. Letters written around this

⁴⁶ Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison (eds), *Taking-Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography* (Farnham, 2010).

⁴⁷ Ann Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ann Stoler, ‘Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies’, *The Journal of American History*, 88 (2001).

⁵⁰ See also Ann Stoler, ‘Intimidations of Empire’, in Ann Stoler (ed.), *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, 2006).

⁵¹ Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, p. 77.

⁵² Charles F. Andrews and W.W. Pearson, Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji, *The Modern Review*, 1916.

time show them constantly evoking and mobilising a pure ashram life in their harsh critique of sexual transgressions that blurred caste, class and religious lines in plantation colonies. This was further complicated by their own lineages and training as celibate Christian missionaries.

Important insights coming from the field of feminist, queer and postcolonial scholarship have been crucial in grappling with the ambivalences that inhere in such complex deployments of the intimate. The elusive trace of sexuality has led the queer feminist scholar Anjali Arondekar to intensify her focus on the epistemic logics of the colonial archive.⁵³ Her work on sodomy trials in colonial India suggest that if homosexuality remained absently present, largely anecdotal or in passing, the act of hiding, it is precisely because of the language employed to record it.⁵⁴ Yet this supposed 'failure' is not merely a record of loss, but also reveals more than it may have intended to. Refiguring the archive as a subject is therefore essential, in an attempt to read its silences and elisions meaningfully. An archival lack is not necessarily absence.

Epistolary archives perhaps yield intimacy more readily than official ones, given obvious differences in its ordering logic and conventions. However, while private letters, being generally affective texts, form an extremely important site to analyse interiority,⁵⁵ there are limits to how such desires could be named and articulated. Love and longing for the guru could be expressed using only certain tropes or safe containers that were generally desexualised. This did not mean a lack of (sexual) desire. The idiom of spiritual love helped contain this potent affection from spelling itself out ever clearly, leaving in its wake a rich trace of allusions, innuendos and ambiguities. To recover such articulations is to also note their failure and limits, and how they were formative of the larger cultural politics at work in such representational hermeneutics. 'Failure' shaped the often-unsteady cultural politics of performance.⁵⁶

⁵³ Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record: On Sexuality and the Colonial Archive in India*, (Durham, 2009), p. 11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵⁵ A critical mass of theoretical and empirical insights on epistolarity have emerged out of the Oliver Schreiner Letters Project, <http://www.oliveschreinerletters.ed.ac.uk/GiantRaceArticlePDF.pdf>. Also Liz Stanley, *The Epistolarium: On Theorizing Letters and Correspondences*, *Auto/Biography*, 2004; 12:201-235; Rebecca Earle, *Ed. Epistolary Selves, Letters and Letter Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, 1999).

⁵⁶ Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke, 2011).

The lofty language of a spiritualised discipleship helped contain the ‘problem of desire’ from spilling over. Aspects of this have been taken up in the chapters on letters, ashrams and discipleship, analysing practices of intimacy that constituted their becoming disciples. With women disciples of Gandhi and Vivekananda such as Madeleine Slade, Margaret Noble, Sara Bull or Josephine MacLeod there was a recurrent risk because their sexuality was relentlessly made to fit within desexed, celibate roles of sisterhood or motherhood. In male disciples’ articulation of affection, there is much homoerotics at work. Andrews’ letters to Tagore exemplify the agony of this affection, and the impossibility of any further fulfilment: ‘O my dear, dear friend, I can never tell you in words how I love you.’⁵⁷ A similar tension appears in Gandhi’s relationship with followers cum associates such as Hermann Kallenbach and Polak, though Gandhi was more open to reciprocal intimations and practices of (homoerotic) male intimacy than Tagore. Sublime friendship became an invocation to express feelings that could otherwise not be named.

Homoeroticism could be framed in remarkably heteronormative terms. The literary scholar Santanu Das has noted in the context of World War I ‘trench letters’ how the homoerotic ‘kiss’ between men or the Victorian cult of ‘romantic friendship’ made possible the articulation of male desire without any serious threat to their masculinity.⁵⁸ Elsewhere, in a discussion on the representation of homosexuality in Indian novels, Ruth Vanita has observed how even disapproving portrayals of such themes aroused a degree of sympathy and limited identification in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Male Indophile letters to their mentors testify to this framing; Gandhi could confidently send ‘love-letters’ to both Andrews and Kallenbach without any overt displacements of gender. It is precisely this ability that made male-male desire speakable, preserved in a language that could be deeply homoerotic but not sexual. Indeed the tendency to collapse all desire as ultimately sexual tends to make both desire and intimacy rather impoverished categories. A history of intimacy is not only one of sexuality, but a larger set of practices that comprise the tactile, the embodied and the material. Personalised projections are

⁵⁷ Andrews to Tagore, 2 Oct 1913, File No. 4-11, Original Letters from C.F. Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, CFA PAPERS, File: 1-26, 28 (ii), CD No: RBVB-018, Rabindra Bhavan, Visvabharati

⁵⁸ Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in the First World War* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 109-110.

⁵⁹ Ruth Vanita, ‘Introduction’, in Pandey Bechan Sharma (ed.), *Chocolate and Other Writings on Male Homoeroticism* (Durham, 2009).

integral to the imagining of this intimacy. In the way Gandhi's mahatma-hood was circumscribed and enforced by the mythopoeic imaginations of the Indian peasantry,⁶⁰ disciples' excess of projections made and remade their gurus. At the centre of such projections lay the body of the guru, around which practices of embodiment were rendered meaningful.

The body, following theoretical interventions by influential figures such as Foucault, Judith Butler and Brian Massumi, to name a very select few, has increasingly emerged as a serious site of historical investigation.⁶¹ Consequently, narratives of embodiment have become a key concern for many scholars, including those cited here. Several chapters focus on practices of embodiment consistently produced through spatial and material mediums, re/creating the experience of discipleship. Letters from the guru, artefacts used by them, or bits of cloth on their body re-enacted this experience. MacLeod's attempt to feel Vivekananda after his death by inhabiting the rooms he lived in reflects this intense desire to imagine and invest in an embodied co-presence. In a similar way, Mira and Andrews sought to feel the larger presence of their gurus through their letters; to touch their handwriting was an evocation of that elusive intimacy rendered real. Bull's desire for Sarada Devi's photograph and rosary blessed by her; Swami Saradananda's cramming of his small room with Bull, Noble and MacLeod's possessions instantiate the many forms in which things, spaces and places became embodied selves. Practices of embodiment were valuable in the ways they made disciples feel connected to their mentor's world. There was distance, sometimes insuperable, but it was often conceived of as creating wonder and mystique, an enchanted world around their Indophilia. Emotions were used as cultural resources to 'imagine and consolidate communities, and for individuals to make sense of their place in a wider social world.'⁶²

⁶⁰ Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma', eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies* (Delhi, 1989), p. 292.

⁶¹ Based on a broad reading of the following works of these authors: The body is the centre of a range of influential works by Foucault, particularly *The History of Sexuality (Vol I)*, (New York, 1978) and *Discipline and Punish*, (London, 1977). Judith Butler's *Senses of the Subject*, (Fordham, 2015) and Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual* (Durham and London, 2002).

⁶² Chatterjee, Robb, and Krishnan, 'Feeling Modern', p. 546.

1.4 Worlding Indophilia

If Indophilia represented the ‘worlding’ of an enchantment, what kinds of India were they producing for the world? Three of the chapters (two, three and five) in this thesis focus on Indophile ‘becoming’; the other two on ‘being’ (four and six). The latter focuses on their discursive investments around the narratives of indenture and Vedanta, for Tagore, Gandhi and Vivekananda’s disciples respectively. In these chapters, I ask: to what use were these intimacies put? If a particular set of India and Indians represented the cross-section of people they were drawn to, in what ways were these set of values re/ produced through their transnational entanglements? Claims to Indian-ness validated their claims to representation for an increasingly proliferating nationalist politics whose scale went far beyond the subcontinent.

There has been a rather benign tendency in certain influential strands of recent scholarship to view such entanglements in largely affirmative terms. In her influential study of fin-de-siècle anti-colonial thought, the literary scholar Leela Gandhi has termed the ability of individuals such as Andrews, Pearson or Nivedita to form ‘cross-cultural friendships’ as constitutive of ‘affective communities’. Framing such friendships as the ‘lost trope of anti-colonial thought’, Gandhi views their mobilisations for a variety of anti-colonial projects as part of a larger ‘affective cosmopolitanism’ that emerged in the late 19th century Britain/Europe.⁶³ The idea of a cross-cultural connection in the cause of a wider anti-colonial network informs Elleke Boehmer’s study of such transnational connections as well. Boehmer conceptualises collaborations between figures such as Sister Nivedita and the extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose as exercises in ‘cross-border interdiscursivity’, fostered between marginalised subjects across the empire.⁶⁴ In a similar vein, historians Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa have argued for a ‘peak period of anticolonial struggle in South Asia from ca 1890 to the mid twentieth century’ that saw the emergence of an ‘aspirational cosmopolitanism’ across lines of difference.

⁶³ Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, p. 17.

⁶⁴ Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National, and the Postcolonial: Resistance in Interaction, 1890-1920* (Oxford, 2005), p. 8.

Manjapra declares: 'If nationalism was the main political project of resistance in the anticolonial era, cosmopolitanism was the main ethical project.'⁶⁵

This thesis takes issue with all such claims and terminologies. Affective or aspirational cosmopolitanism remain rather uninterrogated categories that seem to suggest a coming-of-age universalism in Indian anti-colonial entanglements, a universalism that is generally presumed to be emancipatory in its proclivities. That there was greater connection and awareness of anti-colonial movements around the world is widely acknowledged; less emphasised is the strategic and hegemonic nature of this cosmopolitanism. As Ali Raza and others have pointed out, a cosmopolitan openness is 'wishful thinking'; the hope for an imputed globalism have always been fragmented and imaginary.⁶⁶ Tony Ballantyne's work on the spread of pan-Aryanism, for instance, show how this racial (mis)identification was used by Indians to reify their claims to equality and anti-colonial solidarity.⁶⁷

All three big Indian figures – Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi – shared in this pride of Aryan civilizational greatness, a conviction that also reflected in the negligible engagement with any form of Black cultural politics despite the former two's extensive travels in America, and for the latter, Africa. On a visit to Iran in 1932, Tagore waxed eloquently about the common 'Aryan inheritance' that unified the Indo-Iranian civilisation:

Coming to think of it, my relations with Persia are even more intimate, for am I not an Indo-Aryan! Persians have throughout their history taken pride in their Aryan descent, and that feeling is gaining strength under the present regime [Reza Shah Pahlavi]. So they are looking on me as a blood relation. . . . In thus feeling me to be their own, they have made no mistake, for I too feel quite close to them.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Kris Manjapra, 'Introduction', in Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapra (eds), *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (London, 2010), p. 2.

⁶⁶ Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah (eds), *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds, and World Views 1917–39* (New Delhi, 2015), p. xx.

⁶⁷ Tony Ballantyne, 'Knowledge, Empire and Globalisation', in Stephen Howe (ed.), *The New Imperial Histories Reader* (New York, 2010), p. 231. Sheldon Pollock has noted how German Orientalism fed the myth of the Indo-European Superiority and contributed to the Aryan purity narrative in Germany, 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj', in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds), *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia (South Asia Seminar)* (Philadelphia, 1993).

⁶⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, Cited in Afshin Marashi, 'Imagining Hāfez: Rabindranath Tagore in Iran, 1932', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 3 (2010), p. 58.

It is easy to read this as a moment of anti-colonial solidarity formed in the wake of the fall of the Qajars in Iran. But as chapter three on ashrams will show, Tagore's identification was part of a larger inheritance in Aryan civilizational pride and superiority. Belief in an imputed Aryanism created its own logic of difference and exclusions, some of which have been shown in greater detail for Vivekananda and Gandhi in two subsequent chapters (four and six). Gandhi defined Africa (with the exception of Arab Africans) as outside of the pale of empire and India, a view that he modified only much later in his life.⁶⁹ Almost all western disciples, but particularly Andrews and Nivedita, forcefully argued for this belief in racial and cultural superiority, no doubt borne by contemporary 'scientific' claims about the distinctiveness of this 'racial stock'. If Aryanism was considered a potential ally of anti-colonial articulations, its limits were soon exposed as the imputed claims of equality remained largely unheard in British imperial circles.

Indophile politics was deeply complicit in the re/production of such identifications and its internal hierarchies. As the chapters on Indophile entanglements with indenture and Vedanta will show, the proliferation and penetration of mainstream nationalist discourse within India from the late nineteenth century onwards produced severe anxieties around the representation of India in the empire and beyond. India's position within the British empire as the biggest supplier of cheap labour— indentured and non-indentured — was increasingly seen at odds with the bourgeois aspirations of its nationalist elite. Indophile intimacies were neither innocent nor impervious to realising such aspirations, if not always self-consciously. Indeed, their centrality within mainstream nationalist discourse was determined by their consistent representation of this upper to middle class/ caste elite's interest, within and across the empire, expanding to a larger western geography that included, but was not limited to, North America. Andrews, Polak and Pearson's efforts to abolish indenture was driven by this representative anxiety of producing a respectable India and Indian immigrant fit for assimilation anywhere, but particularly in settler western territories. Vivekananda's American disciples were similarly engaged in the accrual of learned audiences in the West, in their attempts to shore up the glory and greatness of Indian culture and civilisation. Together,

⁶⁹ Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi's Printing Press* (Harvard, 2013), p. 20. Proponents of African nationalism such as John Dube (African National Congress) also pitted the 'heathen' Indians against Christian Africans viewing them as outsiders usurping native control over resources.

these deployments produced India as a site and signifier of high culture and civilisation manifested in the exemplary personhoods of Tagore, Gandhi and Vivekananda.

The transnational/global turn in South Asian historiography has persuasively argued against the tendency of methodological nationalism that reify the hermeneutic tendencies of nationalist history.⁷⁰ Migration and migratory practices in particular illustrate how much extra-national forces were instrumental in producing the ‘national’.⁷¹ The period between 1890 and 1940 is a useful referent to capture the increasingly diverse movements of India in the global flows of migration and exchange. The historian Adam MacKeown has noted how institutional protocols aimed at regulating migration, particularly labour flows from Asia – particularly India and China – has been key to the discourse of integration and segregation that came to characterise international mobility and nationalist discourse around them.⁷² Radhika Mongia has observed how the historical nationalisation of migration has produced un/foreseen eruptions of ‘fervent nationalist claims’, a point that sets the context for Indophile deployments in my indenture chapter.⁷³ This has been particularly true around issues of labour migration, where labour became embroiled in a triangulated contest between the British colonial state, an anxious nationalist elite in India and the demands of global labour supply.

Several scholars such as Ali Raza, Benjamin Zachariah and Franziska Roy have argued against the usage of ‘transnational’ as it conceptually reifies the very borders that it attempts to transcend, preferring instead ‘international’ to encapsulate the steady stream of engagements between South Asian actors and

⁷⁰ This is an increasingly influential argument made by many historians and scholars. Harald Fischer Tine, ‘Indian Nationalism and the ‘World Forces’: Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War’, *Journal of Global History* 2, 3 (2007), 325–44; Isabel Hofmeyr, *Gandhi’s Printing Press* (Harvard, 2013); Ben Zachariah, Ali Raza and Franziska Roy, *The Internationalist Moment* etc; Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire: A Colonial Genealogy of the Modern State* (Durham, 2018), and others.

⁷¹ Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire*, p. 3.

⁷² Adam McKeown, Integration and Segregation, *Global Migration, Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims*, eds. Donna R Gabbacia and Dirk Hoerder, Boston, 2011, p 63. Also Radhika Singha, ‘The Great War and a ‘Proper’ Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882–1922’, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, 3 (2013), 289–315 in the context of Indian immigration.

⁷³ Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire*, p. 6.

networks and elsewhere in the interwar period that took nationalism as its framing principle.⁷⁴ I have retained transnational as a valid analytical category precisely for this reason. For a country that imagines itself as a nation, though not yet so, transnational becomes an aspirational move that reifies and settles that very 'nation' through the very act of transcending. Adopting a transnational scale allows us to grapple with the ambivalence of Indophile entanglements around their mentors' projects operative on two intersecting registers, cultural nationalist and universalist. It reveals that in trying to settle the respectable idea of India that they did, Indophiles reinforced troubling hegemonies in the name of their mentors and a larger Indian nationalist cause, in which all remained complicit to variable degrees.

As well as the influence of fin-de-siècle connections, Harald Fischer-Tine alerts us to the influence of ideologies and discourses such as pan-Islamism and pan-Asianism, both of which provided fertile ground for the cross-hatching of anti-colonial solidarities.⁷⁵ Vivekananda's success in the U.S had contributed to a growing stream of students and nationalist politicians migrating to New York and California. America became a site to counterpose British claims to superiority among the English educated nationalist elite, particularly on grounds of science and technology.⁷⁶ The liberal Press laws proved conducive for the circulation and distribution of revolutionary journals such as the *Indian Sociologist*, run by the India House patron Shyami Krishnavarma. There were important strategic alliances made with Irish nationalists, developments that greatly worried the British imperial government. Pan-Asian connections rose with the victory of Japan over Britain in 1905, and as the interconnections between Kakuzo Okakura and Sister Nivedita demonstrate in the backdrop of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, there was much hope in a resurgent Asia led by Japan at the helm.⁷⁷ Nivedita wanted to revive Indian spirituality in Japan through Okakura: 'I can not think of a better personality through wh[ich] to revive the old tradition of the Indian Sadhu in Japan'.⁷⁸ Pearson published his 'For India' a searing indictment of British rule in India and a cogent case for Home Rule while in Tokyo in 1917: 'Home Rule is

⁷⁴ Raza, Roy and Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment*, pp. xv-xxv.

⁷⁵ Harald Fischer-Tiné, op. cit, p 329-332

⁷⁶ Ross Bassett, *The Technological Indian* (Cambridge, 2016), p. 15.

⁷⁷ Fischer-Tine, p. 333-36.

⁷⁸ Nivedita to Josephine MacLeod, 11 Oct 1902, *Letters of Sister Nivedita-II*, Calcutta, p. 512. Henceforth *LSN*.

inevitable'.⁷⁹ The book was proscribed and Pearson promptly detained by the British imperial government. On a chapter titled 'Is India Ready?', he listed an array of literary, political and industrial Indian luminaries as evidence of that readiness: Tagore, Jagadish Bose, Gokhale, Natesan, Ratan Tata among them. James Campbell Ker, in his confidential report to the Director of Criminal Intelligence noted how Vedanta Societies in the U.S were disseminating Indian nationalist ideas: 'the teachings of the Vedanta Society tend towards Nationalism in politics. Swami Vivekananda himself generally avoided the political side of the case, but by many Hindu nationalists he is regarded as the guru... of the movement.'⁸⁰

Tomoko Masuzawa's important intervention in the global history of religion – particularly around Asian religious forms coming to the West - has dwelt on how the category of 'World Religions' was invented to preserve the superior claims of European universalism in a language of pluralism.⁸¹ Yet, while reading such imports as constitutive moments in the history of Western religious liberalism, we need to study the kinds of mis/recognition this fostered within Asian sites/actors themselves and their western interlocutors. The final chapter on the making of '*Vedanta as a World Religion*' attempts to illustrate the politics of such a move. Embraced by sections of progressive and heterodox liberal circles in the West, this embourgeoisement is eagerly vaunted by cultural/nationalist discourse in India that seeks to settle itself as respectable globally, a symptom of the self-crisis caused by conditions of colonial modernity. The ideal type to settle such a belief is the largely upper caste and upper/middle class cultured Indian, not the lower caste/class labour-immigrant whose inferior social and cultural status threatened to destabilise that project.⁸² Creeds such as Baha'I and Hindu Universalism might have destabilised the categories of East and West,⁸³ but did not displace them; they were reconstituted and mobilised to make claims for Indian religious or civilizational superiority. A global or transnational scale around Indophile

⁷⁹ W.W. Pearson, *For India*, , Pub by the Asiatic Society of Japan, (Tokio, 1917), p 43

⁸⁰ James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1911* (Calcutta, 1917), pp. 215-217.

⁸¹ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago, 2005), p. 13.

⁸² Except for Har Dayal, who seems to have been the only prominent nationalist leader that managed to bridge the gap between student politics and the Indian agricultural labourer in the U.S. See Fischer-Tiné, p. 335.

⁸³ Ruth Harris, 'Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, and global spiritual transformations in the fin de siècle', *Journal of Global History*, 14(2), p. 180.

deployments in religious and political discourses lets us see how and in what ways white discipleship embodied, intensified and settled hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives emerging out of Indian nationalist discourse.

1.5 Brief Outline on Chapters

The five chapters (excluding the introduction) that span this thesis try to thread together these concerns around Indophile 'being' and 'becoming' with some coherence. Chapters Two, Three and Five takes up the theme of Indophile interiority through a specific discussion of letters, ashrams and spaces of spiritual domesticity respectively. I analyse how intimateness is produced between Indian gurus and their western disciples through practices of epistolarity and the different networks that sustained them. Chapters Three and Four take up Tagore and Gandhi's disciples and their mobilisations around the space of the ashram and its role in their articulations against indenture. Ashrams provided the physical space around which to territorialise this intimacy. Foundational in conceptualising alternative formulations of modernity, the ashramic habitus, for Tagore and Gandhi's disciples, emerged as the centre of their spiritual and social striving. This is where the guru's physical presence could be deeply experienced; where self-making practices could be worlded in a larger utopian community. The third chapter also takes up the theme of being, showing how the cultural values of the ashram – seen as the ideal form of Indian community life - profoundly inflected Indophile interlocution of indentured immigration. Andrews and Pearson repeatedly invoked their affection for Tagore, Gandhi as well as nationalist leaders such as Gokhale, and the ideal life of the ashram while making a case for the immorality of indenture. Their consistent critiques of indenture as a 'festering evil' juttled them into mainstream prominence, vindicating their appeal and representative claims in Indian nationalist discourse.

Chapters Five and Six focuses closely on the affective and discursive practices of Vivekananda and his western disciples. Chapter Five – on 'Practices of Discipleship' – returns to the theme of Indophile interiority, this time between Vivekananda and a select group of British and American women whose discipleship was crucial in consolidating his legacies in India and the America. I look at a series of affective landscapes – constituting of spiritual retreats, holy pilgrimages and household spaces – that produced their enchantment around a particular vision of India

inflected by Orientalist typologies. In the final chapter on '*Vedanta as a World Religion*', I see how the fantasy of India as a glorious civilisation produced an anxious soliciting of 'learned audiences' to consolidate that claim.

If chapters Two, Three and Five show how intimacy was created, brokered and sustained through a series of practices that were material, affective and spatialized, chapters Four and Six show their culmination and mobilisation for cultural/nationalist projects that broadly sought to sanitise and represent a respectable India for the world. The Conclusion sums up the arguments made in the thesis, commenting on the broader entanglements of 'white solidarity' and Indophilia in the colonial and postcolonial world.

Spanning five decades between 1890 and 1940, the narrative of the thesis is however, not chronologically aligned. Even though a late nineteenth century figure, the section on Vivekananda and his western networks are placed much later in the thesis. This is for various reasons. The making of Vivekananda's western discipleships happens around 'ashram-like' spaces, the discussion of which cannot be broached without apprehending what the modern ashram is. As such, the chapters on Tagore and Gandhi's ashram projects and discipleships prefigure that of Vivekananda's. That Vivekananda is also a central figure in contemporary Hindu nationalism makes him a particularly apposite figure to end with; Tagore and Gandhi's public legacies on the other hand have suffered near-oblivion and erosion in recent times. Throughout the twentieth century, the deep entanglement of Hindu cultural forms in Indian immigrant politics in the West are anticipated in the way Vedanta was worlded as a universal religion in America. Indophile deployments were mobilised to generate an expansive idea of India that was however also deeply exclusionary.

Chapter 2

Practices of Epistolarity

Indian Gurus, Indophile disciples and the Politics of Letter-Writing

2.1 An Archive of Feelings

What can letters yield as a site of inquiry in the study of these relationships? By foregrounding a discussion on the personal letters exchanged between this close-knit group of gurus and their western disciples, this chapter seeks to chart the important work letters do in moulding sympathetic western men and women into intimate disciples serving a wide variety of non/anticolonial Indian causes. Framed by considerations of race, class and gender, epistolary practices reveal the personal and the everyday that went into the making of these intimacies, they show us the emotional lives that bound their public acts and affirmations. Letters made and unmade the anxieties, avowals and aspirations of Indophile subjects, in relation to that of their mentors.

Epistolary identities shift and transform over time, their authors construct selves as they write, through their writing.¹ Epistolarity is constituted by the formal properties of the letter coming together to create meanings.² The epistolary archive is an archive of feelings. Personal letters reflect the desires, ambiguities and denials that characterised the epistolary articulations of western disciples in their attempt to identify with their mentors and the worlds inhabited by them. Epistolarity creates, informs and sustains a language of love, loss and longing in that conflicted process of identification. Letters become sites of embodiment, self-reflection, instruction and cultivation, for brokering favours and networking, to express desires for intimacy (and contain it). As Michel de Certeau notes elsewhere, ‘the body reaches the written page only through absence’,³ creating the cause and condition for its embodiment. This chapter instantiates this multi-pronged emotion-work that epistolarity does in charting narratives of discipleship. It examines long term personal correspondences between Gandhi, Tagore and Vivekananda and their western disciples whose engagements with a variety of

¹ Rebecca Earle, Introduction, *Epistolary Selves*, p. 2.

² Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (Ohio, 1982), p. 4.

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York, 1988), p. 3.

non/anticolonial projects around India made them important figures in Indian politics.

Peripatetic as these Indian figures were, letters became a dominant mode of being in touch for a group of disciples anxious to be close to them. Through letters, they felt the guru and his world, inhabiting the India they represented and placed themselves in relation to them. In their desire to express and articulate affection through the form/space of a letter, in their love and longing for proximity to specific Indian figures, their anxieties envisaged a language of intimacy that produced substantive ethical shifts in the cultural selves of the white western Indophiles as admirers, disciples and engaged interlocutors. In Andrews's declaration of his 'moral failings' as a missionary to Gandhi and Tagore, in Mira's desire to lay herself at the feet of Gandhi, or Nivedita's efforts to become a Hindu Brahmin brahmacharini to fulfil Vivekananda's wish, letters played a formative role in the brokering of new selves and their deployments.

Letter writing was a form of 'emotional practice' between disciples and mentors where new selves were written, negotiated and come to terms with. There was effusive devotion, a desire for transgression but also moments of doubt, lapse and failure. This chapter demonstrates the multitude of emotion-work letters do, with a view to showcase how letters endeavour to produce and sustain an intimacy that may never be achieved otherwise. Yet, the availability of this space offered disciples a medium to convey and project their feelings, evidencing the personal motivations that informed their public acts and investments, often in their mentors' name. Epistolary articulations become a crucial site of 'moral transformation', where disciples opened up to their mentors in an attempt to self-reflect.

The following sections i) trace the coming of the modern letter in colonial India, and how epistolary modernity redefined practices of self-writing for its subjects; ii) how these epistolary subjects conceived the letter as an intimate text that evidenced their true, inner selves while being embedded within a relationship of reciprocity; iii) showcase the multitude of emotion work letters did – through embodiment, networking and affective intimations – in substantiating disciples' Indophilia.

2.2 The Modern Letter in Colonial India

The coming of the modern letter in India has been intrinsically tied to the expansion of communication networks for the ordering of empire. While often building on the earlier system of *dak*, the rapid proliferation of postal networks scaled time and distance, emerging as key to imperial governance.⁴ The introduction of the Indian penny post in 1854, following its British counterpart in 1840, saw an explosion of postal communication over the next century. Aimed at aiding the unrestricted flow of information, a series of postal reform measures to make post cheaper and popular saw a manifold jump in Indian figures. From 43 million in 1860-61, it increased to nearly 250 million in 1900-1901, all across India – a figure that included not only letters but also the extremely cheap quarter anna postcards.⁵ The Indian Postal Service was also one of the fastest to Indianise, with over half of the 214 senior appointments (ranks between Superintendent to Post Master General) being held by Indians.⁶ It marked the intensification of the postal system and its penetration deep into the countryside, integrating the empire as never before, and with very negligible violence. Mark Frost notes astutely how the diffusion of India's postal system seems to have been 'an act of mass-cooperation' instead of a colonial imposition,⁷ eagerly vaunted and adopted by urban and rural, new literary publics as well as non-literate populations.

In Britain itself, letter-writing manuals since at least the 18th century have been in wide use as prescriptive guides of 'model letters'. In Victorian Britain, they offered instruction in the art of letter-writing, considered a necessary education for building the character of young men and women in their public conduct.⁸ With the popularisation of the penny post in Britain post 1840, letters became part of new cultural and political economies of knowledge circulation and activism. The Transatlantic networks of abolitionist activism, for instance, allowed for conversation to take place between two or more geographically disparate people on

⁴ Devyani Gupta, 'Stamping Empire: Postal Standardization in Nineteenth Century India', in Patrick Manning and Daniel Rood (eds), *Global Scientific Practice in an Age of Revolutions, 1750-1850* (Pittsburgh, 2016), pp. 219-220.

⁵ Mark R. Frost, 'Pandora's Post Box: Empire and Information in India, 1854-1914', *The English Historical Review*, Volume 131, Issue 552 (2016), pp. 1043-1073.

⁶ Frost, *Ibid*, p. 1055.

⁷ Frost, *Ibid*, p. 1058.

⁸ James Poskett, *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race, and the Global History of Science, 1815-1920* (Chicago, 2019), p. 118.

the subject of slavery.⁹ Prescriptive or actual, private letters were understood to reveal the ‘authentic character of an individual even if their public conduct could not’.¹⁰ The private letter was a site to produce and perform a true individual moral self. It was to this epistolary tradition that Western disciples like Andrews, Pearson, Noble, Slade and others belonged to. Their letter-writing exercises intimated what they saw as their true character, the morality of their beliefs and action when corresponding with their mentors.

Indian correspondents on the other hand, came from a different if not unrelated tradition. The coming of print culture had brought forth important breaks and continuities from earlier traditions of orality in the subcontinent. The first Indian letter writing manuals were authored by upper caste men and in circulation since the late 19th century. They familiarised readers with the epistolary propriety required to negotiate the entrenched world of social hierarchies in India.¹¹ The rationalising of postal communication, while introducing new forms of letter-writing, transformed pre-colonial forms of epistolarity as well. While a history of epistolary modernity in India is yet to be written, of particular importance is the emergence of the private letter, and the ways it changed the conventions and meanings around letter-writing practices for the English educated Indian elite. It helped chart a process of self-individualisation in an emergent private sphere, while also partaking in a larger colonial modernity.

There has been a long tradition of epistolary manuals and compilations since at least the Mughal times.¹² Much of these letters focused on diplomacy and there was no broad private/public distinction in epistolary categories. There is nothing similar to the European tradition of ‘familiar letters’, written between correspondents from a position of frankness and equality. The dense hierarchies of caste, class and religion that guided courtly and popular culture might have acted as formidable deterrents in the development of such a ‘friendship’ tradition. Medieval era love letters come closest to any form of personal letter, but they were generally written in effusive

⁹ Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688–1820*, (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁰ Poskett, *Ibid*, p. 118.

¹¹ Arun Kumar gives a fascinating account of how letters mediated the relationship between the lived social world and the written social world for the labouring poor. See Arun Kumar, Letters of the Labouring Poor: The Art of Letter Writing in Colonial India, *Past & Present*, Volume 246, Issue 1, February 2020, p 156.

¹² Francesca Orsini (ed.), *Love in South Asia. A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 234–235.

courtly language that showed off nobility and refinement, more grand than candid in tenor.¹³ As Francesca Orsini notes, colonial literary modernity paved the way for a more individualised process of articulation, giving birth to a new critical individual subjectivity that took itself very seriously.¹⁴ Older epistolary forms were not effaced, but the advent of a modern selfhood helped chart an individualisation of the self that greatly affected the kind of authors and audiences that emerged around the form.

The gradual development of a loose but distinctive public/private sphere made personal letters a critical imaginative space where selves were creatively deployed and cultivated. As discourses of the colonial elite sought to catch up with their metropolitan counterparts, the glamour, distance and status associated with English as a language of power, in comparison to vernacular languages, made letters written in English something of a marker of culture and high learning.¹⁵ Conversely, the ability of certain western educated Indians to correspond and converse in English (alongside their own native languages) generally invested them with the privilege to be part of an anglicised colonial symmetry – a complicit yet potentially subversive position of hybridity that both fixes and is unfixed by such presence.¹⁶ This is not to deny the significant growth that vernacular letter-writing practices have had within elite and non-elite Indian audiences. Nonetheless, a knowledge of English endowed them with the possibility to engage with western networks and audiences beyond India. Rammohan Roy's prolific contacts with important British and American networks and figures bear an early testimony to this possibility.

This influential class of English educated colonial elite (active also in the vernacular public sphere) pioneered ideas and institutions that refracted notions of citizenship and civil rights dominant in metropolitan discourses to the colonial public sphere. As later chapters will show, the lateral networks forged between members of this class and that of sympathetic white western figures (British, American, European) formed part of a complex process of interlocution in which epistolary articulations played a key role. Western disciples formed a precipitating point in the interlocution of these

¹³ Orsini, *Ibid*, p. 220.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 235.

¹⁵ See for instance Gauri Viswanathan's analysis of the relationship between the institutionalisation of English and the exercise of colonial power, Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York, 2015), p. 3.

¹⁶ See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *Talking Back: The Idea of Civilization in the Indian Nationalist Discourse* (Delhi, 2012) on a representation of this discourse emerging out of a colonial elite. Homi Bhabha writes on this more tellingly, on how hybridity arises out of colonisation and creates forms of cultural collusion and conflict, Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, 1994), p. 159.

rights and discourses, vocally arguing for the extension of metropolitan rights and privileges to that of its empire. To this end they collaborated in various colonial bourgeoisie-led projects, and their active presence in non/anticolonial Indian enterprises became a morally legitimising force for various movements that sought to narrow the difference between the ruler and the ruled when it came to exercising similar rights, privileges and duties. As interlocutors engaged in colonial discourses and anti-colonial movements, their involvement in anti-indenture movements in the empire or the spreading of Vedanta in the West were deeply rooted in the personal relationships they forged with prominent Indian figures. The epistolary archives built around their letters bring to the fore a rare intimacy – between iconic Indian figures hailing from a critical class of western educated elite – and their white western disciples. Their letters form a minor if influential trend in a time of high imperial consolidation, of (mostly) British men and women who willingly accepted the discipleship of Indian figures and stood against the imperial politics of their own nation and racial privilege. Tagore and Vivekananda of course made concessions in distinguishing western culture from western imperialism, but this distinction was generally under strain.

The profound spiritual disquiet, often rooted in the deep mechanisation of life produced by western industrialisation, had led Andrews, Pearson, Noble and Slade to seek solace in Indian or ‘eastern’ spiritual forms, spaces and persons. Almost all of them were attracted to some form of immanent spirituality that inhered in the figures of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore. The latter saw themselves as brokering some kind of mediating traffic between a spiritual, if colonised East, and a materialist colonising West, a role that their western disciples too took up as a serious obligation. Western disciples represented white bodies that consciously sought to identify with an idea of India or particular Indians in different ways. In trying to approximate their affection for these Indians as an affection for India in general, Indophiles became part of a cultural border-crossing that rendered their own whiteness an object of nationalist appropriation.

2.3 Epistolary communities

The community of letters formed out of this cast of Indian and Indophile characters was expansive. I look at three major (and occasionally intersecting) networks here – centred around Tagore, Gandhi and Vivekananda – to analyse the emotion work

letters do and the epistolary communities facilitated around them.¹⁷ This section shows how letters functioned as primary sites to mediate the relationships for disciples and their Indian mentors.

The letters passing through this small but influential community can be broadly characterised into primary and secondary epistolary networks. Primary epistolary networks constitute the entire corpus of letters exchanged between disciples and their Indian mentors. In these, disciples poured out their hearts to their mentors, shared their conflicts and concerns and sought wisdom. They laid bare their sense of complicity in imperialism and as compensation, offered themselves in service to their mentors. Letters traded between mentors and their disciples record the gradual shifts and shifting sensibilities that were facilitated by the 'emotional practice' of letter-writing. This is not to say that these relationships were forever beholden to the greatness of the guru or that the spell never broke. They came under frequent strain and primary epistolary networks provide a rich narrative of this densely constituted interiority.

Undergirding these major epistolary networks lay various ancillary connections that refers to lateral correspondence exchanged a) within followers and their close confidant(e)s; b) between various Indian mentors and their wider circles. These include Noble's correspondence with other western disciples of Vivekananda such as Sara Bull and Josephine MacLeod or diaries and accounts of Gandhi's associates Mahadev Bhai and Pyarelal that shed light on the primary networks. Letters exchanged between Gandhi and Tagore, Andrews and Pearson, or members of their wider circles such as the French litterateur Romain Rolland, Tagore's British associate Leonard Elmhirst who worked on his Sriniketan rural reconstruction project, the Moderate Congress politician Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the Arya Samaj leader Munshi Ram or the Wesleyan missionary Edward J Thompson, also belong to this category. Secondary epistolary networks consist of these parallel epistolary connections. They elaborate on how desire, love and jealousy was interwoven in the making of these discipleships, the tensions that cohered in the epistolary practice of these intimacies. Together they constitute the broader epistolary community referred to throughout the chapter. Romain Rolland for instance provided the most

¹⁷ Gandhi and Tagore's as also their disciples' epistolary accounts are more complete than Vivekananda's. This is largely due to censorship practiced by the Ramakrishna mission which keeps strict vigil over the archival traces of its founder and his disciples' – both Indian and Western – legacies.

consistent and coherent record of these intersecting networks.¹⁸ A unique European pacifist literary figure with a deep interest in Indian culture and philosophy, he had personally met and been in touch with Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore and most of their western disciples. He had even ‘gifted’ Slade to Gandhi. Each of them confided in Rolland their doubts, hopes and fears about the others. Rolland’s diaries unify these different sets of disciples within a shared tradition of Indophilia. Rolland’s diary entries, culled from his personal or epistolary exchanges with them, offer valuable comparative insight on various disciples.¹⁹

The mutual interplay of these two networks animates best the textures of these relationships. Secondary epistolary networks written between disciples or other confidants constantly invoke and refer to the state of their relationships with their mentors. Noble, for instance, writes, of her initial days of becoming a Hindu disciple in Calcutta, to her fellow-disciple and friend Josephine MacLeod:

The hot season has begun again. I teach now from 7 till 11 in the morning... At 11 I bathe – eat – rest – and then write, like a veritable Hindu. In future, I mean to dress in this fashion for those hours...

I am visiting Swami’s little cousin in her zenana and teaching her English. Swami says that if I bring her into this work and make her my spiritual and intellectual heir I shall be conferring the greatest benefit that he could ask on him. Just fancy!²⁰

Noble’s self-narration of becoming a Hindu was a way of affirming that identity to herself as well as others. Vivekananda’s influence and imputed desires looms large in these adoptions – in her dress, food and living habits and her teaching English to zenana bound women.

A similar, if more intense interbraiding is seen in Andrews’s letters on his love for Tagore. Written to William Rothenstein, a British literary associate and ally of Tagore’s, Andrews bares his heart:

¹⁸ Rolland, *Inde*.

¹⁹ Rolland, *Inde*. Parts of this text have been translated variously by: Martin Schauss, Andrew Burchell, Matteo Mazzamurro, Paloma Perez Galvan, Pierre Botcherby and Natalie Hanley-Smith.

²⁰ Nivedita to Josephine McLeod, [5.4.99?], *LSN-I*, p 99. This was also a time of the plague epidemic in Calcutta, and Nivedita joined in the relief work, along with Vivekananda’s followers, especially Swami Sadananda.

It is hard even yet to get over the pain of separation from the Poet [Tagore]...

I have never known love such as this, that has been given me from him.²¹

To be sure, Andrew expressed his love and longing in his letters to Tagore himself, as subsequent sections will amply show. But no longer content declaring this love to just him, the claim to intimacy (or its absence) spills into ancillary networks, to Tagore's friends, becoming almost an obsessive display of affection as if to prove its intensity. Secondary epistolary connections provide the useful space where this excess of meaning is performed.

Letters regularly expressed and helped contain such effusions of love within the relatively non-threatening framework of epistolarity. Epistolary articulations of desire for a closer presence continually underlined the impossibility of its physical fulfilment, including but not only sexually. It sustained a language of perpetual deferral, while also making possible quiet self-transformations and upheavals.

2.4 Letters to the Guru

Pearson and Andrews were missionaries when they first met Tagore at London in 1912. Known for their reformist and unorthodox views, Andrews in particular had courted frequent controversy within the Anglican affiliated Cambridge Brotherhood Mission in Delhi as well as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in England. He had been influential in the selection of S.K. Rudra as the first Indian Christian principal for St Stephen's College in Delhi and his missionary dialectics strongly advocated for an Indianisation of Christ and Christianity. Between 1905 and 1910, years that saw the proliferation of the Swadeshi movement in the wake of order to partition Bengal, along with the rise of extremist politics and revolutionary terrorism, Andrews emerged as a distinctive liberal Christian voice. He was reviled by the Anglo-Indian community but regarded by the Moderate faction of nationalist politics highly for his sympathetic support of the movement and denunciation of violence.

Tagore had by then already left far behind his former interest and association with the Swadeshi movement. Increasingly disillusioned and later critical of the exclusivist Hindu cultural nationalist strains that had come to dominate the movement, he had moved towards pantheism and a language of universal humanism.

²¹ Andrews to William Rothenstein, [?] September 1916, *The Ordeal of Love*, p. 129.

In 1912, his *Gitanjali* poems – translated into English from their Bengali originals – had created a stir in London literary circles.²² Its mysticism and lofty spiritual language had moved poets like W B Yeats, and eventually paved the path for his Nobel Prize within a year in 1913.

Andrews and Pearson had first met the poet at a reading session of his poetry in Rothenstein's home in London. Both of them were greatly influenced by his poetry and personality. Within weeks of their first meeting in London, Andrews wrote to Tagore saying how much he was thinking of him: 'so constantly, dear Rabindra Babu,²³ and long to see [you] again'.²⁴

My thoughts are with you so constantly and I seem at times to pass whole days with you altogether, remembering you in my prayers and thinking of you...also longing to be with you... I want you to tell me anything you would wish me to do to help you.²⁵

Tagore became part of Andrew's epistolary projections: in his daily prayer and longing. Pearson, on the other hand, was ready to give up his missionary vocation after their London encounter. He wanted to join Tagore's educational initiative at *Shantiniketan*:

You told me in London that you wanted to capture me for *Shantiniketan* and now I am able to write and tell you that I am a willing captive and that it is only a question of time now for the captive to enter the place where the bonds of affection have been woven.²⁶

Both Andrews and Pearson were already in the process of imagining a putative intimacy with Tagore, while laying a claim on it through their letters. Tagore, in turn, warmly acknowledged and reciprocated both Pearson's and Andrews's overtures in lofty terms. Pearson's letter 'stirred [Tagore's] heart to its depths' and

²² Rabindranath Tagore became the first Asian recipient of Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, when India was still a colonial country.

²³ An Indian honorific.

²⁴ Andrews to Tagore, 13 Sep 1912, File No. 4-11, Original Letters from C.F. Andrews to Rabindranath Tagore, Visva Bharati, Shantiniketan, Rabindra Bhavan Archives. Henceforth MSS/CFA/RBVB/F/4-11

²⁵ Andrews to Tagore, 18 March, 1913, MSS/CFA/RBVB/F/4-11

²⁶ Pearson to Tagore, 17 Dec 1912, Folder 287(ii), Letters from William W. Pearson to Rabindranath Tagore, Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati. Henceforth MSS/WP/RBVB/F/287 (ii)

Tagore felt that he had ‘known him all [his] days and the light of our love will ever become brighter in days to come’,²⁷.

Affirming Andrew’s affection, Tagore wrote: ‘your love has made my life richer and I count it as one of the gains of my life that will abide. Have faith in my love when I am silent.’²⁸ The claim to love would be a recurrent trope in the language of discipleship, used to solicit instruction and offer proposals. Andrews and Pearson visited Tagore’s ashram in his absence to help with the ashram activities and constantly wrote letters to affirm their loyalty, longing and devotion. Letters remained agentic in producing and evidencing their love for Tagore’s ashram, the longing to be part of a utopian space rendered material in long, nostalgic letters written from distant places.

Like Andrews and Pearson, Noble and Slade too wished to be part of their mentors’ lives and work. Letters became the medium to express their desires. Never having met Gandhi in person, Slade had come to know of him through Romain Rolland in 1924.²⁹ Slade had wanted to join his Sabarmati ashram immediately. Gandhi had then professed reconsideration and a preparatory interval of one year before taking a decision. After a year, Slade reiterated her request:

Most Dear Master,

... The first impulse has never faded, but on the contrary my desire to serve you has grown ever more and more fervent... My being is filled with a great joy ... of giving all I have to you and your people and the anguish of being able to give so little. I pine for the day when I shall come to India.

Dear Master, may I come?³⁰

Without ever meeting Gandhi, Mira could already envisage and partly realise – through her letters – feelings of love, joy and anguish. She gave up ‘the drinking of all wines, beers or spirits’, ‘meat of any kind’ and was learning to spin and read

²⁷ Tagore to Pearson, 15 Jan 1913, Folder 287(i), Letters from Tagore to Pearson. Henceforth MSS/RT/RBVB/F/287(i).

²⁸ Tagore to Andrews, 13 May 1915, File No. 1, Original Letters from Rabindranath Tagore to C.F. Andrews, CFA PAPERS, File: 1-26, 28 (ii), CD No: RBVB-018. Henceforth MSS/RT/RBVB/F/1-26, 28 (ii)

²⁹ Vide the publication of Rolland’s book: Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One with the Universal Being* (London, 1924).

³⁰ Madeleine to Gandhi, 29 May 1925, *Beloved Bapu*, p. 11-12. All letters between Gandhi and Mira/Madeleine Slade are taken from this volume unless otherwise stated.

Hindi.³¹ In a similar vein, Noble's guru Swami Vivekananda too had advised against her coming to India. Noble was already active in the London Vedanta Society that Vivekananda had established with the help of his British disciples. Vivekananda acknowledged that she had 'the making ... of a world mover' but felt she 'could do more work for us in England than by coming here.'³² Vivekananda confided in Sara Ole Bull, a wealthy lifelong American patron and disciple, who also knew Noble:

I do not think any European or American will be of any service here just now, and it will be hard for any Westerner to bear the climate. Mrs. Annie Besant with her exceptional powers works only among the Theosophists and thus she submits to all the indignities of isolation which a Mlechha [Untouchable] is made to undergo here. Even Goodwin smarts now and then and has to be called to order. He is doing good work as he is a man and can mix with people. Women have no place in men's society here, and she can do good only among her own sex in India. the English friends that came over to India have not been of any help as yet and do not know whether they will be of any in the future, with all these, if anybody wants to try she is welcome.'³³

In 1898, Josiah Goodwin, a British monastic disciple of Vivekananda, had passed away due to severe exhaustion and illness while working in India.³⁴ Goodwin's death exemplified precisely Vivekananda's anxieties. It was only after other disciples interceded on Noble's behalf regarding her single-minded determination to visit India that he conceded.³⁵ Both Gandhi and Vivekananda warned of the lack of general European comforts and everyday deterrents that ranged from casteism, racism and poverty to language and climate barriers. Aspiring disciples regarded surviving these ordeals as testifying to the purity of their resolve.

Self-abnegation and suffering formed a common narrative experience for disciples to prove their worthiness. Exalted references of 'Master', Bapu/Father, Gurudev served to underscore a relationship of subservience and worshipful reverence. Nivedita exemplifies this yearning to serve Vivekananda and realise his wishes:

³¹ Ibid.

³² Vivekananda to Nivedita, *LSV*, 23 July 1897.

³³ Vivekananda to Ole Bull, *LSV*, 19 Aug 1897.

³⁴ Goodwin is an underexplored figure in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition. Enlisted as a stenographer by Vivekananda's wealthy patrons in America, he went on to become one of his staunchest followers. In India though, he could not fit in with Vivekananda's Indian disciples. The only proper reference to his life is Pravrajika Vrajaprana, *My Faithful Goodwin* (Calcutta, 1994).

³⁵ Vivekananda to Nivedita, 29 July 1897, *LSV*.

today I want to do things only because they are my Father's [Vivekananda's] will.... One longs to serve for serving's sake, for ever and ever, dear Master – not for our miserable little life.³⁶

Declarations of subservience placed them similar to Indian disciples – already familiar in the cultural idiom of gurubhakti – gathered around these figures. Yet, even as it rendered them in relation to their fellow Indian disciples, their difference was well understood. Their letters, often suffused with (spiritual) invocations of complete surrender and excessive adoration continued to perform a symbolic inversion of the racialised colonial hierarchy in everyday life.

2.5 Love in Letters

The expectation of reciprocity was fundamental to the act of letter writing.³⁷ At least the promise of it led disciples to continue writing, in the hope that their letters would be read and answered. Given the very itinerant lives of their famous Indian mentors, letters remained the preferred mode of communication. Vivekananda comforted Noble: 'Every word you write I value' and 'every letter is welcome a hundred times.... whenever ... and whatever you like[d], knowing that nothing will be misinterpreted, nothing unappreciated.'³⁸ For Noble, writing to her guru was an eagerly anticipated exercise. She would playfully assert the joy of that act:

'All day I have been promising myself the joy of writing to you. Haven't I been a bad daughter? To my poor old father, too!'³⁹

The epistolary assertion, seemingly light and playful, of a filial relationship between Vivekananda and Nivedita, however, was also part of a continual attempt to frame that relationship in desexualised terms. An abstracted spiritual love was substituted for physical affection.⁴⁰ Fellow disciples such as MacLeod felt that she had the 'lover's adoration' for the swami.⁴¹ Her letters seemed to be an attempt to tame that feeling,

³⁶ Noble to Vivekananda, 13 Jan 1900, *LSN-I*, p 297

³⁷ Sarah Poustie, 'Re-Theorising Letters and "Letterness"', *Olive Schreiner Letters Project, Working Papers on Letters, Letterness & Epistolary Networks*, 1 (2010), p. 12.

³⁸ Vivekananda to Nivedita, 20 June 1897, *LSV*.

³⁹ Noble to Vivekananda, 15 Dec 1899, *LSN-I*, p 265.

⁴⁰ See Leslie A. Fielder's comparable insight on inter-racial relationships: As long as there is no mingling of blood, love doesn't become a threatening enough force to reckon with in interracial relationships – 'soul may couple with soul in God's undefiled forest', Leslie A. Fielder, *Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey, An End to Innocence: Essays on Culture and Politics* (New York, 1972), p. 148.

⁴¹ Rolland writes of this in his Journal, Rolland, *Inde*, Cited in *Tantine*, p. 217.

by thinking and writing so, she could couch and express that unruly love in appropriately filial terms. Heterosexual discipleship between Gandhi and Vivekananda's women disciples were always subjugated within a father-daughter relationship, in an attempt to tame its potential slippages.

Feelings of love and affection were framed through different kinds of operative limits. Gandhi was the least inhibited in declaring and naming this love, to both his male and female disciples. Gandhi cherished writing 'love-letters' to his white followers, that included the likes of his South African and Jewish colleagues Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach (also a body-builder) and later Andrews and Slade. Gandhi referred to Kallenbach's letters as 'charming love notes' and both of them had, at least on one recorded occasion, pledged in uninhibited terms a deep love for each other, while also regarding Gandhi's wife Kasturba as his 'mother'.⁴² There is much homoerotics that Gandhi doesn't shy away from acknowledging in his relationship with Kallenbach.⁴³ In a letter written from London, Gandhi reminisced:

Your portrait (the only one) stands on my mantelpiece in the bedroom. The mantelpiece is opposite to the bed. ... The pen I use ... in each letter it traces makes me think of you. If, therefore, I wanted to dismiss you from my thoughts, I could not do it. ... The point... is to show to you and me how completely you have taken possession of my body. This is slavery with a vengeance.⁴⁴

Even from a long distance, Kallenbach had 'possessed' Gandhi's body and enslaved it for him. Material artefacts – the portrait and bed, pen – came together to evoke their intimacy in absence. Love-letters allowed for such projections to take place, imagine a co-presence and suture an image of affectionate domesticity. That Gandhi destroyed many of Kallenbach's early letters to preserve their confidentiality limits us from speculating too much on the nature of this possession. In this, he seemed to have acted on Kallenbach's insistence on their not being read by anybody else (perhaps to maintain the scruples of his bodybuilder masculinity?).⁴⁵ Yet, the highly

⁴² Gandhi to Kallenbach, 30 Aug 1909, *CWMG* Vol 96, p. 25.

⁴³ For instance, the Agreement signed by both Gandhi and Kallenbach for 'more love, and yet more love...such ... as the world had never seen', on the eve of Kallenbach's visit to his family in Europe in 1911, 29 July 1911 is particularly insightful, *CWMG*, Vol 96. Gandhi had destroyed Kallenbach's letters to him as he felt it would preserve the confidentiality of their relationship. We only have Gandhi's letters to Kallenbach, preserved by his family members and later taken in possession by the Government of India.

⁴⁴ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 24 Sep 1909, *CWMG*, Vol 96, p. 28-29.

⁴⁵ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 30 July 1909: 'I know that you do not want them to be read by anybody else.' *CWMG* Vol 96, p. 21.

charged language of absence and romanticised evocation of love suggests a strong proprietary claim asserted on a (presumed) lover. Romantic love is driven largely by the idea of a zealous possession, of the lover's mind and body. Gandhi alludes to this powerful love but does not forbid or dissuade him: 'Everyone considers that your love for me is excessive'.⁴⁶ Kallenbach's 'excessive' love soon manifested as jealousy towards C.F. Andrews, who seemed to have become too 'close' to Gandhi within a few weeks of his being in South Africa.

In 1914, Andrews' emergence as a trusted aide and consultant of Gandhi provoked Kallenbach's resentment. We find Gandhi reassuring him repeatedly that: 'Though I love and almost adore Andrews so, I would not exchange you for him.'⁴⁷ Apparently, the reassurance was not enough, for within two months, we find sterner replies to Kallenbach: 'you seem to have been hasty in judging Andrews. I fancy that I know him better.'⁴⁸ Gandhi chided Kallenbach for being 'petty' and judging him too hastily.⁴⁹ Interestingly, it was to Andrews that Gandhi turned for help in getting Kallenbach to India in 1915 after his return from South Africa, with the outbreak of the war (Kallenbach being a German, and later, Zionist).⁵⁰ From Shantiniketan, where Gandhi's Phoenix School boys were temporarily lodged, he remembered Kallenbach while working on sanitary reform with Andrews and Pearson.

Extraordinary changes have been made in the Santiniketan school, Andrews and Pearson rose to the occasion and Pearson and I, whilst we were working away at sanitation reform, thought of you – how you would have thrown yourself into the work.⁵¹

We do not know whether such letters actually soothed Kallenbach's jealousy or fanned them. But they did anticipate correctly the entry and emergence of Andrews as a major contender of Gandhi's affections in the coming years.

⁴⁶ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 10 Sep 1909, *CSMG Vol 96*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 27 February 1914, *CWVG Vol 96*, p. 166.

⁴⁸ Gandhi to Kallenbach, Letters dated 7 April 1914, *CWVG Vol 96*, p 179.

⁴⁹ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 12 April 1914, *CWVG, Vol 96*, p 181.

⁵⁰ Kallenbach's German nationality was a problem in his entering British India on the eve of the First WW. Gandhi consulted Andrews before writing to the Viceroy Hardinge to see what steps could be taken. Gandhi to Kallenbach, 17 Feb 1915, *CWVG Vol 96*, p 202.

⁵¹ Gandhi to Kallenbach, 13 March 1915, *CWVG, Vol 96*, p 205.

On their first encounter, Andrews had stooped to touch Gandhi's feet in an extremely racially polarised South Africa. He was shunned by the white press and populace but this act had gained him the immediate affections of both Gandhi and the Indian community there and in India. Though his stay was brief, he played an important role in the brokering of the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement in the same year.

Andrews hoped that his transgressive acts in Natal would make him worthy of Tagore's love. He confided in Gandhi:

I long - Oh! How deeply I cannot tell you to take this love itself and lay it at the feet of Gurudev. I am longing and hoping that by and through this experience I shall not be made less unworthy of his love.⁵²

The need to 'love' became an existential, almost desperate need for Andrews, required to make his life meaningful. The act of taking dust from Gandhi's feet and the desire to lay himself at the feet of Tagore were also symbolic of outrageous racial transgression.

The racially subversive act of 'dust-taking' brought Andrews closer to both Gandhi and India than ever before. He grew to love Gandhi gradually and slowly, who was so different in personality than Tagore. Andrews was constantly comparing his feelings for Gandhi to Tagore and found that the former fell short: 'I could not love him immediately, instinctively, as I loved you when I saw you in England'.⁵³ Unlike Tagore and Shantiniketan, he felt he had to: 'cut channels, for love to run freely... and to get past the barriers of mere kindness and friendliness which falls short of true love'.⁵⁴ Compared to the rustic, unfettered freedom of Shantiniketan, Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm were highly regulated and disciplined spaces, made with the object of training subjects to carry out political struggles. Andrews's proprietary tendency to compare affections, in particular with Tagore as the grand standard, often betrayed his clear insecurity and need for acceptance. In his letters, he would confide his love for Gandhi to Tagore, that for Tagore to Gandhi, and for both Gandhi and Tagore to Gokhale, creating a thick affective trail linking everyone.

⁵² Andrews to Gandhi, 5 April 1914, MSS/CFA/RBVB/F 1-26, 28 (ii).

⁵³ Andrews to Tagore, 14 Jan 1914, MSS/CFA/RBVB/F/4-11.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Aboard a ship bound for India from Capetown, he yearned for ‘Mohan’:

I have been thinking so much about you on this voyage – more even, I think, than on my voyage from the Cape. It is the coming closer to India that brings me even closer to you....⁵⁵

Reciprocating this embrace, Gandhi’s ‘love-letter’ playfully noted:

If you cannot have a nurse like me, who should make love to you but at the same time enforce strict obedience to doctor’s orders, you need a wife who should see that you had your food properly served, you never went out without an abdominal bandage.... But marriage is probably too late. And not being able to nurse you I can only fret.⁵⁶

‘Love-letters’ such as these virtually re-constituted co-presence. This is an intensely intimate letter, evoking a rare imagery of inter-racial domestic affection arising from a racially segregated South Africa. The attention to material details of care – food, bandages – or the invocation of specific roles such as nurse and wife enabled this intense co-presencing. The reference to love-making and wifely care by a strictly celibate Gandhi for an avowedly single (also celibate) missionary made possible a language of same-sex (but sexless) intimacy rendered through the epistolary. Like a doting wife, he vividly portrayed Andrews as the suffering husband, evoking a vision of conjugal domesticity.

Andrews’s desire to love and be loved by prominent men such as Munshi Ram, Tagore and Gandhi helped him realise his ‘feminine’ self. As he confided to his Stephens colleague and friend S.K. Rudra that he was ‘too much of a woman by nature...and [he] cannot help’ not expressing his love and concern.⁵⁷ This self-perception of his sentimentality as a rather feminine attribute greatly complicates the nature and relationship of his male intimacies. Perhaps anticipating the transgressive sexuality such a self-characterisation might hint at, this ‘feminine’ is qualified as essentially maternal:

⁵⁵ Andrews to Gandhi, 13 April [1914?], MSS/CFA/RBVB/F 1-26, 28 (ii).

⁵⁶ Gandhi to Andrews, 6 August 1918, Gandhi to Andrews, *CWVG XVII*, available online at <http://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-17.pdf> (29 September 2018).

⁵⁷ Andrews to Rudra, 4 May 1915, C.F. Andrews’ File, F.F. Monk’s File, St Stephen’s College.

... it is because of this unchanging motherly influence that the 'mother' in me has grown so strong. My life seems only able to blossom into flower when I can pour out my affection upon others as my mother did upon me.⁵⁸

His desire to love India was construed as essentially embodying this strong maternal urge. Taking cognisance of this self-identification as a woman, it impressed his celibacy at the same time.

Andrews felt powerfully attracted to the different kinds of masculinity embodied by all these 'great' men. To be able to come in close confidence and affection of such 'great men' was perhaps a dual affirmation of his 'womanliness' and their manliness (more in chapter 3). If he conceived himself, to use his words, 'too much of a woman', in relation to his more 'manly' friends, invocations of friendship seem to have become a substantive trope to signify the complex textures of intimacy that could be deeply felt but almost impossible to spell out. They evinced his feminine ability to 'love' and 'long' for their presence while also sublimating it under a larger Indophilia.

Epistolary projections such as these form part of a longer invocation of homoerotic (but not necessarily sexual) intimacy practiced through letters. Gandhi's 'love-letters' constituted a language of love between his western followers and himself that was realised more in epistolary invocation than physical practice. Letters provided them with the form and space to express languages of love, loss and longing without it having to be actualised in practice. Potent attractions of disciples for their mentors could be contained, their sexualities sublimated into non-threatening idioms of affection. Epistolary spaces manifested and indeed celebrated these intimate transgressions less readily achievable in more formal spaces. It 'queered' languages of intimacy within epistolary idioms of discipleship.

When the discipleship was heterosexual, as of Gandhi and Mira, 'love-letters' both expressed and contained mutual love. Justifying his habit he wrote to Mira:

Though you absolve me from having to write to you I cannot deny myself the joy of writing to you every Monday. Writing love letters is a recreation, not a task one would seek an excuse to shirk.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Andrews to Tagore, 27 Jan 1914, Fraser-Tagore Collection, Press Clippings 91-200, University of Edinburgh.

⁵⁹ Gandhi to Mira, 4 April 1927

Referring to them as ‘love-letters’ was an inducement to Mira to continue projecting her ‘love’ when there was little scope for actually realising it. Like Nivedita, Mira too had the ‘lover’s adoration’ for Gandhi, as Rolland astutely notes.⁶⁰ Writing love letters enabled the projection of that love, without actually ever making possible its realisation. To cultivate physical distance, Mira was assiduously sent to different ashrams in an effort to make her learn Hindustani and more importantly, stem her over-attachment to Gandhi. Love letters became a site to stage this love or its claim, even as she felt forlorn and distant from her mentor. It also became a mode of instruction in Gandhian syncretism: ‘I have all your love letters. The one about the repugnance against Mussalmans is disturbing. It is the fear of conversion that has caused this repugnance’.⁶¹

Though letter-writing is a relational practice and based on reciprocity, the desire to please Gandhi had led Mira to even forfeit that expectation. At times, Mira did not even seek an acknowledgment of her ‘love-letters’ from him, satisfied in the knowledge that they would be read by him, in spite of his busy schedule. She wrote voluminously, sometimes, as Gandhi complained, not ‘shorter than ten pages’⁶² – content in her belief that to be replied to was a rare privilege in itself, even if it was a two-line letter. Gandhi’s replies – often short and curt – were hardly as effusive as hers. They followed up on her training in the ashram and other practicalities such as her learning Hindi:

You should give me your day’s doings, and describe the prayers, the studies and the meals. Tell me what you are eating. How are your bowels acting? What is the quantity of milk you are taking? ... Are there mosquitoes there? Do you take your walks regularly? Do you write any Hindi?⁶³

Letters became embodiments of their authors, particularly for disciples, evidencing the touch and self-presence of their mentors. Disciples sought an amplified sense of their guru’s self in letters and generally found it. Epistolary distance made the letter itself an embodied text, compensating for actual physical absences. Andrews wrote to Tagore how

⁶⁰ Rolland, *Inde*, Cited in Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Tantine: the life of Josephine MacLeod, friend of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1990), p 217

⁶¹ Gandhi to Mira, 27 Dec 1926

⁶² Gandhi to Rukminidevi and Benarsilal Bajaj, 8 January 1933, *CWVG* Vol LII, 1932-1933, p 400.

⁶³ Gandhi to Mira, 11 Dec 1926

It was such an intense pleasure to see your dear handwriting again. I had been looking for it mail after mail hoping against hope...and my heart overflowed when it came at last with its opening word of 'friend'. I wish I could tell you what that means to me, but it must be told in other ways than letters!⁶⁴

The 'mail' – embedded in a larger history of imperial networks and postal modernity – ordered epistolary meanings of intimacy through space and time. The wait for the letter created the build-up for the moment of its realisation. Postal and epistolary modernity came to manifest new languages of emotion around the private letter, shaping its correspondents' expectations, desires and intentions. The 'handwriting', signature, text and material interface of the letter came together to reconstitute this cultural-material embodiment. Even as Andrews fretted, 'I could never tell you in words how I love you',⁶⁵ letters came closest to instantiating this love.

2.6 Anxieties of Longing

How does self-writing reflect shifting ethical terrains? Reading primary epistolary networks alongside more auto-didactic texts such as diaries and memoirs show how the act of letter-writing itself was part of a larger self-reflexive process. As affective texts, they continually reconfigure, negotiate and performs a relationship of mutuality between itself, authorial selves and intended objects.

Love for their mentors could not remain opaque to the anti-colonial ethos of their projects. While Tagore did not participate in mainstream political endeavours as Gandhi, he remained a critic of empire along with the credo of nationalism. An anguished Andrews opened up to Tagore about his failings:

I have failed many times. The greatest failure was last year when to my surprise the missionary societies, one and all, asked me to write a book for their younger people to study. I accepted the task... I was ashamed of the book..., especially when I met you and stayed with you. But the sense of shame has increased since I came back to India and visited the ashram...but I will never [emphasis author's] write a book on those lines again! I want to realise a truer self ... and

⁶⁴ Andrews to Tagore, 8 May 1913, MSS/CFA/RBVB/F/4-11. All letters from Andrews to Tagore are from this series unless otherwise stated.

⁶⁵ Andrews to Tagore, 2 Oct 1913

I am going to make a great claim upon your friendship and ask you to help me to do so.⁶⁶

The book – *The Renaissance in India: its Missionary Aspect (1912)* – credited the advent of missionary Christianity in India as responsible for its new social, cultural and political awakening. In letter after letter to Tagore, he expressed his torment for his deeds and sought penitence. Tagore's letters seemed to give him new life

... strangely enough, though things are still so uncertain, since your letter came my mind has been wonderfully relieved. The assurance of your love and the call to your side have changed the aspect of affairs, and I am happy. ..⁶⁷

Andrews could not wait to be 'freed from all ... claims, as soon as possible, of Government and Mission and Anglo India with its social calls and conventions'. Meeting Tagore had only made the 'longing stronger' along with a 'liberalising of [his] own Christian thoughts.'⁶⁸ Pearson underwent a similar experience. In spite of his Baptist missionary affiliation, he was impatient to offer his services for Tagore's ashram 'with the humility and reverence of a worshipper', trying to give up thinking of the poverty and failures of [his] own life and try to fix a steadfast gaze on the ideal for which the as[h]ram stands.⁶⁹ He wanted to quietly work on his Bengali and leave his Baptist missionary obligations before immersing himself in Shantiniketan.

Pearson's love for Tagore elicited in Andrews a similar feeling: 'It has been very beautiful on this voyage to watch Willie's love for you, and it has given me a deep joy which I cannot express in words....To speak of you, as we do together, has been his great and widest comfort.'⁷⁰ He wished to follow in Pearson's footsteps, if he left his missionary affiliation: learn Bengali and Sanskrit, travel and live widely in India and with Indians, engage with (Hindu) Indian philosophy and thought and try to express in the West. He wanted to try, from a 'completely independent standpoint (not as a paid agent)' to express Christian thought in the East: 'I have been proud and conceited in the past and underrated Hinduism; I would be so no longer'.⁷¹ Letters reflect this inter-referentiality of shared affection – creating, informing and sustaining their feelings and interest – in Tagore, India or Hinduism, while also distancing themselves

⁶⁶ Andrews to Tagore, 8 March 1913

⁶⁷ Andrews to Tagore, 15 May 1913.

⁶⁸ Andrews to Tagore, 8 May 1913.

⁶⁹ Pearson to Tagore, 6 May 1913.

⁷⁰ Andrews to Tagore, 5 Oct 1915.

⁷¹ Andrews to Tagore 28 July 1913.

from their Christian missionary assumptions. Love for Tagore spilled over to other things, expanding into new entities and investments, linking them in a relationship of transitivity:

... there has come, I know not how, through my love for you, a new confidence and a new assurance. I have entered into the heritage of India herself and been made one with her spiritual experiences and felt its depth and power...But the fountain of my own heart was still partly sealed and only since I have learnt to love you has it burst its bonds and overflowed. It is this which has made the last year of my life richer in love for all who love India than it had ever been before. It has taught me to love Ajit ...to love Santosh and all the dear friends I have made at the ashram.⁷²

Andrews's 'love talk' for Tagore and Shantiniketan was however, seen as a sign of his going native by missionary colleagues and English newspapers. He wrote to Gandhi of this intense state of turmoil:

That attack on me in the English newspapers for my 'Hindu' proclivities goes on. The missionaries are probably saying that I am going to become a 'Hindu' and if I go to Bolpur and resign the Delhi Mission this will be universally believed ...⁷³

To merge with Tagore's life meant a coming away from his missionary ties:

I could not be truer to my love for you, if I did not seek to share them with you and I trust your love enough to be sure that you will welcome the burden...it was my very meeting with you, which made has made me realize more clearly my own position and become dissatisfied with it. I could not share your life, without feeling the confinement of the narrow walls of my own. If I remain a missionary, in a somewhat narrow Missionary Society, I am in a sort of bondage.⁷⁴

Tagore and Shantiniketan continued to figure in almost every letter from and between Andrews and Pearson, reminding them of the parochiality of mission life and the promise of freedom that the ashram offered. Visions of being with Tagore and working alongside him heightened their longing to unlearn, if not always disown, their cultural inheritances.

⁷² Andrews to Tagore, 13 Dec 1913.

⁷³ Andrews to Gandhi, 13 April [1914?].

⁷⁴ Andrews to Tagore 28 July 1913.

In their desire to be part of their mentors' lives, work became worship and gurus became near-divine characters. Mira, hopping all over India in various ashrams, remained 'immersed in [her] Bapu'. Her letters to Gandhi show the conflicted negotiation of a new cultural self – living a simplified Indian ashram life - and her fear of failure:

Bapu dearest, another long and precious letter from you has just arrived!

I could not, even if I tried, be anything else but what I am before you, and that is why, however I am ashamed of my weakness, I have to lay bear [sic] before my Bapu – Yes- you are indeed father and *mother* and what is more than all, you are Bapu, *my Bapu* – in whom I live, and in whom I have that utter confidence that only boundless love can inspire – and it is Bapu alone who can make me what I should be. The strength and love of my Bapu are ever with me now... Nothing that bears the slightest shade of *untruth* can stand before you. ...⁷⁵

Gandhi's replies to Mira are almost clinical in their brevity and directness. He referred to his disciplining of Mira's passionate desire to be close to Gandhi as a necessary 'operation':

I sent you away too quickly after a serious operation. But the sending you away was part of the operation. ... Jammalaji says I should have kept you with me. Well, you are going to belie their fears and be and keep quite well and cheerful.⁷⁶

Almost like a mandate, Gandhi's instructions to Mira brought less solace and more agony. The attempt to excise personal attachment almost broke Mira, a point that will be taken up in more detail in chapter three. Their 'love-letters' bear testimony to this continued cycle of distress and relief that characterised their relationship in order to effect the change Gandhi envisaged for Mira.

2.7 Becoming Idealised Objects

The bodies of white women and their investments in particular became gendered sites of ethical spectacle. Both Noble and Slade adopted vows of Hindu celibate asceticism or *brahmacharya*, becoming Nivedita and Mira respectively. Vivekananda had anticipated for Noble the role of delivering manhood to Indian men:

⁷⁵ Mira to Gandhi, 15 May 1927

⁷⁶ Gandhi to Mira, 2 Oct 1927.

What was wanted was not a man, but a woman; a real lioness, to work for Indians. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted.⁷⁷

In letter after letter, Vivekananda continued to spell out what the Indian nation needed Nivedita to embody: purity, education and a ‘Celtic’ racial valour instrumentalised to deliver manhood to Indians.

Nivedita in due course became a central figure in the politics of deficit masculinity that dominated discourses of colonial Bengal and India in the early 20th century.

Gandhi, attuned to a different vision of Hinduism and masculinity than Vivekananda, exercised another set of expectations on Mira’s self. Mira had adopted celibacy and took her vows in Gandhi’s presence in 1927. Her letters were frequently circulated by Gandhi for being objects of education for ashram inmates:

you should perhaps know that I send most of your letters to the Ashram for being read to the members. They are so beautiful. Those that contain criticism of the attitude of the Kanya Gurukul I did not send. I destroyed them. ... I do not want you to restrain yourself because other eyes may see the letter...⁷⁸

The practice of circulating letters gave them a wider performative role. Yet this practice of selectively destroying critical letters betrayed Gandhi’s concern to project and create a prescriptive ethical self for consumption by the ashram community. This simultaneous gesture of approval – through circulation of her appreciative letters – and control, by destroying more critical letters suggests how epistolary exchanges were part of a larger disciplining exercise. Disciples’ letters to their mentors could not only become a site to articulate themselves, but also serve as general inspiration for others, generally Indian disciples of the same guru.

Mira’s coming closer to a syncretic form of Hinduism reflected this desire for identification with an aspirational collective:

Everyday of my life I become more and more deeply in love with the Hindu nature – I don’t know how to express it Bapu – I just feel as if it were the highest development of humanity which we have in this world, with its inborn

⁷⁷ Vivekananda to Nivedita, 29 July 1897, *LSV*.

⁷⁸ Gandhi to Mira, 24 Jan 1927.

gentleness, forgiveness and tolerance – its simpleness and natural feeling for God. ...I get the feeling that to pass into the Hindu nature is the natural, perhaps the road to salvation...as long as one remains to any extent outside it, one feels oneself to be to that extent a barbarian.... I now realise that barbarism in myself and sooner or later I will overcome it...If I can not all together overcome it in this life, then I ask nothing better than to be born a Hindu in the next birth – and this the Blessed Way will at last become open to me.⁷⁹

The strong desire to be Hindu produced the experience of being so. Mira was less vocal than Nivedita in discourses around Hindu nationalism, but both of them became examples in their own right, affirming an Indianness that they were not born into. In women figures such as Noble and Slade, therefore, we see a cultural politics of appropriation already at work for different nationalist projects that ranged from self-help to social work. The mentors as also cultural nationalist politics generally remained sensitive to the strategic uses of this voluntary discipleship. Their racial difference made western discipleships more exemplary – and in that sense – more exceptional than their Indian counterparts. The bind this claim created on white women disciples was to further discipline their bodies and desires.

2.8 Archipelagos of affect

In her powerfully argued essay, Monique Scheer argues for an elision of practice with emotion, suggesting that emotions are not merely cognitively rooted but also consistently material, embodied and embedded in practice.⁸⁰ Letters and letter-writing between western disciples and their gurus were a distinctive mode of such emotional practice. The act of writing made physical acts around them more real; conversely, physical acts informed by epistolary dialectics reinforced their convictions. Since historians can only access the expression of an emotional experience, not the experience itself,⁸¹ languages of expression assume primacy in understanding emotions as practice. Emotional experiences are remembered, recalled and refigured through the space of the letter long after their actual incidence.

⁷⁹ Mira to Gandhi, 29 Jan 1929, Muzaffarpur.

⁸⁰ Scheer, *Ibid*, p 194.

⁸¹ Scheer, 'Are Emotions a kind of practice', p. 196.

Letters made possible different but related kinds of emotion work in creating an archipelago of affect. The epistolary narrative of discipleship is not merely one of enchantment but also of repeated rupture and suture. Mentors resisted, not infrequently, the continuous proprietary appropriations of their disciples. Vivekananda and Gandhi continued to sermonise on the dangers of ‘personal love’ to their women disciples. The problem of the ‘personal’ lingered in relationships with women disciples. Letters became a means of inserting distance and clarifying the nature of their discipleships. Vivekananda clarified to Nivedita that in spite of ‘persons giving [him] almost the whole of their love’, he ‘must not give any one the whole of [his] in return, for that day the work would be ruined... a leader must be impersonal’. Similarly, Mira’s continuous desire for physical proximity and willingness to please Gandhi irked him, who chided her sharply:

Why hanker after my company! Why touch or kiss the feet that must one day be dead cold? There is nothing in the body...experience and effort will unravel it before you, never my association in the manner you wish...Why so helplessly rely on me? Why do everything to please me? Why not independently of me and even in spite of me? ...Break the idol to pieces if you can and will.⁸²

Gandhi pushed back against Mira’s constant anxiety to be near him. This invocation of impersonality and the idea of a greater (implicitly spiritual) cause served to stem the dangers of excessive personal adoration. Gandhi was always fearful of sexual transgressions, and his own lifelong experiments with celibacy bear witness to this anxiety. Thwarted by her own mentor, she could only ‘remain immersed in [her] Babu’ from afar, ‘love-letters’ allowing her an acceptable mode to express her love and longing. Gandhi pontificated to Mira that she ‘must not cling to [him] as in this body. The spirit without the body is ever with [her]’.⁸³ Vivekananda struggled with the incessant rumour mongering by detractors brought in the wake of his women followers in the west.⁸⁴ Creating a desexualised and sacralised language of discipleship was required, given how prominent celibacy or *brahmacharya* was to Gandhi and Vivekananda both personally and publicly.

⁸² Gandhi to Mira, 24 June 1929, p. 233.

⁸³ Gandhi to Mira, 22 March 1927.

⁸⁴ See letter from his Brother Disciples to Vivekananda, March 1894, *LSV*, about rumours spread by the Brahma preacher Protap Mazoomdar of him ‘committing every sin under the sun in America – especially ‘unchastity’ of the most degraded type!!!’, Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries, Vol 2* (Calcutta, 1984), p. 90.

With male disciples, disenchantments played out differently. There was no imminent fear or acknowledgement of possible sexual transgressions that loomed large unlike women disciples, and this might explain their relative lack of censure. Tagore and Gandhi even agreed to share Andrews between themselves. As Gandhi wrote to Tagore:

Much as I should like to keep Mr. Andrews with me a little longer, I feel sure that he must leave for Calcutta tonight... And you must have him while you need him...I would ask you...to lend me... Andrews now and then. His guidance at times is most precious to me.⁸⁵

Secondary epistolary exchanges such as these throw extremely useful light not only on primary epistolary networks but also on the tenor of these relationships. It reveals what Indian mentors thought about their Indophile mentees as also each other, and vice versa, reflecting more candidly on the aspirations, anxieties and limits contingent to these relationships. It brings to the fore the doubts, differences and dismissals about each other that lurk beneath direct correspondences. Tagore, for instance, did not hesitate to be sharply critical of Gandhi's practices to Andrews, anticipating much of their later differences in opinion:

Only a moral tyrant like Gandhi can think that he has the dreadful power to make his ideas prevail through the means of slavery. It is absurd to think that you must create slaves to make your ideas free. I would much rather see my ideas perish than to leave them in charge of slaves to be nourished. There are men who make idols of their ideas and sacrifice humanity before their altars.⁸⁶

Tagore continued to air his differences with Gandhi both privately and publicly but Andrews remained a trusted aide of communication between these two figures. Letters such as these expose the limits of these intimacies, emphasizing critical, often irreconcilable differences. Even as his disciples sought to stake a claim on Tagore, he resisted their zealous overtures in his ashram and literary endeavours. He played truant, whenever his disciples', in particular Andrews's, desire for physical proximity became overwhelming, and continued to dispense transcendent wisdom from a

⁸⁵ Gandhi to Tagore, 30 April [1918], *CWMG*, XIV.

⁸⁶ Tagore to Andrews, 7 July 1915.

suitable epistolary distance. Andrews recognised the strain his tendency to act as custodian put on his relationship with the poet. He rationalised that

one with a strong personality tends to weaken the characters of those who are closely associated with him, whenever they remain too long at his side and become dependent on him... This danger I have experienced personally... I was too eager to be continually present with the Poet ... whom I deeply loved, and it became an oppression to him because he saw with his fine instinct that it was weakening my individual character. Therefore, in the gentlest manner possible he warned me from this.’⁸⁷

The ‘oppression’ that such declarations of love conferred on Tagore was not minor. Edward J Thompson, a Wesleyan missionary, poet and admirer of Tagore, was scathing of Andrews: ‘beneath contempt as regards judgement and intellect generally’, as also for fanning Tagore’s vanity.⁸⁸ He did not hesitate to convey this to Tagore’s British admirers and associates, including the poet Robert Bridges and the artist Rothenstein. Thompson’s offers to translate Tagore had often been thwarted by the poet himself, who had ‘every hope that Andrews will be willing to help me in this work’.⁸⁹ Yet, this closeness and help occasionally brought its own allegations. Always uncertain of the literary merit of his English translations, Tagore felt annoyed that his close association with Andrews had led people to suspect that he ‘owe[d] in a large measure to Andrews’ help for [his] literary success, which is so false that [he] can afford to laugh at it’.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Thompson’s allegation blaming Andrews for ‘annex[ing] Tagore as a private possession’, was echoed by others British associates such as Leonard Elmhirst.

Disciples too occasionally rebelled at the continuous demands made on their person. Pearson, often travelling with Tagore on his international voyages and having to act as his secretary, chafed at this imposition. Coming to know of it, Tagore immediately sought to free him from such binds of duty, invoking ‘freedom’

⁸⁷ Andrews to Rothenstein, 3 August 1916, *Ordeal of Love*, p. 129.

⁸⁸ Edward P. Thompson, *Alien Homage* (Delhi, 1993), p. 33. Thompson received an uneven response from Tagore throughout his engagement with the poet. He was also a literary aspirant desirous of translating Tagore’s works from their Bengali originals, and Tagore often thwarted this desire because of Andrews, upon whom he had relied for his translations.

⁸⁹ Tagore to Thompson, 15 Feb 1914, Edward J Thompson – General Correspondence- Tagore, E.J. Thompson Papers, MS. Eng c 5318, Fols 1-40.

⁹⁰ Tagore to Rothenstein, 4 April 1915, Mary Lago (ed.), *Imperfect Encounter: Letters of William Rothenstein and Rabindranath Tagore, 1911-1941* (Cambridge, 1972).

You must have freedom, not only for your sake but for mine. That I had been forcing you to a life from which you had been struggling to be free is a discovery which is the most difficult of all the burdens that I am bearing at present. ... You know I love you, and therefore any service you offer to me which is irksome to you is doing injustice to me.⁹¹

Declarations of love therefore went both ways to act as reason for control as well as freedom.

Disciples generally opened themselves up to their mentors in an attempt to grow closer. Intimacies intensified and became reciprocal, however, only when mentors too returned this gesture. The confiding of their hopes, dreams, inadequacies and fears made them accessible, humane figures. Tagore confided in Andrews about the extreme agony of his inadequacy to serve the ashram, his family, zamindari and country.⁹² He was 'struggling ... through the wilderness... [t]he toll of suffering ... to be paid in full'.⁹³ Andrews, who was undergoing a similar turmoil owing to a crisis of faith in his missionary vocation, was deeply delighted that Tagore had confided in him and sought to share his moments of crisis with him: 'It has given me a great comfort to know that you could turn to me and tell me what you were passing through'.⁹⁴ Hitherto, it was mostly Andrews pouring out his heart, soul and mind to a lofty 'Gurudev', from whom he sought guidance and inspiration. This change in the dynamics of this relationship was a remarkable departure from the usual approach of a superior being dispensing wisdom to a lost soul. Tagore's inner sufferings somehow made him more human, their relationship less asymmetrical, for which Andrews could 'love [him] all the more'.⁹⁵

Dreams, for instance, became part of such projections, where disciples could enter the subconscious of their gurus. Pearson dreamt the vision of a battle-worn Tagore:

Your face was deathly pale, full of profoundest sorrow. I did not know the reason but it seemed to me quite natural...you were wounded in your right arm. It was

⁹¹ Tagore to Pearson, 23 Dec 1920

⁹² Prashanta Pal, *Rabijibani*, Vol. 7, Calcutta, p 10.

⁹³ Tagore to Andrews, 21 May 1914

⁹⁴ Andrews to Tagore, 23 May 1914

⁹⁵ Andrews to Tagore, 25 May 1914.

an intense suffering for me, - I suppose it was your pain which was transferred to my heart. Then I woke up.⁹⁶

More than the dream itself, it was the manner of its expression, and the language employed that matters here. Pearson's ability to empathise with Tagore's (supposed) pain in his dream-reality reflected his love for him. Tagore evoked feelings of maternal affection in Pearson: 'Watching Gurudev's face, his white haired and bearded face my maternal affections would spill over – I felt like hugging him close to my chest like a little child.'⁹⁷ Moments like this brought disciples emotionally closer to their mentors. As letters embodied their authors, the epistolary narration of experiences gave moments like this a tangibility that went beyond the symbolic, adding and deepening their relationships.

2.9 Conclusion

The act of letter writing reflects the continuous grappling of western disciples with a new set of idioms and individuals all of which are distinctively Indian. Informed and mediated by the politics of race, nation and gender, the letter became a point of convergence between individuals located on various asymmetries of power. They become agentic in intermeshing big discourses in their everyday contexts and power relationships. The letter, as also autobiographical texts and ashramic spaces (more on ashrams in the next chapter), became active sites to renegotiate this relationship of identity with their Indian masters. Even a simple act of narrating or describing meaningful real life colonial experiences became an integral aspect of this self-articulation.

Epistolary texts abound in a language of loss, the will to intimacy constantly riven by the doubt of their worth. The tendency to overcompensate is writ large in much of their epistolary exchanges, but this is particularly telling in the initial phases of their discipleship. Later chapters show how these intimacies get transformed, serving as nodes for bigger transnational projects drawing a wider audience. The circulation of affect through letters therefore formed a complex process of discourse that linked emotional practice to substantive public/political projects. The various networks they traversed through came to manifest a dense traffic that forged loyalties,

⁹⁶ Tagore to Pearson, 11 Oct 1915.

⁹⁷ Urmila Devi, 'Winstanley Pearson', *Pearson Smriti*, (Calcutta, 1923), p 14

brokered friendships, embodied absences and produced meaning out of epistolary distance. The meaning attached to letters and their immense emotional investedness helped personalise distant unavailable figures – Gandhi became Bapu or Mohan, Vivekananda became ‘King/Master’ and Tagore became an almost superhuman ‘Gurudev’. Conversely, Andrews became Charlie, Pearson became Willie, Noble - Nivedita and Slade - Mira.

Chapter 3

Home in the World

Indophiles Passages through the Ashram

The modern ashram came to encapsulate a new kind of utopian community where alternative modernities were imagined and put to practice. Even as this larger understanding informs my writing, I ask why and how this matters to the cast of western disciples who sought a wilful participation in the life of these ashrams. This chapter looks at how ashrams constituted a) an aspirational world for Indophile disciples to imagine and invest in alternative forms of modernity through their mentors' worlds. Why and how did ashrams cast an enchantment on these disciples? In so doing, these ashrams b) acted as emotional communities with a set of practices and performances (around race, caste, class and gender) that mobilised the affections of Indophile followers for their Indian mentors around a given space while c) their engagements with the ashram came to indelibly shape their anti-colonial gestures outside of it, making the ashram a critical node to enter the nation. In other words, ashrams became a legitimising site for Indophile bodies and selves to be Indianised.

3.1 Prologue

Ashrams constituted a major preoccupation for both gurus and disciples. Tagore, Gandhi and Vivekananda instituted major ashram experiments, from within, but not exclusively, a Hindu tradition. Only the former two lived long enough to see them grow into definite institutions. Shantiniketan and Sabarmati emerged as the locus of aspiration and intense striving for western disciples. From 1913 onwards till their deaths, Pearson, Andrews and Mira actively moved, inhabited and invested in the ashrams of their mentors. Letters exchanged during this time vigorously refer to things ashram. Ashram engagements shaped their identification with the guru and his wider cultural world, inflecting the kind of India they idealised.

As an emotional community, ashrams were crucial in mediating their Indophilia and becoming new subjects. In her pioneering work, the historian Barbara Rosenwein defines emotional communities as 'groups in which people adhere to the same norms of emotional expression and value – or devalue – the same or related

emotions.¹ I rework this term to ask: if ashrams constituted an emotional community, in what ways did western disciples relate to such a community? More importantly, the complex emotional responses in trying to relate to the ashrams of their gurus produced a range of practices and performances in which Indophile selves were in perpetual flux. They became physical spaces to rethink their cultural, political and racial affiliations while making them available for anti-colonial projects.

The coming of Andrews, Pearson and Mira to the ashrams of their mentors represented a coming closer to their mentors' worlds and staking in it a claim of their own. All of them were enchanted, drawn and captivated – at least initially – to this new world of community built and fostered by their gurus. The sense of this captivation worked differently, however. Pearson and Andrews wanted to be 'captive' to the promise of freedom that Shantiniketan enjoined, with its unstructured method of life and education; Mira on the other hand, sought to enter into a tightly wound institution of strict discipline and control, and make herself a pliant subject for the ashram and Gandhi to mould. The difference in the emphases of Gandhi and Tagore's ashrams was reflected in the practices of their disciples' engagements. While Gandhi put Mira through rigorous disciplinary practices to be a perfect and ideal disciple for the ashram, 'to shed all angularities' as he put it,² Tagore neither demanded nor imposed any sacrifice that was not already offered. Both saw Andrews, Pearson and Slade as 'gifts' of the West who would act as bridges to the East.³ Yet, in their own ways, these acts, gestures and practices revolved around a performance of excess for these Indophile disciples: of respectful obeisance, zealous proprietorship, adoption of ashram food and dressing habits.

Along with epistolarity, ashrams were a formative space in the narrative arc of their becoming. The desire to enter and be part of a collective commune life made disciples do the things they did. In that, ashrams, much like letters – even as they were premised on a group of actors – went beyond them to produce a greater sense

¹ Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities*, p. 2.

² Gandhi to Mira, 22 March 1927, in Tridip Suhrud and Thomas Weber (eds), *Beloved Bapu: The Gandhi – Mirabehn Correspondence* (Orient Blackswan, 2014), pp. 42–43.

³ See Gandhi's letter to Romain Rolland, 13 November 1925: 'I shall leave no stone unturned to assist her to become a bridge between East and West.', *CWMG* Vol. 33, p 218

of ashram-ness that was generative of Indophile cultural politics. Ashrams – as their mentors’ abode – territorialised their (dis)affections and desires for intimacy.

I focus largely on Tagore and Gandhi’s ashrams, given their disciples’ frequent passages through it and also because the traffic between these two ashrams was the most consistent. Sabarmati and Shantiniketan were two extremely prominent inclusive (inter)national experiments, with its founders and interlocutors constantly engaged in an axis of dialogue that was integral to early 20th century nationalist discourse. Other important Hindu ashramic spaces include the strictly monastic Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda and the puritanical Hindu Gurukul Kangri established by Munshi Ram (later Swami Shraddhanand of the *shuddhi* movement fame), both of which figure in Indophile movements. Their treatment however, remain cursory due to their extremely closed character in terms of access and membership. Outside of these upper caste Hindu undertakings lay several low caste/marginal ashram initiatives markedly different in their constitution and membership. All these institutions were part of a wider Hindu ashramic modernity arising out of the colonial encounter; however, I shall only consider Tagore and Gandhi’s ashrams in this chapter.

3.2 The modern ashram

The ashram emerged as a ‘curious category’ in the Indian nationalist imagination.⁴ By the early 20th century, the modern ashram became a significant mode to think the nation, as well as imagine and invest a new life for it. Despite a similarity of mode, all of the above mentioned ashrams differed in their methods, impulses and thrusts. What made the ashram such a unique mode for colonial subjects to experiment, envisage and ethically cultivate new selves for the nation? Further, how did such ashramic spaces, alongside epistolary networks, mediate the cultural politics of western Indophile figures?

As an institution, the ashram has been in existence since at least the Vedic times in ancient India. It is derived from the Sanskrit root ‘Shram’ – to toil – and is characterised by intense spiritual exercise and meditation. Very broadly, an ashram can be described as a forest hermitage, with a ‘spontaneous community of disciples

⁴ Ajay Skaria, ‘Gandhi’s politics: Liberalism and the Question of the Ashram’ in Saurabh Dube (eds). *Enchantments of Modernity* (New Dehli: Routledge, 2009), p 199.

gathered around a spiritual leader' or guru who guides them in the practise of *sadhana* or spiritual discipline and higher learning.⁵ The guru or *Acharya* occupies a central role in ashram life. He is deeply venerated by disciples, his charismatic authority a source of wisdom and general guidance for ashramites.⁶ *Deeksha gurus* offered formal initiation to disciples within their *sampradaya*/sect, while *shiksha gurus* dispensed instruction to anyone who sought it. The ashram is also related to *varnashrama dharma* or the four stages of a twice born upper caste Hindu: student, householder, renouncer and ascetic. Throughout ancient and medieval Indian history, the ashram had remained a common phenomenon for those who sought spiritual life and learning.

The ashram was recovered from its precolonial past as a romanticised 'theme in colonial thought', thanks to Orientalists such as Max Mueller and Paul Deussen.⁷ From this Orientalist romanticisation, Ajay Skaria argues, the nationalist category of ashram emerged as a representative site of ancient Hindu spirituality that had degenerated ever since.⁸ The nationalist ashram was a call to resuscitate such spaces and through them, the nation. As the British colonial state increasingly reified the reach of temporal power, the rhetoric of spiritual strength and power became a logic of Hindu cultural sovereignty through which colonial subjects asserted themselves. The ashram became a mode to embody its ancient prototype – as repositories of spirituality, knowledge and wisdom – necessary to escape the secular disciplinary regimes of colonial modernity. Spiritual and moral power, even as it was considered superior to forms of political or temporal power, was necessary for any claim to the latter. A loss of spirituality justified the loss of temporal power, and the tables could be turned only by returning, restoring and nurturing that lost vitality described variously in nationalist discourse as manliness, morality and freedom. The modern ashram became a new site of convergence for various forms of bhakti (devotion): the older, spiritual or religious bhakti was now distinctively tinged with *deshbhakti* or love for the motherland. Older forms of territorial attachment were increasingly co-opted within or effaced by the new affective

⁵ Helen Ralston, 'The Construction of Authority in the Christian Ashram Movement', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 67 – 1 (1989), p. 54.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55

⁷ Skaria, 'Gandhi's politics', p. 207

⁸ *Ibid.*

language of nationalism.⁹ This is not to say that spirituality was only purposed to service an incipient nation; but the ever-looming discourse of nationalism wrought its imprint on such endeavours. Tagore privileged society or the 'social' repeatedly to emphasise an essential Hindu syncretism that characterised Indian life.¹⁰ Yet, the convergence of national and social continued unabated, if ambivalently. Nationalism continued to disrupt his ashram community in Shantiniketan; his vigorous denunciations did not necessarily insulate its members from being swept by it. As we shall see, Andrews, in particular, as well as Pearson were often instigators.

In a wide-ranging commentary on 'modernity and its enchantments', the historian Saurabh Dube observes that the 'idea of modernity rests on rupture';¹¹ a rupture that is premised on a series of oppositions 'embedded within formidable projects of power and knowledge', enlightenment, empire and nation.¹² In other words, if modernity is constitutive of and constituted by what it perceives as anti/non-modern, the ambivalences and ambiguities that surround such propositions are in effect, responses to aspects of modernity itself. An enchantment with modernity is coupled with its disenchantments, producing formations that are coeval as 'subjects of modernity' negotiate for themselves traditions, practices and spaces with specific truth claims. Propositions for alternative or anti-modernities are often rooted in disenchantments with hegemonic forms that modernity, and in this case, colonial modernity, assumed in their imperial guise.

The modern ashram embodied this disenchantment and shaped the colonised desire for an idealised lost world, a world that also held value for those disenchanted with the closures of an industrial modernity. The ashram manifested the yearning for a romanticised past under conditions of colonial modernity, through a form and category that was decidedly indigenist but lent itself to modern adaptations readily. The ashram was a mode to insert the moral, the religious and the spiritual into the liberal secular discourse of nation and nationalism. As a mode, it could inhabit

⁹ There is a voluminous literature on this since the publication of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

¹⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Society and State', 1904, in *Towards Universal Man* (London, 1961), pp. 49-66.

¹¹ Saurabh Dube (eds), *Enchantments of Modernity* (New Dehli: Routledge, 2009), p. 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp 6-7.

modernity not only discursively, 'but through regulation of everyday habits and practices, and cultivation of technologies of self.'¹³

As an indigenist mode, ashrams could fold multiple temporalities – sacred and secular – within its habitus, seeking to disrupt the movements of a secular capitalist time. These disruptions were necessarily partial; the desire for alternative forms of community could never fully escape the deep transformations wrought by colonial modernity. This tension, for instance, was manifest in the way modern clock time was central to almost all early 20th century ashrams that saw themselves as creating new subjects and subjectivities for an emergent Indian nation, howsoever differently.

3.3 Sabarmati, Shantiniketan and other ashrams

Ashrams became the preferred form to experiment with modernity for its remarkable ability to manifest coevalness. Tagore and Gandhi's ashramic communes were variable engagements with this dis/enchantment. This section charts in some detail the specific lineages of Tagore and Gandhi's ashrams as self-making projects. These lineages are important as they intersected with Indophile interest and intimacies in the ashram, as enchanted spaces.

The disquiet with effects of industrial modernity was shared by Andrews and Pearson in the course of their missionary work; Mira's was tinged with experiences of the First World War.¹⁴ Ashrams sought to reimagine a utopian collective life as against the proliferating individualisation produced by Western industrial modernity.¹⁵ Both Tagore and Gandhi were critical of urban industrial modernity, and the mechanisation of human life produced by modern science and its technicism. Sabarmati and Shantiniketan ashrams were informed by their founders' profound disquiet with the disciplinary regimes and the hierarchies sustained by

¹³ Veena Das, 'Foreward' in *Enchantments of Modernity* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), p. xi.

¹⁴ Slade talks about the animosity towards German and Austrian musicians in England during this time while trying to organise orchestra events. Mira Behn (Madeleine Slade), *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, (London: Coward-McCann, 1960), p. 53.

¹⁵ Ashis Nandy explains how Gandhi was against both technicism and technocracy – the hierarchy between those who possess modern technology and those who don't – and how this inequality becomes a logic of power. Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyrannies and Utopias*, (Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 1987), pp. 136-137.

permutations of colonialism and industrial modernity. Both stressed a simplicity of lifestyle (that differed in degrees, if not kind), *brahmacharya* (celibacy) for its ashram members and vegetarianism as the prescribed dietary practice.¹⁶ These appealed to prospective western disciples as a call to remake their own lives from materialist excesses, this withdrawal seen as a fulfilment of their own spiritual quests. The Gandhi scholar Thomas Weber refers to these experiments as ‘intentional communities’, where alternative lifestyles were pursued with a marked ethical content.¹⁷

Tagore was neither ascetic nor monastic, though he himself never remarried after his wife’s early death. Gandhi’s asceticism was of course also a powerful political capital, bestowing a purity to his intentions. Both Tagore and Gandhi had platonic relationships with women in their mature age,¹⁸ in addition to troubled relationships with young women in the ashram.¹⁹ Gandhi in particular indulged in a widely publicised series of celibacy tests that involved sleeping with young women,²⁰ for which he courted considerable controversy. Ashrams were crucial spaces in mediating intimacies between disciples and their gurus. Investing in its work and life was a way of coming closer to the object of their adoration, their self-sacrifice for a greater good a constant invocation.

Early Gandhian ashrams had relied on critical support from several western followers for its sustenance, all of whom were drawn to alternative religiosities and ways of living that professed self-abnegation.²¹ Inspired by fin-de-siècle London

¹⁶ Vegetarianism was also financially more viable as a dietary practice, particularly for Shantiniketan. However, Debendranath Tagore had very clearly laid down the rule (not out of financial considerations) that no meat was to be consumed within the ashram compound. Tagore was not personally a vegetarian, but financial compulsions in the ashram might have led to the glorification of vegetarianism as the ideal dietary type. The ashram in itself, was, and continue to be permeated by a Brahminical sensibility.

¹⁷ Thomas Weber, ‘Gandhi Moves : Intentional Communities and Friendship’ in Debjani Ganguly and

John Docker (eds), *Rethinking Gandhi and Nonviolent Relationality*, New York, 2008, pp 83-99.

¹⁸ Such as Tagore’s relationship with the Argentinian poet and litterateur Victoria Ocampo and Gandhi’s with woman political activist Sarala Devi Chaudharani (also Tagore’s niece).

¹⁹As for instance Tagore’s muse Ranu Mukherjee, a young student of his ashram. Ranu Mukherjee wrote long letters full of romantic longing and pain to Tagore. Letters from Ranu Adhikari to Tagore and Leonard K Elmhirst, 1924, Dartington Hall Trust Papers. The Bengali author Sunil Gangopadhyay fictionalised their relationship in his novel *Rānu o Bhānu*, Kolkata, 2001.

²⁰ Abha and Manu Gandhi, with whom Gandhi used to sleep naked. The women themselves never raised any concerns about his behaviour or allegations of sexual misconduct. However, there was fierce competition for Gandhi’s attention among ashram women of all ages; as between a guru and his women disciples.

²¹ The only study, though not strictly scholarly, that discusses all of Gandhian ashrams within a single volume is Mark Thomson, *Gandhi and His Ashrams*, Mumbai, 1993. Individual studies of Gandhian ashrams include works by Skaria, Weber and Kathryn Tidrick.

trends such as radical vegetarianism, he saw his early ashram efforts as creating a 'community of men of religion' away from industrial cities.²² The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy's critique of industrial modernity, and the social alienation bred by such a modernity influenced Gandhi deeply, as also the late 19th century British social critic John Ruskin's similar critique of social inequalities. Both Tolstoy and Ruskin saw in modern civilisation's avowal of materialist excesses a 'devastating retreat from morality'.²³ They inspired his early experiments in commune living as a way to flatten the hierarchies created by capital and caste, part of a larger trend since the early 19th century that saw several British thinkers such as Robert Owen experimenting with socialist commune models, as a response to the growing inequalities caused by industrialisation.²⁴ In South Africa, Gandhi founded the Phoenix settlement (1904) and Tolstoy Farm (1908) along with his close followers and colleagues Henry Polak and Hermann Kallenbach.²⁵ Both Polak and Kallenbach were part of a group of young Jewish intellectuals in Johannesburg drawn to Hindu and Buddhist thought through their engagements with Theosophy.²⁶ Incidentally, though not directly connected to Gandhi, the first *kibbutz* was also founded in Degania (northern Israel) around the same time, a utopian experiment in communal living.²⁷ With Polak and Kallenbach's assistance, Gandhi:

... determined to take Indian Opinion [a mouthpiece for Gandhi's mobilising activities in South Africa] into a forest where I should live with the workers as members of my family. I purchased 100 acres of land and founded Phoenix Settlement, which neither we nor anyone else called an ashram. It had a religious basis, but the visible object was purity of body and mind as well as

²² M.K. Gandhi, *Ashram Observances in Action*, translated by Valji Govindji Desai, (Ahmedabad, 1955), p. 3.

²³ Charles Bower, "The Gandhian Ashram and its Contemporaries" (2015). Unpublished Undergraduate Honors Theses. 784, https://scholar.colorado.edu/honr_theses/784

²⁴ Charlotte Alston, *Tolstoy and His Disciples: The History of a Radical International Movement* (London, 2014), pp 90-92.

²⁵ I have not indulged in a wider discussion of Kallenbach and Polak in this chapter due to various reasons: a) their fields of activity was never centrally based in mainland India itself b) a discussion on the involvement of European Jews in anti-colonial projects merits a deeper elaboration on how stratified whiteness worked in settler colonial contexts. c) Radical Jewish politics also has a complex lineage which it will not be possible to address here, particularly in the way it merges with Asian forms of religious and cultural inheritances.

²⁶ Jonathan Hyslop, 'Gandhi 1869-1915: The transnational emergence of a public figure', Judith Brown and Anthony Parel (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 41.

²⁷ Though their trajectories grew into very different ones. Whether there was any link between the two is only speculative. Kallenbach, a German Jew, later came to be closely associated with the Zionist cause, Charles Bower, *The Gandhian Ashram* (University of Colorado Boulder, 2015), pp. 44-45.

economic equality. I did not then consider brahmacharya (chastity) to be essential...²⁸

The 'forest' – a metaphor for seeking alternative modernity – became an ideal space for such an experiment in a rural setting. Neither Phoenix nor Tolstoy were labelled as ashrams, yet, these anti-modern experiments were often based on a 'classically modern set of technologies' such as the printing press.²⁹ This ambiguity would continue to inhere in all of Gandhian ashrams. In hindsight, Gandhi described them as an 'ashram life' even though he and his close-living associate cum followers did not call it by that name.³⁰ Tolstoy and Phoenix made possible experiments in a shared domesticity and male intimacy between Gandhi, Kallenbach and Polak. Gandhi recounts

Both of us were living a sort of ashram life.... we led a comparatively very simple life in the sparsely populated country, and were religiously minded. Kallenbach purchased a farm of 1,100 acres and the Satyagrahi families settled there. Religious problems confronted us now at every step and the whole institution was managed from a religious standpoint. Among the settlers there were Hindus, Musalmans, Christians and Parsis. But I do not remember that they ever quarrelled with one another, though each was staunch in his own faith.³¹

A significant section of these settlers came from indentured labourer backgrounds and the early commune became a major experiment to test syncretic practices. Gandhi felt that the presence of multiple sects, religions and castes helped their children to be immune to the 'infection of religious intolerance.'³² He undertook numerous dietary and living experiments in these communal settlements, including vegetarian diets and nature cure such as mud and water therapies, refusing to indulge in western medicine.

These practices continued with his Satyagraha Ashram or Sabarmati – established in 1917 – near Ahmedabad in India. The Sabarmati ashram was an attempt to create a non-hierarchical ideal society, emphatically effacing boundaries of class, caste and religion. Gandhi saw in such a society, argues cultural psychologist Ashis

²⁸ Gandhi, *Ashram Observances...*, p 3

²⁹ Hyslop, 'Gandhi 1869-1915', p. 43.

³⁰ *Ashram Observances...*, p 3.

³¹ *Ibid*, p 4

³² Gandhi, *Mahatma Gandhi at Work*, p. 322.

Nandy, a possible utopia and rescue from the dehumanisation and fragmentation of life enforced by a fearful techno-modernity.³³ In Gandhian ashrams, individual selves had to be diminished to cultivate a uniform ashram ethic that was highly regulated, a practice Slade found exacting even as she desired it. Ashramites were to consider themselves as vessels for collective moral action, rather than engage in pursuits of curiosity or creative impulses.³⁴ Their bodies and bodily desires were rigidly policed and shamed for any subsequent lapse.³⁵ Gandhi built the Sabarmati ashram to train satyagrahis for future anti-colonial political movements and nation building activities such as the promotion of khadi and removal of untouchability. Restating on multiple occasions his critique of modernity and the ashram as a bearer of anti-modern experiments, Sabarmati was nonetheless sustained by generous donations from Bombay and Gujarati industrial capitalists.

Shantiniketan, on the other hand, grew out of Tagore's growing dissatisfaction with the inadequacy of colonial pedagogy. He felt that modern schools were in reality 'a factory, and the teachers are part of it.'³⁶ The focus on a radically different kind of pedagogy mattered to Andrews (in particular) and Pearson, both of whom had experience in missionary education. They found it refreshingly different, open and free from the rigidly hierarchical and condescending world of Christian missionary education.³⁷ Andrews and Pearson wanted to be part of this radical pedagogic experiment.

Shantiniketan sought to emulate ancient *tapovans* or forest hermitages as sources of knowledge and wisdom, located in the wilderness of nature. The idyllic *tapovan* life portrayed in the ancient Sanskrit poet Kalidas moved him: a place that radiated peace and transcendent love, where people abjure their violence, even animals such

³³ Nandy, *Traditions Tyranny and Utopias*, p. 141.

³⁴ Tanika Sarkar, 'Gandhi and social relations', *Cambridge Companion to Gandhi...*, p 188.

³⁵ Gandhi cut the long hair of two girl students in an effort to save them from sinful male gaze in the Tolstoy farm. Long hair makes them vulnerable to sexualised abuse. Gandhi, *Mahatma Gandhi at Work*, p. 325.

³⁶ Rabindranath Tagore, 'The Problem of Education', *Towards Universal Man*, 1906, in Uma Dasgupta (ed.), *The Oxford India Tagore: Selected Writings on Education and Nationalism*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 112.

³⁷ For a discussion on missionary education in India during this time, see: Hayden J.A. Bellenoit, 'Missionary Education, Religion and Knowledge in India, c.1880 –1915' *Modern Asian Studies* 41, 2 (2007) pp.369 – 394.

as lions.³⁸ Shantiniketan sought to be a modern tapovan, where human life was not fragmented from its place in the vast world of nature:

At the centre of the tapovan is the guru. He is not a machine, he is a being. Not in any passive way, but actively....to quicken the minds of his disciples in the forceful flow of tapasya/penance is part of his sadhana/spiritual practice.³⁹

Tagore believed that the modern school was a machine that produced clerks instead of thinkers.⁴⁰ In its stead, the Shantiniketan ashram would be a place where the guru/Acharya would strive along with his pupils, embracing their creative impulses, a 'school of nature', uncaged by the time-discipline of colonial schooling.⁴¹ Tagore was very much the *shiksha guru*.

The ashram, begun as *Brahmacharyashrama* in 1902, was founded under the influence of Vedic Brahminism, and upheld the hierarchies of the varna system (Brahmin and non-Brahmin students dined separately till at least 1915).⁴² Till 1907, the ashram remained conservatively Brahminical in practice, Tagore's own shifts coinciding with the Hindu revivalist turn around the Partition of Bengal in 1905. The ashram was opened up only later in the 1910s to be more inclusive.⁴³ His ashram was based on an idealised Vedic form of community, rooted in the vision of an unsullied Hindu cultural past and civilizational greatness.⁴⁴ In later years, the ashram was renamed Visvabharati, to indicate the universal humanitarian turn in Tagore, shedding its former conservatism. Even while Tagore emerged as a bitter critique of nationalism, the Shantiniketan ashram was widely considered a 'nationalist' institution, not in the sense Tagore was critiquing the concept, but as a

³⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Tapovan', Tagore Web, <http://www.tagoreweb.in/>, p. 10.

³⁹ Tagore, 'Ashramer Roop o Bikash-1', Tagore Web, p. 1.

⁴⁰ This was also a critique of the colonial education system that was implemented following the controversial Macaulay's Educational Policy, 1835, introduced by Thomas Babbington Macaulay.

⁴¹ Tagore, 'Ashramer Roop o Bikash-3', Tagore Web, p. 4.

⁴² Tagore's father Debendranath had advocated a return of the Brahmo Samaj to a more conservative form of Brahminical Hinduism.

⁴³ Rajarshi Chunder, 'Tagore and Caste: From Brahmacharyasram to Swadeshi Movement (1901–07)'. <https://www.sahapedia.org/tagore-and-caste-brahmacharyasram-swadeshi-movement-1901%E2%80%9307>. Though the ashram had three Christian teachers (high caste Hindu converts) at the very beginning, including Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay.

⁴⁴ It was not until Gandhi's visit and intervention in the Shantiniketan ashram that intercaste dining was discontinued in 1915. However, a Brahmin-line continued during meal hours for students who wanted it. For Tagore, forcing them to not follow caste practices amounted to an imposition from above. See Uma Dasgupta, *Rabindranath Tagore: An Illustrated Life* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 69.

space that was distinctively Indian, if predominantly Hindu upper caste, and rooted in indigenist traditions, celebrating Indian music, art and culture.⁴⁵

Shantiniketan was very much a representation of the best of high culture, art and learning that Tagore thought civilisation could muster. Tagore was quite in step with 'world cultural' trends and a pioneer in pan-Asianism. At the same time, Tagore was captive to the notion of civilisation as a universal category that would expand continuously to include hitherto uncivilised geographies.⁴⁶ His ashram, he believed, was a particular way of reaching or celebrating that universal in civilisation.⁴⁷ Perhaps for this belief, there was a conspicuous absence of African or Black intellectuals or geographies throughout his life in the ashram.⁴⁸ His lofty call to universalism, eagerly vaunted by disciples such as Andrews and Pearson, for instance, idealised a common human unity without actually reflecting on how certain communities, owing to historical circumstances of exclusion, can never fully invest in it.

Both Sabarmati and Shantiniketan ashrams were variable responses to aspects of capitalist modernity Tagore and Gandhi were deeply dissatisfied with. For Gandhi it was the dehumanisation caused by techno-modernity, while for Tagore it was the mechanised pedagogies of modern schooling. As Slade would succinctly put it:

⁴⁵ V. Balgangadhara Menon, V Gopala Reddy and Mrinalini Sarabhai, students who came from staunchly nationalist backgrounds attest that their 'nationalist commitments were not hampered' but found new cultural expression in Shantiniketan. Uma Das Gupta, In Pursuit of a Different Freedom: Tagore's world university at Santiniketan, *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3/4, India: A National Culture? (WINTER 2002-SPRING 2003), pp 34-35

⁴⁶ Skaria, op. cit., p. 212. Belief in the 'universal' of civilisation is typical to almost all Indian (as well as non-Indian) thinkers including Gandhi, Nehru, Ambedkar and Tagore, among others.

⁴⁷ Hence the ancient tapovan life was not merely circumstantial living in the forest, but a matter of enlightened and conscious choice. He illustrates this difference with living in the African forest, 'where to stay in nature was borne by ignorance.' Rabindranath Tagore, Tapovan, Tagore web, p 9. Merze Tate was the first African- American woman to have visited Shantiniketan, a decade after Tagore's death and under Rathindranath's tenure. She participated in the pedagogical experiments there in 1950-'51. <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/whit/2018/12/05/toward-a-history-of-womens-international-thought/>.

⁴⁸ Barring the one time when the famous African-American civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, deeply inspired and troubled by Indian anti-colonialism, sought out Tagore for a message for his monthly journal *Crisis*. See Du Bois to Tagore, 19 Feb 1929, <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b183-i406/#page/1/mode/1up>. There is no recorded conversation between Tagore and Ambedkar as well at a time when the anti-caste movement was in full swing in both India and Bengal. His universalism did not really differentiate between the privileged parochialism of the nationalist elite and the identitarian politics of the anti-caste discourses. See also article by Yogita Goyal (2019) On transnational analogy: Thinking race and caste with W. E. B. Du Bois and Rabindranath Tagore, *Atlantic Studies*, 16:1, 54-71, DOI: [10.1080/14788810.2018.1477653](https://doi.org/10.1080/14788810.2018.1477653).

Sabarmati and Shantiniketan were not irreconcilable but complementary institutions, one focusing on the ascetic, the other on the artistic.⁴⁹ Both ashrams were indigenist idioms of dissent against the hegemony of modern disciplinary regimes.

Tagore and Gandhi's ashrams offered a critique of western modernity not only discursively, but also through everyday habits and practices. Vegetarianism and *brahmacharya* or celibacy were practised rigorously and were seen as part of this critique, aspects that greatly appealed to their western disciples in their pursuit of alternative modernities. The denial of meat and material desire in the ashram came to represent a control over appetite and urges. Rathindranath, Tagore's son and student of his ashram averred that their life was

Not only simple but austere. The ideal of Brahmacharya was the keynote of everything. The yellow uniform, which covered up the poverty of clothes... the vegetarian meals comparable to jail diet in their dull monotony – these were the standards laid down. Nobody wore shoes or even sandals and such luxuries as toothpaste or hair oil were taboo.⁵⁰

This aspiration to austerity fit in with Andrews and Pearson's quests. Though Tagore was never one to advocate extreme austerities, Pearson and Andrews found in the ashram life an opportunity to merge their lives in the service of a larger community, an urge that resonated with their own deeply held missionary convictions of self-abnegation and Christ-like sacrifice. Young men and women students in Shantiniketan, however, revelled in the air of freedom, romance and cultural activity.⁵¹ Pearson was captivated at the 'Sanskrit prayer chanted by the boys of Bolpur' [the town closest to Shantiniketan]:

I wish it were possible to preserve the freshness of one's first impressions, for then the very sound of the prayer would be a constant and never fading inspiration. I cannot describe the thrill which I felt as I listened to that

⁴⁹ Mira to Gandhi, 6 January 1929, in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 166.

⁵⁰ Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, Calcutta, 1958, p. 53. Debendranath Tagore had explicitly forbade consumption of meat in the ashram premises. Though a major financial consideration, vegetarianism was idealised, if only to normalise and render its ease in implementing.

⁵¹ Though Tucci, an Italian visiting scholar writes: 'They say that in Santiniketan there is freedom and Ananda [bliss]. Ananda may be, but certainly no freedom; if somebody wishes to speak frankly, he is very often compelled to go'. Andrew Robinson and Krishna Dutta, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad Minded Man* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p. 276.

ascending chant filling the fresh morning air with its solemn notes of youthful aspiration.⁵²

Andrews yearned from afar to be back in Shantiniketan every 'Wednesday and Thursday morning to join with them in their service of prayer'.⁵³

In Sabarmati, Gandhi's injunctions on sex and dietetics were much more severe. Slade had found, on her arrival to Sabarmati, its rigorous moral discipline quite demanding:

Moral standards were poised at a height where the slightest wavering by an inmate from the strictest truth, honesty and rectitude was noted down and made the subject of public discussion between Bapu and the rest of Ashramites. Physical standards regarding diet, labour and hours of rising and going to rest were rigidly severe, and economic ideals required that everyone should use only hand-spun and hand-woven cloth, and other hand-made articles as far as possible, besides living a life of the utmost simplicity, even by Indian standards.⁵⁴

Gandhi's prayer service, on the other hand, while involving the singing of devotional hymns, was a more didactic affair. It was often used as an opportunity to publicly discuss breaches of ashram discipline or collective instruction. Even though Mira was unable to follow the prayer service initially [it was largely in Gujarati], she later became proficient in Sanskrit chants, leading the ashram's Morning Prayer.⁵⁵ Prayer services assembled the ashram as an emotional community, partaking in a shared spiritual striving.

As materialism came to be increasingly associated as a sign of Western decadence and its materialist culture in late 19th century India, the emphasis on austerity, control and abstinence came to stand as anti-colonial idioms to revitalise Indian spirituality. Sabarmati and Shantiniketan ashrams represented their founders' desire for utopian non/anti-modern spaces, romanticised visions of a lost world around an ancient form that could recover India's spiritual and civilisational greatness. Simulations of the forest came to represent possible habitations of alternative modernities, seen across the ashram experiments of many Hindu

⁵² Pearson, *Shantiniketan: the Bolpur School*, p. 32.

⁵³ CFA to RT, 1 Sep 1913

⁵⁴ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 71.

⁵⁵ Halide Edib, *Inside India* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p. 276.

thinkers such as Tagore, Gandhi, Munshi Ram and Vivekananda. These ashrams embodied the enchantment for imagining alternative modernities. British (and more broadly western) followers of Gandhi and Tagore found in such enchanted spaces a remarkable resonance of their own dissatisfactions with industrial modernity.

Since at least 1910, Andrews had insisted on missionary platforms that ashrams were the only true way to indigenise Christ in India that would not deracinate Indian Christians.⁵⁶ At that time, he was exposed to only Munshi Ram's Gurukul Kangri in Hardwar. Christian missionaries were aware of modern Hindu ashrams emerging at the beginning of the 20th century but there was much opposition to it, as most held ashrams to be typically Hindu institutions. Christian ashrams, argued Andrews, greatly enabled the imaging of an Indian Christ, who was after all an Oriental. By the end of his life, Andrews was able to conceive of a pan-ashram movement, spreading all over Asia and adapted to in the West:

India may give this Ashram ideal... to the Christian Church in the West...

... What a wonderful thing it would be if the Indian Christian Church cd [sic] offer some greatly needed gift to the West: May not the Ashram Movement be one way to do so?...What a beautiful thing it would be, if now India cd give to the West one of its own treasures' (Instead of missionaries being sent by the west)... You see the time is now ripe in the West.⁵⁷

Shantiniketan also fitted with his own spiritual quests to indigenise Christ and Christianity through Indian idioms and practices, which if fruitful, could create a 'Christian Chaitanya or Christian Vivekananda'.⁵⁸ The ashram seemed to be an eminently suitable mode for such quests. Andrews's attempt to instrumentalise ashrams for the missionary propagation of Christianity later mutated into a personal quest for Christ through the ashrams of Tagore and Gandhi, none of whom insisted on any kind of religious conversion. Ashrams became a sacred locus for these disciples, through which their mentors' lives and work could be felt, and to

⁵⁶ C.F. Andrews, *The Indigenous character of Our Work*, Paper presented at National Missionary Society Conference, April 12, 1912, cited in Donald Fossett Ebright, *The National Missionary Society of India, 1905-1942: An Expression of the Movement Toward Indigenization within the Indian Christian Community*, (PhD thesis, Chicago, 1944), p. 147.

⁵⁷ CF Andrews, *Sandhya Meditations at the Christukula Ashram*, Natesan, Madras, 1940* posthumous.

⁵⁸ Young Men of India, December 1910, p. 25. In a rather programmatic missionary statement Andrews etches this out: "a body of spiritual Christian men eminently fitted by learning and temperament to pursue a life of study and contemplation, to be like swamis and Paramhansas, fitted to set a new standard of Christian holiness which shall appeal to the New India of the future. Such men would have a mission to Indian Christians as well as non-Christians.", P 25.

invest in its everyday habits was to merge oneself in this wider community of believers. This is not to say that the enchantments never wore off or these disciples were never critical of either gurus or their ashrams. There were moments of rupture, disagreements and criticism of aspects of the ashram by their western disciples but the validity of the mode itself was never contested.

3.4 Andrews, Pearson and the world of Shantiniketan

This and the subsequent sections focus largely on the passages of C.F. Andrews, William Pearson and Madeleine Slade in and around the ashrams of Tagore and Gandhi, what entering these aspirational worlds meant for them (as also for the ashrams) and how it shaped their own selfhoods. The previous chapter has already illustrated how epistolary networks determined Indophile intimacies with their mentors. Ashramic spaces were coaligned in shaping such processes of interiority. They provided the physical space for British disciples to aspire, engage and transform their cultural selves towards avowedly Indian identities. In Mira's anxiety to be in close proximity of Gandhi and serve her Bapu, or Andrews and Pearson's desire to serve Tagore as their lofty gurudev, the ashram became a crucial site to affirm their loyalties in practice. To enter the ashram was to stake a claim in the collective life of that emotional community and its practices: of prayer, teaching, or partaking in dietary experiments and sanitation work. Here I explore these two ashrams and their Indophile disciples' engagements around them individually and collectively, so as to emphasise the specificities of their passages before considering them together.

To re-cite a letter from Pearson to Tagore referred to in the earlier chapter more fully:

You told me in London that you wanted to capture me for *Shantiniketan* and now I am able to write and tell you that I am a willing captive and that it is only a question of time now for the captive to enter the place where the bonds of affection have been woven. This I tell you in confidence for I want quietly to work at Bengali for the next year or two until I have completed my engagement in Delhi. After that I will gladly enter the service of the *ashram* if I am worthy of it. ...Andrews is the only friend I have told here in India.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Pearson to Tagore, 17 December 1912. Italicized words transliterated in English from their Bangla originals.

Pearson repeatedly emphasises his sense of captivation to indicate his desire to become a 'captive', almost as if the magic world of Shantiniketan had completely entrapped him. There is much doubt about his self-worth, but also a quiet promise to prove himself by learning Bengali while slowly disengaging from his mission work. He was willing to put in the hard work. Joining Shantiniketan would immediately raise heckles of 'going native' or Hindu in missionary and official circles, a fate that came to haunt Andrews rather brutally. Within a year though, Pearson was signing off his letters with 'Bhaktipoorn Pranam' (worshipful pranam) to 'Gurudev' Tagore.

Andrews expressed a similar wish to visit and join Shantiniketan, believing that 'it will be a pilgrimage and every step of the way will be sacred'.⁶⁰ His itinerant travels as an Anglican missionary to Munshi Ram's Gurukul Kangri in the Himalayan foothills of Hardwar exemplified this 'yearning' for a space that exuded 'nearer presence of God':

.... for the nearer presence of God – I found that fulfilled during those days at the Gurukula, and it came through you, my dearest friend. God has used you and your work as His spiritual temple and I was treading, all unworthy, in its courts...⁶¹

Shantiniketan was a continuation of this quest. Pearson's first visit to the ashram was enough to captivate him for life. Its communal life, its rustic setting and the morning 'Sanskrit prayers chanted by the boys of Bolpur'⁶² thrilled him. He wrote back to Tagore, who was then abroad, about the farewell ceremony given to him, and how it touched him:

at 7.30 the whole school assembled outside the mandir to bid me Farewell with a service of parting benediction. The sloka which was uttered by Thakur dada [Dwijendranath Tagore, R.T's elder brother] was the one used when Sakuntala left the ashram and was a prayer that I might take the joy and peace of the ashram with me. I was quite overcome and utterly humbled by the affection...and ... I couldn't help feeling as I stood there in the morning light with bowed head and full heart that this was really the ceremony of my

⁶⁰ Andrews to Tagore, 20 Dec 1912.

⁶¹ Andrews to Munshi Ram, [?], Cited from Daniel O' Connor, *The Testimony of C.F. Andrews*, Madras, 1974, p 114.

⁶² William W. Pearson, *Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranth Tagore* (London: Macmillan, 1917), p. 32.

dedication to the service of the ashram I have been captivated and captured.⁶³

Letters – that were continually producing a feeling of intimateness between gurus and their disciples – became a chief way to evidence this feeling of incipient oneness to the ashram. Andrews, a busier man owing to his high profile lobbying commitments all over India, visited the ashram a few months later in March, 1913:

...the tiredness went away when I reached the ashram and saw the boys and was taken up to the very room where you had lived – with that wonderful balcony and all the dreaming[?] trees so close at hand and the distant view.... we went out and sat in the wood at evening and watched the sun set and the moon rise and Ajit sang to me from Gitanjali...It was all so pure and still and sacred after dusty noisy Delhi and the wearisome train journey. ... The excitement was too great and I spent most of the night in the balcony watching the moon in its glory and the dim silent stars and thinking of my mother in England and again of you and looking down upon the sleeping school...Night is wonderful in Panjab but in Bengal it is far more wonderful still. ...I was astonished by the bright intelligence of the children. It was an experience quite different from our dull Panjabi children. But the free unfettered life of the ashram was of course the main factor. [Your presence] each day became more real to me; but it was at night time, in the silence that it was most speaking.⁶⁴

The ashram was facilitating dense transferences: its idyllic unfettered life, Tagore's intangible spirit, music, the quiet nights, ashram students and members held for Andrews and Pearson visions of an enchanted world. The ashram and its ambience felt pristine, untouched, and unreal almost, its excitement infectious. It was a world far removed from the bustle of modern urban life and the moral exhaustion of missionary politicking. The ashram became an affective, emotional community for them, framing their aspirations and making them reflect on their moral positions.

Their lofty romanticising of this seemingly pre-modern world rendered it beyond the pale of any material hierarchy, almost unscathed by influences of the colonial or industrial civilisation that surround it. The presence of Santhal villages around the

⁶³ Pearson to Tagore, 17 Dec 1912. Shakuntala is the protagonist of the ancient Indian poet Kalidasa's play 'Abhijnana Shakuntalam', the same poet who inspired Tagore's visions about a *tapovan* style modern ashram.

⁶⁴ Andrews to Tagore, 8 March 1913.

edges of Shantiniketan gave it a further air of primordiality. It served as a site to transcend their self-perceived moral and cultural lack as missionary members of the colonising race. Pearson wanted to offer his service

for the asram [sic] with the humility and reverence of a worshipper who offers a few flowers at a shrine...I try to give up thinking of the poverty and failures of my own life and try to fix a steadfast gaze on the ideal for which the asram stands.⁶⁵

Andrews was already mulling the 'call to Bolpur' [Shantiniketan] as an opportunity to resign from his 'actual place in a formal missionary society'.⁶⁶ His sense of shame increased after his visit to the ashram, and he felt repentant for his complicity in the writing and dissemination of Christian missionary literature that patronised India and Hinduism. He wanted to realise a

...a truer self... to be with you, or to be in the ashram where your spirit will be to me itself the lesson that I need. ...I am claiming you as my true Gurudev and I am truly one of your own pupils, however I may have failed to be worthy of the name.⁶⁷

The claim on his 'true Gurudev' was not lightly made. He offered to help Tagore by 'taking charge' of the ashram in his absence, not in a position of superiority, but out of 'sympathy' and in subordination, as he clarified.⁶⁸ He prided himself for having worked 'for ten years under and with Mr. Rudra ... the position of ... authority would be difficult for me.' He further stated that he had already been following a strict vegetarian diet, under Munshi Ram's influence and found benefit in it.⁶⁹

Andrews's attachment to Shantiniketan and talk of resigning his mission alarmed the Delhi Cambridge Mission who thought he was converting to Hinduism. Yet, for Andrews, the call to Shantiniketan was for him a call 'to follow Christ simply and truly': 'If men in authority take my clergyman's orders away from me, I must all the more closely follow Christ himself.'⁷⁰ From afar, his heart kept drawing back to the ashram every day: 'I keep Wednesday and Thursday morning to join with

⁶⁵ Pearson to Tagore, 6 May 1913.

⁶⁶ Andrews to Tagore, 15 May 1913.

⁶⁷ Andrews to Tagore, 8 March 1913.

⁶⁸ Andrews to Tagore, 29 May 1913.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ CFA to Mahatma Gandhi, 13 April [1914?]

them in their service of prayer. It has all become a part of my inner life'.⁷¹

Andrews's impressions inspired Pearson even further:

I am happy too to hear from Shantiniketan of the great happiness of our friend Andrews. I hear from him constantly and he tells me how wonderfully and absolutely at home he is both with the Teachers and the boys... I cannot tell you how happy I am at the prospect of beginning work there so soon for although I was there for only two days in December I feel deeply attached to the place and the boys and teachers, and the memory of my visit has been the most fragrant memory of the past six months.⁷²

Shantiniketan came to be a sacred memory and metaphor of freedom for both. Dreams manifested their desires. Pearson continued to dream from a distant and dusty Delhi of the magical world of Shantiniketan: 'twice during the past fortnight I have had vivid dreams of Bolpur. In the first dream I was present to welcome Gurudev and do you know I wept so bitterly as I thought how unworthy I was to be there. In the second dream I was working at the ashram and talking to the boys'⁷³. The ashram made them dream of its enchanting world and shed tears thinking of their unworthiness. Recollecting, writing of those dreams made such dream projections feel even more real.

Given that Shantiniketan occupied a tense and marginal position pedagogically in its defiance to impose uniform methods of modern schooling, Indophile investments seemed to affirm its relevance in nationalist discourse.⁷⁴

Tagore's son Rathindranath attests to this marginality: 'People looked down upon

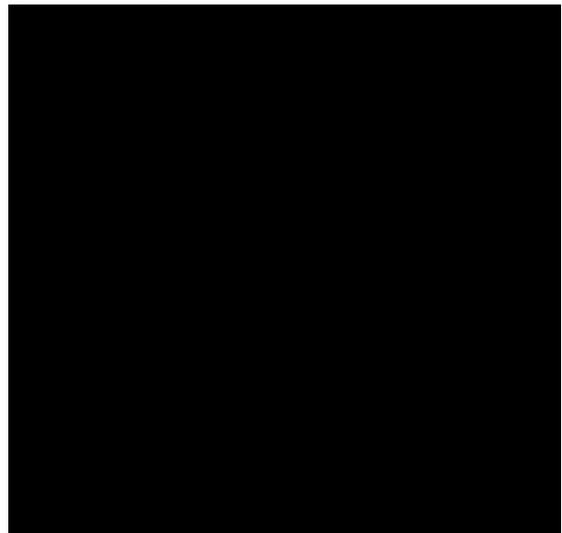


Figure 2: Mr C.F. Andrews
Source: *The Times of India*, 20 Oct 1915.
ProQuest Historical Newspapers

⁷¹ CFA to RT, 1 Sep 1913.

⁷² WP to RT, 30 July 1913.

⁷³ WP to Ajit [?]. 8 Oct 1913, Delhi, Folder 287 (iv), Pearson Misc

⁷⁴ There were of course, very real limits to this. Students of the ashram had to pay the price of its utopia. They had to face the struggles of higher education and jobs after a certain age. Shantiniketan wasn't taken seriously as a proper education institution and its students often had to experience the stiff competition that characterised college education and job markets. See Sudhiranjan Das, *Amader Shantiniketan*, (Calcutta: Visva-Bharadti 1959), pp, 104-106.

the institution and ridiculed father's attempt to introduce new ideas in education'.⁷⁵ Basing themselves in Tagore's ashram connected the ashram to larger political stakes, even at a time when he was increasingly critical of mainstream nationalism and nationalist discourse. Andrews and Pearson's involvements in nationalist projects around anti-indenture or Gandhian causes made the ashram a relevant institution through the spaces they moved, not just nationally but trans-nationally. Wherever Andrews and Pearson toured and lectured – South Africa, Australia, Fiji, US or Europe – Tagore and Shantiniketan continually formed a crucial part of their interlocution for India and the prospect of an 'East-West' cultural union.

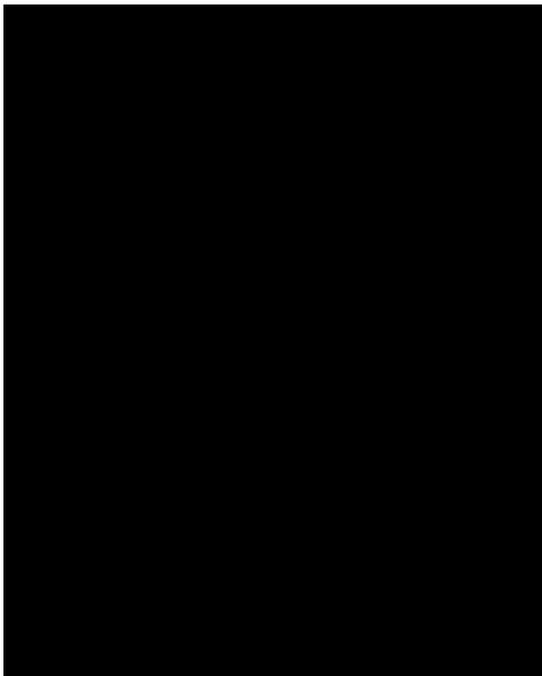


Figure 3: Indians in South Africa
Source: The Times of India; 25 Mar 25, 1914;
ProQuest Historical Newspapers

3.5 Mira and the Mahatma's ashram

Most Dear Master...

May I come to your Ashram to study spinning and weaving, to learn to live your ideals and principles in daily life, and indeed to learn in what way I may hope to serve you in the future? In order to become a fit servant of your cause I feel the absolute necessity of that training and I will do my very best to be a not too unworthy pupil if you will accept me.

In the meantime I continue my preparations as best I can. I spin and weave. With the aid of many kind Indian friends I perplex my head over long Hindustani exercises I read. ...The more I enter into Indian thought, the more I feel as if I were reaching at last, a long lost home...I have given up the drinking of all wines, beers or spirits, and I no longer eat meat of any kind.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Tagore, *On the Edges*, p. 154.

⁷⁶ Madeleine Slade to Gandhi, 29 May 1925 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 12.

Her entering into Indian thought – mostly through French translations of *Bhagavad-Gita* and *Rigveda* – felt like reaching a ‘long lost home’. She strenuously strove to follow the prescribed dietary regime of Gandhi’s ashram, readying herself for acceptance within the ashram fold. Habitual practices were already being mobilised in the making of new selves. Having already bestowed on him the title of ‘Master’, she could not wait to give all she had to Gandhi and ‘[his] people’. She pined for the day when she could come to India. Rolland, who introduced her to Gandhi writes how Slade

has been touched by grace: she converted to Mahatma Gandhi’s faith; she decided to give her life to serve it; she will leave to India, and enter in Sabarmati’s Ashram in Ahmedabad, where Gandhi has accepted her.⁷⁷

Her striving to enter Gandhi’s utopian ashram had made her prepare for its life long before she was able to physically meet him. She wished to become a ‘fit servant’ for his cause. She read all of his works and learnt some Urdu, among other things. This pre-determined articulation of herself as a humble servant and Gandhi as the merciful Master was conspicuous by its remarkable resonance to the idiom of complete self-surrender in the tradition of bhakti.

By the early 1920s, Gandhi was the pre-eminent figure in Indian politics. Riding high on his success of the satyagraha movement in South Africa in 1914, he had consolidated his position in India through diverse issues and interests raised by the Champaran, Kheda and Non-Cooperation movements. He had also demonstrated his commitment to the principle of non-violent satyagraha through these movements and successfully ushered in the era of mass agitations through boycott and civil disobedience led by the Congress. Forever the conscientious imperial subject, Gandhi pledged not to resume direct political action till 1928, to mark the formal end of his original prison term. While corresponding with Slade, he was still serving his prison term for the Chauri Chaura incident. Slade was made aware of Gandhi by Romain Rolland’s book on him, published in 1924.⁷⁸ His political experiments were not the primary cause that drew Slade to the Mahatma. Gandhi’s

⁷⁷ 14 Sep 1925, Rolland, *Inde..*

⁷⁸ Romain Rolland, *Gandhi....*

21 day long fast for Hindu-Muslim unity in Delhi moved Slade to seek his spiritual discipleship.⁷⁹

Sabarmati was founded with the explicit object of producing *satyagrahi* disciples who would lead different Gandhian movements. Seeking to combine the moral force of spirituality with politics, Gandhi had founded the Satyagraha ashram on the banks of Sabarmati, near Ahmedabad in 1915. Primarily funded by Gujarati and Bombay industrialists, the ashram was an exceptional synthesis of many sorts. Departing from the conventional notion of the ashram as a spiritual cum religious retreat, Gandhi's ashram was unique in its emphasis on the abolition of untouchability and the adoption of rigorous sanitary practices. Based on the idea of voluntary labour, ashramites were expected to spin their own yarn (in khadi), cook their own food, and clean their own refuse. Gandhi instituted 11 vows to be followed by his followers: non-violence, truth, non-theft, non-possession, bread-labour, celibacy, dietary control, fearlessness, respect for all religions, swadeshi and abolition of untouchability.⁸⁰ The ashram members, drawn from a wide variety of people, included the most ascetic and the most worldly. The householder followers, in their efforts to serve Gandhi in whatever way possible, often had to bring their families with them, who generally remained outside the pale of strictures applicable to themselves. The presence of non-Gandhian family members, often disinterested in and uncommitted to the principles and austerities of the ashram, led to the outbreak of frequent frictions, conflicts and furores that regularly violated one or the other foundational vow of the ashram.⁸¹ There were intermittent instances of petty squabbles, homosexual incidents among boys and petty theft that pervaded the ashram life. It exerted much of Gandhi's time and patience to keep the place running. Sabarmati was a tightly wound space, unlike the more unstructured Shantiniketan ashram.

It was into this experimental semi-ascetic, semi-domestic space that Slade sought admission. From her initial interest itself, she was insistent on leading an intensive ashram life under Gandhi's tutelage. In the one year of probation advised by Gandhi, she was already practising a simulated ashram life in England. She was

⁷⁹ 14 Sep 1925, Rolland, *Inde...*, pp 100-101

⁸⁰ Rajmohan Gandhi, *Mohandas: A True Story of a Man, His People, and an Empire*, (Delhi, 2004), p. 192.

⁸¹ Thompson, *Gandhi and his ashrams*, p. 107.

learning to speak Hindustani, spun and wove (wool, whose sample she enclosed in the above letter), became a complete teetotaler and vegetarian, slept on a hard bed; in other words, she simplified life as much as possible to be eligible for the ashram. Her family members were concerned at her decision but did not protest as she gave up her small comforts gradually, including her passion for Beethoven and music. Rolland was excited that he was able to send Gandhi an able volunteer, and proudly noted in her days of self-preparation at London how her example had influenced her parents too: 'She says her example has carried along her parents; her mother is spinning, and her father, the admiral is weaving (cursing Gandhi all the time)'.⁸²

Gandhi warned her in advance 'that the life at the Ashram is not all rosy, it is strenuous. Bodily labour is given by every inmate'.⁸³ Nevertheless, Slade finally met Gandhi at the Sabarmati ashram in November 1925. As she entered,

a slight brown figure rose up and came toward me. I was conscious of nothing but a sense of light. I fell on my knees. Hands gently raised me up, and a voice said: "You shall be my daughter." My consciousness of the physical world began to return, and I saw a face smiling at me with eyes full of love, blended with a gentle twinkle of amusement. Yes, this was Mahatma Gandhi, *and I had arrived.* (emphasis mine).⁸⁴

Slade's exalted first encounter was exactly what she had imagined it to be: a *darshan* or vision of her guru in his ashram abode. Gandhi preferred the more accessible term Bapu [the Gujarati word for father] than the lofty sounding 'guru', as 'no one in these days [are] competent to live up to the ideal', he opined.⁸⁵ However, the role of a paternal figure intensively mentoring his disciples in the enclosed space of the ashram remained similar. To Rolland she wrote enthusiastically that she 'had been prepared for a Prophet and [she] ... found an Angel'.⁸⁶ However, she found that the ashram was hardly the 'compact group' she had imagined it to be:

⁸² Romain Rolland, Extracts from Romain Rolland's Diary, September 1925 in *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondences*, (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1976), p. 48.

⁸³ 24 July 1925, Gandhi to Slade, p. 12-13.

⁸⁴ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Slade, *Ibid.*, p. 75. Though he popularised calling Tagore 'Gurudev'.

⁸⁶ Madeleine Slade to Romain Rolland, 12 November 1925, in *Romain Rolland and Gandhi Correspondences*, p. 50.

I found a heterogeneous collection of one or two hundred people, men, women and children of all ages and all degrees of faith, from fanatical ascetics to sceptical family women.... Because Bapu himself was all-sided, he attracted people of the most varied types.⁸⁷

As the novelty of the experience wore off, she found that instead of being a monastic retreat based on rigorous principles, the ashram 'was a miniature cross-section of the everyday world', and comprised of 'highly explosive material'⁸⁸, no doubt referring to the affairs of the family members of dedicated Gandhians resident in the ashram, and not directly bound to Gandhi. She had expected the ashram to be a compact almost homogenous group but instead she found it to be a heterogeneous collection ranging from 'fanatical ascetics to sceptical family women'.⁸⁹ Different members were drawn by different aspects of Gandhi to join the ashram and there was no common motive that bound them. Slade came to side with the more ascetic group within the ashram, advocating greater austerity, simplicity and adherence to ashram rules, demonstrating her dedication to Gandhi.

Slade soon busied himself with everyday ashram work, revelling in the presence of Gandhi and eager to follow his instructions. Among her first jobs in the ashram included cleaning the communal latrines, reflecting Gandhi's emphasis on the primacy of sanitation work. His appreciation enthused her to exert herself harder, ignoring the physical and mental strain that these exertions put on her. Thanking Rolland for the 'treasure' he had sent him, Gandhi reported: 'Miss. Slade is showing wonderful adaptability and has already put us at ease about herself'.⁹⁰

Her first phase of training, as devised by Gandhi, involved learning Hindustani in the Devanagari script (Mira had been hitherto been learning Urdu in the Arabic script), spin cotton and learn carding, and the daily sweeping of the ashram latrines.⁹¹ We get a sense of the value of her discipleship – and its relative difference from Indian disciples – from Mahadev Desai's dairies. Desai, a close

⁸⁷ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 70.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p 71.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 70.

⁹⁰ Gandhi to Rolland, 13 November 1925 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, (you sure is the right date? Cant find it in the book)

⁹¹ Slade, *Spirit's...*, p 67 (Behn?)

associate and ashram secretary was chided by Gandhi for trying to learn French from Mira:

Do you know that Miss Slade has come here, having burnt all her boats? Do you know that her sacrifice for our cause is greater than that of any one of us? Do you know that she is here to learn and study and serve and give all her time to the service of our people and thereby her own people, and that nothing that happens at her own home will swerve her from her appointed task here? Every minute of her time is therefore doubly precious and it is for us to give her as much as we can. She wants to know everything about us, she must master Hindustani.⁹²

Desai publicised (or was made to publish?) this anecdote in the ashram journal *Young India* as a moral lesson on the value of time for ashram readers but it throws light on how Gandhi saw Mira. Slade's especial-ness was emphasized as 'doubly precious'. In a single semantic move, Gandhi correlated her 'service to our people' as a service to 'her own people', suggesting that her services to India were an exercise in the moral redemption of Britain. Within two decades of her discipleship to Gandhi, she was ventriloquising the political positions taken by him and representing Indian nationalist interests in influential British official circles. When Churchill told her in an interview in 1934 that the 'Indian nation does not exist', Slade assured him that he was wrong: 'being in India for a decade, I can vouch that there is a unifying culture throughout the land and from North to South and from East to West, wherever you go you find this yearning for freedom.'⁹³ And more bluntly, during the Quit India movement in 1942 to Gilbert Laithwaite, Principal Secretary of the Viceroy Lord Linlithgow, when the latter refused to see her:

This time it will be impossible for you to hold him [Gandhi]. No jail will contain him, no crushing will silence him. The more you crush, the more his power will spread. You are faced with two alternatives; one to declare India's independence, and the other to kill Gandhiji, and once you kill him, you kill for ever all hope of friendship between India and England. ...⁹⁴

⁹² Mahadev Desai, 'Our Time a Trust', *Young India*, 26-11-1925, *CWMG*, Vol 33, p 260

⁹³ Notes on Interview with Winston Churchill, 2nd Nov 1934, Writings by Mira Behn, Sl No 2, Mira Behn Papers, NMML.

⁹⁴ Mira to [Gandhi?], 17 July 1942 on her meeting with Laithwaite, Secretary to the Viceroy, Mira Behn Correspondence with Lord Halifax (Linlithgow), 5th Instalment,

She didn't spare Linlithgow, making her loyalties clear while acting as a representative for Gandhi: 'I am the daughter of the late Admiral Sir Edmond Slade, who came to Gandhiji seventeen years ago, and has ever since been closely associated with him in all his activities.'⁹⁵

It was not without reason, perhaps, that Gandhi re-christened Madeleine as Mira, after the famous medieval Bhakti saint Mirabai of Mewar, whose bhajans (devotional hymns) Slade grew to love and sing in later life: '[a]s an Indian name had to be chosen the one that best describes Miss Slade's aspirations was chosen'.⁹⁶ Her clingy love and loyalty for Gandhi were similar to the spectacularly personal devotion of the medieval saint Mirabai to the deity of Krishna.

Eager to prove her loyalty to the Mahatma, Mira desperately wanted to please Gandhi by making her life consonant with his wishes, often at great physical and mental distress. When she decided to take a vow of celibacy, Gandhi warned, while also invoking Andrews's preferred path:

... a vow means a religious determination to carry out a decision for self-restraint even at the cost of one's life. I ... welcome your desire to take what is perhaps the supremest vow for a man or a woman. But... let it be taken after the maturest deliberation.

...But there is the other side, i.e., Andrews's. He says: 'I must... hold myself free to do the will of God as I discover it from moment to moment.'⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Slade persisted in becoming a celibate Mira through the adoption of the strictest vows. Living a communal life was a 'tough job', as she put it, having never attended schools or colleges before. There were frequent minor tempests with other inmates of Sabarmati, including Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary. Trying to follow Gandhi's directions to the extreme, she was

In continual dispute with Mahadev Desai, the first secretary and right arm of Gandhi. This very proud man, Brahmin, great intellectual – rebels, when Mira (of her own authority), gives him orders: - "You will do this" – "You will do

⁹⁵ Mira to Lord Linlithgow, 16 July 1942, Birla House, New Delhi

⁹⁶ Gandhi, 'A Silence Day Note', [On or before November 24, 1925], CWMG, Vol 33, p 247

⁹⁷ Gandhi to Mira, 28 Feb 1927, in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 39.

that” – “No! I will not do it!” – “You will do it” – “No!” – he goes away, slamming the doors. A short time after, he returns, repenting of his anger.

But Mira, her, does not repent. She stays upright, tough, and proud. – There is only Gandhi whose judgment can break this haughty creature. He knows her, and he is also very harsh on her – in his own way.⁹⁸

Gandhi’s reprimanding ‘like an old aunt’s’, would leave Mira distraught and apologetic.⁹⁹ While attesting Gandhi’s appeal to multiple audiences and the ashram as a social experiment in diversity, Slade often tended to conceive of difference as deviance from the stated principles of the ashram. Her criticism of the Sabarmati ashram would only increase in later years, as we shall see, often leading to serious debates with Gandhi regarding the nature of the ashram itself. The space of the *ashram* inspired and framed Slade’s love for Gandhi and India. Her experience in different ashrams became substantive sites to legitimise her aspirations to Indian-ness. Yet, her zealous vision of the ashram space as a semi-monastic institution spent in prayer, celibacy and charity was often frustrated – an ideal of collective life that was realised more in her striving than through her experience. Her over-identification with the Gandhian ashram were also the cause for her frustration.

3.6 Ashram and Self-Making

If letters enacted the diachronic performance of distant self- making for British disciples, ashrams become the physical site to translate their statements of love and longing into larger affections – for its people, practices and ideals. Both letters and ashrams expanded, derived and imparted meaning to each other on how disciples saw themselves in relation to the ashram. In a race torn South Africa, Andrews found solace talking of the ashram in his letters to Tagore:

My whole heart is set on coming direct to the Ashrama before the boys leave and receiving your blessing and offering thanks to God there first of all on my return. If you only knew the homesickness to get back to India that everyday here brings with it, you would understand! ... I look back to the peace of the Ashrama as a kind of dream or haven of rest, I feed on that picture day by day and it sustains me.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Rolland, *Inde*, p. 385.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 385.

¹⁰⁰ Andrews to Tagore, Jan 1914.

The daily act of writing about the ashram made that space and the nostalgia for it ever more real. From a distance, the trope of the ashram acted as a metaphor for a life that was not yet given, possessing a dream-like quality that offered sustenance in a hate-filled political scenario. Mira, on the other hand, wrote weekly letters to Rolland's sister with news from the Sabarmati ashram. Everyday details of care informed much of its content, including instances such as Gandhi having lost consciousness in Mira's arms due to fatigue and exhaustion.¹⁰¹ Mira would often massage a bodily tired Gandhi, or measure his blood pressure. Her diary gives etchings of this habitual intimacy: 'This morning he slept quite a lot during massage'¹⁰² or the time spent in spinning khadi¹⁰³. Moments of bodily weakness brought for Mira an opportunity to serve Gandhi. She cherished such moments of caring for Gandhi deeply: 'Bapu took gur and water in the early morning and later his breakfast. He looks a little better than yesterday afternoon, but still very worn and pale. He is so sad over Pyarelal, and P's condition continues to grow worse....Everything points to its being typhoid fever. The cholera is also getting worse in the [Segaon] village.'¹⁰⁴

Given that attachment for mentors remained a primary drive of Indophilia, ashram became the space to actualise and authenticate that attachment. Partaking in the daily habits and material practices of the ashram enacted the gradual shifts in their cultural selfhoods through the everyday. It also brought to the fore the difficulties, possibilities and politics of this engagement. As mentors, Gandhi and Tagore pushed for these personal affections to be translated into more impersonal commitments in and around their communities. When Gokhale suspected that it was Andrews's 'strong personal love and warmth of heart' that was driving him to serve Tagore: 'I told him that if Gurudev were to die – in that case I should regard the call to go there as doubly sacred and doubly an act of duty, then he became happy about it'.¹⁰⁵

Ashram remained central as a spatial site for such practices - exemplified in Andrews (and to a less extent Pearson's) zealous involvements in Tagore's English

¹⁰¹ Mira to Mme Rolland, 10 Sep 1928 in *Inde*, pp. 230-231.

¹⁰² 20 April 1938, Diary No 3, Mira Behn Papers, VI inst, Acc No- 1552, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi.

¹⁰³ Diary No 4: Daily Notes- Aug 25, 1938 to Sept 19, 1938, p. 6.

¹⁰⁴ 13 Aug 1938, Diary No 3, Mira Behn Papers....

¹⁰⁵ Andrews to Gandhi, 5 April 1914, Folder 21, Letters from CFA to Gandhi (1914-1933), CFA Papers; File 1-26, 28 (ii), RBVB-018, CD

literary translations or Mira's forceful learning of Hindi and propagation of khadi. These were practices of self-making that depended heavily on the acts performed, in an attempt to participate in their mentors' live and work more substantively.

Self-making practices of disciples frequently sought to over-compensate and instrumentalise their racial privilege. It was not enough – could never be enough – to be a fervent disciple. Their Indian-ness had to be continually proven and performed through the spectacle of the nation – by taking up positions, politics and projects that directly or indirectly – supported the projects of their mentors. Their relationship with the ashram was enmeshed within that of a broad anti-imperialism that both Sabarmati and Shantiniketan shared. Mira willingly courted political imprisonment for Gandhian movements. Indeed, her proudest moment in 1932 was arguably on the occasion of her first arrest for aiding the Civil Disobedience Movement: It seems that the honour will be mine at last! A notice has been served on me and I expect arrest tomorrow morning.¹⁰⁶ She was sentenced to three months prison along with many 'leading ladies' of Bombay in C-class cells. Ashram life helped Mira in embracing the prison:

The Ashram discipline stood me in good stead now. I made out a regular daily program of work and exercise, which I stuck to strictly. So much time for reading, so much for Hindi, so much for spinning, so much for cooking, eating and clothes-washing, and so much for walking up and down the yard for exercise.¹⁰⁷

Political imprisonment was a much cherished accomplishment in Gandhian movements and women followers eagerly filled prisons alongside their male counterparts. The shared prison life produced a different kind of intimate understanding between Gandhi and Mira, yoking her deeper within the anti-colonial nationalist discourse.

While Andrews never went to jail, given his excellent contacts in high official circles and lobbying skills, Pearson was once deported, arrested and warned for his book 'For India' severely criticising British rule. Written while he was in Japan, the

¹⁰⁶ Mira to Rolland, 17 February 1932, Romain Rolland and Gandhi..., p 258.

¹⁰⁷ Behn, *Spirit's Pilgrimage*, pp 156-158

new Communist Government in Russia translated the pamphlet and distributed it in the Far East.¹⁰⁸ Pearson was warned severely by British authorities as liable to penalties under British Law before being released. He saw this as 'nishkam karma', an idea of detached service that having rendered, needed to move on. Andrews continued to lobby and represent Indian nationalist opinion at home and abroad all across India and the Indian Ocean. Notwithstanding his immense investments for Indian immigrant settlers, allegations of him being a British spy follow him. In Nairobi, Sitaram Achariar, editor of the *Democrat* newspaper, attacked Andrews as having betrayed Indians there and charged him for being an English spy.¹⁰⁹ At home, Indian labourers, whose interests Andrews represented during the railway strike in 1922, were told that he was not to be trusted as he was 'both an Englishman and a spy'.¹¹⁰ Ashrams legitimised and guided their Indophilia but there inhered an ambiguity that was impossible to surmount completely.

3.7 Within the Ashram

The ashram and the relationships it fostered remained a moving factor for disciples seeking to substantiate their Indophilia. Love for the ashram showed in different ways. Even as Andrews moved heaven and earth to prove his commitment, Pearson was content to show his love for Tagore and the ashram through an intensive involvement in its activities. He learnt Bengali, taught ashram students and set up night schools in adjacent tribal villages as part of Tagore's for Sriniketan enterprise. He took the ashram boys on local trips for leisure:

We want to go to the river Ajoy for a picnic this afternoon starting at 3 o'clock. Can you let us have your motor lurry?

If this is not possible could we come to Surul and cook under the trees there? As there are about 40 boys we shall have to use the school bus too which needs attending to by Alu Roy.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸Pearson wrote a pamphlet *For India* while in Yokohama, Japan, severely criticising British rule, exploited by the Japanese propaganda machine.

¹⁰⁹ *Democrat*, 11 Aug 1923, cited in Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, p. 203.

¹¹⁰ Leonard Elmhirst, *Poet and Plowman* (Calcutta: Visva-Bharati, 1975), p. 147.

¹¹¹ Pearson to Elmhirst, [undated, seems like the memo like letter was sent by hand when they lived in the close vicinity of the ashram or between Sriniketan and Shantiniketan, 1922?]

Pearson was ‘calm, composed and loved to work in his corner of the ashram’ while Andrews needed to be mobile and make things happen, being of course more politically active and connected than the former. As Elmhirst, another English disciple and associate of Tagore noted: ‘Andrews arrived back at 8.00 this morning and was cheered lustily for some minutes by the whole school and college.’¹¹² Tagore jokingly referred to him as ‘Sir Charles’, given his constant propensity to relieve the ‘wrongs’ done to Indians everywhere.¹¹³

Pramathanath Bishi, a student of the ashram notes this characteristic difference, while framing their participation on a high note of exemplary ‘self-sacrifice’:

Both of them embraced with easy regard the unused to life of the ashram; they had difficulties, but no ever saw them unhappy because of it.... There was no outwardly glory in teaching here, no worldly praise for the small responsibilities, yet they performed everything with respect, pride and undiluted pleasure and became part of the ashram –perhaps this is complete self-sacrifice. They have received many offers with attractive pay; yet they have without a second thought, refused them.¹¹⁴

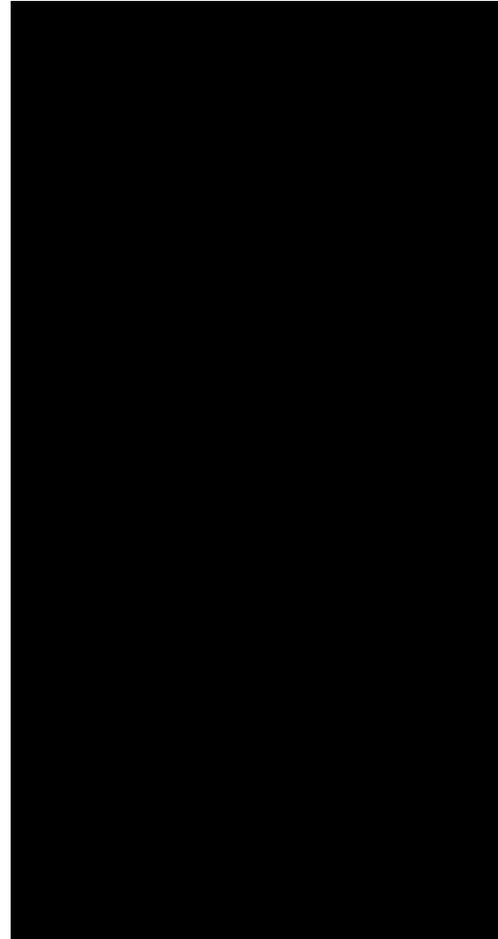


Figure 4: Andrews’s name in the Governing Board of Visvabharati
Source: Roll_00025_File_No_237_B, 1935, PA_Microfilm, MR Jayakar Papers, NAI

In Bishi’s words: ‘we were devoted to Mr Andrews, and Mr Pearson we loved’.¹¹⁵ Pearson immersed himself completely in the life of the ashram and its boys. His continuous living in the ashram made him fluent in Bengali and brought him closer to the cultural world of the ashram. Pearson acted in a minor role in Tagore’s play *Achalayatan* (The Petrified Altar), staged in Shantiniketan ‘on the occasion of a

¹¹² Elmhirst, *Poet and Plowman*, p. 67.

¹¹³ Elmhirst, LKE Notes and Articles, Dartington Hall Records, LKE/TAG/3/B, pp 12-13.

¹¹⁴ Pramathanath Bishi, ‘Andrews O Pearson’ in *Rabindranath o Shantiniketan*, 1944, Calcutta, pp. 88-89. Translation from Bengali by author.

¹¹⁵ Bishi, *Rabindranath o Shantiniketan*, p. 90.

reception given to C.F. Andrews' (1914).¹¹⁶ While Pearson played cricket and football with the ashram students, and managed ashram affairs minutely, Andrews raised money for Tagore's ashram from distant friends as Vice Chancellor of Visva-bharati [as Shantiniketan was rechristened in 1921 to make it a more cosmopolitan project]. Tagore appreciatingly wrote of his devoted efforts: 'Andrews has started this morning for Madras on a Visva Bharati errand', presumably a fund raising trip that yielded 'meagre results'.¹¹⁷ His name was continuously proposed as a member of the *Sansad* or Governing Body of the ashram.¹¹⁸

Urmila Devi, mother of an ashram student recounts how her son wrote about his fondness for Pearson: 'he loves me very much'. When her son was almost unconscious with typhoid, the few words he could barely mutter was all about him. Pearson urged her to wire everyday about his health, sending 12 prepaid telegram forms so that she wouldn't incur any expense.¹¹⁹ Their personal possessions and services of these disciples were slowly but surely claimed by an ever-encroaching ashram as its own. Neither Pearson nor Andrews resisted such a claim. As Dorothy, his sister, attested: 'He told me quite recently that all his books had had the School Library label put on them once while he was away so of course they had better be left where they are.'¹²⁰ The personal fused with the collective, though not for the sake of any homogenised uniformity. Tagore valued individuality greatly.

Edward Thompson, Wesleyan Missionary at Bankura, near Shantiniketan, poet and translator, confirms that both these sahibs were 'immensely popular' and to be considered a friend of theirs was to earn immediate affection.¹²¹ Both of them wore 'dhoti and punjabi while staying in the ashram'.¹²² Often, Andrews would pull the rickshaw carrying Tagore's infirm elder brother Dwijendranath to the ashram.¹²³ The influence of the ashram's food and dress habits on Andrews is testified by Nathaniel Sircar, Bengali catechist of the Burdwan church, who was surprised at

¹¹⁶ Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges...*, p 101

¹¹⁷ Tagore to Pearson, 15 May 1922, Santiniketan, Folder 287(i), Letters from Tagore to Pearson

¹¹⁸ Voting Paper for Election of 7 ordinary members of the Samsad/Governing Body, Roll_00025_File_No_237_A, 1926, PA_Microfilm, National Archives of India, Digitized Private Papers, M. R. Jayakar.

¹¹⁹ Urmila Devi, 'Winstanley Pearson', *Pearson Smriti*, Calcutta, 1923, p 14, Folder 287 (viii), Rabindra Bhavan.

¹²⁰ Dorothy Pearson to Leonard Elmhirst, 10 Oct 1923 [after Pearson's death].

¹²¹ Thompson, *Alien Homage*, p. 113.

¹²² Bishi, *Rabindranath o Shantiniketan*, p. 90.

¹²³ Bishi, *Rabindranath o Shantiniketan*, pp. 89-91.

Andrews's dress on his visit there, like 'a Bengali gentleman, with dhoti, shirt, chuddar, and slippers'.¹²⁴ Andrews's visits, who was almost always itinerant for various nationalist causes, were eagerly anticipated moments:

Gurudev, it is wonderful to be home. I'm quite exhausted! I never want to leave the Ashram again. In fact I just now saw Jagadananda Babu on my way here. I told him I plan to start up my English classes again from next week. I must go now and get rest.

"Sir Charles! the Poet jokingly answered."¹²⁵

The ashram journal *Visvabharati- News* followed his travels and visits closely: 'Mr C.F. Andrews has come back to India for a few days' hurried consultation and it is expected he will make time to visit us during the coming Utsav'.¹²⁶ In 1935, nearly a decade later, Andrews's visits were as eagerly heralded:

C.F. Andrews spending 4 days during the Pous Utsav in Shantiniketan. On 24th morning he gave a short sermon on the life of Jesus Christ and presided over the reunion meeting of ex-students. Expects to be back during summer for a few months. Andrews present at the 34th Foundation anniversary of Shantinketan.¹²⁷

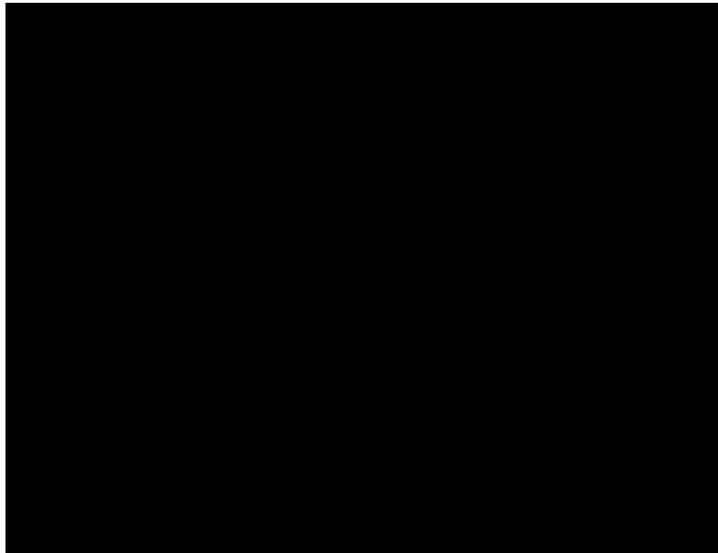


Figure 5 Andrews's poem on 'My Gurudeva', published in the ashram journal on Tagore's birthday anniversary. Source: *Visvabharati News*, Vol IV, May and June 1936, Nos. 11 & 12, p 88, MR Jayakar Papers, NAI

Christianity still continued to play a part in his personal motivations but this was not proselytising. Andrews and Pearson continued to be involved in ashram affairs till their deaths. Pearson's book '*Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranath Tagore*' was received and circulated widely. It portrayed Shantiniketan in the image

¹²⁴ Butler to Waller, 9 July 1914, cited in Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, p. 95.

¹²⁵ Leonard K Elmhirst, Notes and Articles, Dartington Hall Records, LKE/TAG/3/B, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁶ The Pous Utsav or Winter Festival, celebrated in Shantiniketan to mark the coming together of the ashram community and villagers from the adjacent tribal areas. *Visvabharati News*, Vol III, Dec 1934, Roll_00025_File_No_237_B, 1935, PA_Microfilm, Digitized Private Papers M. R. Jayakar

¹²⁷ *Visvabharati News*, (Feb ?) 1935, p 50, Roll_00025_File_No_237_B, 1935, PA_Microfilm

of an idyllic vision of a Vedic ashram – brahmachari/celibate students coming to learn from wise gurus/rishis who resided in forest schools.¹²⁸ Caste never figured in these portrayals of the ashram, and the normalised upper caste presumptions of Hindu high culture were dutifully upheld.

Andrews gave devotional tributes to Tagore's profound influence in breaking down the 'narrow barriers of religious tradition' that had confined him before. Being in the ashram with 'My Gurudeva' had released him from this confinement. On Tagore's birth anniversary in 1936, he invoked and cherished his love for his guru: 'Twenty five years ago, my whole heart was given to the poet Rabindranath Tagore, and it has remained ever since.'¹²⁹

Mira's devotion to Gandhi, while premised on a similar idiom of bhakti, was far more intensely personal: '[f]rom early morning to the last thing at night I lived for the moments when I could set eyes on Bapu. To be in his presence was to be lifted out of oneself.'¹³⁰ This living for Bapu led her to rush into an austere lifestyle, thinking it would make Gandhi happy: 'I was myself sufficiently highly strung during at that period and spontaneously joined the ascetic group with not a little fanatical zeal'.¹³¹ This asceticism extended to drastic dietary practices, premised of course on Gandhian dietetics that believed in '*worldly food, worldly dreams*':

Both my mind and body have been troubled especially when spices, ghee etc do get into food. My experience in the last 3 years has invariably been *worldly food, worldly dreams*.

And so I am taking drastic steps for the moment... I will eat only roti made by my own hands & vegetables that I have prepared myself, together with milk, fruit etc according to circumstances.¹³²

Building 'ashrams in the air', she looked for Gandhi's approval. Following Gandhi's examples in exercising minimalism and *brahmacharya*

The next urges that took possession of me were to have my hair cut off and to take a vow of celibacy. This was a very much more serious matter and Bapu

¹²⁸ William W Pearson, Shantiniketan: The Bolpur School of Rabindranath Tagore (page?)

¹²⁹ C.F. Andrews, 'My Gurudeva', Visva-bharati News, Vol IV, May and June 1936, Nos. 11 & 12, p 88, Roll_00025_File_No_237_B, 1935, PA_Microfilm

¹³⁰ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, pp. 69-70.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 71.

¹³² Mira to Gandhi, 1 Nov 1928 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 140.

held me back for some time, even though these two things were greatly to his own liking.¹³³

In the end, Gandhi relented. Mira took to wearing khadi sarees and travelling in third class railway compartments like her master. In the ashram, she along with a group of ascetic minded followers pushed for austerities and minimalism within Gandhi's ashram.¹³⁴ She took up the practice of fasting with zeal, fasting for seven days 'as a spiritual experience'.¹³⁵ Bordering on the austere, these sartorial lifestyle choices often did not please Gandhi, who thought them pre-mature, as he felt she did not grasp the moral or political significance of the act itself. Gandhi confided in Kasturba in 1933, when even eight years of discipleship had not dimmed her devotion: 'Mirabehn has only one thought day and night. She doesn't attend any meeting, but spends all her time in keeping things ready for me.'¹³⁶ Mira's cherished desire to serve Gandhi personally was also her most vivid moments of self-sublimation. The mahatma's most selfless worker was also the most attached. Despite his repeated attempts to thwart her presence, she was however

on the brain. I look about me, and miss you. I open the charkha and miss you....But what is the use? ...all the time you were squandering your love on me personally, I felt guilty of misappropriation.¹³⁷

Reining in her 'personal love' would remain an unfinished project. Yet, Gandhi's own methods of training were no less severe. Wary of Mira's longing for an intensely personal relationship, he sent her away for long periods of time to ashrams elsewhere – the Kanya Gurukul in Delhi, the Gurukul Kangri at Hardwar and the Bhagavad Bhakti ashram at Rewari, Rajasthan – to cultivate distance or learn Hindustani. Gandhi referred to these acts of considerable severity as 'operation': 'I have been very severe with you but I could not do otherwise. I had to perform an operation and I steadied myself for it.'¹³⁸ Feeling disgraced for her lapses, Gandhi

¹³³ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 80.

¹³⁴ Mira to Gandhi, 21 October 1928, p 126

¹³⁵ Gandhi to Esther Menon, 8 August 1926, *CWMG, Vol 36*, p 182

¹³⁶ Gandhi to Kasturba, 7 December 1933, *CWMG, Vol LVI*,

¹³⁷ Gandhi to Mira, 24 June 1931 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 290.

¹³⁸ Gandhi to Mira, 28 Sep 1927 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 96.

hurried to assure her that she wasn't.¹³⁹ But distance only heightened her longing. For Gandhi, she would not hesitate to dare the police: 'when the police came to arrest Gandhi at Bombay, Mira's eyes blazed, and she had insulting words for them.'¹⁴⁰

Gandhi corresponded in detail regarding the moral and material aspects of these ashrams' ambience and activities, enquired after her dietary habits and even bowel movements, spinning and praying habits etc.¹⁴¹ Mira continued to seek Gandhi's counsel on the ethics of even the smallest habits: should she use soap as it contained animal fat?¹⁴² When a group of women accosted her at a meeting in Delhi insisting that she sing a *Mira bhajan* - "a bhajan - a bhajan, we must have a bhajan from you", she obliged. 'It went off quite successfully and they all beamed with such charming simple delight & started cries of "Mirabai ki jai". The name had evidently appealed to them.' Thrilled at the recognition and celebration of this dual register of love and longing - *krishnabhakti* and *deshbhakti* - she learnt more Mira bai bhajans anticipating further demands. Halide Edib, a distinguished travel writer from Turkey, wrote in 1935, of how she thought of Mira, as did those close to her as 'a Hindu of Hindus'.¹⁴³ She was impressed at Mira's Sanskrit chanting during the ashram's Morning Prayer, the others repeating after her.¹⁴⁴

Holding forth Mira's strivings and struggles as emulative for his own ashram, Gandhi forwarded much of her correspondence for general reading by specifically the women members of the ashram:

Mirabehn's life should set all of you thinking... .. She does not waste a single moment. I expect such devotion, sacrifice and purity from you.¹⁴⁵

Mira's letter became spectacles to emphasise personal sacrifice and purity. He regularly enclosed her 'perfect letters' as mandatory reading for the ashram girls.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Gandhi to Mira, 2 Oct 1927 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁰ Rolland, *Inde*, p. 385.

¹⁴¹ Gandhi to Mira, 9 December 1926 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 28.

¹⁴² Gandhi assured that she can, as long as she did not eat it, clarifying that 'applying is not eating, Gandhi to Mira, 15 October 1926, *CWMG*- 36, p 408

¹⁴³ Edib, *Inside India*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

¹⁴⁵ Mahatma Gandhi, Letter to Ashram Women, 13 December 1926, *CWMG-Vol . XXXII*, P 438

¹⁴⁶ Gandhi to Maganlal Gandhi, 20 December 1926, p 423

Commending her as ‘the most ideal woman worker among us’¹⁴⁷, he, however, did not circulate the more critical letters Mira wrote of the various ashrams she lived through.¹⁴⁸

Mira’s letters illustrate the convergence of the epistolary and the ashramic in self-making processes. The letter and the ashram became intersecting emotive spaces - self-writing practices used to reinforce the aspirational world of its larger community. Many of the practices and professions in these ashrams were in direct conflict with several of Gandhi’s foundational vows. At the Kanya Gurukul and Gurukul Kangri, both affiliate institutions founded by Swami Shraddhanand, the foremost proponent of militant Hinduism in his time, she was perturbed at the pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment, heightened by Shraddhanand’s assassination by a Muslim man in 1926. The third – Bhagwad Bhakti ashram, where she was sent to learn Hindi by Gandhi in 1927, suffered from a rampant ‘*bhang* problem’ [cannabis laden drink, often consumed by religious devotees to produce a euphoric effect]. This was a very different kind of ashram, one that did not endeavour to produce new selves or subjects for an emergent nation. Unfamiliar with the habit of consuming bhang in the ‘*sadhu world*’, she was horrified.¹⁴⁹ The all-male members of the Bhagwad Bhakti ashram ganged up on Mira and Gungu behn, a young girl staying with her – forcing them to consume the bhang:

Maharajji chimed in with “Drink, drink, just a little”, and one of the brahmachari taking some bhung in a glass came straight for me – I retired a little way into the room. He then put his hand into the glass and tried to put his fingers to my mouth. I tried to avoid him, but it was no good. I caught him by the wrist; took the bung from his hand and emptied it out of the window...

... as we descended the stair case I felt some bhung being sprinkled on our backs from above.¹⁵⁰

Reminiscent of bawdy tavern scenes, Mira was aghast but sought to interpret it as a ‘loving joke’. Gandhi, expressing disappointment at the fall of another ashram in his esteem, insisted that it was not her place to suggest any reform but to learn

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 439.

¹⁴⁸ Gandhi to Mira, 24 Jan 1927

¹⁴⁹ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁰ Mira to Gandhi, 27 May 1927, Ibid, p 59

Hindi.¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, he did acknowledge her criticisms of these spaces as Mira's 'honest attempts' to lead an ashram life. Reflecting on this time later in her life, she writes how in her zeal to gain Gandhi's approval, she rode roughshod over her own freedom

I was progressively crushing my natural independence ...and putting myself wholly under another's will....It was the intense reverential love I felt for Bapu which made me discipline myself in that way.¹⁵²

The centrality of the ashram as a meaningful space for cultural unlearning and relearning for Mira could hardly be understated. The wish for a closer relationship with her mentor and his ashram continued her drive to undertake extreme habits and practices. For Gandhi, it was Mira's adaptability to a variety of different ashram experiences that would fulfil the necessary condition of her becoming Indian:

I want you to be a perfect woman ...to shed all angularities....Ashram is the centre of your home, but wherever you happen to be must be your home...you must not cling to me as in this body.¹⁵³

Ashram was the prescribed mode for her to attain perfection. Gandhi believed that the differences in the mode and materiality of these ashram spaces would be an object lesson for Mira to be continuously challenged and shaped by these non-familiar situations. Insisting that she 'must forget what [she had] been', he laid for her the prospective vision of being proud of the day she would 'be taken for a common village girl'.¹⁵⁴ Gandhi was relentless in his attempt to uncouple her affections for himself rather than his ideals. Being loyal to his ideals, however, need not mean a personal loyalty to himself. If Gandhi fought against her attachment, Mira fought for it. If however, separation became unbearable, she could 'come without waiting for an answer or any prompting from' Gandhi.¹⁵⁵ While accepting their relationship as that of a father and daughter, her adoration and longing for

¹⁵¹ Gandhi to Mira, 3 June 1927, Ibid, p 65

¹⁵² Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 88.

¹⁵³ Gandhi to Mira, 22 March 1927 in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁵⁴ Gandhi to Mira, 13 April 1927, in Suhrud (eds), *Beloved Bapu*, p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ Gandhi to Mira, 25 April 1927, *op. cit.*, p 47

him was most intense, and separation often resulted in severe mental and physical illness.

3.8 Beyond the Ashram

In what ways did ashrams inform and influence the doings of Indophile disciples that went beyond the ashram? Intimacies fostered through the ashram often inspired disciples to lay a zealous claim on their mentor's projects. Sustaining Tagore's literary reputation in the west or propagating the cause of khadi for Gandhi represent two such endeavours that their disciples asserted an increasing claim on. Indian disciples were present in these projects too but the presence of willing western disciples provided valuable international networks, leverage and audiences to impress the ashram's value for a wider world.

Andrews inserted himself extensively in the brokering of Tagore's translation contracts with his publishers and dealings with prominent western literary associates. He saw this as a service to Tagore and his ashram, which was always cash-strapped and needed the royalties from his publications to meet financial ends. Though himself not a literary critic, Andrews's gushing adoration of Tagore's translated works skated over its often uneven quality. William Rothenstein, a friend and British associate of Tagore wrote to Edward J Thompson, a Wesleyan missionary and poet stationed in Bankura, near Shantiniketan how Tagore's 'vanity has become ridiculous', blaming 'Andrews, who has encouraged it'.¹⁵⁶ Thompson, knowledgeable in English and Bengali literature, would go on to write several important and sympathetic volumes on Indian literature and history, a few of which Tagore critiqued devastatingly.¹⁵⁷

Thompson was present in the ashram on the day Tagore received news of his being awarded the Nobel Prize. Caught up in the frenzy of feet-touching by the Indian students and staff, he almost did it. Fortunately, it struck him that he was still 'an Englishman & have a stern contempt for the fools who pretend they are easterners', referring to the likes of Nivedita, Andrews and Pearson of course. This fundamental

¹⁵⁶ Rothenstein to Edward J. Thompson, 18 May 1932

¹⁵⁷ In particular his biography of Tagore: Edward J. Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore: His Life & Work* (London: Association Press, 1921). Tagore thought it was a one of the most 'ridiculous' books ever written on a poet's life.

tension was at the heart of liberal sympathisers such as Thompson (still a formal Christian missionary) and more indigenised figures such as Andrews or Pearson who adopted native customs, food, dress and culture quite openly. This almost but then ‘not quite’ was a crucial difference. Andrews and Pearson openly touched the feet of their guru, an intimate marker accepting Tagore’s superiority while gesturing towards a symbolic equality with Indian disciples.

Thompson had approached Tagore with an offer to translate, and was thwarted several times by him, the latter often citing literary and financial considerations:

Your proposal of translating my stories is a little premature. If you had read at least a dozen of them and felt that they must be translated then I should consider your proposal seriously....

The next best thing for me is to work with some Englishman who has literary abilities. I have every hope that Andrews will be willing to help me in this work when he comes back [to Shantiniketan] from England in April....This arrangement will help Andrews to learn Bengali and help me to learn handling English prose with more freedom than I dare do now.¹⁵⁸

Andrews never really learnt much Bengali but Tagore’s denial of Thompson and the avowal of Andrews stung Thompson deeply, particularly as he was a published poet and considered himself well acquainted with contemporary English literature. Thompson ranted against Andrews:

beneath contempt as regards judgment (& intellect generally). I can’t understand how R.[abindranath] ever got humbugged into his ecstatic exaltation of him...I have always refused to worship indiscriminately.¹⁵⁹

He saw Andrews’s excessive worship of Tagore and his uncritical acceptance of it as responsible for the stifling atmosphere of adulatory excess and pose in the ashram. Andrews became, what the historian E.P. Thompson has called the ‘Western door-keeper’ of the proliferating Tagore cult.¹⁶⁰ Andrews laid claim on Tagore’s literary affairs in a bid to safeguard his legacy and to make the ashram’s financial future secure. He remained completely unaware of the contemptuous asides and reputation he had gained as a ‘foul flatterer’. Rothenstein wryly observed to

¹⁵⁸ Tagore to Thompson, 18 Feb 1914, Edward J Thompson – General Correspondence- Tagore, E.J Thompson Papers, MS. Eng c 5318, Fols 1-40

¹⁵⁹ Thompson to Canton, 14 Aug 1917, cited from Thompson, *Alien Homage*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁰ Thompson, *Alien Homage*, p. 33.

Thompson that it ‘is not to a foul flatterer like Andrews, but to one like yourself from whom we can look for truth about India.’¹⁶¹ A claim to represent Tagore was also a claim to represent India and evidence their Indophilia. Completely unaware of the simmering resentment against him and his role in perpetuating a ‘Tagore Cult’, Andrews asserted to Thompson that Tagore was still very forceful and ‘virile’: ‘Books like ‘Nationalism’ ‘Home and the World’ ‘Personality’ etc. surely do not fall in with the ‘Tagore Cult’ of the ‘mystical Orient’. He has surely kept his virile nature in his English as well as in his Bengali works.’¹⁶²

Pearson, while less proprietary and possessing a decent knowledge of Bengali, was similarly, if less defensively, invested in producing and preserving Tagore’s literary legacies in translation. Tagore had earlier suggested if Thompson could take up translating his novel ‘Gora’ in 1920¹⁶³; yet by 1922, we find Pearson translating it, serially published in the journal *Modern Review*: ‘I have reached Page 220 in “GORA”, and at each hundredth page I feel like having a celebration!’¹⁶⁴ Any labours rendered by Pearson and Andrews in this regard was generally unremunerated, the royalties from these translations used for the sustenance of the ashram.¹⁶⁵ It further raised their profile within the close knit world of the ashram.

Andrews and Pearson’s representation of Tagore as a lofty Gurudev chiding the materialistic West reinforced this image. Thompson put it acidly: ‘His appetite for flattery has grown to absurdity since his first success. He lives amid incense, and India outside Bengal and the Punjab half resents, half laughs at it.’¹⁶⁶ The avowals of British disciples added to the stereotype of Tagore as a mystical saint dispensing

¹⁶¹ Rothenstein to EJT, 1 June 1932, MS. Eng. C 5311, E J Thompson; General Correspondence – Rothenstein-Rust.

¹⁶² Andrews to E.J. Thompson, 26 March 1921, E.J. Thompson Papers, General Correspondence-Abbott- Bayley, MS. Eng. C 5273

¹⁶³ Tagore to E.J. Thompson, 17 Nov 1920: ‘Can you take up ‘Gora’ yourself or find some competent person who can undertake to translate it?’, Thompson Papers, MS. Eng. C, 5318, fol 112. See Pearson to Tagore, 15 June 1922 where he cautions against abridging his translation of Gora for the sake of foreign readers, Folder 287(ii), Letters from William W. Pearson to Rabindranath Tagore.

¹⁶⁴ See Pearson to Tagore, 15 June 1922 where he cautions against abridging his translation of Gora for the sake of foreign readers, Folder 287(ii), Letters from William W. Pearson to Rabindranath Tagore

¹⁶⁵ When the first two volumes of Tagore’s short stories were published in English translation *Hungry Stones and Other Stories* (1916), *Mashi and Other Stories* (1918), only Andrews was alone acknowledged as the translator of seven stories, Thompson was mentioned as having assisted in the work. EJT took it badly and the next time Tagore sought Thompson’s translations, he promptly refused. See Uma Dasgupta (eds.), *A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore, 1913-1940* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 19.

¹⁶⁶ 14 May 1932, Thompson to Rothenstein, MS. Eng. C 5311, E J Thompson; General Correspondence – Rothenstein-Rust.

transcendent wisdom, particularly against nationalism. Conversely, this also attributed to Andrews and Pearson a halo of sainthood that made them impervious to external criticism. Proprietary claims to represent Tagore were justified for the sake of preserving his literary integrity, the welfare of his ashram and its upkeep. Andrews would habitually insert himself in editorial decisions, advising on whom to grant requests and permissions, often involving established literary figures in Britain (the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges for instance).¹⁶⁷ Staking on his intimacy with Tagore, he asserted to Thompson: 'I suffer in no small degree through my ignorance of Bengali but I have had the unique advantage of an intimate friendship with the Poet himself.'¹⁶⁸ Pearson, now proficient in Bengali, made several translations of Tagore's and other Bengali works and insisted on Tagore not to abridge his translations so as to please Western readers: 'Think of what a terrible misfortune it would have been if the novels of Tolstoy, of Turgenev, of Dostoevsky had been abridged in the way that you abridged for example your "Glimpses of Bengal".'¹⁶⁹ In this, he presciently echoed Thompson's cautions against dumbing down Tagore for the west, which his translations often did: 'I fear that your "careful abridgement" is nearly always more correctly described as "ruthless pruning"!' He advised Tagore not to pay too much importance to some English readers' impatience with detail, but rather heed those who would want to learn about a foreign country in its fullest and finest detail.¹⁷⁰

Both of Tagore's disciples were wound up in the management of Tagore's literary legacy in the West. If Tagore was, as Thompson suggests, too ensnared by the adulation of his disciples, both British and Indian, Gandhi remained sceptical of Mira's many attempts to please him. This did not deter Mira from enthusiastically taking up Gandhian causes such as khadi. Widely held as the 'national fabric', the moral and material significance of khadi and charkha in the Gandhian politics of satyagraha was supreme. Wearing khadi for those who were used to donning western clothes was, in this sense, a supposedly transformative experience seeking

¹⁶⁷ This seems to have created a rumour that Andrews ghost-wrote some of Tagore's translations. Tagore was on the defensive when such allegations reached his ears: 'There are people who suspect that I owe in a large measure to Andrews' help for my literary success, which is so false that I can afford to laugh at it.', Tagore to Rothenstein, 4 April 1915.

¹⁶⁸ Andrews to Thompson, 26 March 1921.

¹⁶⁹ Pearson to Tagore, 15 June 1922.

¹⁷⁰ Pearson to Tagore, 15 June 1922.

to de-colonize one's individual identity by making it visibly 'Indian'.¹⁷¹ For Mira to align with such practices was a clear intimation of her Indian-ness. Mira continued to propagate the All India Spinning Association's work in Indian villages for more than a decade. 'Spinning wheel and the act of spinning', argued Gandhi, 'would instill truth, purity, peace and a spirit of service in one's life'.¹⁷² The act of wearing and weaving khadi, given Gandhi's prominent political presence and patronisation for it, was therefore a mainstream vindication of being authenticated as sufficiently Indian in one's politics and preferences. In other words, at a time when Gandhi's politics and practices were deemed as near-hegemonic in its popular currency, to be visibly Gandhian could be an undisputed (and also perhaps the easiest) way of being Indian.

Hitherto, she had been wearing white khadi skirts and shirts stitched in London, as 'Bapu seemed rather against [her] taking to Indian clothes'.¹⁷³ In her eagerness to win Gandhi's affection and approval, she had learnt how to wear a saree made of khadi from Anasuya Sarabhai, a non-ashramite Gandhian belonging to a powerful industrial family in Ahmedabad. Gandhi was displeased, probably because he thought them pre-mature, but did not prevent her from wearing so. Once her adoption of khadi was confirmed, she now moved towards an active engagement with the cause of khadi. Within a year, she began touring villages in United Provinces, Behar and Nepal promoting khadi, adopting improvisations and organizing demonstration workshops to village women in particular. Gushingly, she wrote to Gandhi that her 'little room [was] adorned with charkhas, ginning machines and carding bows and [she felt] so happy'.¹⁷⁴

Pleased that she was devoting her time to his causes rather than to himself, he began discussing intricate technical details involving the adaptability of various slivers, wheels, yarns, spindles and their suitability to local needs. She emphasized her insights gleaned from her memorable travels across Bihar, which she cherished. Pointing to the utter 'uselessness to the peasants of the wheels, spindles and ginning charkhas being turned out at the Udyog Mandir workshop', the crafts workshop within the Sabarmati ashram, as they were neither simple nor cheap to

¹⁷¹ Rahul Ramagundam, *Gandhi's Khadi: A history of Contention and Conciliation*, Delhi, 2008, p 7.

¹⁷² M.K. Gandhi, 'Speech to Students', Dimapur, 21 May 1925, *CWMG XXVII*, 1925, p 141.

¹⁷³ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 80.

¹⁷⁴ Mira to Gandhi, 13 November 1928, p. 151.

use, she urged the need to improvise tools that would address these twin problems.¹⁷⁵ Khadi - its practice and profession – became a regular concern for Mira in her correspondence with Gandhi. It seemed to suggest that Mira was finally able to transfer or at least expand his affections from the person of Gandhi to his ideas and institutions. Yet, after long periods of physical separation, Mira's reunions with Gandhi were emotionally charged affairs. She would burst into tears and Gandhi would chide him for the nature and expression of her attachment, once again advising the necessity of physical separation.¹⁷⁶ Distance brought an awareness of the impossibility of intimacy, at least in the way Mira sought it.

3.9 Epilogue: Disenchantments

The ashram and its habitus occupied a central role in mediating the mentor-disciple encounter. The psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakkar has noted in Mira and Gandhi's relationship a strong unresolved psycho-sexual desire, which made Gandhi resist her so fervently.¹⁷⁷ In Andrews too (Pearson less so) we find this urge for personal love but it has not been noted with the same intensity, probably because it was between men. The ashram became a site of sublimation for all such personal desires, a continuous deferral of the potent 'eros' towards more 'impersonal' work. The effacement of physical urges was seen as part of this striving. It is perhaps unsurprising that both Andrews and Pearson (who died in a train accident aged forty) remained unmarried, barring feeble attempts on occasion that seem like perfunctory nods to masculinity.

The ashram was however, not always an enchanted space. When these enchantments broke, it affected their relationships as well. When Pearson wanted freedom from playing the obedient disciple, Tagore was visibly hurt, pointing out that he had not asked him to.

You have got into some conventional habits, such as calling me 'Gurudev' and making 'pranam' to me. Drop them. For I know there are occasions when they hurt you and for that very reason are truly discourteous to me. You know I

¹⁷⁵ Mira to Gandhi, 4 November, 1928, p. 143.

¹⁷⁶ Behn, *The Spirit's Pilgrimage*, p. 92.

¹⁷⁷ Sudhir Kakkar, *Mira and the Mahatma* (Delhi: Penguin, 2005).

never care to assume the role of a prophet or a teacher; I do not claim homage from my fellow beings...¹⁷⁸

The wish to not claim 'homage' was however, routinely violated by his followers in practice. Pearson resented having to go on long voyages with Tagore, acting as his secretary (having an Englishman as a secretary was both strategic and symbolic) and Tagore only gauged the extent of this resentment when he ran away (to Boston) in the middle of a tour. Rolland, once again, gives us a first-hand account of Pearson's bitterness:

What he tells us of Santiniketan is quite discouraging. Tagore's International University (more fictional than real) lacks true organisation ... Chance in part governs the offering of lectures and courses during the year ... pupils come sometimes one or two hours after that indicated. Bengalis are intelligent, very gifted, exuberant in words and gestures like southerners,¹⁷⁹ but are without perseverance, and following that without spirit. They tire as quickly as they enflame themselves. ...But they would not be willing to accept anything from a more energetic race. And Tagore is a poet, hardly a practical man. He seems to tire as quickly as his compatriots. He was enthralled for his school for several years; now he barely takes interest.¹⁸⁰

Pearson relieved his growing disquiet with Shantiniketan to Rolland in France, far removed from that world, yet vitally connected to many of the major leaders in India. The promise of freedom that had once seduced Pearson had been largely eroded. Tagore cautioned him against the 'growing feeling of distrust' 'towards your colleagues in the ashram is leading you astray from the path of charity and love. With very great pain I have been noticing for some time past Andrews also drifting into this hopeless mood of contemptuous mistrust.'¹⁸¹ Tagore believed Pearson could never reconcile with the ashram becoming the international university of Visva-Bharati in 1921: 'Until his last days, Pearson never reconciled himself completely with it. Intellectually, he had nothing to say back to it, but his heart was pained.'¹⁸² Rolland felt 'melancholy in Pearson's destiny': 'uprooted, who has lost his homeland and not found it again. ...And yet he can no longer live

¹⁷⁸ Tagore to Pearson, 13 Dec 1920, Folder 287 (i), Tagore to Pearson.

¹⁷⁹ My British friends assure me that Rolland definitely had the French or Italians in mind!

¹⁸⁰ September 1923, Rolland, *Inde*, p. 47.

¹⁸¹ Tagore to Pearson, 16 May 1915, Folder 287(i), Letters from Tagore to Pearson, Rabindra Bhavan Archives

¹⁸² Tagore to Romain Rolland, 21 Feb 1924, March 1924, *Inde...*, p 60

anywhere else other than India. He has gotten out of the habits of European life, and can no longer tolerate it.’¹⁸³ The ashram that had once seemed home had lost its appeal. He died a tragic death falling from a train in Italy, near Pistoia, in 1923, far from his beloved guru and ashram. Rolland noted a similar sense of dislocation in Mira:

Mira is happy to be back in India. Her return to England (where her mother died, alone, far from her, a few months ago), instead of awakening affection, made her feel more strongly how much the native land was a foreign land for her.¹⁸⁴

A sign of her deep Indophilia, England and Europe now felt alien within a decade. She yearned to return to India: her ‘native land was a foreign land for her’.¹⁸⁵ On meeting Lord Halifax, former Indian Viceroy in 1934, she almost ventriloquised the ‘mythopoeic’ divine status that Gandhi enjoyed with the peasantry:

Gandhiraj will mean something more in his [peasant’s] stomach, less taxation and a feeling of being cared for. ... I further explained how in the villages one rarely hears “Mahatma Gandhi ki ji [jai]” but Gandhi Maharaj ki ji [Jai]...¹⁸⁶

Indophilia was firmly rooted within an Indian geography and Gadhian imaginary.

Andrews remained devout in his loyalty to the ashram. His zealous overtures to run his ashram often exasperated Tagore, and Andrews had to clarify that he had no assumptions to superiority in his absence or presence. His connections to Gandhian movements ran the risk of politicising Shantiniketan students, which Tagore remained critical and wary of. Andrews betrayed this concern when the ashram was under his tutelage in Tagore’s absence. He confided in Pearson that ‘[i]t has been extraordinarily difficult for me at times because...in Gurudev’s absence, it was absolutely vital not to involve the ashram itself directly in ‘politics’...’.¹⁸⁷ Andrews felt the political sand shift continually and his presence instigated Shantiniketan ashram members to actively participate in nationalist

¹⁸³ Rolland, *Inde*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁴ Rolland, *Inde*, p. 342

¹⁸⁵ Rolland, *Inde*, p. 342.

¹⁸⁶ Notes on interview with Lord Halifax, 1st Nov 1934, Writings by Her, S. No 1, Mira Behn Papers, NMML.

¹⁸⁷ Andrews to Pearson, 22 Feb 1921. March 1924

politics, in sharp contravention to Tagore's wishes. Andrews was held responsible by the Poet for infusing his students with mainstream nationalist politics. On one occasion when some staff and students wanted to go on strike responding to the call to Gandhian non-cooperation:

Tagore... immediately called to Charlie Andrews in his room across the passage. 'Charlie', he said, 'this is all your doing. You are responsible. Whilst I was away you turned my school over to politics. You must now help us get out of this trouble. Take Alu [the driver] and the lorry right away. Meet those three boys on the road. Tell them we can on no account have any of them back at Santiniketan. Take Shotyen to the station and telegraph his people.'¹⁸⁸

While Tagore himself never participated in non-cooperation or boycott it would be a mistake to consider that all ashram members were staunchly against nationalism. Non-cooperation featured in the ashram life not infrequently, Andrews often rousing passions. Andrews's position on the Mappila riots that broke out in Malabar irked Tagore (in which Hindu landlords were attacked by their Muslim peasantry in 1921). Speaking at Shantiniketan on the same

Andrews made continuous appeals to the sentiment and emotions of his student audience. Time and again Tagore tried to pull him up, and kept asking him 'How far do you think you will get towards further progress by appealing to our lowest instincts for revenge?'¹⁸⁹

Tagore was unmoved by Andrews's repeated call for revenge [against Muslim perpetrators, addressed to a Hindu audience]. Tagore was by then a vocal critic of nationalism, precisely for its capacity to alienate its own people. There was much difference of opinion with Gandhi on this point, as Tagore refused to let himself or his ashram follow in the trend of Gandhian nationalism.¹⁹⁰ Andrews's attempt to act as interlocutor between Tagore and Gandhi often left him 'perpetually torn... and swept by deep emotions'.¹⁹¹ Constantly moving between Gandhi and Tagore's worlds as the 'hyphen' between them, he felt drawn to both. Desirous of being close to both, his own convictions remained restless. In Gandhi's house, he felt 'a

¹⁸⁸ Leonard K Elmhirst, Notes and Articles, Dartington Hall Records, LKE/TAG/3/B, p 11

¹⁸⁹ Elmhirst, *Poet and Plowman*, p 118

¹⁹⁰ See Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (eds), *The Mahatma and the Poet: Letters and Debates Between Gandhi and Tagore, 1915-1941* (Delhi: National Book Trust, 1997).

¹⁹¹ LKE Notes and Articles, Dartington Hall Records, LKE/TAG/3/B, p 12

Christ-like passion' an absence of selfishness in his everyday tireless service, compared to the lofty peace and aloof solitude of Tagore.¹⁹²

Mira's disenchantments with Gandhian ashrams were more serious. Even as Gandhi made public and private declarations of Mira's exemplary discipleship: 'No member of the Ashram has striven more strenuously than Mira behn to observe the rules of the Ashram and realise its ideals'; she thought Sabarmati had moved away from a life of simplicity and spirituality that it was premised on. She came across several small ashram like institutions (often for promoting khadi) in Bihar and Nepal whose 'simplicity and village life' appealed to her greatly, an ideal she believed the Sabarmati ashram had moved away from. She vented to Gandhi about the superficiality of the 'Sabarmati boys': 'with their watches, their torch lights, their bicycles and their glaring white soap washed clothes'¹⁹³:

nowadays the Ashram is being *run by force*. This force has produced a fine outward appearance ...but underneath...much bitterness, backbiting and hypocrisy...!¹⁹⁴

She hauled up Gandhi and Sabarmati children for making serious compromises with modern technology. Confessing to Gandhi that the return to Sabarmati filled her with dread, she pointed out that the lack of village life and the presence of urban distractions hollowed the spiritual potential of his ashram and its members.¹⁹⁵ She felt closer to 'her Babu's self' in the villages she visited rather than in the simulated atmosphere of the Sabarmati ashram. This dissatisfaction grew more acute with Gandhi's decision to involve the ashram members in his Salt Satyagraha in 1930, Mira doubting the ability of the ashramites to participate in it. Gandhi resisted the imposition of a strict ascetic ideal for the ashram, pointing to her that it reflected the vision of a composite society, to be delivered through striving.¹⁹⁶

Disappointed with so many ashrams she had passed through, the ideal of the ashram as an aspirational world, however, did not lose its appeal. She continued to build ashrams wherever she went, Sevagram at Wardha being

¹⁹² Andrews to Rolland, 22 March 1924, Rolland, *Inde*, p. 65.

¹⁹³ Mira to Gandhi, 29 October 1928, p. 136.

¹⁹⁴ Mira to Gandhi, (?)January 1930. 167

¹⁹⁵ Mira to Gandhi, 2 November 1928, p. 142.

¹⁹⁶ Gandhi to Mira, 20 April 1933, p. 364.

the most prominent. She carried buckets of human excreta every day to make it sanitary and habitable, tending to Gandhi, and building up a Gandhian community there. Mahadev Desai, Gandhi's secretary, remarked how she 'looked a perfect picture of [a] modern sadhu' as someone who 'had more effectively burnt her boats and ... worldly ties' than any other disciple of Gandhi.

3.10 Conclusion

The ashram, therefore, emerged as the primary physical node for Indophile disciples to invest, articulate and serve in an idealised Indian space and its larger community. It rooted their attachments to India through an indigenist category and gave them a firm anchor that was free from their previous missionary and imperial presumptions. This traffic worked both ways: if their association with Tagore and Gandhi's ashrams authenticated their intimations of Indian-ness, the presence of dedicated white British members made these ashrams relevant beyond its national frame.

The ashrams themselves and their founders, in co-opting these disciples, found in them useful resources - 'white' interlocutors for brown-led projects. For the western disciple, to enter the enchanted space of the ashram and be immersed in its habits was to partake in a non-western form of alterity that sought to unsettle the logic of (inferior) difference through which colonial modernity was imposed. The ashram, its members and their mentors created a matrix of relationships that sustained this complex equivalence of meanings and practices. It emerged as an emotional community for such meanings to be negotiated, selves to be recast and everyday intimations of Indian-ness to be authenticated.

Andrews, Pearson and Mira saw their efforts for Tagore, Gandhi and their ashrams partly as *prayaschitta* or personal atonement, performed on behalf of the British nation for its injustices. Gandhi verbalised this desire aptly in an editorial in the Gujarati journal *Navajivan*:

Non-violent disobedience can be a holy duty. It is with this thought that Deenabandhu Andrews has often said that he is doing atonement on behalf of the English, that Mirabai has come to live in the Ashram...¹⁹⁷.

¹⁹⁷ M.K. Gandhi, 'We are All One', *Navajivan*, 16 March 1930, CWMG XLIII, 1930, p 82

Or in Pearson's utterance on his deathbed in Italy, far away from his beloved Shantiniketan: 'My one and only love – India'.¹⁹⁸ Thompson, generally a bitter critic of Andrews, acknowledged (again on his deathbed) that Andrews was the 'bravest man on the planet' to go against his own country.¹⁹⁹ Gandhi, in spite of his turbulent relationship with Mira, would attest a decade later that 'Mira behn's faults are negligible, but her merits are worthy of emulation.'²⁰⁰ There is much heart-break, but there is redemption also. Ashrams made possible a politics of redemption whose practices could be harnessed for Indian nationalist projects within and beyond the ashram – in Gandhian movements, in anti-indenture discourses or preserving the literary legacy of Tagore.

¹⁹⁸ Dorothy Pearson, Willie Pearson's last Days, Before his death in Pistoia, Italy, Folder 287 (viii), RBVB

¹⁹⁹ EJT to Tagore, 15 Nov 1935 in Uma Dasgupta (eds), *A Difficult Friendship: Letters of Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore, 1913-1940* (New Delhi, 2003), p. 194.

²⁰⁰ Gandhi to Jamnalal Bajaj, 21 May 1936 in *Mira Behn: Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple, Birth Centenary Volume*, (New Delhi: Himalaya Seva Sangh, 1992), p. 10.

Chapter 4

India, Indophiles and Indenture

Cultural Politics of a Transnational Discourse

1911-1921

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, while based on the proliferating discourse around indenture in the early decades of the twentieth century, is not primarily about indentured labour itself. There already exists a substantial body of scholarship that has looked at the history of this practice and the debates surrounding it, beginning with Hugh Tinker's classification of indenture as a 'New System of Slavery'.¹ Instead, it argues how indenture became a discursive site for a small but influential group of western disciples to substantiate their identification with a certain kind of India and Indians. I look at the role of sympathetic western disciples of Gandhi and Tagore; such as Henry Polak (1882-1959), C.F. Andrews (1871-1940), and William Pearson (1881-1923) in the anti-indenture movement and the politics surrounding its abolition. I will show that the affiliations, habitations and intimacies produced through their discipleships to Gandhi and Tagore, among others, came to determine their investments around indenture. Indophile politics and articulations around the issue of indentured immigration helped realise their own aspirations to Indian-ness. It harnessed the personal affections of these disciples for their Indian mentors by mobilising it for nationalist political ends. Love for their Indian mentors became a driver to represent and fight for Indian rights and interests elsewhere.

Indophile interlocution of the anti-indenture struggle affirmed and authenticated their claim to Indianness. At the same time, these relationships enacted certain notions of class, caste and race as acceptable to the politics of respectability characterised in Indian nationalist discourse. It affirmed, forged and tempered their loyalties and convictions to create a more 'egalitarian' form of imperial co-existence.

¹ A selective representation of this historiography include, but in no way limited to: Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920* (London, 1974); David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism*; Kay Saunders (ed.), *Indentured Labour in the British Empire, 1834-1920* (London, 1984); Marina Carter, *Voices from indenture: experiences of Indian migrants in the British empire*, (London, 1996); more recent works include Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal: The Furies of Nature and the Fortunes of Migrants* (Cambridge, Mass., 2013); Ashutosh Kumar, *Coolies of the empire: indentured Indians in the sugar colonies, 1830-1920*, (Cambridge, 2017).

Andrews, Pearson and Polak saw this as stemming out of their own desire for a place in their mentors' lives and ashramic world. However, to see these engagements as only an epiphenomenon of that desire would be limiting. Even as I acknowledge the larger interest in the way these intimacies became a source of inspiration, aspiration and excess in the politics around indenture, it is important to see how they ventriloquised Indian nationalist politics.

The abolition of slavery in 1834 in the British empire witnessed a massive surge in the demand for cheap labour, most of which was supplied from the Indian subcontinent, China and the west coast of Africa. Between, 1834 and 1860, the consensus around indenture was increasingly consolidated in Britain and its empire, often justified in the name of anti-slavery and free trade.² This normalisation posited indenture as in effect, civilising primitive Indian labour and rescuing them from a life of material impoverishment and caste atrocities. Liberal economic and demographic theories were used to argue that the supposed failures of emancipation could be corrected in the system of indenture.³ Indentured labour became a synonym for 'free labour', pitted as fair against the patent unjustness of slave or 'unfree' labour. The scale of this regulated labour regime was vast, spreading rapidly across different imperial colonies. As several historians have noted, Indian indentured labour was well integrated within the globally expanding and shifting markets all across the Indian Ocean world and beyond.⁴

Supplied through an elaborate and exploitative system of recruiters, middlemen and government agents, labourers from colonial India were eagerly sought by planters across the Indian Ocean littoral, starting with Mauritius, Fiji and South Africa, expanding significantly by the latter decades of the 19th century to include East Africa and other parts of the Indian Ocean fringe. Recruited mostly from labour surplus rural Indian provinces, more than three million Indians emigrated as indentured labourers between 1834-1920 to work not only in British, but also in French, Dutch and Portuguese colonies. They were hired through a system of debt bondage, and shipped from Indian ports in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras to work

² Jonathan Connolly, *Indentured Labour Migration and the Meaning of Emancipation: Free Trade, Race and Labour in the British Public Debate, 1838-1860*, *Past and Present*, Feb 2018, No 238, pp 85-119.

³ *Ibid*, pp 103-109

⁴ Michael Mann, *Migration-Re-migration – Circulation: South Asian Kulis in the Indian Ocean and Beyond, 1840-1940*, eds. Donna R Gabbacia and Dirk Hoerder, *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims* (Boston, 2011), p 109

largely on plantations, primarily sugar, but also coffee and other industries. An elaborate chain of professional recruiters was put in place who acted as hiring agents and liaised between various government institutions in India and European planters. Exploitative and fraudulent practices were rife in recruitment. Shipboard mortality was quite high, even though Emigration Commissions sought to exercise a degree of government control in the selection of emigrants.⁵ There has been difference in opinion on whether coolies were mere victims of an oppressive labour regime,⁶ or sought (and often found) better lives through work overseas. More recent studies have suggested 'Coolitude' as a shared identity that commemorates the experiences of the Indian labour diaspora, based on the lines of Negritude.⁷ Indentured labourers' experiences however, are rather fragmentary and difficult to obtain.⁸ Nevertheless, it is important to remember the racial hierarchies that inhered in experiences of imperial migratory experiences: ethnic British migration to the 'British World' was hardly the same as Indian labour migration to that world.⁹

In South Africa, Natal saw the first wave of emigrating labourers, from where it spread to East Africa and across the Indian and Pacific Ocean through Fiji and Mauritius to Australia and New Zealand. Settler colonies such as South Africa, New Zealand and Australia hired indentured labourers extensively to develop infrastructural projects: coal mines and railways became big industries for such labour. Parallel to labour migration, indenture also brought in its wake a steady emigration of mercantile and artisanal communities from India's western seaboard, who took advantages afforded by imperial expansion and consolidation in opening up internal and external trade between various parts of the British empire and beyond. These gradually expanded to lower level bureaucrats and administrative staff in which Indian presence increased from the early 1900s.¹⁰

⁵ Marina Carter, *Voices ...*, pp 46-47.

⁶ This is the line taken by Tinker and many of his influential followers.

⁷ Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*, (London, 2002).

⁸ Carter's *Voices from Indenture* tries to fill in this lack, but acknowledges the scale of the problem, p 2-3

⁹ For how British moved around and across their 'World', see Gary B Magee and Andrew S. Thompson, *Empire and Globalisation: Networks of People, Goods and Capital in the British World, c 1850-1914* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹⁰ Bill Guest, 'Indians in Natal and Southern Africa in the 1890s', Gandhi and South Africa: Principles and Politics, Eds. Judith Brown and M. Prozesky (Pietermaritzburg, 1996), pp 9-13.

4.2 Indenture and its Wider Context

The introduction of a significant community of Indian emigrants in British African colonies posed a major problematic in the racial ordering of colonial difference. Indians were preferred by planters over Afro-Caribbean workers, the former deemed more pliant and suitable to work as cheap agricultural labour.¹¹ However, Indian emigrants threatened to destabilise the binarised status quo of 'native Africans' and 'settler Europeans'.¹² Neither white European nor native African, existing racial categories struggled to accommodate an intermedial identity such as that of the Indian. The co-existence of an economically affluent, mercantile class of Indian interests¹³ alongside the poor indentured labourer further complicated this identity work. The figure of the unsanitary Indian 'coolie' became a conflated cultural marker for white settlers to signify both ends of a diverse emigrant community.¹⁴ The indentured labourer became an exceptional site to fight many battles. If they became a precipitating node in settler discourse against any kind of Indian emigration, it was used as a major template in Indian emigrant and mainland nationalist discourse to push for equal imperial mobility and migration. This is where Indophile intervention became instrumental and meaningful. (Mis)reading indenture and emigration as integrally co-aligned was a deliberately political act for everyone except the indentured labourer herself.

How were the discursive contours around indenture mobilised and articulated as moral critique by white Indophiles? This critique reflected and resonated with nationalist anxiety around the way India and Indians were perceived abroad. Indophilia came to embody an expansive sense of love and belonging to what was Indian: a notion that emerged out of an attachment to specific Indians to encompass the interests of displaced or diasporic Indian communities. If indentured Indian

¹¹ Madhavi Kale, *Indian Labor in Trinidad and British Guiana*, ed. Peter Van Der Veer, *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, (Philadelphia, 1995) p 80.

¹² Sana Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, (London, 2015). Though of course, mercantile connections with South Asia had existed way before European colonial rule in Eastern and Southern Africa.

¹³ By 1900, the emergence of a well-to-do mercantile community of Indians by 1900 in Natal threatened white business interests, who now actively lobbied for a restriction of franchise rights and Indian economic activities to less threatening roles such as that of indentured labourers, Kathryn Tidrick, *Gandhi: A Political and Spiritual Life*, (London, 2008), p 53.

¹⁴ While Gandhi was considered an exceptional Indian, at par with white counterparts, most white-run papers would note that the average Indian in South Africa was a creature of 'bestial habits, given to malingering and dishonest practices, Natal Witness, 29 Dec 1894, Cited in Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi Before India*, (London, 2013), p 79.

labourers represented an unflattering portrayal of India and Indian emigrants to a wider audience in the west and western colonies, Indophile interventions, following nationalist discourse, tried to reclaim public discourse on indentured Indians as redeemable from the immoral circumstances of their work, reinvented as the respectable middle class immigrant and settler.

Indian nationalist leaders such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Gandhi, or institutions such as the Indian National Congress, the Imperialist Citizenship Association and the Indian Overseas Association were perpetually haunted by the anxieties of 'Indian honour' being at stake.¹⁵ Indophile articulations against indenture became agentic in representing and upholding their notion of Indian honour, indelibly tied to and representative of the honour of their Indian mentors. I look at how indenture becomes a projection of Indophile intimacies with various Indian leaders but also how it transforms them into central figures in Indian nationalist politics. Indophile figures enter this narrative, become entangled in the racialised politics and practices of anti-indenture, and help rearticulate it as a case for free imperial emigration.

The conjoining of Indophiles and indenture is distinctive for several reasons. As white (British) men, they were particularly well positioned to comprehend and embody the cultural privilege that 'imperial' endowed on its citizens. Educated Indians like Gandhi could not escape the racial stigma of inferiority or move like Andrews, Polak or Pearson or similar white counterparts. Indenture exposed the limits and inequality of imperial citizenship in a way no other nationalist discourse in India had ever before. It tested and breached the liberal claims of equal citizenship as part of one empire united by a single sovereign. For the first time, the axis of Indian nationalist politics moved beyond the usual India-Britain traffic to embrace other parts of the empire. Emigrant Indians – both indentured and non-indentured – were situated at the cusp of such a realignment.

Indophile identification with the cause of Indian immigration represented a prominent moment in the history of anti-colonial nationalism in a narrative of

¹⁵ The Indian National Congress (1885) was the premier nationalist organisation run by mostly English educated Indian elite members, hailing from upper class/caste backgrounds. It was predominantly Liberal and moderate belief in the munificence of empire till at least the 1900s, when a more radical faction emerged that split the organisation till at least 1916. The Imperialist Citizenship Association and Indian Overseas Association were founded by Indian merchants and industrialists to represent the interests of mercantile emigration in the empire.

Gandhian mass movements. Indophile actors derived authority in Indian politics through such a move, staging India to the world and bringing the 'world' to India. Indenture and immigration – given its pan-imperial scales – proved central in legitimising Indophile authority and articulation in multiple sites of the empire and beyond. Andrews's and Pearson's increasing involvements with the cause of indenture from 1913 onwards were contingent to their own self-transformations, through ashrams, letters and other Indophile encounters.

Nationalist political organisations and leaders repeatedly deployed these western actors to mobilise public opinion against indenture both in India and abroad, as an 'immoral' exploitative practice that was unrepresentative of the greatness of Indian civilisation. It occurred alongside other involvements such as Non-Cooperation or running ashram affairs for Gandhi and Tagore. We get a sense of this overlap and multitude of entanglements in Andrews's soliciting of Gandhi's advice on his choice of work:

- i) I can stay on in India and possibly visit the Punjab and above all get some real writing done
 - ii) If we are of real need I could visit South Africa
 - iii) I could pay my provincial visit to Malaya and tackle the labour problems there
- But what would you wish?¹⁶

The choice of tasks indicates also indicate the opportunities afforded: almost all of them were pressing matters of the time. Gandhi strongly believed that Andrews was particularly suited to address the issues of overseas Indian settlements, given his extensive contacts and mediating abilities. Almost all major commissions, reports and papers – Indian or British – referenced and/or involved Andrews, Polak and Pearson's efforts in the deliberation of issues arising out of indentured immigration.¹⁷ This was hardly a coincidence. For decades, Andrews, Polak and Pearson's incessant lobbying and propagandising had helped abolish the system of indenture. They helped normalise, in imperial and nationalist discourses on emigration, a moral and sanitised Indian emigrant, detached or transformed from its undesirable indentured

¹⁶ Andrews to Gandhi, 16 July 1919, Folder 21, Letters from CFA to Gandhi (1914-1933), CFA Papers; File 1-26, 28 (ii), RBVB-018, CD. Henceforth MSS/F/RBVB/F/21

¹⁷ See Indians Overseas Papers, India Office British Library. Andrews in particular is continually jutting around the globe at requests of Indian communities settled in Fiji, Guyana, South and East Africa, New Zealand etc. See Tinker, *The Ordeal of Love*, for a rather appraising discussion of Andrews and others.

habitations. This consensus was then harnessed to support free imperial immigration by middle class, mercantile Indians, who would help bear its culture and civilisation, restoring Indian 'honour' abroad. Culture-talk often masked the intense economic rivalry between Indian merchants and small entrepreneurs and European business. Demands for racialised legislation to prevent the settlement of Indians were no less driven by loss of economic opportunities for European settlers.

This process – of producing the image of an acceptable Indian emigrant across the British empire bearing 'cherished' Indian cultural and religious values – authenticated the representative abilities of Indophiles as well. In an age of anti-colonial mass politics, their consistent vocalising and supporting of the aspirations of an anti-colonial nationalist leadership secured their own positions in mainstream nationalist discourse. No public discussion on indenture and emigration could occur henceforth without profusely invoking Andrews, and to a lesser extent, Polak and Pearson.

4.3 Gandhi and South Africa

Between 1914 to 1930, this small but influential ensemble of Indophile figures enabled the production of a transnational discourse against indenture in South Africa, Fiji, Mauritius and elsewhere across the British empire. The association of white Indophiles such as C.F. Andrews, W.W. Pearson and Henry Polak made indenture and its exploitative regime visible to a wider audience across the empire, comprising of both Indian nationalist leadership led by the Congress and imperial authorities in Britain and South Africa. Indenture rallied Indian nationalist opinion on the issue of imperial emigration, while casting indenture as a less appealing aspect of emigration itself. Indophile interlocution of indentured migration drew deeply from an earlier generation of abolitionist arguments, couched in a (racialised) language of humanitarian appeal.

To illustrate the linkages between personal intimacies and indenture, I take as my point of entry the anti-Indian immigration debates in South Africa and later Fiji. I focus on several key debates involving Indian immigration, British Indophiles and indenture that sheds crucial light on the modalities of this encounter. It tells us how Indophile reports, visits and presences relating to indentured immigration became formative to the creation of a discursive consensus against indenture across the empire and for non-indentured emigration at various levels. Their reports and

testimonies helped create a national consensus for abolition, subsuming indentured labour subjectivity within the cultural politics of an Indian 'nation'.

Gandhi was representing the middle class Indian community's struggle for equal rights and recognition under the South African Dominion government since the turn of the 19th century. Arguing for controlled immigration, he presented the case as:

British Indians do not desire an indiscriminate influx of their countrymen into the Transvaal...by a judicious administration of the Immigration Act, all but a few – say six highly educated Indians per year – maybe prevented from entering the colony.¹⁸

The trope of the 'highly educated Indian' continued to figure throughout immigration debates, in response to white settler allegations of the 'uncultured and unsanitary Indian' stereotype. Between them, they constructed the indentured coolie as an undesirable immigrant, the disabling provisions that applied to 'coolies' should be applicable to 'respectable' Indians.¹⁹

Gandhi's ashram communes – Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Settlement – provided a key base for his activities. Henry Polak, a British lawyer and journalist, had been close living with Gandhi in South Africa since at least 1906. Polak and his wife Millie shared Gandhi's household in Durban and Johannesburg, and later the Phoenix settlement, one of Gandhi's earliest experiments in community living. Gandhi assumed the role of his 'elder brother'. Polak eagerly shared an identity of Indian-ness that tied him to Gandhi and his cause. Gandhi was Polak's best man at his wedding and referred to himself and his friends as 'we Indians' which caused the registry office to withhold the wedding pending enquiries about whether it was a mixed marriage.²⁰ The shared male intimacy was such that Gandhi wrote comforting letters to Millie when Polak felt upset:

¹⁸Mohandas K. Gandhi, 'Summary of Enclosed Statement', Papers relating to Indian Struggle in South Africa, File No.5, 1904, Servants of India Society Papers, NMML, Delhi, p 9

¹⁹ It was therefore the franchise rights and trading interests of the Indian merchants that Gandhi attempted to secure first, arguing that it was unfit to bracket prestigious, educated Indians to the same restrictive regulations as that of their uneducated, labouring countrymen. Such a stand on migration, however, denied from its ambit, job opportunities to thousands of prospective mostly illiterate and impoverished Indians, who were forced to migrate from their native villages due to dire necessities.

²⁰Thomas Weber, *Gandhi as Mentor and Disciple*,(Cambridge, 2006) p 60,

Henry is a tender flower. The slightest breeze ruffles his spirits. You and I divide him. When he is in such a mood, you can make him happy and to a lesser degree I. But alas! He can just now have neither you nor me.²¹

The shared claim to affection suggests a co-dependent domestic arrangement accepted and followed by all three parties. Polak had left his well-paid legal career to take up the editorship of Gandhi's *Indian Opinion* in 1906, as also canvass support against discriminatory legislation introduced against Indians by the Union government of South Africa. He contributed time, money and his own efforts in running the campaign by editing journals, fighting legal battles and running the settlements. He campaigned, fundraised and represented for Indians in South Africa, Britain and India. In 1909, he published his first pamphlet on the issue: *The Indians of South Africa: Helots Within The Empire And How They Are Treated* that observed how 'the real Indian nation is being hammered out in South Africa'.²² Gandhi had sent Polak to represent South African Indians at the Indian National Congress sessions and to appeal for their support. His knowledge, Gandhi believed, "of the different questions affecting British Indian settlers and Asiatic legislation... is almost unrivalled". Polak's public campaigning in India for thirteen months, with the help of the Servants of India Society (founded by Gokhale) in 1909, pleading moral and material support for Gandhi's movement was hugely successful. At Gokhale's behest, the Congress passed a Resolution supporting the Indian struggle in South Africa at its Lahore session in 1909.

For the first time, South African Indian grievances became a 'central feature of the session', particularly their disenfranchisement and prohibitions against property ownership in Natal but also elsewhere.²³ The appointment of the new liberal Viceroy Hardinge – who was sympathetic to the Indian cause in South Africa – greatly strengthened the nationalist campaign led by Gokhale. In growing recognition of the South African Indian problem, Gokhale himself visited Natal in October 1912. He engaged in high-powered diplomatic meetings with prominent white South African politicians and ministers to push for an abolition of indenture and the repeal of the discriminatory laws.

²¹ Gandhi to Millie Polak, 24 April 1910, *CWVG*, vol. 11, p 18

²² Henri Polak, *The Indians of South Africa: Helots within the Empire and how they are treated*, Madras, 1909

²³C.F. Andrews. Ed., 'Mr Polak's Visit to India', Appendix VII, *Mahatma Gandhi at Work: His Own Story Continued*, (London, 1931), p 392

In essay after essay written through the 1900s, Gokhale appealed to the 'righteous' conscience of the Englishman, arousing moral indignation at the injustice meted out to fellow subjects within the ambit of the British Empire: 'The bitter mockery of the assertion that we are British subjects... was never made plainer than by this Natal business'.²⁴ Gokhale had returned on an optimistic note though, assured by the Union Government of their desire to abolish indenture and other discriminatory laws. Instead, the Immigration Regulation Bill to limit Indian immigration to South Africa was passed in 1913. Gandhi sought help from Gokhale and the Indian National Congress. Gokhale approached Andrews, who roped in Pearson to visit South Africa as personal envoys to help Gandhi broker truce with General Botha, who led the South African government.²⁵

Andrews and Pearson had already come under the charismatic influence of Tagore and were eager to prove their self-worth for Shantiniketan. Going abroad was a self-inflicted test to prove that their personal loyalties were inextricably tied to a broader service for Indian nationalist causes. Both of them saw this opportunity as an extended way to affirm and build on the intimacies fostered with Tagore and his Shantiniketan ashram, while also gradually distancing themselves from the more imperialist missionary work they did. As Pearson reflected:

The very thought that I go to South Africa as a messenger from the ashram will strengthen me and help me to mend the broken threads of my life's purposes in that service of love.

All through our voyage my chief endeavour will be to preserve the peace and quietness of mind which came to me in such full measure during my stay with you [Tagore].²⁶

Neither of them had joined Shantiniketan properly yet. That, however, did not stop them from conceiving of themselves as 'messengers of the ashram'. Being in the ashram was a state of mind they had already arrived at and had been inhabiting since their encounter with Tagore and Shantiniketan. Offering their services for the Indian

²⁴ Gokhale, 'British Indians in South Africa', *The India*, June 1897, *Speeches and Writings of Gokhale, Vol 2, Political*, (London, 1966), p 400

²⁵ Though Hardinge sent a British ICS Officer – Benjamin Robertson – as an official representative of India, it was Gokhale's personal emissaries – the Reverend C.F. Andrews in particular, and Willie Pearson, both Englishmen, who played a signal role in the mediations that resulted in the Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914.

²⁶ Pearson to Tagore, 14 Dec 1913. MSS/WP/RBVB/F 287(ii). All letters from Pearson to Tagore from this series unless otherwise stated.

cause in South Africa was a visibly recuperative gesture - a 'service of love' aimed at mending the 'broken threads' of their lives.

As missionaries who found their own vocations morally limiting, the pull to serve a cause that bound them to India and Indian nationalist politics beyond the ashram was deeply affirming. Andrews's Mission Secretary Dr Stanton had dismissed his tendencies as 'mere selfish bias' and pointed out that he was 'being less than just to [his] own countrymen'.²⁷ Andrews feared being an outcast in missionary and Anglo-Indian circles, but he was desperate to liberate himself. Pearson, similarly, could not wait to finish his Baptist missionary engagement in Delhi. He wanted to be free to join Tagore's side fully, to 'give up thinking of the poverty and failures of [his] own life'.²⁸ Aboard the ship to South Africa and later in Australia, on their investigative trips regarding indentured labour conditions, the men reminisced on how their 'greatest time when we are tired is to talk about you [Tagore] and to turn our minds back to our home at Shantiniketan'.²⁹ Tagore and his ashram became an embodied memory that moved his disciples onwards and outwards to embrace political tasks and projects relating to India far from home. A distant Tagore reassured them: 'You know our best love was with you while you were fighting our cause in South Africa.'³⁰

Andrews and Pearson reached South Africa at a time when the movement was nearing final negotiations between General Smuts and Gandhi, in January 1914. Though Andrews believed their arrival was at a time 'just when the deadlock was most critical'³¹, Gandhi remembers it as a time when the 'worst was over'. Yet, in this brief two months, they had managed to etch themselves firmly in South African public discourse, in particular Andrews, shadowing at times Gandhi's longstanding associates Polak and Kallenbach. Gandhi, in summing up the three major causes that contributed to the elaborate defense of the anti-indenture Bill in the Parliament, accounted for Andrews' 'mission of love' as a major factor.³²

On their first encounter, Andrew had 'instinctively' touched Gandhi's feet at the Durban port. A practice that he very likely picked up at Shantiniketan, his feet

²⁷ Andrews to Tagore, 28 July 1913, MSS/CFA/RBVB/F/ 4-11.

²⁸ Pearson to Tagore, 6 May 1913,

²⁹ Pearson to Tagore, 19 Oct 1915.

³⁰ Tagore to Andrews, [Undated] 1914.

³¹ Andrews to Tagore, 6 January, 1914.

³² 'A Historic Debate', *Indian Opinion*, 17 June 1914, *CWVG XIV*, p 182.

touching was a deeply transgressive act. Andrews's letter to Tagore gives us a sense of the reactions it espoused:

The struggle has begun and all the turmoil you expected and warned me about has already been realised. The English in Natal are far worse than the English in Calcutta. What was exercising them at present is the fact that I took the dust of Mr Gandhi's feet – the feet of an Asiatic – on landing. I am afraid I shall never be forgiven. They boil over with indignation that I, an Englishman, - an Englishman mind you! – should have touched the feet of an Asiatic.³³

White opinion was scathing of him for his 'feet touching' act, seen as a betrayal of his own race despite being an 'Englishman'. He was stared and ridiculed at for socialising with Indian friends and warned not to 'do these things in this country', for the 'bad effect it has on the kaffirs!' Feeling stifled in this hate-filled place, Andrews was heartened to spot Tagore's book of poems 'Gitanjali' on arrival in Durban in 1913:

I cannot tell you what living water that was to my parched spirit! The whole aspect of life was changed in a moment and I took heart again! ...I found that very many had been reading it. Those who had were enthusiastic and if ever I was able to strike a sympathetic note and get right past the racial barrier it was through your writings. And you know, I can be very enthusiastic when I begin to speak of then to you, and my enthusiasm carries conviction with it!³⁴

Tagore's writings helped him cross the racial barrier and sympathise with Indians. Andrews preached at two cathedrals in Durban and Pretoria quoting from his poems. Excitedly, he somewhat overstated to Tagore that talking about him had made white listeners 'change wholly their view of India and Indians'.³⁵ The sense of jubilation was momentary. His own convictions in Christianity suffered a great blow when Gandhi and other Indians were not allowed to enter the church in which he was invited to speak in Natal.³⁶ However, it was his sensational act of obeisance to Gandhi that had won him almost immediate popularity in Indian circles. It became a powerful

³³ Andrews to Tagore, 6 Jan 1914. On landing, Andrews greeted Polak and asked: "Where is Mr. Gandhi?" Polak turned to a slight ascetic figure, dressed in a white dhoti and kurta of such coarse material as an indentured labourer might wear. Andrews bent swiftly down and touched Gandhi's feet. Charles Freer Andrews, *CWMA*, Vol 14, Footnote, p 20.

³⁴ Andrews to Tagore, 6 Jan 1914.

³⁵ Andrews to Tagore, 6 Jan 1914.

³⁶ Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 88.

transgressive performance premised on the symbolic enactment of subservience. In almost every article/essay/memoir that Gandhi wrote thereafter in the *Indian Opinion* or elsewhere, Andrews's name was invoked warmly as an ally. Gandhi appraisingly wrote how Andrews 'entirely lives the Indian life and loves to live among and with Indians. He had a two-hour interview (private) with the Governor-General [Botha] and he preached at the Cathedral here last Sunday'.³⁷ And again: 'Mr. Andrews is moving forward. He has got a wonderful grasp of the central position and he is pushing it forward with all the spiritual force he possesses'.³⁸

At Andrews' insistence, Gandhi agreed to stay for a week at the Phoenix ashram with him.³⁹ Physical proximity to each other also implied a mutual entanglement in each other's private lives and corporeal gestures of service. Asking his son Manilal to accompany Andrews as his secretary on his tour of Natal, Gandhi advised him that 'he should have no shame about doing any work for Mr. Andrews. You may even massage his calves; polish his shoes and tie up his laces'.⁴⁰ Having massaged Andrews' calves before, Gandhi found that he had 'liked it'. The act of massage, in particular of someone's legs, was a deeply meaningful expression rooted in reverential service. Some of Gandhi's fondest memories of his father involved his massaging his father's legs every night shortly before his death. Indeed, his greatest regret at his father's death was that he was not by his father's side 'massaging him', but in the 'grip of lust' towards his wife. Being deprived of the privilege of his father dying in his arms continued to haunt him long after his death.⁴¹ To massage Andrews' calves, was therefore, an invocation of that reverential love and service.

However, Andrews was not the first 'white' foreigner with whom Gandhi had come in close physical proximity. Gandhi - living with Polak and his wife Millie since the 1900s - considered himself Polak's second wife, for 'he would pour himself out only before' them.⁴² A more intimate (and possibly romantic) relationship was struck

³⁷ Gandhi to Hermann Kallenbach, 14 January 1914, *CWGMG*, Vol. 14, p 32

³⁸ Gandhi to Hermann Kallenbach, 18 Jan 1914, *Ibid.* p 37.

³⁹ Gandhi, Cable to Gokhale, 3 January 1914, Servants of India Society Papers, F. No. 45, National Archives of India (NAI).

⁴⁰ Gandhi to Manilal, 28 January 1914, *CWGMG*, Vol XII, p 341

⁴¹ M.K. Gandhi, 'My Double Shame', *My Experiments with Truth*, (Ahmedabad, 1927), pp 73-79.

⁴² Weber, *Ibid.* p 62. A comparable instance can be found in C. Rajagopalachari's admonitory letter to Gandhi, when he was romantically drawn towards Sarala Devi, noted poet, singer and niece of Rabindranath Tagore. Urging Gandhi that his love for her was no less than a woman's, he warned

between Gandhi and Herman Kallenbach about the same time; the Jewish architect based in South Africa with whom Gandhi had jointly started the Tolstoy Farm. Gandhi had left his wife to live with him during this period, and in spite of earning comfortable incomes, both of them had participated in a number of strictures to lead simple lives together. Gandhi referred to Kallenbach's letters as 'charming love notes' and both of them had, at least on one recorded occasion, pledged in uninhibited terms a deep evocation of love for each other.⁴³ Mundane and small acts involving tactile performances such as daily sharing of meals, touching of feet and 'massaging of calves' or 'polishing of shoes' were crucial in deepening the degree of mutual familiarity between themselves. Cross-racial corporeality created a sense of the domestic that sutured the everyday relationship between white followers and Indian leaders. They created a sense of shared space that inspired their various political undertakings. Andrews' emergence as a trusted aide and consultant of Gandhi in early 1914 provoked Kallenbach's resentment and jealousy, a point touched on in the chapter on letters.

Andrews's ability to identify with Indians rested significantly on the ease with which he could adopt to their sartorial and culinary habits – Gandhi remarked how Andrews 'dressed in dhoti' and 'is full of India'.⁴⁴ Pearson remained busy studying the conditions of indentured labourers away from the high political lobbying at Cape Town. Pearson was far less in the political limelight than Andrews, what with the latter's penchant for lobbying in different circles. Their stay in South Africa was brief but eventfully memorable, creating lasting connections between themselves and the course of indentured history. Gandhi thanked Gokhale for this deputation:

him refrain from straying if he truly loved him: 'There are no more...women, - certainly no more than me,... who simply dote on you as no woman ever loved man', C. Rajagopalachari to Gandhi, 16 June 1920, *My Dear Bapu: Letters from C. Rajagopalachari to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Devadas Gandhi and Gopalkrishna Gandhi*, ed. Gopalkrishna Gandhi, (Delhi, 2012). Throughout his life, there are several such instances of male intimacies that borders on the romantic.

⁴³For instance, the Agreement signed by both Gandhi and Kallenbach for 'more love and yet more love...such ... as the world had never seen', on the eve of Kallenbach's visit to his family in Europe in 1911. 'An Agreement', Gandhi 29 July 1911 is particularly insightful, *CWMG*, Vol 96. Gandhi had destroyed Kallenbach's letters to him as he felt it would preserve the confidentiality of their relationship. We only have Gandhi's letters to Kallenbach, preserved by his family members and later taken in possession by the Government of India.

⁴⁴ Gandhi to Chhanaganal Gandhi, 18 Jan 1914, *CWMG XIV*, p 38

Indians feel deeply grateful for deputation of Messrs Andrews and Pearson. Many Europeans, including Ministers, have expressed sincere satisfaction at the results of the visit. Mr. Andrews spread a spirit of sympathy and love all round and has contributed much towards speedy settlement.⁴⁵

Gandhi was deeply pleased at Andrews's 'wonderful work' and how his 'main topic of conversation being always India and Tagore or the Indian question here'.⁴⁶

The movement around the rights of emigration of ex-indentured labourers in South Africa represented a major transnational moment in Indian nationalist networking. It actively forged links between extraterritorial nationalist organisations, leaders and activists across the empire. The figure of the British Indophile, exemplified most spectacularly by Andrews, but also Polak and Pearson – now became a coveted figure, for their imperial reach and influence, situated at the intersections of Indian nationalist, extraterritorial nationalist and British imperial individuals and institutions. Their growing clout directly contributed to their growing stature in mainstream Indian politics, as legitimate interlocutors of Indian causes everywhere. Its intimate histories reveal the immense emotional investments that made these networks possible. Not only did it vindicate and reinforce existing relationships and intimacies such as with Tagore or Munshi Ram, it forged new, influential ones, such as that between Gandhi and Andrews. For instance, Munshi Ram assured Andrews that his South African venture affirmed his Indian-ness and made him more popular than before:

Your work in South Africa has endeared you to the Indian masses and I hope that you will in future have found opportunities of serving the motherland – for [have] you not become an adopted son of the land?⁴⁷ [Emphasis Munshi Ram's]

Andrews derived great comfort in such intimations. It reiterated his older affections and determined new ones. Though love for Gandhi did not come 'immediately, instinctively' as it had for Tagore, Andrews hoped [through?] his 'overflowing love

⁴⁵Gandhi, CABLE TO G. K. GOKHALE, February 24, 1914, Cape Town, *CW/MG* XIV, p 76

⁴⁶ Gandhi to Hermann Kallenbach, 17 Feb 1914, *Ibid.* p 70

⁴⁷ Munshi Ram to Andrews, 31 January 1914

of India to find that love running freely between us.⁴⁸ Love for Gandhi continued to grow and by the time he left South Africa,

I have been thinking so much about you on this voyage – more even, I think, than on my voyage from the Cape. It is the coming closer to India that brings me even closer to you.... I do so long to keep very close to you and now I feel I shall. You have been with me, drawing nearer to me, not receding from me, during all these weeks of absence, and this has taken place amid distractions and anxieties which might have taken me from you, if our love had not taken deep root. What I have known and felt is that your love has brought me really closer to you, in your absence or in your presence, for I have quite constantly turned to you in spirit...and I have quite constantly clung to you in times of anxiety and trouble.⁴⁹

‘Coming closer’ to Gandhi felt like coming closer to India. Within months, Andrews and Gandhi had become Charlie and Mohan, and their intimacy deepened:

...you have been to me in South Africa what no one else ever could be and are now a part of my life as Mahatmaji and Gurudev and Sushil and Ajit are – and when I saw you on the wharf standing with hands raised in prayer and benediction I know as I had not known, even in Pretoria how very very dear you had become to me. And I gazed and gazed and the sadness grew up in me and even the thought that I was on my way to India could not overcome it. Somehow I did not quite know how much you had learnt to love me till that morning when you put your hand on my shoulder and spoke of the loneliness that there would be to you...and when again you told me you had kept those hurried letters I had sent you- then I knew...⁵⁰

Once again, epistolarity produced and recreated affective meanings around the practice of letter-writing. Andrews could imagine Gandhi’s hand on his shoulder and experience his love and loss for him. The conceptual unity that bound Andrews’s love for India with Tagore and others⁵¹ now embraced Gandhi and his causes too as part of the same imaginary. Trust deepened by the continued investment in their leaders’

⁴⁸ Andrews to Tagore, 14 Jan 1914, Cited in *Ordeal*, p 86

⁴⁹ Andrews to Gandhi, 13 April [1914], MSS/CFA/RBVB/ F/ 21. All letters from Andrews to Gandhi from this series unless otherwise stated.

⁵⁰ Andrews to Gandhi, 26 Feb (1914?).

⁵¹ As for instance Ajit and Sushil Rudra, colleagues at the Stephen’s College.

causes. Andrews and Polak continued to be involved in the anti-indenture/Indian emigration cause, especially after Gandhi left South Africa to enter Indian politics permanently.

4.4 Representing 'Indian Honour'

If indenture became a site through which to forge and foster these relationships, what presumptions underlay its politics? More specifically, what were the presumptions of class and culture that inevitably shaped their own articulation about indenture? We have already dwelt on Andrews's admiration at seeing Tagore being represented in South African bookshops. His many lectures on Tagore, some published in major dailies such as 'Cape Times', emphasised how 'the personality of Tagore was [an] intense expression of Indian imaginative national life', an example of how 'India had developed perhaps far above other parts of the British empire in civilisation and efforts to attain higher life'.⁵² This evocation of a 'real', exalted and enlightened India, exemplified through personalities such as Tagore or Gandhi, was a common contrasting rhetoric when countering the stigma that 'coolie labour' brought in its wake.

In South African public discourse, the figure of the Indian or 'Asiatic immigrant' was deeply rooted in the stereotype of the indentured coolie, a status resented by non-indentured Indian emigrants often engaged in medical, clerical or commercial professions. Polak laments, in his 1909 book on *The Indians of South Africa* that the

great Indian languages, with their wonderful literatures, are not recognised; and thus a learned pundit, deeply versed in Sanskrit and the profound philosophy of his race, but possessing no knowledge of English or any other European language, would be prohibited from entering Natal... except as visitors.⁵³

Terms such as coolie doctors or coolie lawyers to refer to Indian men, and 'coolie maries' to refer to Indian women, were common. Indians engaged in middle class 'respectable' professions such as law and medicine resented the generic racial slurs

⁵² CABLE TO G. K. GOKHALE from Gandhi, February 19, 1914, CAPE TOWN, *CWMG, Vol 14*, p 73

⁵³ Polak, *The Indians of South Africa*, pp 22-23

they had to endure because of indentured labourers and their public perception. These upper/middle class Indian emigrants were eager to produce a discourse of difference that portrayed themselves as representative of an India and Indians distinguished by their honour and high culture. Honour was enmeshed within a particular intersection of race, caste, class and profession in Indian claims for equality with the whites (the Black African as the common other).

India Office reports attested to the inferior status of indentured work that influenced European public opinion of all Indians and fuelled segregationist policies against them:

the system created a false impression abroad of India's status; it gave no opportunity for the settlement of the good types of Indian agriculturist; India came to be regarded merely as a reservoir of the lowest kind of unskilled labour. This kind of objection operates now to make unpopular, not only the old indenture system, but any kind of emigration based merely on the labour requirements of the country of immigration ... that the term coolie became synonymous with Indian in the West Indies and with Hindu in South Africa.⁵⁴

The 'good type' of agriculturist was pitted against the 'bad' unskilled labour immigrant, blamed for propelling anti-Indian immigration policies. Several historians have noted how the institutions and paperwork forged at the borders of these great migration macro-systems were designed to exclude Asia and Africa, ultimately coming to define the relationship of all mobility and borders within the international system.⁵⁵ Radhika Mongia has noted how the racialised nature of the passport-control regime was aimed at restricting the mobility of Asian immigration on the basis of the 'colour-bar'.⁵⁶ Indian nationalist opinion chafed against the imposition of the colour bar, despite the Government of India trying to argue for equal mobility in various imperial councils.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Indians Overseas: Note by Mr. J.C. Walton, IOR/L/PO/1/22 (ii), Fol 105, India Office Records, British Library.

⁵⁵ Adam McKeown, Integration and Segregation in Global Migration, eds. Donna R Gabbacia and Dirk Hoerder, *Connecting Seas*, p 63.

⁵⁶ Radhika Mongia, *Indian Migration and Empire*, pp 2-6. Radhika Singha reminds us that there were also other geopolitical considerations and the management of labour flows in the Indian Ocean region, Radhika Singha, *The Great War and a 'Proper' Passport for the Colony: Border-Crossing in British India, c.1882-1922*, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 50, 3 (2013), p 290.

⁵⁷ Singha, Op. Cit, p 291

Dominated by liberal politicians such as Gokhale and their conviction of India as a rightful member of the imperial Commonwealth, the aspirations of non-indentured middle class Indian emigrants fitted neatly in the Indian nationalist rhetoric for equal rights and representation within a multi-ethnic British empire. This anxiety also reflected the very middle to upper class/caste constitution of Indian nationalist organisations in producing educated, ‘respectable’ Indians, fit for migration and settlement anywhere in the empire. As an emergent Indian nationalist elite sought to reclaim a cultural sovereignty that was already absent politically, British Indophiles performed the very useful task of representing this phenotype of caste-class-culture as the authentic bearer of India’s power and profile. As Andrews’ reporting of the South African satyagraha reveals:

“Isn’t it simply a question of Indian honour?” His eyes flashed into mine and I shall never forget his look, as he said quickly, almost vehemently – “Yes! That is it! That is it! That is the real point at issue.” As far as I was concerned, this answer ended the whole matter. For it did not need even a day’s residence in Natal to understand, that for an Indian leader to give up honour meant to lose the whole position...⁵⁸

And Andrews’s complete claim of self-effacement as he assumes the Indian position as his own:

My own intense love for India made me able to see the real issue with their eyes... we might surrender our reputation in the eyes of the world: we might be misrepresented and even slandered: we might surrender the immediate abolition of the 3£ tax. But one thing we could not surrender (I am writing as one of themselves) - we could not sacrifice our Indian honour.⁵⁹

The will to be Indian was relentlessly followed up by claims to be so. Within a few months of his involvement, Andrews was already identifying completely with the cause of ‘Indian honour’: ‘I am writing as one of themselves’. Written largely for an elite English educated reading public in India, it further vindicated his own claims to represent India ‘as an Indian’. Andrews’s reports emphasized how Gandhi had

⁵⁸ C.F. Andrews, Mr. Gandhi and the Commission, *The Modern Review*, July 1914, p 97.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p 98

grasped this absolute notion of Indian honour and have managed to yoke ‘the poorest and humblest men and women, just out of indenture’ to rally around ‘this one intangible thing – *honour*’.⁶⁰ Indenture was increasingly cast as an example of bad immigration, while mercantile and other non-indentured immigrations were the desirable kind. The vision of a unified empire with equal access and citizenship rights remained a common aspirational ideal for the Congress-led nationalist leadership. Indian nationalist politics increasingly became entangled in an intensifying campaign for the abolition of indenture in the Indian Ocean world. Their articulations for uniform citizenship rights across a unified imperial space spoke to the growing concerns of a nationalist elite haunted by anxieties of India’s status in the empire.

India’s South African moment, and the insertion of the white Indophile figure thereof, came to represent a strategic transnational convergence of many sorts. Embodying both white privilege and the idea of ‘imperial’, their association strengthened the rhetoric of free and equal access in all parts of the British Commonwealth. It brought, for the first time, the issue of imperial immigration at the fore of Indian nationalist discourse in the decades following the 1900s. The Indian National Congress and its leadership, by officially recognising such extra-territorial bodies as the Natal Indian Congress and the Transvaal Indian Congress as legitimate affiliates, reinforced an expansive axis of imperial citizenship in which Indians at home and abroad were unified discursively. The South African moment ushered a new phase of the ‘transnational’ in Indian imperial politics whose arc moved towards East Africa and Dominion colonies such as Australia. Andrews put it across sharply, even as his complete identification with the Indian cause occluded his understanding of the exclusivist racial politics pitted against African land and communities:

East Africa is really what we may call a test case for Great Britain. If Indians cannot be welcomed [?] as equals in a vacant, or almost vacant part of the world, where they did all the pioneering and where they were first in occupation ... it means that they can only be tolerated, even in their own tropical belt of the world, as inferiors, and that the so-called freedom of the British Empire is a sham and a delusion. This is what I mean by a test case, and the ‘British

⁶⁰ Ibid, p 98

Commonwealth' would not stand the test as things are today, of any equality outside the European race.⁶¹

4.5 Fiji: Reporting Moral Panic

Immediately after their South African debut, Andrews and Pearson was requested by the Indian National Congress to visit Fiji to investigate into the conditions of indentured labour hired by sugar plantations. Andrews had wanted to make a delayed trip, but 'Pearson ... decided it' for him.⁶² Fiji had come into sharp focus after the publication of *Fiji Dwip mein Mere Ikkis Varsh* (21 years in Fiji Island), narrating the account of indentured labourers in Fiji.⁶³ A further important publication was James McNeill's report on indentured labour in the four British colonies.⁶⁴ Chaturvedi, a Gandhian nationalist who also ran the *Vishal Bharat* journal from Calcutta was quite the puritan in matters both social and literary.⁶⁵ In him, Andrews found a faithful disciple obsessed with (national) purity and the dangers of contagion that emanated from the unregulated morals of indentured societies. Missionary and nationalist disgust converged in the making of a 'moral panic' narrative around indentured immigration. Criticising the McNeill report, Andrews fulminated to the Viceroy Hardinge, with whom he was on close terms:

I have seen these wretched, frightened, quivering, cowering Indian coolies with the haunted look in their eyes. I have heard their stories from their own lips. McNeill has evidently not. If he had, his pages would burn with fire.⁶⁶

In his portrayal, the coolie became a mute, dumb cattle-like creature, with nothing on their side. Pearson wrote about the suffocating racism that characterised Fiji sugar plantations and society. When they had gone to meet a Hotel Manager

⁶¹ Andrews to Rathindranath Tagore, 6 Sep 1920, Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 168

⁶² Andrews to Munshi Ram, 27 Sep 1914, *Ordeal*, p 113

⁶³ Written by Pandit Totaram Sanadhya in collaboration with Banarsidas Chaturvedi, *Fiji Dwip mein Mere Ikkis Varsh*, (Varanasi, 1914).

⁶⁴ Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 107. *East India (Indentured labour) Report to the Government of India on the conditions of Indian immigrants in four British colonies and Surinam*, by Mr. James McNeill, Indian Civil Service, and Mr. Chimman Lal, India, London : H. M. Stationery Off., printed in India, 1915.

⁶⁵ See Ruth Vanita, Introduction, Pandey Bechan Sharma 'Ugra', *Chocolate and Other Writings on Male Homoeroticism*, (London, 2009), pp xxii-xxiii.

⁶⁶ Andrews to Hardinge, 28 June 1914, Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 108

who has 50 Indian servants under him and treats them abominably. We went into his office and in two minutes were bundled out again by his offensive rudeness.... Our discomfiture was witnessed by several delighted white men, and I have no doubt that they thought we had been rightly served.⁶⁷

Based on their findings, Andrews and Pearson published a comprehensive *Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji* in the *Modern Review* journal in 1916 which became a key moment in the crystallising of nationalist opinion for abolishing indenture. The India Office seemed less impressed at their feat. Thomas Holderness, the Undersecretary, conceded that the system is 'morally bad' but remarked: 'Mr. Andrews saw precisely what he had meant to see when he planned his visit, and has returned confirmed in his original opinions.'⁶⁸

The report embodied the nationalist anxiety around the loss of 'Indian honour' and values. It became a moral basis for an increased demand by nationalist organisations to abolish indenture across the empire. Take for instance, the nature of the language of their evidence gathering:

A Madrasi of very low caste and low features came to us for protection against a sardar [coolie managers] who had locked him up ... and beaten and starved him.....

A Hindustani girl of good caste and respectable Hindu parentage' was deceived by a neighbouring woman in her village ... On board ship her honour was assailed and only with the greatest possible difficulty had she been able to retain it. Now her only hope is that her father and mother will think that she is dead, because she has brought disgrace to her family.⁶⁹ [emphasis mine]

The presumptions of caste hierarchies and attributes are telling. They were shocked that high caste boys were being put out to hard field labour or low caste Hindus were made to cut 'meat with other Muslim butchers': 'we gave our own personal opinion to the Fiji authorities, that Hindus, however low in caste, should not be set to do the

⁶⁷ Pearson to Tagore, 8 Dec 1915, MSS/WP/RBVB/F 287 (ii)

⁶⁸ Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 123

⁶⁹ Andrews and Pearson, Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji, p 395

work of slaughtering animals.⁷⁰ The consumption of meat by Hindu labourers disturbed the caste expectations of Andrews and Pearson, who considered vegetarianism as the default diet of the caste Hindu: 'It was a strange sight for us to see a butcher's shop in Suva, where beef as well as mutton was being sold, crowded with Hindus waiting eagerly to obtain their purchases of meat.'⁷¹ The authors' associations with Tagore, Munshi Ram, Gandhi and their ashram circles, comprising mostly of upper/middle caste Hindus with a preferred vegetarian diet (for different reasons) had also led them to consider vegetarianism as the ideal Hindu dietary regime. The diverse internal hierarchies of upper and lower castes mostly eluded Andrews and Pearson, but their position anticipated the two broad ends of an increasingly polarising public discourse on caste.

If meat-eating disturbed the upper caste ashram-attuned missionary sensibilities of Andrews and Pearson, the issue of women, their bodies and moral status in indentured contexts absolutely horrified them. They disapproved of the way in which 'respectable' women mixed up with 'abandoned women' aboard the ship: 'Temptation to evil was ever present'.⁷² In a narrative worthy of descriptions of the Black Atlantic's middle passage, the report detailed the misery and scores of death caused by the voyage from India to Fiji.⁷³ The sex ratio was hugely skewed in favour of male indentured labourers. Women labourers were proportionately very low because of their perceived low per capita productivity compared to men. Planters opposed women labourers as they considered them less profitable than male labour.⁷⁴ The hugely skewed sex ratio resulted often in a high incidence of (un)/'regulated prostitution on the estates'. The authors, given their missionary backgrounds, felt 'utterly repugnant' to broach the subject. Horrified of the 'moral evil' festering in Fiji and the 'unmistakeable tale of vice' that marked the men and women in the coolie lines and young children being exposed to it, they thought 'the moral disease ... was eating into the heart and life of the people'.⁷⁵ In this, Andrews followed Gandhi's opinion on how this contagion spread back to the mainland, threatening the vitality of the national body:

⁷⁰ Ibid, p 393

⁷¹ Ibid, pp 400-401

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Ibid, p 401

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 401

⁷⁵ Ibid, p 402

Indians who return to Madras and Behar and UP disseminate new vices among the simple village peasants of India. Mr Gandhi says they have acted like plague spots on certain districts in Tamil country. Secondly, Government by entering into the system at all gives it a prestige and thus itself becomes a recruiter. Each wretched recruiting agent uses the name of Sarkar. I have written to the Viceroy fully on with these points.⁷⁶

The skewed sex ratio led to rampant trafficking of young girls as also to new forms of matrimonial practices without any legal recognition. Andrews and Pearson recorded that fathers sold their daughters multiple times to different men in marriage. Divorces were also common and 'women left their husbands for the sake of jewellery and went to live with other men. They seemed to do just what they pleased, and to live just as they liked. Castes and religions were mixed together in a common jumble. Hindu girls were sold in marriage to Muhammadans and vice versa: sweepers' children were sometimes married to Brahmans.'⁷⁷

The report bemoaned the contagion spread by coolie line habits among the marriage practices of the Hindu population in Fiji: 'The tragedy of it all was this, that the whole Hindu fabric had gone to wreck on this one rock of marriage, and there were no leaders to bring the people back into the right paths. The best Hindus we met were in despair about it'.⁷⁸ Of particular alarm was the profligacy and immorality of Hindu women, fallen from culture and religion:

The Hindu woman in the coolie 'lines', having no semblance, even of a separate home of her own... and divorced from her old home ties, has abandoned religion itself. The moral ruin is almost pitiful on this side. Though there are beautiful and stately rivers in Fiji, no women are seen making their morning offerings: no temples rise on their banks; there is no household shrine. The outward life which the Hindu women in the 'lines' lead in Fiji, appears to be without love and without worship, - a sordid round of mean and joyless occupations.⁷⁹

It harked back to this upper caste notion of Hindu womanhood and piety and how Fiji Indian women had fallen from that desirable ideal. Andrews and Pearson's report on Fiji and indenture in general was primarily a moral argument on how 'everything that could be recognised as Hindu ha[d] departed, and with this, the religious spirit

⁷⁶ Andrews to Tagore, [early Oct?] 1915

⁷⁷ Andrews and Pearson, Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji, p 516

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 519

⁷⁹ Ibid, p 519

has departed also'.⁸⁰ At the centre of this moral propaganda were Hindu women and their bodies, displaced from fulfilling its upper caste nationalist function as repositories of religion and morality. Their report thought of the indentured sexual mores as little more than 'legalised prostitution...of chaste and pure Indian women being inveigled out'.⁸¹ The demand for abolition was therefore, primarily a moral propaganda to recover Hindu Indians in Fiji and save Hindu women from their present decadence due to indenture:

when the present indenture system has been abolished and the present recruiting system stopped, we have every hope that a rapid recovery of the morals of the Indian population will ensue. With the improvement in morals, other changes will follow their turn.⁸²

The emphasis on morals and Hindu values in the report reflects the extended exposure of the authors in various Hindu ashramic spaces – of Tagore, Munshi Ram and Gandhi. In prescribing the abolition of indenture, they were, in effect, projecting the values of their ashramic habitus – upper caste Hindu spaces premised on exercises of moral and national improvement. That ashram values, ideals and memories informed their investigations were fully acknowledged:

The memory and inspiration of the Ashram, and of those who dwelt there, was with us through all our long journey. The freedom of its life made us the more sensitive to the misery which we witnessed in the coolie 'lines'.⁸³

The new kind of sociality that indenture fostered in plantation societies was a marked departure from the vaunted norm of ashram communities or village family units. The moral decadence narrative, built on a missionary understanding of sin, combined with an approach that constituted and essentialised upper caste 'Hindu ideals' for women and society. Andrews pressed Viceroy Hardinge with the moral arguments presented in their report to abolish indenture, warning that the 'Fiji question would lead to far worse resentment than the South African trouble if it continued much longer unchecked.'⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Ibid, p 518

⁸¹ Andrews to Susil Rudra, 12 Jan 1917, *Ordeal*, p 133

⁸² Andrews and Pearson, *Report on Indentured Labour*, p 617.

⁸³ Ibid, p 623

⁸⁴ Andrews to Hardinge, 27 Sep 1914, *Ordeal*, p 113

The refrain on the loss of Hindu values fed the broader nationalist libido of 'Hinduism in danger' and the reformist/ revivalist rhetoric around it. The Fiji Report was eagerly taken up by the Hindu nationalist leader Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who moved a resolution in the Legislative Council calling upon the Govt of India to abolish the indenture system. Hardinge, acknowledging the influence of the report and the validity of its findings, wrote back:

I have been reading your pamphlet on indentured labour in Fiji. It is very good, and its contents did not astonish me, the Pundit's [Malaviya] resolution comes up on the 20th [March] and I am going to speak on it in Council. You will probably see my speech in the Press...hope you... think it satisfactory.⁸⁵

Malaviya urged Andrews to commit to the anti-indenture campaign at the Lucknow session of the Indian National Congress in 1916, which Polak too was attending to mobilise support for abolishing indenture. Polak's campaign against indenture explicitly referenced the Fiji report to argue how indentured immigration is acting against free Indian emigration in general. He pointed out how the widely held impression of India as a 'coolie country' and all Indians as 'coolies' thwarted aspirations of racial equality for more respectable Indian emigrants:

This danger is bound to militate against closer relations between the people of India and the white inhabitants of the colonies and dominions, ... I know, of my own experience in South Africa, how the whole Indian population, including those Indians who are born there, are classed alike as "coolies" by the average white citizen of the Union, a fact that is an unceasing cause of heart burning amongst the Indian settlers' who resent this 'contemptuous designation' as impeding their civic and political progress.⁸⁶

It resonated well with the Indian nationalist imagination, seeking equality of status with British settler colonies. Only in the abolition of indenture could lie a vindication of 'Indian honour', represented invariably by the culture bearing upper caste men and women. Gandhi considered it as a 'severe struggle'

for the preservation of our honour, and ...if we do not take care, the promise made by Lord Hardinge, that indentured labour should soon be a thing of the past may be reduced to a nullity... We are thankful ... to that good Englishman,

⁸⁵ Andrews to Malaviya, *Ordeal*, p 125.

⁸⁶ Indian Emigration – Problems, Memorandum of Mr. H.S.L.Polak on The Colonial Emigration Conference, (Madras, 1918), p 4

Mr. C.F. Andrews for the lead he gave us in that matter. So soon as he gained the information from Fiji that five years' extension was taken by the planters of those islands as a settled fact, he forsook his sick bed and his rest at Shanti Niketan, and sounded us the call of duty.⁸⁷

Andrews and Pearson's report precipitated the abolitionist discourse by early 1917. In an emotionally charged speech Gandhi spelt out in explicit terms what was at stake: 'either Mr. Andrews' harrowing picture of the conditions of life in Fiji is true or it is untrue. We believe it to be true, and it has never been seriously attacked....Substitute or no substitute, we are entitled, for the sake of our motherhood [motherland?], for the sake of our own honour and reputation, and indeed that of the Empire, to the unconditional abolition of this last remnant of slavery.'⁸⁸

The Fiji Report powerfully enabled this discursive projection. Their letters and articles on indentured societies focused mostly on the sexual promiscuity of women, to shock the moral sensitivity of middle class Indians. Several monthly issues of the journal *Modern Review* contained an expose of Fiji indenture by Andrews and his disciple Banarasidas Chaturvedi, with sordid details relating to the proliferation of 'whore houses', venereal diseases, and sexual assault: 'every indentured Indian woman has to serve three indentured men, as well as various outsiders'.⁸⁹

Within a year of the publication of their report in 1915, and the mobilisation of nationalist outrage and political lobbying, indenture was successfully abolished in May 1917. The Fiji report by Andrews and Pearson was cited not only by Malaviya while moving a motion for abolition in the Legislative Council, but also the Government spokesman. Post-abolition work was difficult and painstaking. Andrews remained involved in lobbying for rights and rehabilitative measures such as 'early termination of the indentures which have not expired', often shuttling all over the Indian Ocean fringe resolving and representing issues faced by immigrant Indian communities. He fought against Indian sub-imperialist impulses in Africa (demand for special zone in Tanganyika) to create their own territory as well as the

⁸⁷ Gandhi's speech 'Indentured Labour', made on the occasion of the abolition of indenture campaign in early 1917, *Speeches and Writings of M.K. Gandhi*, with an Introduction by C.F. Andrews, A Tribute by G.A. Natesan and a Biographical Sketch by H.S.L. Polak, p 90

⁸⁸ Gandhi, *Ibid*, p 91

⁸⁹ *Ordeal*, pp 142-143

foreclosing of Indian immigration in African territories controlled by European powers.

After abolition, the Indian Overseas Association was formed by mercantile and artisanal Indian immigrants to represent their cause in India and Britain. Henry Polak was made responsible for the campaign against racial legislation in London.⁹⁰ Andrews was invited to lobby for Indian settlers in Fiji, Mauritius, East and South Africa, Malaya and even British Guiana. Indophile investments now moved in the direction of normalising the Indian emigrant as a desirable entity in the empire, often enabling imperial ethics and expansion. Abolition of indenture was aimed at improving the public status of the middle class Indian settler who resented being seen as 'coolies'. This was no easy task as European associations pushed back fiercely against any kind of concession to Indians. An anxious Andrews telegraphed Gandhi in 1919:

East African situation now most critically dangerous because united attempt made by European associations to close door against future immigration and stop Indian Franchise [STOP] Chief reason stated through Indian contact but advance under Christian Western civilisation [STOP] Government economic commission report recently published takes same attitude mentioning specifically Indian moral depravity and approving South African exclusion policy [STOP] intense indignation expressed here by Indian Congress gathering which was remarkable for its weight and numbers. I have decided on urgent request to stay till January here.⁹¹

An Imperial Conference in 1921, comprising of Indian leaders such as V Srinivasa Sastri and the Colonial Office Secretary Winston Churchill, adopted Resolutions to improve the status of Indians in the Empire. It supported the 'entry of educated Indians', improvement of sanitary conditions and the adoption of policies to make them 'good citizens' of whatever (settler white) country they are domiciled in.⁹² These moves aligned perfectly with what Andrews, Pearson and Polak, along with Indian nationalist leaders had hoped for. The indentured labourer seems to have silently slipped away as the narrative came to be dominated by the middle class

⁹⁰ Aiyar, *Indians in Kenya*, p 78

⁹¹ Andrews to Gandhi, 4 Dec 1919, Nairobi, MSS/F/RBVB/21

⁹² Supplementary Memorandum by the Government of India on the Position of British Indians, containing certain detailed suggestions arising out of the Report of the Asiatic Enquiry Commission and Sir. B. Robertson's Statement before the Commission, *Imperial Conference 1921: Resolution regarding Position of Indians in the Empire*, IOR/L/E/7/148.

educated emigrant. Five years after abolition, 'batches' of repatriated labourers came to visit Andrews in Shantiniketan, asking to be sent back:

Nothing on earth will make these people settle down in India, if only they can get away, anywhere, out of the country... They always answer me "Either shoot us and get rid of us or send us back. We shall commit suicide if you force us to remain in this country."⁹³

It revealed the bias of representation, and how much the needs of the middle class Indian immigrant overwrote the demands of labourers themselves, justified in the name of morality and nation. The difficulty of reintegration, given strictures of caste, class and religion in rural Indian society was particularly acute for those repatriated. Used to a more fluid form of social mobility and life, repatriation was hard, particularly for lower caste returnees.⁹⁴

The 'Indian Question' evolved into a demand for settlement rights and political representation by immigrant Indians, precipitating around the 'colour bar'. In a Report of the Economic Commission of the East Africa Protectorate, 1917, convened by members of the Allied Nation in Paris, a new ruse came up: that of the 'welfare of the native African'. The Commission felt that due to the intimate contact and introduction of an intermediate race of Indians between Europeans and Africans, 'the African of this country is at present receiving [influences that] are mainly imparted to him by the Asiatic, and are predominantly Indian rather than British.'⁹⁵ The Indian immigrant was cast as a figure steeped in crime, violence, squalor and moral depravity against whose influence the child-like native African needed protection. Andrews, Polak and Pearson continued to refute these allegations, representing the suitability of educated Indians as bearers of a distinctively high civilizational background. Andrews's defence of Indians simultaneously justified the necessity of European interventions to 'civilise' Africans:

⁹³ CFA to Banarsidas, 10 April 1922, *Ordeal*, pp 193-194.

⁹⁴ Oddvar Hollup. "The Disintegration of Caste and Changing Concepts of Indian Ethnic Identity in Mauritius." *Ethnology*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1994, p. 297. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/3773901.

⁹⁵ The Report argued how British control of Uganda (post WW1), and employment of Indian labour led to a substantial increase in labour and capital costs in the building of Uganda Railway projects compared to the hiring of African or that of white labour in South Africa. Cited from C.F. Andrews, *The Indian Question in East Africa* (For Private Circulation Only), (Nairobi, 1921) [?]

I have seen the African in his raw and savage state, - the state wherein cannibalism was practised as a matter of course. I have no illusions ... about the kind of existence which used often to be led before the European intervened.⁹⁶

The belief in an essential difference between Indians and Africans, as Andrews and many others including Gandhi suggested, could not have been starker. In line with hierarchized notions of civilisation, it produced a logic of difference that kept Indians at bay from their (particularly Black) African counterparts. Indophile arguments reified that difference.

Overseas Indian organisations and local Congresses repeatedly invited their white supporters to mediate, investigate and broker agreements and disputes on their behalf in various Councils and Commissions such as the white dominated Convention of Associations. Representing the Indian emigrant side, Andrews and Polak argued how no Indian was ever invited to give evidence against these allegations for racial assimilation (as it would enable the spread of culture and education among natives and Indians alike), and against the forced segregation/repatriation of Indians through racial legislation. They advocated against a white monopoly in the British Commonwealth: 'that this assumption, if once finally accepted and endorsed, would change the whole structure of British Rule abroad'.⁹⁷ Realising the impossibility of racial or political equality for India and Indians within the empire, he now advocated for India's freedom from the empire.

By 1920, Andrews felt keenly the hardening of 'the 'White Race' idea everywhere among the British all over the world'. It was a realisation brought on by post war British nationalism and the erosion of any residual belief in imperial munificence: 'We must get outside, and feel ourselves free men, or else perish.'⁹⁸ Polak converged with Andrews to issue a joint statement that the Govt and people of India unite in defence to fight for the rights of overseas Indians, and to oppose the Colonial Office policy of acceding to white settler demands in pushing Indians out of their countries.⁹⁹ Andrews's virtual identification with the Indian emigration

⁹⁶ C.F. Andrews, Final Report, Part I, of the Economic Commission of the East Africa Protectorate, 1917, *The Indian Question in East Africa* (For Private Circulation Only, Nairobi, Kenya Colony, 1921 [?] p 74

⁹⁷ Andrews, *The Indian Question in East Africa.*, p 25

⁹⁸ Andrews to Gandhi, 4 Sep 1920, MSS/F/RBVB/21

⁹⁹ Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 194

cause led him to be assaulted twice on his way to Nairobi on 26 November 1921. Angry European mobs tried to drag him out of the train. He had to be hospitalised and travel under police protection on his way back. The Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill smugly replied to the Governor of Kenya when he was notified of the incident that it ‘would have been a source of satisfaction to [him]... if the offender had received the punishment he deserved’.¹⁰⁰

4.6 Conclusion: Becoming National Icons

The association with indenture transformed the public legacies of Andrews, Polak and Pearson. They emerged as important figures with wide (trans)national acclaim, networked with a wide variety of Indians and Indian representations across the empire. In a moving account of Andrews’s travels along the Nile in East Africa, he recounts meeting groups of Indian men, women and children, who wistfully greeted him at railway halts in remote locations. In a darkness that was broken only by dim lantern lights, he gave impromptu addresses at ports in broken Hindustani.¹⁰¹

Andrews, Polak and Pearson’s engagements with indenture and Indian immigration attests to the problematic nature of their Indophilia. The desire to express their love and loyalty for Gandhi and Tagore propelled them to identify with a larger frame of Indian community and their struggles for equal rights. Indophile subjectivity brought to such movements a coveted whiteness – to be used and deployed to represent the honour of their mentors and leaders – as also the various projects they undertook. White privilege was actively solicited to redress nationalist wrongs. Since the honour of these Indian leaders, India and the causes they led formed part of a composite conceptual logic, defending one would generally mean a defence of the other. Their discipleships were continually projected in a performance of excess to justify itself. In this, their racial identity acted both for and against them. The invocation of personal loyalty was not enough, could never be enough, as their whiteness was uncomfortably close to the identity of the colonising race. Only by instrumentalising their racial privilege against the dominant narratives of their race could their affections and intimacies be vindicated. This tense deployment of racial privilege was central in legitimising their investments for an Indian audience.

¹⁰⁰ House of Commons Debates, 14 June 1922 Question from Josiah Wedgwood to Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, Tinker, Cited in Tinker, *Ordeal*, p 189.

¹⁰¹ ‘Railway Journey: Indian Settlers in Africa’, I, *Modern Review*, June 1920.

Indenture provided an extraordinary site and situation where this privilege was deployed to spectacular practice.

In a discourse that spanned different contexts and sharply split along racial lines, the presence of rare white figures to speak for Indian interests in the empire provided a critical impetus to the politics of representation. Indophile activists against indenture embodied the dense transnational convergences that characterised Indian nationalist discourse. Debates around indenture animated the nationalist presumptions of saving 'Indian honour' that informed Indophile articulation of this issue. Indeed, this also gives us a glimpse into the fraught nature of their interlocution. Since Indophiles associated with indenture saw their investments as a projection of their personal affections to various upper caste/class Indian leaders, it also meant a projection of their specific values as national. The tenor of their own intimacies was premised on the successful articulation of certain class/caste values as normative, ethical and authentically 'Indian'.

Indenture became a discursive site to evidence that representative claim. The success of the anti-indenture campaign legitimised their representative agency on behalf of India and Indians. The abolition of indenture became entangled with their public legacy and repeatedly invoked to justify their participation in and representation of Indian nationalist causes. An Indian daily newspaper reported on Polak's representation of 'South African Indians': 'Mr. Henry Polak has been all within his power to keep before the preoccupied public mind the problem of the position of Indians in South Africa'.¹⁰² In a speech at Kheda in 1918, where peasants had offered satyagraha due to their inability to pay the high taxes, Gandhi introduced Andrews in these words:

I have had occasion before now to introduce Mr. Andrews to you. He can best be described as a rishi for he has all the qualities of a holy sage. He has recently returned from Fiji, where he went on a mission that concerns us. While in Fiji...he lived among the labourers, in their own houses, and studied their manner of living. We have, at present, the Kheda affair at hand. ... I am sure you will be glad to hear that Mr. Andrews has taken it up as his own for the time being. He is leaving today for Bombay to see his Excellency the Governor. He will, on my behalf, place certain facts before him and also convey

¹⁰² 'The South African Indians', *The Times of India*, Nov 6, 1911, pg. 7, accessed from ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Times of India

my request. If anything comes of this, all right; otherwise he will be in Nadiad on Sunday next. Thus he has started working for our cause as well.¹⁰³

The fight against indenture made Andrew a *rishi*, a sage who ‘sacrificed’ his racial privileges to stand for an Indian nationalist cause. The sway of such a narrative is manifest in an anonymous letter to the Editor, published in the *Bombay Chronicle*, with the pseudonym ‘Bharatiya Hriday’ [An Indian Heart]. Referring to a particular instance in Fiji, where 150 Indians were convicted owing to their strike against repatriation measures after the abolition of indenture. The correspondent suggested that ‘Mr. Andrews is returning from South Africa and certainly he is the best person to do this difficult task’ [of investigating]. Owing to Andrews’s illness however, he suggested ‘Pandit Tota Ram of Firozabad’ whom Andrews had praised for his work in Fiji. Andrews’ service, ‘sacrifice’ and sincerity emerged as a grand standard in Indian public life, to be invoked, emulated, celebrated.¹⁰⁴

Andrews, Pearson and Polak’s movements on indenture and emigration was continuously reported and followed in public media, giving them a sympathetic national audience and credibility in India that few white British figures had ever achieved. Their work was not without its critics on the Indian side, but their representative abilities were never questioned, given their ‘sacrifices’. British official opinions differed on the role they fulfilled. Andrews for instance was considered ‘one of those who always sees the virtues of other nations and only the faults of his own’.¹⁰⁵ Most of them acknowledged the important place they had come to occupy in the Indian public imagination, even if it meant a critique of official British politics and policies. Ramsay Macdonald, British Prime Minister in 1932, attests to this serious consideration accorded to Andrews and his close links to Gandhi that were considered useful: ‘I have myself seen Mr. Andrews personally in connection with recent events and he is in regular touch with the India Office.’¹⁰⁶ While ‘disliked and mistrusted by most Englishmen in India’, his endorsement was seen as carrying

¹⁰³ Speech at Ahmedabad meeting, 21 March 1918, ‘Prajabandhu’, translated from Gujarati, *CWMG*, XIV, Oct 1917- July 1918, Delhi, 1965, p 274

¹⁰⁴ Letter to the Editor, ‘Ek Bharatiya Hriday’, *The Bombay Chronicle*, 8 April 1920, Indians in Fiji, IOR/L/PJ/6/2705

¹⁰⁵ Chelmsford to Clare, 5 March 1918, *Ordeal*, p 138

¹⁰⁶ Ramsay Macdonald to Lord Maclay, 20 Oct 1932, MSS EUR/D1113/1-3, C.F. Andrews Collection, British Library. This was during the impasse caused by the Poona Pact due to Ambedkar’s demand for a separate electorate for Dalits/Depressed Classes.

greater authority in India than several other prominent Indian leaders. This understanding led to his being instrumentalised by the India and Colonial Office, perhaps without him being fully aware of it. Recommending his usefulness in the matter of Indian immigration to Kenya, the British Governor of Nigeria remarked to his colleague:

more than anyone else he is in a position to deliver the goods as far as Indian opinion is concerned. If Shastri were to consent to a settlement it would not follow that Indian opinion would endorse it: if Andrews were to say that it was just and fair there is a big probability that he would carry India with him.¹⁰⁷

His ability to mediate between colonial officials and Indian leadership was frequently instrumentalised by imperial offices, who used him as a convenient go-between who could 'deliver the goods'. The association of white Indophiles in a transnational discourse such as indenture /immigration precipitated major intersections in Indian politics. They opened up mainland politics to the struggles and debates of its extraterritorial diasporas. Whether India would be equal and free in the larger empire was put to test not so much in India itself as through Indians elsewhere in the empire: in Africa, Australia or South America. Polak and Andrews brought home the point that the real site to battle out imperial citizenship and the extension of metropolitan rights that should come with it was not in India so much as these diasporic locations spread across the empire. Supporting the right for Indians to equal citizenship and mobility in a unified Commonwealth, they critiqued the racist representative politics of the white community in Dominion colonies:

This assumption – that the White Community alone can represent the British Commonwealth, and that citizenship in that Commonwealth must never be extended beyond the White Race- this assumption, if once finally accepted and endorsed, would change the whole structure of British Rule abroad.¹⁰⁸

Only by realising the the exclusions practiced at its margins, they argued, could Indian nationalist discourse harness a wider geopolitical ambit. As interlocutors, they were continuously writing, reporting and mobilising against indenture and for free

¹⁰⁷ Oldham to Lugard, 22 May 1923, MSS EUR/D1113/1-3.

¹⁰⁸ C.F. Andrews, *The Indian Question in East Africa*, p 25

immigration. Their reports, essays and books informed and crucially shaped official and unofficial attitudes on indenture. Almost every issue of the journal *Modern Review* had an article on indenture or Indian immigration issues from 1914 to 1940. Institutions such as the Imperialist Citizenship Organisation and Overseas Indians Association supported their travels and visits to emigrant Indian communities settled abroad, and also their investigations of conditions in indentured ex-colonies. Polak, based in London, lobbied for better pay and work conditions through the Overseas Indians Association, 'to allay public feeling in the Indian community in Fiji and also in India.'¹⁰⁹

As members of the colonising race, their whiteness made them valuable resources in providing leverage in high profile negotiations, providing access to multiple audiences and spaces that hitherto no Indian individual or institution could have, an attribute which was exploited most skilfully by nationalist politics at home and abroad. They brought together apparently incongruent entities and interests, mediating and brokering as strategic go-betweens. But perhaps most importantly, they helped normalise the ideal Indian as a bearer of high culture, birth and civilizational inheritance. This articulation and representation of the ideal Indian emigrant in imperial discourses on migration invariably refracted and replicated the class/caste presumptions of Indian nationalist politics, allying it closely with the anxieties of the colonial elite concerned with the politics of representation. Only by upholding the nationalist status quo that this class/caste nexus represented could their intimacies with their mentors be sustained. The ideal Indian emigrant was to be in the image of a Tagore, Gandhi or Gokhale, educated, spreading culture or civilisation in British colonies everywhere, their communities upholding ethical values and an idealised family life wherever they settled.

¹⁰⁹ Polak, Secy of the Indians Overseas Association, London to the India Office, 14 Feb 1921, Indians in Fiji, IOR/L/PJ/6/2705, British Library

Chapter 5

Places and Practices of Discipleship

Vivekananda and his Women Disciples

1890-1910

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is about Vivekananda and a handful of his women disciples all of whom were British or American. While some of Mira's experiences with Gandhi and his ashrams bear analogy, I only allude to her while drawing on such comparisons directly. This is for various reasons. Unlike Gandhi (or Tagore), Vivekananda did not have any woman-disciple in India even as he was very much the first major modern Hindu guru that preached religion in the West. None of Vivekananda's women disciples ever lived in a formal ashram, and their experiences of discipleship diverge significantly because of that spatial difference. Moreover, while part of late nineteenth century cultural nationalism, Vivekananda predated the decades of 1910-1920s, a period that saw an intensification of the reach of Indian nationalism and defined the activities of Gandhi and Tagore's western disciples.

Several reasons mark the absence of Indian women disciples. Ramakrishna, the nineteenth century mystic - was famous for his aversion to women and gold - *kaminikanchan* - unless they were amply maternal or daughterly, both forms that negated or transcended their sexuality. The initiation into conventional monasticism meant a withdrawal from the world; overcoming attachments to women were a key part of that process. His disciples inherited and practised such an approach quite rigorously. Male disciples' access to Sarada Devi's household (Ramakrishna's consort, regarded as the Holy Mother of the community), for instance, was tightly bound by purdah rules. The Ramakrishna Mission established by Vivekananda with his community of brother-monks, while making important departures from conventional monasticism such as an active role in social service or *seva*, did not allow for the equal co-presence of women.¹ Vivekananda's ambition

¹ Gwilym Beckerlegge discusses how *seva* emerged as a central tenet of the Mission in the context of sweeping changes in the nature of organised philanthropy in nineteenth century colonial India. See

was to realise projects such as Hindu women's education, but a lack of any female takers within India, accorded western women (and workers in general) a special place in his projects. Given that Vivekananda did not make any female Indian disciple in his lifetime,² their inclusion is significant. In this, he followed the precedent set by Brahma Samaj and other reformist societies in Bengal, Madras and Bombay, that freely enlisted the intervention of white women inspired by a zeal to educate their Indian 'sisters'.³ His wish to have 'heaps of other English workers out here' for different initiatives such as a farm colony in Bihar remained unfulfilled.⁴ Yet those who managed to follow him all the way to India and sustained interest even after his death became important figures in a larger history of Indophilia, helping produce forms of India and Hinduism for both universalist and cultural nationalist consumption. This chapter looks at their 'worlding' as disciples, how their entry into the cultural world of Hindu devotion and moments of enchantment, education and failure became part of a larger cultural realignment that fostered their love for an idealised India. Their entry into this world heralded a coming closer to their guru, even as this becoming was constantly surrounded by doubt, agony and difficulties of difference.

Following from the earlier examination of letters and ashrams, this chapter continues to explore and extend on the theme of self-making across a range of intimate sites. Western women who enlisted themselves in the cause of Vivekananda and Vedanta came from a certain class of well-educated, non-

Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Oxford: 2006). The number of works on Ramakrishna and his influence is vast. Major representative works include but are not limited to Amiya P Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation* (Delhi, 2006); See also Sen's *Three essays on Sri Ramakrishna and his times*, Shimla, 2001; Gwilym Beckerlegge, *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement*, (Oxford, 2000); Sumit Sarkar, *An exploration of the Ramakrishna Vivekananda tradition*, (Shimla, 1993); also Sarkar's 'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti': Ramakrishna and His Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 29, (Jul. 18, 1992), pp. 1543-1559+1561-1566. Works that dismiss Ramakrishna's influence as purely propaganda include Narasingha P. Sil, 'Vivekānanda's Rāmākṛṣṇa: An Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propaganda', *Numen* Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), pp. 38-62.

² Sarala Devi Chaudhuri, also Tagore's niece, came close to accepting his discipleship but it collapsed after opposition from his family, who were staunch Adi Brahma Samaj supporters. See her autobiography *Jeebaner Jharapata*, (Calcutta, 1950) where she regrets not having joined Vivekananda due to her family's opposition (that included Tagore). She would come to play a major role in the cultural nationalist turn through the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal during 1905-1910, contributing to the growth of physical culture and *akhadas*.

³ Several historians have problematized the politics of such interventions, see Kumari Jayawardene, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia During British Rule* (1995); Nupur Chaudhuri, Margaret Strobel, eds. *Western Women and Imperialism Complicity and Resistance*, Bloomington, 1992; [Vron Ware](#), *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History*, London, 1992.

⁴ Nivedita to Mrs. Eric Hammond, 7 Aug [1898], *LSN-I*, p 17.

conformist but spiritually inclined women who generally had access to important social, cultural and economic resources. For them, Vivekananda was both *deeksha* and *siksha* guru, providing ritual initiation and instruction in the cultural world of Hindu devotion. It shows the production of loyal Indophile subjects out of sympathetic western seekers. In so doing, how did they encounter Vivekananda and his larger community, framed by differences of race, caste, class and gender? What were the spaces, places and objects that framed the setting of such encounters? I explore how these encounters came together to create a language of spiritual domesticity that evoked and sustained the practice of discipleship. They encompass a series of spatial, material and physical experiences that made possible a process of intimate-ness that continuously sought to bring disciples closer to the life and world inhabited by Vivekananda, embedded in his larger community.

A focus on the dynamics of their personal relationships with Vivekananda's spiritual community helps reclaim the seemingly difficult and distant discourse of Vedanta through everyday practices. Vedanta, an abstract and monist form of Hindu philosophy, greatly appealed to western audiences for its ability to render itself as rational, universal and scientific, without negating their belief in other religious systems. Vedanta became a powerful, if abstract, signifier for these disciples to gather around Vivekananda as its charismatic preacher. The personhood of Vivekananda was no less influential in rendering these affections into concrete discipleships.

This chapter argues how the claim to intimacy also became a cause for change, framed by their close encounters with a series of new spaces, sights and sensations. To be able to love the India that Vivekananda represented was to immerse themselves in their guru's world – of spiritual mothers, fellow godmen, holy shrines and rituals – that was for them full of novelty and wonder. That it also was to unsettle, often fundamentally, their own senses of cultural belonging and beliefs was not always a pleasant discovery. Everyday and extraordinary experiences produced in these disciples a love for the guru, his community and the idea of a glorious Hindu civilisation. They shed valuable light on affective aspects of their discipleship, even as they get harnessed for more public-political projects that take Vedanta as an open signifier.

Disciples' desire to be part of Vivekananda's life and work involved lengthy periods of training and travel across sacred landscapes of Hinduism. These experiences were often characterised by bitterness, doubt and non-understanding. Noble's British pride, for instance, was relentlessly exposed and disabused by Vivekananda. The period of initiation and training by Vivekananda was replete with such tensions and transgressions. In spite of its different thrusts, there was a constant re-education and cultural realignment that characterised this process. Each small training was part of a larger self-remaking process that western disciples had to undergo.

Their residence as disciples, the spiritual retreats and camps in picturesque locations, or travels across the sacred Himalayan landscapes formed a continuum of spaces suffused with intense spiritual presence. Ashram-like spaces, much like ashrams, came to embody the qualities and experiences of their own difference and its possible dissolution. As the strictly monastic and celibate ashram of Ramakrishna Mission did not allow for admission of female disciples, the household of Sarada Devi or their own small house by the Ganges came to fulfil that aspiration. They created a series of aestheticized spiritual landscapes, performing and providing gestures of acceptance suggestive of meaningful inclusion. Unlike the formal ashramic structures or discipline that regulated Tagore, Gandhi or Vivekananda's ashrams, these spaces were informal; not always definite yet resembled them in its experience. Vivekananda was no less opposed to

the eternal mechanization of actions and thoughts that claim to "organise", by petrifying people. He wanted the internal flow to be perpetually at liberty; and he was not afraid of contradictions.'⁵

Populated by a cast of holy characters that ranged from Vivekananda, his *gurubhais*/brother-disciples,⁶ and Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother of the Mission to others, these ashram-like spaces, their landscapes and mundane artefacts provided the spatial, affective and material loci of deep discipleship. It produced and sustained a spiritual-domestic world that these women disciples sought to identify with and enter. It framed their encounters with Vivekananda and his spiritual community, spatialized their affections and translated their love, longing and

⁵ Account of Miss MacLeod, Rolland, *Inde...*, p 193

⁶ Disciples of the same guru, in this instance Ramakrishna.

loyalty within an idiom of guru and *shishya*/disciple. The desire to be intimate also produced its own tensions.

For these white women, negotiating a new, unfamiliar idiom of relationship with their guru was not beyond the hegemonic and racialised structures of affect that characterised such exchanges. They understood the difference they embodied but also its instrumental value, exploited amply in taking Vivekananda and Vedanta to the 'world'. MacLeod felt deeply discomfited at the prospect of touching Sarada Devi's feet, and while travelling in North India, they came across places that prohibited Vivekananda from dining with his white disciples. Bull and Noble struggled with the notion of complete submission to their guru required of them, while MacLeod refused to do so, seeking to contain her relationship within the trope of a 'friend'. On the other hand, in some orthodox Hindu temples, these disciples found themselves denied entry owing to their outcaste status, something they learnt to accept without any open resentment.

5.2 Encountering Vivekananda

Vivekananda's personality exercised a great pull over his women followers, who were spellbound by his oratorical power and physical appearance. That a large number of women followers were single unattached women drawn to an avowedly unavailable monk attests to the gendered nature of this attraction. Similar to Gandhi and Tagore's western disciples, it was an attraction that rested fundamentally on the non-resolution of personal desire and its continual sublimation. Christine Greenstidel, who adopted Vivekananda as her guru and later became Sister Christine, felt overwhelmed by the 'forceful, virile figure which stepped on the platform....a powerful saint':

He stood on the platform of the Unitarian Church pouring forth glorious truths in a voice unlike any voice one had ever heard before, a voice full of cadences, expressing every motion, now with a pathos that stirred hitherto unknown depths of tragedy, and then just as the pain was becoming unbearable, that same voice would move one to mirth only to check it in a midcourse with the thunder of an earnestness so intense that it left one awed, a

trumpet call to awake. One felt that one never knew what music was until one heard that marvellous voice.⁷

Similar to Mira's first encounter of Gandhi, the description has a *darshan* like quality in its detail; a devotee struck by the vision of her deity. This awe of his voice and power was shared by MacLeod, who never tired of pointing out

the beauty, the charm, and the attractive power that beamed from him. An athletic force, that united him to grace. An energetic jaw and fiery eyes. A wonderful voice that in part ensured his success. A beautiful voice like a cello, a bit serious, absorbing, moving (very different from Tagore's – which is higher), without éclats, but whose deep vibrations filled the room and the hearts, and knew how to quieten gradually to the level of an intense *piano* when the audience was captivated, thus training its audience to the intimacy of the soul⁸

MacLeod spoke admiringly of his 'athletic body and jet-black eyes'⁹ to European literary icons such as Romain Rolland and Nikos Kazantzakis. Several private and public accounts, particularly those of women admirers, remark on the pull of his physical appearance. Noble notes that even as she remained sceptical about the novelty of his message, she was 'deeply attracted by his personality'.¹⁰ His sonorous voice, lofty eloquence, 'liquid eyes' and a blatant disregard for chivalrous codes made him a forceful, if unconventional, manly figure to his followers. Reeves Calkins, a Christian missionary from America acidly remarked that it was more his eyes than his ideals that 'were leading captive silly American women'.¹¹ Greenstidel recounts how he would provocatively blow the cigarette smoke on the face of his women followers, arguing that at the heart of all chivalrous performances lie sexual desire.¹² While visiting Paris, the French Satanist Jules Bois apparently encouraged the famous French operatic singer Emma Calve to secretly seduce Vivekananda, to test of his vows of strict celibacy.¹³

⁷ Christine Greenstidel, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda: His Eastern and Western Admirers*, (Mayavati, 1983), p 103

⁸ 13 May 1927, Josephine MacLeod's meeting with Rolland, *Inde...*, p 192

⁹ Nikos Kazantzakis, *England; a travel journal*, (London, 1966). Kazantzakis is widely regarded as a major author in Modern Greek literature.

¹⁰ Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him, Being Pages from the Life of the Swami Vivekananda*, (London, 1910), pp 11-12.

¹¹ Reeve Calkins, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, p 399

¹² Christine Greenstidel, *Reminiscences...*, p 135

¹³ Calve refused Bois's overtures, arguing that Vivekananda was a monk and 'she respected the God who was within him MacLeod'. In later life, she visited Belur Math to pay her respects to

Denunciations (and temptations) of sexual desire aside, the presence of (generally single) white women around him and their adorations served to buttress the power and spectacle of his own hetero-masculinity not only in the west but also outside of it. He praised the beauty, energy and intelligence of American women and commended them to his fellow countrymen. The erotics involved in crowds of white women adoring a celibate brown guru served to delineate the power of his own masculinity and self-control, seemingly impervious and standing above any sexual temptation. Turiyananda, an Indian disciple of Vivekananda asserted: 'Look at Swamiji! What was his power? He was free from lust. He lived among beautiful women, yet there was dispassion in his heart.'¹⁴ The ability to transcend his sexuality was what made him a powerful celibate figure. In a rather Foucauldian move, it framed Vivekananda's success in relation to his being a sexual subject, if only to deny it.

The transnational/western recognition and celebration of his non-western masculinity magnified its allegorical power in colonial nationalist discourse. He became the idealized figure of masculinity in cultural nationalist discourse, idolised

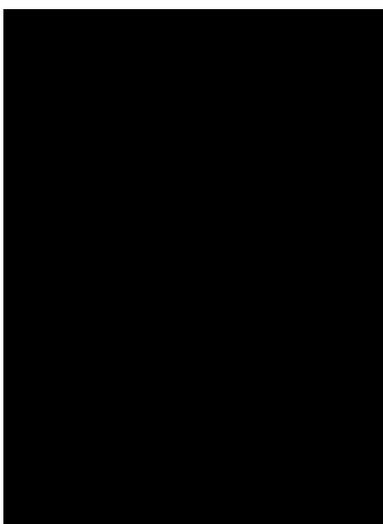


Figure 6: Swami Vivekananda, September, 1893, Chicago. The Folded hand pose, now iconised nationally and internationally. Source: Ramakrishna Mission

in the famous cross-armed pose (see figure) that circulated widely post 1905 with the spread of extremist nationalist politics in India.

Vivekananda demonstrated the performative aspect of guru-dom with great panache to curious audiences. In a West-end drawing room in London in November, Noble reports,

he sat amongst us, in his crimson robe and girdle, as one bringing us news from a far land, with a curious habit of saying now and again "Shiva! Shiva!" and wearing that look of mingled gentleness and loftiness, that one sees on the faces of those who live much in meditation...¹⁵

Vivekananda and her guru Ramakrishna. The source of much of this gossip is Rolland, via MacLeod. *Tantine*, p 215.

¹⁴ Swami Turiyananda, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, p 341

¹⁵ Nivedita, *The Master*, p 8

The chanting of strange Sanskrit hymns in a near mystifying atmosphere, clad in a Hindu monk's habit and slipping in and out of meditation, produced great theatrical effects. For Noble it was a feeling that 'great music wakes in us, grows and deepens with its repetition'.¹⁶ Vivekananda's first words came to MacLeod as truth and 'for seven years whatever he uttered was ... truth'. So complete was this immersion that:

[w]hen Swamiji started speaking,...I lifted my eyes and saw with these very eyes.... Krishna himself standing there and preaching the Gita. That was my first wonderful vision. I stared and stared... I saw only the figure, and all else vanished.'¹⁷

This effacement and merging between Vivekananda and Krishna invoked and deepened the experience of bhakti in followers such as MacLeod. But her Krishna was the eloquent prophet uttering the Gita, not the philandering romantic who flirted with 'cow-girls'. In disciples' projection of Vivekananda, we already see the incipient figure of the 'patriot-prophet' that would intensify in later cultural nationalist discourse. Later hagiographies around the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition would develop the claim of their being avatars or reincarnations of various Hindu deities and seers (*saptarshi*) to great popular appeal, part of the organisation's attempt to strengthen its connection to with mainstream Hindu traditions.

These soul-stirring performances and enunciations of a lofty and elusive yet enchanting guru made lifelong disciples out of several curiosity seekers. It birthed a desire to love and serve India – or a form of Indophilia – that sought to bring them forever closer to their guru's life and world. It derived out of their attraction to Vivekananda but was not bound by it. Disciples' derivations of their guru, particularly after his death, existed in a relationship of tense ambiguity, in the kind of investments they sought to identify with. But the memory of Vivekananda remained a moving factor, the power of his speech a continuous source of inspiration. That Vivekananda's semantic acts could have an immense mobilising effect is confirmed by Greenstidel:

Our love for India came to birth, I think, when we first heard him say the word, "India", in that marvellous voice of his. It seems incredible that so much could have been put into one small word of five letters. There was love,

¹⁶ Nivedita, *The Master*, p 11

¹⁷ Linda Prugh, *Josephine MacLeod and Vivekananda's Mission*, (Chennai, 1999) p 26

passion, pride, longing, adoration... It had the magic power of creating love in those who heard it. Ever after, India became the land of heart's desire.

Everything concerning her became of interest — became living — her people, her history, architecture, her manners and customs, her rivers, mountains, plains, her culture, her great spiritual concepts, her scriptures. And so began a new life, a life of study, of meditation. The centre of interest was shifted.¹⁸

Noble, Bull and MacLeod - not to mention many other disciples – felt similarly. MacLeod recalls how Vivekananda instilled in her a desire to love India, rendered through various efforts in later life. Encountering Vivekananda therefore, was a sensory revelation.

In the early years of their relationship, western disciples were not forced to renounce or renegotiate their national or religious identities to be able to love Vivekananda, Vedanta and India. As Noble puts it: not 'only has the New Hinduism found its first firm foothold in the USA and in London, but everyone who has joined it actively is passionately loyal to England.'¹⁹ The desire to serve India sat very well with an imperial vision of civilisation, if only Vedanta was an indigenist nationalist trope used in that service. That these early beliefs soon came under severe strain and suspension was borne out by the gradual deepening of their discipleship. It saw a sharp shift in their politics in later life – particularly Noble's – through her complete identification with the anti-colonial cause and disavowal of British privileges. Vivekananda considered Noble a 'real acquisition', an asset for his Indian work. He was sure that 'she will soon surpass Mrs. [Annie] Besant as a speaker'.²⁰ Within two years of her stay, Noble wrote: '...my whole soul is in India. I am more and more convinced that there is nothing to be done outside'.²¹

Vivekananda's articulations, like Tagore and Gandhi's were able to move, push and mobilise his disciples to sympathetically identify with a country and culture far removed from their own, an India whose racial and political relationship with the west rested largely on subjugation. It created 'love' – made possible an affective connection with India as its object. To be able to love such a distant cultural entity and its people was to come to terms with their own closures, their discipleships constituting a process that aided its realisation. In Vivekananda's rousing rhetoric,

¹⁸ Sister Christine, *Reminiscences*, p 105

¹⁹ Noble to Mr and Mrs. Hammond, 10 Feb 1898, *LSN-I*, p 7

²⁰ Vivekananda to Shashi, March 1898, *LSV* – p 377

²¹ Noble to Macleod, Jan 1901, *LSN-I*, p 167

his disciples found a new love for India that manifested itself through different religious, political and cultural projects. Indophilia emerged as a central condition and consequence of their discipleship.

Vivekananda struggled to create an impersonalised language of discipleship premised on the sublimation of more personal desires. Recognising the dangers of personal adoration and its potential to unsettle his strict code of celibacy (and to neutralise related rumours), he continually sought to create a language of discipleship that did not hold him captive to the expectations of his followers. He struggled to demarcate the proprieties of these affections, fearing the excessive personal adoration as an impediment to grasping the spiritual. It made the negotiation of discipleships for these western women entirely new to the paradigm of Indian guru-dom quite fraught. The struggle to reconcile their deep affections for Vivekananda into impersonal practices had to take into account the immense power hierarchies of Indo-western encounters. The relationships thus created were not impervious to the truth of such a power. That most of these western disciples were patrons providing critical material sustenance to the Vedantic movement recreated the symbolism of that hierarchy, if not always the substance. Consequently, an element of patronising, however subtle, seemed inescapable.

An acknowledgement of Vivekananda and Vedanta's moral superiority unsettled that material hierarchy but the relationships themselves had to be reconstituted, reframed and renamed in different terms. Invoking varieties of filial, maternal and fraternal love with close western members became a common way to incorporate their affections in acceptable terms. Affectionate nicknames were coined such as Yum and JoJo for MacLeod, Saint Sara for Bull or Margot for Noble. Vivekananda was variously referred to in exalted terms as Master, Swami, Prophet and even King.

Not all of his followers were captivated by this enthralling power. Mrs. Ashton Jonson, an early British disciple who grew disillusioned, criticised the 'cult' and culture that grew around Vivekananda. She castigated Vivekananda's lifestyle in the West as un-monastic and opulent for a sannyasin, a charge that others such as E.T. Sturdy and Henrietta Muller made as well, before abandoning Vedantic activities in 1899. Jonson felt absolutely disgusted by Noble's 'worship at the Swami's feet', a gesture she considered 'so deplorable as to be quite unspeakable

from an English woman's point of view'.²² 'Feet-touching' was very much a transgressive act for a white (British) person to perform, one that absolutely polarised racial difference across a variety of contexts. That it instigated so much white resentment while earning respect with Indians attests to its potency. Submitting oneself at the feet of an Indian guru was therefore common to the self-effacement practices of Andrews, Mira and Pearson.

Muller had been an early benefactor for Vivekananda's British work. She had housed and hosted him and his retinue of Indian monks and followers in London. But their domestic arrangement was a tense one, where Muller seemed to have earned the epithet of 'old maid' in Vivekananda's circle. Mahendranath Dutta (Vivekananda's brother) who was staying in the same house with Swami Saradananda recounts Vivekananda's comments (made in Bengali):

That mad hag [khyaptan magi] is making me restless. Look Sarat [Saradananda], in this country women who do not get married end up in two ways when they age. Some women fatten up; they remain nice gentle people. Some women shrivel up; they become querulous. ... Listen you all, you must be very careful when dealing with the old hag. Get up immediately when she comes in the room, ask her how she is, don't put your hands in your pantaloon pockets, don't put them on your chest. As long the old maid [buri] is standing, you guys must not sit. ... Satisfy her by all means.²³ (Tr. mine)

Framed in strongly racialised, sexist and misogynist terms, it also reveals the compulsions of outward reverence that financial obligation brought towards white patrons. In later life, Muller alleged deception against Vivekananda (and Hinduism in general) and returned to Protestant Christianity assuring Noble: "Oh you won't love him [Vivekananda] long!"²⁴ Indian disciples were privy to frictions between Vivekananda and his western associates in a way that the latter may not have always registered.

²² Cited from, Gwilym Beckerlegge, *The Ramakrishna Mission*, pp 171-174. Sturdy and Muller's withdrew from the Vedanta Society work in England by 1899. New York also suffered as Abhednanda's relationship became strained with some longstanding disciples such as Francis Leggett. Swami Kripananda and Abhayananda, two of his American disciples also defected. The personal financial support and underwriting of the cost of the Society's activities suffered with these withdrawals. p 169

²³ Mahendranath Dutta, *Londone Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1931), p 71

²⁴ Noble to MacLeod, [1.1.1899?], *LSN-I*, P 32

Even as several disciples felt disenchanted with the Vedantic cause or found fault with Vivekananda's monasticism, there remained others whose faith and investments deepened. Bull became a maternal figure for the fledgling brotherhood of the Ramakrishna Mission. She was addressed by Vivekananda and many of his Indian and western disciples as the '(American) Mother', who in turn, would refer to the latter as 'my dearest child'.²⁵ While in matters spiritual Vivekananda remained the superior, she remained influential in managing the administrative work and finances of the early Vedanta Societies in the U.S. Yet, assumptions of motherhood and guru-hood did not always sit together comfortably. There were bitter clashes over decisions taken regarding the working of the Vedanta Societies in the initial years of their relationship. Bull would reprimand Vivekananda for his occasional loss of temper while dealing with missionaries and detractors who sought to disprove or disgrace him. After a particularly sharp exchange between Vivekananda and a Presbyterian priest at a parlour talk in New York in 1895, Vivekananda fretted, in a vein similar to his guru Ramakrishna, on attachments to women:

The last fight with the Presbyterian priest and the long fight afterwards with Mrs. Bull showed me ... [That] ... [a]ll friendship, all love, is only limitation. There never was a friendship, especially of women, which was not exacting'.²⁶

At times of friction, particularly with women disciples, Vivekananda was wont to invoke the metaphor of bondage. His wish to break free of limitations ran counter to the deep obligations his work sustained. Being a guru did not absolve him of that limitation or rendered his sway absolute. The claim to guruhood was continually, if often implicitly, contested by the presence of other claims – personal and material. Unlike disciples like Henrietta Mueller or Edward Sturdy, however, Bull never broke away owing to her disagreements with Vivekananda, bequeathing most of her massive fortune to causes and people affiliated to Vivekananda after her death, a revelation that was bitterly contested by her daughter Olea Bull in the U.S.²⁷ Noble and Christine became *brahmacharinis* or initiated monastic disciples, adopting the

²⁵ Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara: The Life of Sara Chapman Bull, The American Mother of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, 2002, p 104

²⁶ Vivekananda to Mary Hale, 1 Feb 1895, New York, *LSV*

²⁷ It inaugurated a protracted legal battle that was eventually won by Bull's daughter, though she died hours after the settlement hearing. The whole trial was salaciously reported and followed in the major dailies between Feb-June 1911. Vivekananda, the Ramakrishna Mission and particularly Sister Nivedita was viciously maligned. Ole Bull Will Contest', *New York Times*, 13 Feb 1911; 'Spirits urged \$25,000 Gift, Said Mrs. Bull', *Boston Herald*, 15 June 1911.

severest asceticism with regard to diet, habits, dress and even company. Several others, including Bull, accepted initiation as lay disciples. MacLeod never thought of herself as a disciple but a friend. She accepted Vivekananda's authority as a teacher, her 'idol and her passion', whose influence changed her life irrevocably.

I take the term discipleship in a wide sense of the term, to refer to people who adopted Vivekananda as their direct spiritual mentor and his exposition of (neo) Vedanta. In this regard, it was similar to the spiritual mentorship of Tagore and Gandhi to Andrews, Pearson and Mira. There were, of course, important individual differences in the ways these discipleships were negotiated. While there was no uniformity in method or practices of discipleship, there was a unity in the way they gathered under Vivekananda's tutelage:

With some, it was an incessant hammering. The severest asceticism was imposed with regard to diet, habits, even clothing and conversation. With others his method was not so easy to understand, for the habit of asceticism was not encouraged. Was it because in this case there was spiritual vanity to be overcome and because good had become a bondage? With one the method was ridicule — loving ridicule — with another it was sternness. We watched the transformation of those who put themselves into line with it. Nor were we ourselves spared. Our pet foibles were gently smiled out of existence. Our conventional ideas underwent a process of education. We were taught to think things through, to reject the false and hold to the true fearlessly, no matter what the cost.²⁸

Nivedita fitted easily within the framework of ascetic training and 'loving ridicule', that nearly broke her; for MacLeod and Bull, asceticism was never advised. Notions of *seva* (service) and *sadhana* (spiritual exercise) played a crucial role in Vivekananda's training of his disciples.²⁹ He constantly propelled his disciples to the wider cause of philanthropic service, a mode through which they could merge and identify with things larger than themselves. If industrial modernity and capitalist formations individuated western society, Vivekananda's exhortations against western material excesses were a call to suture such segregated selves into a utopian spiritualised collectivity. The trope of *sadhana* or striving (spiritual, but

²⁸ Christine, *Reminiscences*, p 134

²⁹ Gwilym Beckerlegge has dealt with the complex socio-economic organisation that shaped the multi-sited discourses of *seva* and *sadhana* in late 19th century colonial Bengal in which the Ramakrishna Mission's legacy was rooted, Gwilym Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (Oxford, 2006).

not solely) informed the self-transformations of Mira, Andrews and Pearson too, as well as the push to merge oneself in the service of a 'greater good'. Their training and close living in the wider socio-spiritual community of Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi animated that lost ethic through particular spaces where individualised selves could be scaled down and harnessed into a spiritualised whole.

5.3 Mapping Spiritual Domesticity

Unlike Slade, Andrews and Pearson, who lived and moved across Gandhi and Tagore's ashrams freely, the world of Vivekananda's monastic ashram life was barred to his women disciples for its rigid adherence to segregated living. In its absence, they came to inhabit ashram-like spaces – simulations of ashrams – that shaped their own sense of belonging to Vivekananda and India. This is perhaps an awkwardly termed category, in the absence of a more elegant phrase, to denote a range of socio-spiritual spaces that were not designated as formal ashrams.

Ashram-like spaces enabled them with a sense of community marked by intense spiritual striving. It provided disciples with a shared space to indulge in emotional and material practices of their discipleship. Many of these landscapes were mobile spaces, in the sense of not being definite or territorially rooted. These include camps and retreats organised in the presence of Vivekananda or his brother disciples in places such as Thousand Islands in the US. The presence of Vivekananda or other holy associations could spur into being such communities of belonging.

It was in the course of such camps, retreats and gatherings that his disciples came to partake in Vivekananda's religious undertakings. These socio-spiritual spaces had a similar function to that of ashrams but was decidedly less formal and flexible in its organisation. It nurtured a spiritual community of belonging for his disciples, living close to their mentor and his world, even as they were unable to participate in it fully owing to their outcaste and gender locations within India. In western settings, this would usually take the form of camps and retreats in quiet picturesque sites. It is revealing that Vivekananda's western work would come to be organised under the sign of 'Vedanta Society', while in India, it proliferated as the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.³⁰ This dual move signifies the universalist and

³⁰ See Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (Calcutta, 1957) for a fairly extensive, if one-sided, account of the national and international growth of the organisation.

cultural nationalist discourses to which it sought to lay claim and placed itself alongside, reflecting anxieties of respectability and authenticity respectively, if not exclusively. Vivekananda's global operations relied fundamentally on his disciples' desire to replicate the particular spirituality attendant to ashramic spaces. They travelled back and forth from India and collaborated closely with Indian monastics of the Ramakrishna Order who helped in the proliferation of the Vedanta network all over north America.

In India, disciples' training involved long periods of travel, stay and instruction in spaces and places sacred to Hindu religious geography. This string of aestheticized spiritual landscapes forged a geography of belonging – making 'homes' out of hitherto unfamiliar spaces – that produced an essentialised sense of Indian-ness for disciples to relate themselves. A series of everyday spiritualised spaces were connected to their self-making practices in meaningful ways. Disciples visualised spectacular moments through their guru, even though much of their meaning remained elusive. Its elusiveness was however, also its effect, the density of the experience necessitating the need for the guru who embodied and elaborated.

Retreats and camps were a common mode to recreate this sense of spiritual (be)longing. Vivekananda visited the picturesque Camp Percy by Lake Christine, New Hampshire at Francis Leggett's (MacLeod's brother-in-law) invitation in 1895. One morning, he seemed to have lost consciousness while meditating under a pine tree one morning. He was not breathing and the 'Gita had fallen from his hand and the front of his robe was wet with tears.'³¹ MacLeod, on witnessing this, thought he had passed away. When Leggett assured her that he had fallen in a trance and attempted to shake him out of it, MacLeod stopped him, remembering that 'Swamiji had once said that when he would be in deep meditation one should not touch him'.³² The trance like spectacle of *nirvikalpa samadhi* (Absolute Transcendence) remained beyond the grasp of his western disciples,³³ yet this inaccessibility impressed Vivekananda's spiritual power and became a lesson to those witnessing.

³¹ Prugh, *Josephine MacLeod*, p 45

³² Ibid.

³³ A state of mind considered in Indian Yoga as the attainment of the highest state of consciousness, where the boundaries between the knower, the known and the act of knowing is dissolved.

MacLeod felt as if the days in the camp 'passed in a dream'. The swami's presence wrought a colossal change in her in the last few months. She felt herself living and breathing in a 'tremendous, wonderful... dream'. All externalities dissolved into Vivekananda: 'She saw only him, illumined... From that moment everything began, from that moment everything would go on for eternity and she with it.'³⁴ Being with Vivekananda - listening to him - produced the transcendental effect of suspending space and time. At Ridgely Manor, the Leggetts' residence, Vivekananda's eloquence left his audience in a heightened spiritual state:

we were all spellbound by his eloquence – such thoughts I have never heard expressed by mortal man such as he uttered for two and a half hours. We were all deeply affected. Swami was inspired to a degree that I have never heard before. He leaves us soon and perhaps we shall never see him again, but he will leave an ineffaceable impression on our hearts that will comfort us to the end of our earthly careers.³⁵

Draped in 'flame coloured silks' his 'splendid' demeanour enthralled the hearts and imaginations of those gathered. However, he was not only a lofty guru. He mingled easily with the MacLeod-Leggett family, partaking in a domesticity that included the everyday and the ordinary made spiritual. Vivekananda struck deep bonds with MacLeod and her family, sharing their life, love and laughter. The family came to revere Vivekananda as a 'Prophet' and was inspired by his presence. At Ridgely Manor, Vivekananda and his brother disciples Turiyananda and Abhedananda stayed as guests in July 1899, along with Noble and Bull. The stay subsequently came to be referred to as the 'Great Summer' by their hosts for its elevating and deeply memorable times. Vivekananda reciprocated such gestures of affection and inclusion warmly. MacLeod fondly recalled his fondness for chocolate ice cream: 'because, "I too am chocolate and I like it," he would say' (a moment of racial identification?).³⁶ Maud Stumm, a young artist and admirer of Vivekananda and frequent visitor at the Ridgely Manor recounts his affection for MacLeod:

As he was landing from the steamer he was carrying most carefully a big bottle wrapped in papers that were torn and ragged; this precious bottle which he

³⁴ Frances Leggett, *Late and Soon: The Story of a Transatlantic Marriage*, (Boston, 1968), p 278

³⁵ Frank to MacLeod, 6 Jan 1896, *Late and Soon*, p 102

³⁶ Josephine MacLeod, *Reminiscences*, p 160

refused to relinquish before reaching Binneswater contained a wonderful sauce like curry, brought by hand from India. "For Joe," he said'.³⁷

The feelings and memories evoked around 'chocolate ice-creams' to 'sauce like curries' attests to how such commonplace practices of domestic affection threaded the differences that bound them. He continued to be entangled in the routine world of his followers in the U.S, attending for instance MacLeod's sister Betty and her husband Frank Leggett's marriage in Paris. So pervasive was the presence of Vivekananda in their everyday lives that Frank would write to Betty, after proposing marriage: 'and I long for you and love you with the ardour of *our Hindu* and I go along repeating the comforting words "Betty is mine, Betty is mine".³⁸ It shows the domesticizing of cultural meanings derived through a broader set of affective practices around him and his circle of followers.

Epistolary practices inscribed the extent of such affiliations, and the spontaneous, normalised manner in which Vivekananda or his world became part of everyday conversations. MacLeod wanted to name Betty and Frank's daughter *Nalini* (The Blue Lotus, a symbol of enlightenment in Vedantic and Buddhist philosophy), regarding her as a spiritual child of the Swami and herself. Frank, who seemed to have been unmoved in this regard, named her Frances (clearing once and for all any doubt about his paternity).³⁹ Assumptions to spiritual matrimony shed light on the sublimations perpetually at work in the relationships negotiated between Vivekananda and some of his female followers, particularly Noble and MacLeod.

Greenstidel wrote of a similar joyful experience in the Thousand Islands Retreat in the same year, living in Vivekananda's presence:

Of the wonderful weeks that followed, it is difficult to write. Only if one's mind were lifted to that high state of consciousness in which we lived for the time could one hope to recapture the experience. We were filled with joy. We did not know at that time that we were living in his radiance. On the wings of inspiration, he carried us to the height which was his natural abode. He himself, speaking of it later, said that he was at his best in Thousand Islands.⁴⁰

³⁷ Leggett, *Late and Soon*, p115

³⁸ Frank Leggett to Betty, 17 July 1895, Prugh, *Josephine MacLeod*, p 100. Italics mine.

³⁹ Ibid, p 106.

⁴⁰ Christine, *Reminiscences*, 112. The plan at Thousand Islands was to 'live as a community, without servants, each doing a share of the work'. It failed and an outsider had to be engaged for housekeeping with a couple of the more capable ones undertaking certain responsibilities ,p 113.

Being in the company of their mentor uplifted them, gave their lives a meaning that seemed bigger than themselves. The deep silence of his meditations invited those around him to share in that lofty, if abstracted mode of being. Surrounded by a dense forest and in deep solitude, the atmosphere of the retreat emulated that of ancient tapovans, an ashram-like space where disciples received instructions from the guru amidst open nature. It was here that Vivekananda

reached some of his loftiest flights, there he showed us his heart and mind. We saw ideas unfold and flower. We saw the evolution of plans which grew into institutions in the years that followed. It was a blessed experience.⁴¹

Through such moments and places, disciples felt a sense of one-ness with their guru and his life, sharing in his teachings and company.

5.4 ‘Feeling Blessed’: Belur Math, Sarada Devi, Himalayas

In India, entanglements and experiences of spiritual domesticity continued to expand with disciples’ travels and contact with socio-spiritual spaces. Vivekananda made it clear to his disciples of the general lack of material comfort, poverty, heightened racial and gendered segregation, class and caste prejudices that characterised Indian life:

‘Europeans and the Hindus ... live as oil and water. Mixing with Natives is damning to the Europeans ... dirt and filth everywhere, and brown people, though plenty of people to talk philosophy with.’⁴²

His disciples persevered in spite of Vivekananda’s warning. Bull did not find the poverty she encountered to be particularly ‘painful as anticipated’, and was struck by the sense of self-respect of the Indians she met in spite of their colonised status.⁴³ She thought of Indians as ‘a healthy, handsome race, even the poorest, with bodies beautiful enough to be models.’⁴⁴ Their physical appeal to Bull (echoed by MacLeod, Nivedita and Christine) suggests their open-ness to an avowal of non-white bodies and beauty.

The spiritual commune of Belur – where Vivekananda and his brother-disciples stayed and the household of Sarada Devi – mesmerised them. It was also their first

⁴¹ Ibid, p 112.

⁴² Vivekananda to Josephine MacLeod, 10 July 1897, Prugh, *Josephine Macleod*, p 99

⁴³ Bull to Olea, *Saint Sara*, p 262

⁴⁴ Sara Bull to Olea Bull, Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara*, p 261

encounter with Indian monastic communes, places where a guru and his community of disciples lodge and train together. Starkly different from anything they had hitherto experienced in upscale retreats and well-furnished western drawing rooms, it represented a new world of sights and sensibilities. They witnessed monks who were half-clad, widowed women wearing the simplest of cotton white sarees, a life of dire material poverty but potent with spiritual possibilities. Outside the monastic community lay the city of Calcutta, whose 'mass of humanity' - loin-clothed men, thinly draped women and naked babies was a novel sight. To be able to enter this world of senses, beliefs, feelings and gestures represented a new episode in the practice of their discipleship and training.

Bull, MacLeod and Noble had converged in Calcutta in early 1898 to meet Vivekananda. Unable to stay in the same place as Vivekananda and his brother disciples owing to gendered monastic strictures against co-residence, Bull and MacLeod had refurbished an abandoned cottage that was in ruins by the Ganges but in close proximity to Vivekananda's monastery. The cottage was part of the plot purchased through the munificence of Bull, where the Belur Math would be built later. Bull and MacLeod restored the house and redecorated it with old mahogany furniture bought from Calcutta. The drawing room was redesigned in Indo-western style; half of it was Indian and the other half Western.⁴⁵ Vivekananda marvelled at the 'Yanks' industriousness: 'It is wonderful how they accommodate themselves to our Indian life of privation and hardship... After the luxuries of Boston and New York to be quite content and happy in this wretched little house'.⁴⁶ Suffering was seen as a mark of sacrifice, a necessary spiritual striving. MacLeod observed to Rolland how when she first met Noble in Calcutta her face was swollen, 'devoured by mosquitoes but glowing with joy'.⁴⁷

The little cottage became a home for the three women, where they realised close communion with their mentor for the first time in his own land. Vivekananda visited them almost every morning for tea, breakfast and discourse in the subsequent months. He loved their little villa by the Ganges, finding 'that little house of Dhira Mata [Bull, referred to as the Steady Mother] like heaven, for it is

⁴⁵ On a plot that was purchased with Bull's money to build the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Mission. Josephine MacLeod, *Reminiscences...*, p 157

⁴⁶ Vivekananda to Christina Greenstidel, *LSV*

⁴⁷ Rolland, *Inde...* p 194

all love, from beginning to end'.⁴⁸ He lectured them every morning on Ramakrishna, his own life before Chicago and commentaries on Indian religions, mythology and history: 'with his stories of Uma and Siva, of Radha and Krishna, and his fragments of song and poetry'.⁴⁹

The backdrop of the Ganges – a river central to Hindu sacred geography – and the location of the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar on the other side of the riverbank where Ramakrishna served as a priest, enabled the cottage and its inhabitants to become part of and partake in that sacred spatiality. MacLeod felt

It was perhaps the most beautiful time we ever had with Swamiji. He loved our living at the riverside cottage and he would bring all those who came to visit him to see what a charming home we had made of this house which he had thought uninhabitable. In the afternoons... we used to give tea parties in the front of the house, in full view of the river, where always could be seen loads of boats going up-stream, we receiving as if we were in our drawing rooms. Swamiji loved all that intimate use we made of things, which they took, as a matter of course.⁵⁰

The cottage and its scenic setting by the Ganges embodied and evoked the feeling of spiritual domesticity. The place making on the banks of the wide flowing Ganges was as much a spatial negotiation as sensory. The house, its material artefacts and arrangements, and the people who inhabited it made it feel like an intimate home. In this 'heaven', Vivekananda passionately discoursed on a wide range of subjects, ending always on the 'note of the Infinite'. The spatial ordering of the house – loads of boats coming to shore on their drawing room – aided such projections. Noble writes:

Indeed I do not know that our Master's realisation of the Advaita Philosophy has been in anything more convincing than in this matter of his interpretation of the world. He might appear to take up any subject, literary, ethnological, or scientific, but he always made us feel it as an illustration of the Ultimate Vision. There was, for him, nothing secular.⁵¹

His disciples struggled to grasp the abstract ideas but 'by his burning enthusiasm it was possible to enter into these things, and dimly, even then, to apprehend their

⁴⁸ Sister Nivedita, *Notes of Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1913) p 16

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ MacLeod, *Reminiscences*, p 157

⁵¹ Ibid, p 17

meaning'.⁵² He would chant poems on Radha-Krishna bhakti, a common Vaishnavite practice in India to instil and imbue listeners with an affection for the spiritual love and divine communion it represented. It represented a 'worlding' of their Indophilia within a dense web of human and spatial relationships, evincing feelings of affection, attraction and mystique.

Even as they sought to grapple with ideas and practices that seemed distant and not readily available, gestures of affection in the household of Sarada Devi and her companions brought home practices of transcultural identification more meaningfully. Sarada and her female companions were widowed women who led their lives in strict caste orthodoxy and seclusion. They lived in a household separate from the male monastic disciples in Calcutta. The voluntary seclusion of Sarada, however did not render her role secondary; rather, after the death of Ramakrishna, she was acknowledged as the highest spiritual authority by his disciples and her word was considered superior even to Vivekananda.⁵³

Meeting the 'Holy Mother' of the young sect was therefore a much anticipated event. Vivekananda took his disciples to meet Sarada Devi on March 17, 1898 (Noble notes that it was also St Patrick's Day, part of her constant search for Christian equivalences). It was the occasion of Ramakrishna's birth anniversary celebrations. MacLeod invited Sarada Devi to have food with them which she accepted despite all caste taboos and restrictions that bound her. It was a rare spectacle of inversion, a remarkable gesture that moved the women deeply. Noble referred to it as a 'Day of Days' in her diary:

...“my daughter” she calls me. She has been terribly orthodox, but all this melted away the instant she saw the first two Westerns – Mrs. Bull and Miss MacLeod, and she tasted food with them! Fruit is always presented to us immediately, and this was naturally offered to her, and she to the surprise of everyone accepted. This gave us all a dignity and made my future work possible in a way nothing else could possibly have done.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³Incidentally, Vivekananda was not Sarada's favourite 'son', it was his brother disciples Yogen and Sarat, for whom she had an extraordinary love and affection. Vivekananda might have been Ramakrishna's chosen one, but for Sarada, it was the other two who held her in the highest regard.

⁵⁴Nivedita to Mrs. Eric Hammond, 22 May 1898, *LSN, Vol I*, p 10

The gesture of inclusion shown by the orthodox Brahmin widow of Ramakrishna was held as deeply momentous for western disciples. Sarada, however, justified later her dining with foreigners as not breaking any caste stricture: 'I did not take rice – I took only fruits and sweets. I did not violate the rules of Hindu scriptures in spirit.'⁵⁵ Yet, the outward gesture of commensality for these women was sufficient to indicate acceptance. Bull wrote proudly to Max Mueller, the famous Orientalist scholar and philologist at Oxford: 'we are the first foreigners to have received permission to see Sarada'.⁵⁶ Though they considered the gesture of commensality a sharp contrast to her 'terribly orthodox' strictures, Sarada's caste practices, while outwardly rigorous, were never absolute. There were past instances in her life where she had served food with her own hands to Amjad – a 'lowly' Muslim construction worker at her village Jayrambati (in Bengal), and also accepted fruit offerings from him.⁵⁷ These transgressions however, were kept as clandestine as possible, largely due to a fear of scandal and peer censoring. They also visited Gopaler Ma (literally Gopal's Mother) a companion of Sarada Devi and disciple of Ramakrishna in her thatched mud cottage on the banks of the Ganga in Dakshineswar. She fed them puffed rice (*muri*), some of which MacLeod expressed a desire to take back with her to the U.S.⁵⁸ In spite of the huge cultural and language distance, the disciples were touched by the simplicity of their living and gestures of affection.

Though Bull and MacLeod never relocated to India, all of them continued to hold Sarada in high regard. In spite of being deeply religious, MacLeod averred that 'Sarada was still capable of interesting herself in the toilette of her European friends with a childlike joy'.⁵⁹ MacLeod saw her as representative of Indian women, whom she held in 'high esteem' and 'superior to men in general' for their 'dignity, an abnegation and an activeness that cannot be denied'.⁶⁰ Bull turned to Sarada for advice on her relationship with Vivekananda. She felt guilty of defying him as guru when their opinions differed sharply. Sarada put her disquiet to rest by suggesting that while the guru's directives are supreme in things spiritual, she was allowed to

⁵⁵Swami Asheshananda, *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, (Chennai, 1982), p 22.

⁵⁶ Saint Sara, p 271

⁵⁷ Asheshananda, *Glimpses ...*, p 22

⁵⁸ *Saint Sara*, p 271

⁵⁹ *Inde*, p 195

⁶⁰ *Inde*, p 195

use her discretion on temporal matters, 'even if at times it were not in agreement'.⁶¹ Sarada Devi and Noble's relationship grew extremely close in later years, notwithstanding the social and language barriers that separated them. She felt herself at home in 'the Mother's room':

When the hot weather came, it was by her express command that I returned to her better-arranged house, for sleeping-quarters. And then I occupied no room apart, but shared the cool and simple dormitory of the others, with its row of mats, pillows, and nets, against the polished red earthenware of the floor.⁶²

Her 'deep self-abnegation' amazed Nivedita. In spite of this growing intimacy, however, Sarada and her household of women were seen as essentially creatures of feeling, incapable of 'educated thought'. This was, as Nivedita put it, due to a lack of formal education:

For in thought, outside the range of practicality and experience, these ladies have no range; it is in feeling that they are so strong. You see, they have never had the education that would enable her to frame a thought that would appeal to a stranger.⁶³

The outcaste status of Nivedita dissolved in this close mother-daughter relationship. At Noble's insistence, Sarada formally inaugurated her primary school for girls in November 1898, a place that she continued to visit and enquire about.⁶⁴ Noble's admission and acceptance in her home displaced orthodox caste strictures of Hindu widowhood. Even as she was entering Hinduism from an outcaste location, Noble herself was never critical of the caste system, knowing it might threaten her own uncertain claim as a Hindu nun. She would often defend its

⁶¹ Cited from Max Mueller, *The Life and Sayings of Ramakrishna*, (Calcutta, 1951), pp 64-65' in *Saint Sara*, p 273

⁶² Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him*, p 70

⁶³ Nivedita to Mrs Eric Hammond, 9 March 1899, *LSN-I*, p 76

⁶⁴Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother, Her Life and Conversations*, (Madras, 1958), pp 315-316. She had also kept a decadent piece of Assam silk or *endi* that Nivedita had gifted to her, among other things such as her photo, as a token of Nivedita's love for her. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother Sarada Devi*, R.K. Math, Madras, 1955, p 391. After Noble had passed away in 1911, Sarada Devi tearfully recalled how she "would prostrate herself before me and with great tenderness, take the dust of my feet with her handkerchief. I felt that she even hesitated to touch my feet.

merits, entering into heated exchanges with reformist friends and leaders such as Jagadish Bose and Bipin Pal, both members of the Brahma Samaj.⁶⁵

Everyday micropractices such as these broke down race, caste and cultural difference. It forged intimate connections between western disciples and an India they sought to identify with. Gestures of acknowledgement became worthy of celebration and personal remembrance. This went both ways. Even as Sarada came to be embraced as the 'spiritual mother' of the Mission by western and Indian disciples, Bull became a near-beatified figure in the fold, elevated as Saint Sara. Being older in age to most of Vivekananda and his brother-disciples, she eagerly adopted this maternal position, treating the male monastic disciples as her sons. Vivekananda, acknowledging this maternal bond, wrote: 'Ere this I had only love for you, but recent development proves that you are appointed by the Mother [Shakti, a deified force of Nature] to watch over my life; hence faith has been added to love!'⁶⁶This maternal side was, however, not without its material effects: she continued to dispense huge sums of money to Vivekananda's Indian and Western projects until her death.⁶⁷ Saradananda, brother disciple of Vivekananda and the first Secretary of the newly founded Mission, kept only two photographs in his austere room at the monastery – that of Sarada and Bull. Bull used to fondly refer to Vivekananda and Saradananda as her two sons whose tempers were comparable to the sun and moon.⁶⁸ The latter took care of their belongings left behind in the Belur cottage while they were away touring in the Himalayas with Vivekananda. Saradananda also distributed their material possessions when the cottage had to be disbanded for Math related construction work:

I have taken as many of them as I could manage in my little room: viz., the guest room bed-stead, your wash stand and bowls... the little tea-table for keeping my books, two clothes horses, and two carpets; also the writing pad of

⁶⁵ Bose to Tagore, 18 April 1900, *Dui Bandhur Chithi: Parasparik o Paramparik*, 1899-1936, Jagadish Chandra Basu & Rabindranath Thakur, (Calcutta, 2008), pp 23-24. Pal had commented on how casteism keeps down men of genius, including her own guru Vivekananda. She reacted with utter contempt, denouncing that Brahmos are 'neither Hindus nor Christians',

⁶⁶ Prugh, *Ibid.* p 155. Bull had offered \$15, 000 to Vivekananda for the purchase of land for the Ramakrishna Math, and helped him register the deed, p 153

⁶⁷ Bull had offered \$15, 000 to Vivekananda for the purchase of land for the Ramakrishna Math, and helped him register the deed, Prugh, p 153

⁶⁸ *Saint Sara*, p 7. Sara was also funding Saradananda's brother's education.

Jojo, and some little things... I have taken so many of them in my little room for I thought I would be able to take better care than the others.⁶⁹

Small things became part of greater enactments. Cramming these everyday objects into his small room was a way of preserving their absent presences. Personal artefacts such as wash stand, bowls, books and carpets formed material sites of attachment. Objects and the everyday material culture built through them came to embody the absent selves of their owners. Their re-use and care was an enactment of that affective connection, a recreation of that relationship, if in absence. For a renunciate monk supposed to possess the most minimal of material belongings, this re-materialisation affirmed the potency of these relationships and how material forms could become sites to script personal attachments. Saradananda cherished this filial relationship developed between himself and Bull, fondly referring to her as 'Grannie' throughout his life.⁷⁰

Traces of this material relationship entered more spiritual practices of discipleship such as meditation. Swarupananda, a monastic disciple of Vivekananda, helped women disciples understand its practice and powers, and the material circumstances that influence it. Nivedita found a skin rug helpful to focus: 'it isolates one and increases the magnetic power in some way'.⁷¹ Sara sought a rosary bead specifically blessed by Sarada for her daily prayer.⁷² It mediated the vestiges of her touch, far yet near. Material things became interfaces for accessing and domesticising a new world of spirituality.

5.5 Initiation and after

Alongside practices of spatial familiarisation lay also more didactic methods of instruction. The role of ritual initiation by the guru is of utmost spiritual significance in the life of the *shishya*/disciple. Rites of monastic initiation or *mantradeeksha* spell the moment of rebirth for a disciple, adopting their 'new life' as the older self is cast away. Vivekananda's initiation of his disciples, in particular Noble, shows how this process of self-shedding, embroiled in anxieties of race and gender, was a fraught task. Assumptions of racial and cultural difference were not subverted simply by a formal acknowledgement of that disciple relationship. For

⁶⁹ Saradananda to Bull, Olea S. Kaland Collection, *Saint Sara*, p 283

⁷⁰ 'Saradananda always inquires for news', Sara to Olea, 24 May 1898, *Ibid.*

⁷¹ N to Nell Hammond, 7 August 1898, *LSNI*

⁷² Saradananda to Sara, 13 Sep 1898, *Saint Sara*, p 300

western disciples, this was an entirely new idiom with a set of practices whose broad thrust was submissive. In effect, the acceptance of Vivekananda as guru would flip the racial relationship on its head, and no discipleship could be impervious to the strain this would entail in practice. There were lengthy and difficult exchanges involved in the remaking of disciples' interiorities.

On the morning of 25th March 1898, Vivekananda took Bull, Noble and MacLeod to the Math for an initiation service. Noble was initiated into the rites of a *naisthik brahmacharini*, the first step in a Hindu nun's life of celibacy dedicated to the service of God. A year later, Noble reflected:

I fancy he made me a Brahmacharini for life partly for the sake of reviving the old order of Naishtik [Naishthik] Brahmacharini, and partly because I am not really ready for anything higher in his eyes.⁷³

That Vivekananda made her only a *brahmachari* and not a *sannyasi* suggests that the decision was not made flippantly. *Sannyasa* takes years, even decades for Indian followers to attain and initiation into brahmacharihood indicated the beginning of a life-long process whose end was nowhere near. Bull was initiated as well though not as a monastic, while MacLeod bore witness to the service, not taking any vows herself. All of them were bestowed with new Sanskritic names – Noble became Nivedita⁷⁴ (the Dedicated), Bull was christened Dhira Mata (the Steady Mother) and MacLeod Jaya (the victorious one). It was a mark of their new births, in line with Hindu monastic traditions of adopting new names that signified symbolically the beginning of a different life hereafter. The Christian Feast of the Annunciation fell on the same day, the Biblical day when Mary was informed by the angel Gabriel of her conception of Jesus, the 'Son of God'. It mattered to Noble that her consecration occurred on a doubly auspicious day. It helped her relate to these experiences in the affirmative:

... Friday, the Christian feast of the Annunciation, - he took us all three back to the Math, and there, in the worship-room [of Belur Math] was held a little service of initiation, where one was made a *Brahmacharini*. That was the happiest of mornings. After the service, ...[t]he Swami put on the ashes and

⁷³ Vivekananda to Nivedita, 26 March 1899, *LSN- I*, p 93.

⁷⁴ Henceforth I refer to Noble as Nivedita, as she largely identified and referred to herself in private and public. MacLeod and Bull generally continued to use their Christian names, only occasionally, in private correspondence, using their Indian names.

bone-earrings and matted locks of a Siva-yogi, and sang and played to us – Indian music on Indian instruments – for an hour.⁷⁵

The elaborate performance of Vivekananda – donning matted locks and face smeared with ash – similar to the deity of Shiva as *yogi* enthralled and impressed the sensory revelation of his guru-dom upon his disciples. The initiation ceremony went beyond a spiritual service to become a spectacle, evoking wonder, awe and inner devotion in his disciple spectators.

Initiation rites were however, only constitutive rather than conclusive in processes of cultural realignment. This was borne out by the bitterness that followed between Nivedita and Vivekananda. Her autobiographical account *Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda* (1913) testified to these tribulations. Curiously written in the third person, she seemed to be desperately trying to create through her writing an impersonal distance for their relationship that was already excessively personal. Acknowledging the extent of her own belief in British pride, she writes:

The youngest of the Swami's disciples at this time, it must be remembered, was an English woman, and of how much this fact meant intellectually, - what a strong bias it implied, and always does imply, in the reading of India, what an idealism of the English race and all their deeds and history, - the Swami himself had had no conception till the day after her initiation at the monastery.⁷⁶

Vivekananda had naively assumed upon her initiation into the life of a Hindu *brahmacharini* that her British loyalties would cease to exist, that somehow her feelings of cultural affiliation would be now transformed into love for forms of the Indian nation. When Vivekananda asked her after the day of her initiation as to what nation she belonged, he 'had been startled to find with what a passion of loyalty and worship she regarded the English-flag, giving to it much of the feeling that an Indian woman would give to her Thakoor[deity]'.⁷⁷ An annoyed guru had let it pass then, but matters came to head during her travels across the Himalayan sacred Hindu pilgrim sites of Nainital, Almora, and Kashmir in the summer of 1898. Around this time, Nivedita was still seeking Anglo-Indian introductions from friends and believed it to be the dream of her life 'to make England and India love

⁷⁵ Nivedita, *Notes*, p 19.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 23

⁷⁷ Nivedita, *Notes*, p 24.

each other'.⁷⁸ Nivedita had not expected her patriotism to be called into question. Or that loving her guru and his country might eventually mean having to un-love England. These dual affections co-existed in tense relation until they completely dissolved towards the end of her life.. This kind of paternalist approach characterised much of contemporary British liberal thinking, including that of E.J. Thompson and at one time Andrews and Pearson, that visualised a kind of egalitarian relationship of enlightened governance between Britain and colonies such as India, Britain and the British playing the benevolent teacher to India and Indians as their dutiful student .

The strain and stress of negotiating the cultural politics of their discipleship continued throughout this period of travel and training. The difference in American and British identities is perhaps also best illustrated in these episodes. The absence of a direct colonial relationship with the U.S allowed Bull and MacLeod to escape much of the bitterness that characterised Nivedita's experiences. This did not however, mean that American disciples were critical of British rule already. Indeed, as the controversy of *Mother India* in 1927 showed, there was wide white American support for the continuance of British rule in India.⁷⁹

Vivekananda chastised Nivedita for what he saw as her unbending British pride. As MacLeod, who was present then, noted

[Vivekananda] insulted in every way he could Nivedita's proud and righteous English character. And perhaps also he wanted to protect himself from the adoring fondness that Nivedita showed for him ... He chided her sharply without consideration. He found fault with everything she did. She sometimes returned in tears, seeking consolation in the arms of Miss MacLeod.⁸⁰

The exhaustion of the personal – in the form of her ascribed cultural loyalties - was for Vivekananda a necessary precursor to entering her new life as a Hindu *Brahmin brahmacharini*. It pained Nivedita to see 'the dream of a friendly and beloved leader

⁷⁸ Nivedita to Mrs. Hammond, 5 June 1898, *LSN -I*

⁷⁹ The controversy erupted with the publication of Katherine Mayo's *Mother India* (1927), that squarely damned Indian religion, culture and society and vocally supported the continuance of British rule in India. Mayo herself was a white nationalist who believed in Anglo-Saxon racial superiority. For a insightful discussion on the far ranging effects of the controversy, see Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham: 2006).

⁸⁰ Rolland, *Inde, Journal*, 16 May 1927, p 126. Based on MacLeod's recounting of these episodes to Rolland.

falling away from me, and the picture of one who would be at least indifferent, and possibly, silently hostile, substituting itself instead.’⁸¹ Extreme in form, this kind of virulent cultural self-excision almost broke Nivedita but Vivekananda perhaps saw this as a pre-condition for her new life.

Unable to bear her agony, Bull and MacLeod would intercede on Nivedita’s behalf against what they felt was excessive severity. A reconciliation followed, Vivekananda blessing her on a new moon Day, Nivedita kneeling before him. In Vivekananda’s blessing touch, Nivedita realised the ‘importance of destroying a personal relationship only to bestow the Impersonal vision in its place.’⁸² She felt her older relationship was broken, and not yet anticipating ‘that a new and deeper life was being given to it, knew only that the hour was strange and passing sweet’.⁸³ Even though it was a ‘terrible experience’ for Nivedita, and Vivekananda dropped this aggressive method, she felt the swami never dictated any opinion or creed, it was ‘never more than emancipation from partiality’.⁸⁴ Writing in hindsight, she justified his actions as necessary in the preparation of her new self, the effacement of personal enchantments with Vivekananda to be transformed into an impersonal, disenchanted ethic of service.

5.6 ‘Going-to-school’

Living and travelling with their guru across the Himalayan landscape felt like a period of ‘going-to-school’. It took the form of ‘morning talks’, prayer and visits to holy shrines and Hindu archaeological sites. Staying in picturesque mountain village homes was inspiring: ‘You never knew anything so ‘blessed’ as this little home amongst mountains with its utter love and generosity and simplicity.’⁸⁵ Here too we find the pursuit of homing; reflecting the anxieties of identification in their guru’s home.

In these settings, morning talks ‘took the form of assaults upon deep-rooted preconceptions, social, literary, and artistic, or of long comparisons of Indian and European history and sentiments’:

⁸¹ Sister Nivedita, *The Master*, p 126

⁸² Rolland, *Inde*, p 127

⁸³ Sister Nivedita, *Notes*, p 32

⁸⁴ Nivedita, *Notes*, pp 23-24

⁸⁵ Nivedita to Mrs. Hammond, 5 June 1898, *LSN-I*

He was always testing his disciples, and the manner of these particular discourses was probably adopted in order to put to the proof the courage and sincerity of one who was both woman and European.⁸⁶

Being a woman and European were both points of stress, particularly in the case of Nivedita but also others. Vivekananda's provocative observations on Western colonialism and racial prejudice frequently pre-empted sharp exchanges. Their western cultural beliefs and loyalties were repeatedly tested in such sessions, pitted against the exacting claims of an Indian form of discipleship. He also narrated tales from Indian mythology, initiating them into the world of wonder and fantasy so as to draw its lessons:

Sometimes all through the summer he would sit for hours telling us stories, those cradle-tales of Hinduism, whose function is not at all that of our nursery fictions, but much more, like the man-making myths of the old Hellenic world.

⁸⁷

Story-telling or teaching with parables has been a common and intimate narrative mode for Indian gurus while preaching to their disciples. Ramakrishna was famous for his parable-like teachings, where a popular story was recounted in the simplest of languages, followed by a philosophical gleaning. Vivekananda would tell them of his own visions, the romantic legends of Krishna or life stories of his guru Ramakrishna. He would make the geographies through which they were travelling come alive through such tellings:

... as we journeyed across the Terai, in the hot hours of an afternoon near the beginning of the rains, we were made to feel that this was the very earth on which had passed the youth and renunciation of Buddha. The wild peacocks spoke to us of Rajputana and her ballad lore. An occasional elephant was the text for tales of ancient battles, and the story of an India that was never defeated, so long as she could oppose to the tide of conquest the military walls of these living artillery.⁸⁸

Stories of gallantry became a semantic invocation to reclaim a greatness for India that was no longer available. It contrasted sharply with the discriminatory racialised treatment meted out to the swamis at various 'Europeans only' places for

⁸⁶ Nivedita, *Notes*, p 24

⁸⁷ Nivedita, *Notes*, p 28

⁸⁸ Sister N, *The Master ...*, p 46

food and lodging. Vivekananda would be regularly denied entry in 'European only' rest houses. It brought home the truth of conquest and colonisation in ways they did not encounter before. Nonetheless, journeying with the swami was 'delightful'. At times, the disciples took turns to drive with Vivekananda in his tonga: 'we were always sorry to reach a destination'.⁸⁹ They lived and travelled through scenic places of 'indescribable beauty' on their way to Kashmir – hamlets, frozen rivers, mountain springs and deep woods – mingling with sadhus, peasants, people of many faiths and pilgrims at various holy places. These became part of a moving but unbroken landscape to territorialise their love for India and Hinduism, evoking in them a romanticised love for the land and its people. It induced in them a lofty sense of freedom, as if they were living a kind of unfettered Vedantic life.

Vivekananda repeatedly broke caste orthodoxy and religious taboos in the course of his journey, partaking food and shelter with lower castes and Muslims. In Pahalgam, a small shepherd-village in Kashmir, they halted to observe *ekadasi* (a day of ritual fasting following the Hindu lunar calendar). Vivekananda took Nivedita to be blessed, 'which really meant to distribute alms' to the pilgrims gathered there. The party also visited the holy shrines of Takt-i-Suleiman, Kshir Bhavani and the derelict Martand temple in Pandrethan. Vivekananda waxed eloquently on the history of Kashmir and Shiva worship, and the 'Hindu genius' in temple-building. Shiva became a frequent benediction for his disciples, a blessing aimed at imbuing them with divine energy and intervention. Staying on the dungas or houseboats on the river Jhelum in Srinagar, Bull felt: 'I have found enough to make me hope that the coming months of this quiet life with nature will bring an inner strength that I needed.'⁹⁰ In his presence and in the natural settings, they felt themselves 'brought face to face with the invisible and absolute'.⁹¹ These small observations, benedictions and dedications became constitutive of the emotional practice of discipleship. While aspects of this cultural experience remained opaque to his disciples, the physical act of participation itself created a space for attachments to form.

Kashmir constituted the high point of their travels. At Amarnath, the sight of the Shiva lingam made of ice in a mountain cave overwhelmed Vivekananda: 'To him,

⁸⁹ Nivedita, *Notes*, pp 40-43

⁹⁰ Sara to Olea, [undated, 1898], *Saint Sara*, p 290

⁹¹ Nivedita, *Notes...*, p 55

the heavens had opened. He had touched the feet of Siva.’⁹² Vivekananda dedicated Nivedita to the deity, an elusive moment she held in deep regard. Shiva symbolised the benevolent yet furious destructive force in the Holy trinity of canonical Hinduism. Dedicating her to such a deity seemed to be a gesture of effacement from her past selves, to be reborn as a Hindu with a new sense of belief and belonging. Nivedita believed as much though she herself could barely grasp the meaning of the *darshan* and the dedication, a culturally specific experience that eluded her Anglican western sensibilities:

... it is such terrible pain to come face to face with something which is all *inwardness* to someone you worship, and for yourself to be able to get little farther than externals. Swami could have made it live – but was lost.⁹³

The ‘inwardness’ or interiority of the moment remained intangible, she could only appreciate the grandness of its external beauty and Vivekananda’s revelatory delight in it. Nevertheless, it was the physical experience itself that seemed to perform for Nivedita what she wanted it to. She felt herself to be ‘growing Hindu in taste with alarming rapidity’ immediately after, a realisation that seems to bear out this claim. It also exposed the limits of cross-cultural identification and the impossibility of accessing a near-intuitive experience that was beyond rational knowledge. Vivekananda’s revelations became their revelations, even as much of it was lost in translation.

Amarnath, along with other Hindu shrines, became part of a sensory learning for disciples in the cultural practices of Hinduism. Even as they were unable to enter or understand that wonderful experience, Vivekananda reassured that having ‘made the pilgrimage...it will go on working...The effects will come.’⁹⁴ A similar but more powerful revelation ensued in the Kshir Bhavani (literally, Milk of the Mother) temple, the Divine Feminine in the form of Shakti (Nature). The *darshan* pushed Vivekananda into a state of ecstasy, who had gone there alone. From Shiva, his mood shifted distinctively to that of Shakti. He came back ‘transfigured and inspired’, filled with the searing presence of the ‘Mother’. Nivedita felt her words were too inadequate to even begin to describe this experience

⁹² *Notes*, p 72

⁹³ Nivedita to Mrs Eric Hammond, 7 August 1898, *LSN-I*

⁹⁴ *Notes*, p 72

He simply talks like a child of “[T?]he Mother” – but his soul and voice are those of a God... He is all love now. The mingled solemnity and exhilaration of his presence have made me retire to the farthest corner, and just worship in silence all the time.

Patriotism is a mistake. Everything is a mistake” – he said when he came home. “It is all Mother....I am never going to teach any more. ...

He is all love now. There is not an impatient word, even for the wrongdoer or the oppressor, it is all peace and self-sacrifice and rapture. ‘Swamiji is dead and gone’ were the last words I heard him say.⁹⁵

This was a transformation that his disciples had never witnessed before – the ability to be completely absorbed and intoxicated by a powerful divine vision. It laid bare the versatile world of Indian bhakti – one form of devotion could easily mutate or merge into another – and the experience of accessing them. Vivekananda’s disciples saw him consumed by thoughts of the Goddess *Kali*, singing devotional songs of Ramprasad,⁹⁶ imagining himself as her child. So intense was this affective state of fevered inspiration that he wrote the poem ‘*Kali the Mother*’, collapsing on the floor after finishing it. He filled himself and his disciple-companions with a sense of this elusive yet ever-present mother:

It was always his habit to speak simply and naturally of "Mother," and some of the older members of the party caught this, so that such phrases as "Well, well! Mother knows best!" were a constant mode of thought and speech amongst us, when, for instance, some cherished intention had to be abandoned.⁹⁷

It is this habitual interweaving of spiritual domesticity – in the unselfconscious way Kali or Shiva were constantly invoked in everyday conversations – that deep discipleship manifested itself in practice. The constant exposure to various deities throughout their travels initiated them to the multiplicity of the Hindu pantheon and its specific sensibilities. Kali and Shiva would become interlinked states of mind, tethered to their own identities and articulations. Nivedita would come to regard *Kali* as the ‘Vision of Shiva’ in later life, an embodiment of both the maternally affectionate and terrifying aspects of Nature. She saw the worship of

⁹⁵ N to [?], 13 Oct 1898, *LSN –I*, pp 24-25

⁹⁶ Sadhak Rāmprasād Sen was a Hindu Shakta poet and saint of eighteenth century Bengal. His bhakti poems, known as Ramprasadi, are still popular in Bengal—they are usually addressed to the Hindu goddess Kali and written in Bengali.

⁹⁷ Nivedita, *The Master*, p 62

Kali as commemorating a primal instinct of love and loss, of sacrifice and self-realization, of the benevolent and the violent that create and define human life. In a character sketch of Nivedita, Bipin Chandra Pal, the Extremist Congress leader and Brahmo preacher comments how Nivedita struck him as “a child of nature....a pagan of pagans...born by some mischance among Christian peoples.”⁹⁸ For Nivedita, *Kali* became, as the literary scholar Elleke Boehmer suggests, a ‘legitimation of her Hindu self’, a motif of cultural de-anglicization⁹⁹.

At work around the notion of *Kali* or the ‘Divine Mother’ was a constant de-sexualisation cum spiritualisation of the female body. Motherhood was the safest form of relationship with women as it did not pose any immediate temptation to male ascetics. Occasionally, even the position of the motherhood was not beyond the reproach of ‘female shortcomings’. However, motherhood remained the exalted mode. In Srinagar, Vivekananda worshipped the daughters of a Muslim boatman and a Brahmin pundit as the Divine Virgin in front of his disciples. Both were pre-pubescent virgins or *kumaris* yet to achieve their sexual maturity.¹⁰⁰ This spiritualising helped contain a potently risqué female sexuality that seemed to inhere in the bodies and selves of his women disciples. At one remove, it seamlessly connected all womankind to an indigenist but also universal trope of idealised maternity. Shakti, *Kali*, Sarada, Bull, the Virgin Mary could all be fused into one.

Motherhood also made available a conjoined category of sisterhood – of single young women disciples such as Nivedita and Christine (or Mira for Gandhi), also desexualized – that could be harnessed for service in a variety of nationalist awakening projects. Nivedita’s identification with sisterhood aided her own de-sexualisation and cultural rehabilitation, making her body available as a spectacle for nationalist politics to appropriate. Yet, the attainment and acceptance of a celibate state of sisterhood remained a tortuous and often, traumatic episode of learning. Her personal attraction for Vivekananda was ruthlessly disabused along with her British cultural pride. Past selves had to be continually emptied out before a new self could be assembled. The French-Swiss author Romain Rolland, who

⁹⁸ Bipin Chandra Pal, *Character Sketches*, (Calcutta, 1957), pp 97-98.

⁹⁹ Elleke Boehmer, *Empire, the National and the Postcolonial*, p 59

¹⁰⁰ It is now institutionalised as a celebration in the Ramakrishna Mission as *kumari puja*, where a pre-pubescent virgin girl is worshipped as the divine form of Shakti.

knew both Nivedita and Mira, found in their experiences a comparative similarity in the nature of their adoration for their mentors:

Sister Nivedita was treated very harshly by Vivekananda during the early days. ... Maybe in this way he defended himself against the worshipful passion Nivedita had for him. Because it seems she had for him the *lover's adoration* which our friend Miss Slade showed for Gandhi. But between Gandhi and Miss Slade there was a distance of thirty years; between Vivekananda and Nivedita there were only five or six. And though the sentiment of N had always been of absolute purity, maybe Vivekananda understood the danger. He rebuked her without sparing her and would find fault with everything she did. He was not a man to tolerate the passions people had for him nor to treat them with fatherly compassion as Gandhi did. [*italics mine*]¹⁰¹

Any hint of 'lover's adoration' was brutally suppressed or harnessed into a trope of spiritual love. Both Nivedita and Mira exemplified the tragedy of such a negotiation, their 'passions' potentially threatening to exceed the acceptable boundaries of their discipleship. Gandhi was hardly as compassionate about Mira's excessive personal adoration as Rolland believed. She went through the same agony as Nivedita for a much longer period of time (Gandhi lived a long life). Bound by the claims of celibate sisterhood on one hand and the struggle to efface past cultural selves so as to embrace a new one, Nivedita and Mira's sacrifices became inextricably tied to how Indian nationalist discourse saw itself etched on the bodies of white women disciples in the wake of their brown gurus.

5.7 Epilogue: New Selves

Nivedita grew into the life of celibate sisterhood envisaged by Vivekananda. He disapproved of her indiscriminate socialising with all classes and sections of people fearing it might impede her acceptance in orthodox Hindu society. It shows the anxiety of conversion and assimilation that haunted Vivekananda as well. To consolidate Nivedita as well as her work for Hindu women, her Hindu identity needed to be stabilised first. An acknowledgement with ritual strictures was enjoined. Nivedita's body became a site of control and discipline for Hindu

¹⁰¹ Rolland, Inde., Cited in *Tantine.*, p 217

nationalist discourse to build on. Vivekananda advised her to give up all socialising and live in strict seclusion:

to eat only of approved foods, and to do this with the fingers, to sit and sleep on the floor, to perform Hindu ceremonies, and bind oneself strictly by the feelings and observances of Hindu etiquette, were all, to his thinking, means of arriving at that Indian consciousness which would afterwards enable one to orientate oneself truly to the Indian aspects of larger questions. Even so trifling a matter as the use of lime-juice and powdered lentils, instead of soap, appeared to him worthy of thought and effort.¹⁰²

The emphasis on practice was absolute for her to become a Hindu. Vivekananda and Sarada Devi were 'constantly working to make a place for [her], as a foreigner, in Hindu society'.¹⁰³ She ate with her hands - 'à la Hindu' - at home in the white (later ochre) monastic robes of a Hindu nun. Vivekananda would ask her to cook a dish and share it with fellow Hindus so as to break their caste taboos towards her. Sarada Devi would let her stay in her household breaking orthodox Hindu convention, comprised mostly of orthodox Hindu widows. This spatial and ritual inclusion was premised on her becoming a chaste and desexualised Hindu nun, an austere process that would un/resettle her race, caste and gender identities. The ideal of chaste Hindu widowhood was held up as an emulative model. Orthodox Hindu widowhood was also a position of extreme social marginality, and to embrace it willingly was a test of Nivedita's character, supposedly enabling her to enter Hindu society from her liminal outcaste location. To be accepted into caste Hindu society, even as a nun, was therefore possible only through the rigorous practice of an ideal of Brahmin widowhood:

You have to set yourself to Hinduise your thoughts, your needs, your conceptions, and your habits. Your life, internal and external, has to become all that an orthodox Hindu Brahmin Brahmacharini's ought to be. The method will come to you, if only you desire it sufficiently. But you have to forget your own past, and to cause it to be forgotten. You have to lose even its memory!¹⁰⁴

To be Hinduised was a forceful act that entailed the loss of her cultural memory. All she was required to do was 'desire it sufficiently', a performance that would

¹⁰² Nivedita, *The Master*, p 76

¹⁰³ Ibid, p 76

¹⁰⁴ Nivedita, *The Master*, p 146

reconstitute her own subjectivity. Being an orthodox Hindu Brahmin brahmacharini was contingent to this forceful excision of her past life – an interior self-remaking process that necessitated prising herself out from even the memory of her old self. Noble resisted, interrogated and argued with Vivekananda the most, but ‘when she surrendered’, there was no turning back. Only through the deliberate forgetting of her cultural past, could a space for her new Hindu self be forged. Vivekananda warned her of her eclectic socialising in Calcutta’s reformist circles, especially with the Tagores:

as long as you [Nivedita] go on mixing with that [Tagore] family Margot I must go on sounding this gong. Remember that that family has poured a flood of erotic venom over Bengal.” ... and just you remember... my mission is not Ramakrishna’s nor Vedanta’s – nor anything but simply to bring MANHOOD to this people.” “I’ll help you Swami” I said. “I know it” he said – “And so I beat the alarm.”¹⁰⁵

That Nivedita received the message to deliver ‘MANHOOD’ in capital shows that she did not intend to be confined to mere monasticism or women’s education, a project that was anyway characterised by many disruptions. To be able to deliver manhood to an emasculated nation, she needed to embody the powerful, ‘pure’ and chaste ideal of her Celtic womanhood. Her increasing entanglements with revolutionary terrorism testify to the continuation of this pursuit: ‘When will the Motherland rise again – the Gita on one hand, and the Sword in the Other?’¹⁰⁶ Vivekananda’s death had extinguished in Nivedita for a brief while the possibility of personal attachment: ‘Ever since He [V] went, I have felt the utter impossibility of being personal in my love for anyone....’¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, the spiritual articulation of her personal love for Vivekananda meant that it would be framed only as pure. Yet the growing intimacy with men such as Sadananda, Bose and Kakuzo Okakura, leading Japanese artist and pan-Asian thinker, seemed to have bothered MacLeod. MacLeod alleged a ‘physical awakening’ in Nivedita caused by her relationship with these men. We do not possess MacLeod’s letters, but Nivedita’s terse reply evidences a rare moment of upheaval when her ‘sexual purity’ was questioned by her closest friend and confidante:

¹⁰⁵ Nivedita to MacLeod, 12 March 1899, *LSN-I*, p 82

¹⁰⁶ Nivedita to Alberta and Hollister, 28 Jan 1903, *LSN-II*, p 537

¹⁰⁷ Nivedita to MacLeod, 24 July 1902 [?], *LSN-II*

I feel absurdly shocked and hurt at the warnings that you have just sent me ... about massage and other matters. Are you referring to that sacred thing I told you about Sadananda after my illness? Oh Yum! I cannot think of anything else.

And are you warning me about entering people's bedrooms? I have never done such a thing except once in the middle of the night when Nigu [Okakura] was lying here ill and groaning so loudly ... that I woke and dressed and came to him. But that was a matter for the doctors – it was so bad....

... You talk of a "physical awakening", and I think you mean for me. I must be quite plain about this... If I do wrong in these matters... the wrong will be a matter of failure of judgment, and never of temptation. You need not quote Swamiji's opinion on these points – because my own standards are far stricter and impose far more pain than ever His.'

He [Bose] understands the idea that I represent, but his words of rapt worship half unconscious and involuntary showed me that I had not lowered it to him. And you know I have had no deceit any where. ... when I asked him if I had been a temptation, he said "you made me natural, Dear, you made me a child of God."¹⁰⁸

The allegations must have stung Nivedita fairly deeply for her to flatly ask Bose if she had been a 'temptation'. Bose's reply, while phrased loftily, was evasive. Nivedita had always effusively referred to Bose as Bairn, Scottish for 'child' and cherished their relationship, the latter benefitting immensely from Nivedita's western contacts. We can only speculate whether there was a Freudian slip in their relationship, but there might be some truth in the way idealised, non-sexualised forms of relationship desperately attempted to contain the 'gender trouble' wrought by her sexuality.

The letter only hints (tantalisingly) at the nature of the 'massage' between Sadananda and Nivedita, or her care for Bose and Okakura in their times of illness and wellness. Vivekananda had commented about Sadananda's possessiveness before: 'He loves you Margot, and wants to follow you about like a dog – and he was jealous!'¹⁰⁹ The limitations imposed by monastic celibacy on Sadananda meant that 'love' and 'jealousy' could only be expressed in other ways. Sadananda emerged as a

¹⁰⁸ Nivedita to MacLeod, 23 Oct 1902, *LSN-I*, P 517

¹⁰⁹ Nivedita to MacLeod, 27 August 1902, *LSN-I*, p 497

devoted aide of Nivedita, always by her side during her travels and projects in the subsequent years. Personal infatuations/devotion for Nivedita were generally rendered in more acceptable terms – maternal, filial, cordial – by Sadananda, Okakura and Bose.

MacLeod's letter 'hurt and horrified' Nivedita, who pointed out that she had not grasped their Master's idea of purity at all: 'Swami's saying that you were "as pure as purity itself" was NOT due to any of your puny definitions of purity'.¹¹⁰ Rather ironically perhaps, the claim to purity was used to assert their intimacy with Vivekananda as well as represent him after his death. The invocation to purity did not fade away, it continued to determine the personal relationships of these women, none of whom ever married or even pursued any romantic relationships openly. The pursuit of purity remained a point of contention between Nivedita and MacLeod, the latter seemingly more Victorian in her emphasis of sexual purity even as she claimed a position of 'non-discipleship' and non-initiation. Nivedita, while acknowledging MacLeod's 'unerring, faultless', perfect renunciation, saw her abhorrence to sexual union as severely limiting:

As to purity, dear Yum – do not we both torture ourselves too much trying to rush forward into definitions of wh[?]o? We shall be intellectually capable only in some other life?

You are wrong. We are hypnotising ourselves by this talk of pure and impure into looking at ourselves instead of at the One. The union of sexes is not impure – how could it be? ...it is forgetting that all-is-One that constitutes impurity....¹¹¹

Nivedita's impatience at MacLeod's utter failure to grasp the significance of 'purity' shows the tensions that adhered to the practice of Vivekananda's discipleship. But these intimate relationships only intensified Nivedita's love for India, through new human attachments, particularly after Vivekananda's demise. She did not wish to propagandise in the West anymore, turning instead towards India-Japan-Asia:

¹¹⁰ Nivedita to MacLeod, 23 Oct 1902, *LSN-I*, p 519

¹¹¹ Nivedita to MacLeod, 11 Oct 1902, *LSN-I*, p 513

I do not wish or expect to go West again.... Saradananda will do that. My place is here – possibly a visit to Japan, and certainly, if so, to China also, then, more India. Then the end.¹¹²

By 1903, the shift in her interiority and identification with India was more complete than any of Vivekananda's western disciples:

...you will understand that these festivals [Christmas and New Year] seem now scarcely to exist. In externals, I find I remain more steadily and even boldly European that I would have wished, but in heart, I think even Swamiji might be satisfied!¹¹³

While Noble rose to great national prominence as the revered Sister Nivedita, Bull and MacLeod charted out distinct trajectories for themselves. They remained in constant touch with each other, Bull and MacLeod returning to the U.S. and continuing to work mostly from abroad. The locus of their activities focused on developing the Vedantic movement in the West, though India remained a constant node of engagement. They did not renounce their western privileges unlike Nivedita, but adopted specific Hindu cultural practices in their everyday life. Bull continued to manage, organise and host swamis for the Vedanta movement's work in the U.S. Both of them became personal benefactors to Indians (such as the scientist J.C. Bose) seeking support for a range of causes, whose broad thrust was to expand Hindu Indian nationalist discourse.

MacLeod refused to make herself 'subject to the discipline of renunciation and obedience' as others. She embraced Vedantism as an 'itinerant credo, a faith of nomadic pragmatism'.¹¹⁴ To remain in one place became for her a sign of limitation and immobility. Vedantism came to embody a logic of perpetual movement. Vivekananda became the source of inspiration for all her investments around India. Even as she vouched for her relationship to him as 'only a friend', her last letter, written only a few months before Vivekananda's death was a movingly intimate one-liner: "I swim or sink with you."¹¹⁵ She never received a reply but was content that she had let Vivekananda know of her feelings for him. MacLeod regarded 29 January 1895 to be her real birthday, the day she first met Vivekananda. It was the

¹¹² Nivedita to MacLeod, 23 Oct 1902, *LSN-II*, p 518

¹¹³ Nivedita to MacLeod, 28 Jan 1903, *LSN-II*, p 537

¹¹⁴ Leggett, *Late and Soon*, p 239

¹¹⁵ Josephine MacLeod, *Reminiscences*, p 163

greatest ‘turning point’ in the latter’s life: ‘everything in her mind and heart ... revolved around him’.¹¹⁶ An avid traveller, she fondly referred to her itinerant trips around the world as ‘making lovers for Swamiji’.¹¹⁷ She increasingly withdrew from a life of social indulgence finding parties and get-togethers ‘so worldly and vulgar’:

what was the sense in all that conversation? Why ask people to come to your house to eat? why not all sit on the floor and be simple?’ after her ineffectual protests ‘she would take to her bed and live on bread and milk and excerpts from the Bhagavat Gita’.¹¹⁸

This was deep discipleship naturalised through (cultural) practice. Sitting on the floor, surviving on bread and milk and reading the Gita were gestures of this appropriation and naturalisation that Vivekananda and his spiritual community wrought on her self. She lived frugally, travelled widely and had protégés everywhere ‘to whom she wrote and who wrote back.’¹¹⁹ Travelling in third class carriages felt like an ‘acme of comfort’. She lived on the milk from railway stations and carried

in a small chamois bag tied by a string around her neck ... the equivalent of at least a thousand dollars in rupees, sterling, lire, drachmas. She gave away freely what money she had to people who asked or needed it, often advising them to buy a second class ticket to India where, by the shores of the Ganges, emanated truth and wisdom.¹²⁰

She mobilised resources for constructive work in various parts of rural and urban India: to build



Figure 7: Letters from Josephine MacLeod to Leonard K Elmhirst, written on the Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math’s pad.
Source: Tantine MacLeod, LKE/IN/13/B, Dartington Hall Trust, Devon.

¹¹⁶ Leggett, *Late and Soon* pp 11-12

¹¹⁷ Leggett, *Late and Soon*, p 134

¹¹⁸ Leggett, *Late and Soon* p 112

¹¹⁹ Leggett, *Ibid*, pp 11-12

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 241

new irrigation systems, schools, sending a prize bull from the U.S to rejuvenate the strain of sacred Indian cows.¹²¹ She brought the Japanese artist and intellectual Kakuzo Okakura to India, who pioneered ideas and networks of pan-Asianism in the early 20th century.¹²² Vivekananda's death devastated her; it changed her. She was no longer 'the devoted, heartbroken friend, but a woman with a mission – Tantine, Joyananda, Universal Aunt, Family Priestess'.¹²³ Fourteen years after his death, she returned to India:

They like to have me at the monastery guest house, because I keep Vivekananda alive, as none of these young men have ever seen him. And I like to be in India, remembering once when I asked him, "Swamiji, how can I best help you?" his answer was, "Love India!" So the upper floor of the guest house at the [Belur Math] monastery is mine where I go and will probably go winters, until the end.¹²⁴

Unlike Nivedita, who formally dissociated from the activities of the Mission, MacLeod remained involved in the affairs of the Ramakrishna Mission, visiting almost every winter a decade after the passage of Vivekananda's death. Her many letters to Leonard Elmhirst,¹²⁵ a close associate of Tagore in the 1920s indicate the frequency of her stay at Belur Math, the Mission's official headquarters near Calcutta. She found in India the realisation of an imputed Vedantic unity: 'What India makes one know is that one is in Eternity! That gives space and time and serenity. It's such fun!'¹²⁶

While MacLeod remained loyal to Vivekananda's broad vision of an inclusive pan-Hinduism, Nivedita veered towards becoming an icon of the less tolerant Hindu nationalist and 'aggressive Hinduism' discourse. MacLeod remained sharply critical of the conservative Hindu turn both Nivedita and the Mission took in the 1920s and was

scandalised by this degeneration of the ideal, and, strong with the authority conferred by her long intimacy with Vivekananda, she speaks harshly, from on

¹²¹ Ibid, 242

¹²² Ibid, p 134

¹²³ Ibid, p 238

¹²⁴ MacLeod, *Reminiscences*, p 164

¹²⁵ The only ones still in public domain that has not been already claimed and locked away by the Ramakrishna Mission.

¹²⁶ MacLeod to Elmhirst, 30 Oct 1924, Tantine MacLeod, LKE/IN/13/B, Dartington Hall Trust Papers, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter.

high, to the monks. She is outraged that they plant shards of glass in the walls of their garden to prohibit Mahomedans from passing, or that they speak, in case of a disagreement, to go to the police. With a cold disdain, she thanks them for having given her bitterness over seeing the great teachings of Vivekananda denied. And they shut up, humiliated; they are ashamed.¹²⁷

The invocation of her intimacy with Vivekananda to impress her authority on a new generation of monks shows the (racialised) hierarchy that direct discipleship conferred. The straitjacketing of Vivekananda into a Hindutva icon demonstrated the reach and success of the Hindu Mahasabha – already at work then – against which MacLeod’s remonstrations were but feeble protests.

Monastic leaders of the Ramakrishna Mission had been seeking the support of Hindu Mahasabha leaders such as M.R. Jayakar to expand its own activities – particularly in western India – and these intersecting networks told on the practices of the Mission as it

sought to align itself more closely to mainstream Hindu religiosity.¹²⁸ Nivedita was effusively invoked as an icon of this discourse, memorialised in Savarkar’s influential booklet in 1923: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*¹²⁹

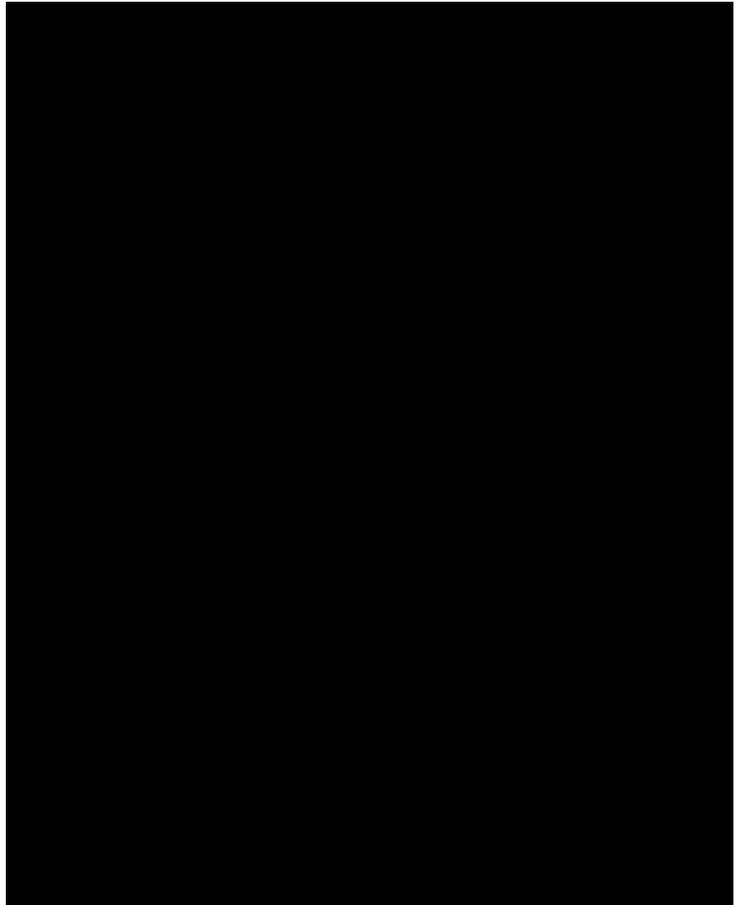


Figure 8: Letter to M.R. Jayakar requesting help to expand the Ramakrishna Mission’s work in western India. Source: M.R. Jayakar, 21 October 1925, Roll_00024_File_No_233, PA_Microfilm, NAI

¹²⁷ Rolland, *Inde*, p 272. Rolland observantly notes that ‘Nationalism is infiltrating into them.’

¹²⁸ Swami Yatishwarananda to M.R. Jayakar, 21 October 1925, Roll_00024_File_No_233, PA_Microfilm, Digitized Private Papers, M. R. Jayakar, National Archives of India

¹²⁹ V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay, 1923).

5.8 Conclusion

Vivekananda and Vedanta therefore, spawned multiple trajectories, some of which will be taken up in the chapter on Vedanta as a World Religion. Bull, Noble and MacLeod remained attached to Vivekananda and the Vedantic cause throughout their lives, contributing greatly to the institutions and ideologies that grew around them. Conversely, these relationships fulfilled a metonymic function: white disciples represented the coming of the ‘world’ around Vivekananda and his projects. Loving India translated into loving Vivekananda, keeping his memory alive among his disciples and countrymen. Indophilia - constituted through a language of spiritual domesticity – became part of a larger spatial imbrication. Love and longing for the mentor and his world was intertwined with the spaces and places he lived and moved through, congealed as shared individual and collective experience. Deep discipleship produced a subjective experience that took them into ‘realms of perception, imagination, fiction and fantasy’, creating ‘mental spaces and maps as so many mirages of the supposedly ‘real’ thing’.¹³⁰ It produced narratives, discourses and metaphors of its own, different if not always disparate. Embedded in the big discourse of Vedanta are such small everyday narratives of being and becoming, as actors of a movement whose deep affective ties and practices of discipleship shaped their own investments in it.

The material world of objects, spaces and places became traces of extended selves, evoking and sustaining an intimate-ness that lived on through such subjective experiences. They became sites to invest, manifest and embody a rich archive of meanings and feelings. Articles used by Vivekananda became objects of worship and affection, evoking their guru’s presence. Nivedita scavenged for MacLeod a piece of the cloth Vivekananda was wearing on his funeral pyre:

safe out of all burning and blackness, there blew to my feet the very two or three inches I had desired out of the border of the cloth. I took it as a Letter from Him to you, from beyond the grave.¹³¹

The ‘border of the cloth’ became for MacLeod, an answer to her last letter for which she had not received any reply. She also got for MacLeod the ‘incense burner

¹³⁰ David Harvey, *The condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford, 1990), p 203.

¹³¹ Nivedita to MacLeod, 14 Sep 1902, *LSN-I*, p 505

I stole from the pillow – where it was used all through those last hours. I felt that it would bring you the one assurance for wh[ic]h you w[ould]d long – and it w[ould]d rightly do so.’¹³² Bull pleaded with Sarada Devi for a photograph, so that she could take it back to America for worship. She hoped her photograph would remediate her presence, giving her strength and blessing. Emerging as a medium in India in the 1850s, the novelty of the photographic mode redefined personal embodiment.¹³³ Sarada Devi cherished looking at Nivedita’s photograph ‘now and then’ when the latter was away: ‘[a]nd it seems as if you are present with me’.¹³⁴ Swarupananda, another monk of the Ramakrishna Order, longingly gazed at the photograph of MacLeod, uttering: ‘My Mother!! How strange! When she was here I did not think so much about her!’¹³⁵ Nivedita often kissed MacLeod’s photograph. A very vibrant affective economy involving photographs connected women disciples to their guru and his wider world. They constantly sought and swapped pictures of Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda, along with each other’s, to feel the touch of distant (or dead) selves. Photographs reconstituted embodiment by projecting an image of the body of the real person. They made possible a close visual conception of people in a way that letters did not.

This did not however diminish the worth of letters. Letters from Sarada carried her love and blessings: ‘May this letter carry all blessings! My dear love to you, Baby Daughter Nivedita... You are a manifestation of the ever blissful Mother’.¹³⁶ Photographs, like letters, evidenced absent selves, by recreating their presence. It provided a material interface to convey that embodiment. After Vivekananda’s death, MacLeod would follow in his footsteps in the U.S, living in the same spaces as him. It was inhabiting a form of intimate absence, as if his essence was still tangible in the spaces he passed through, that excess which makes even emptiness seem full. Material and affective practices of discipleship were replete with such recursive traces of love (as also its failure), longing and loss.

¹³² Nivedita to MacLeod, 27 August 1902, *LSN-I*, p 497

¹³³ Nathaniel Gaskel and Diva Gujaral, *Photography in India: A VISUAL HISTORY FROM THE 1850S TO THE PRESENT*, (London, 2019)

¹³⁴ Sarada Devi to Nivedita, 13 May 1900. Translation made by Nivedita from the original Bengali, which is lost/unavailable. *LSN- I*, p 412

¹³⁵ Nivedita to MacLeod, 9 1. 1899, *LSN-I*, p 42

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Chapter 6

Vedanta and its Variables

Practices and Politics of a 'World Religion'

In the wonderful disposition of Providence, it has been designed that truths revealed, perhaps for the first time to the sages of our country and treasured up by them in a monumental form, should cross oceans and mountains and spread among nations utterly foreign to us both in their past and present lives. The Kantian revolution in Western philosophy the outpourings of the Upanishad-intoxicated Schopenhauer,... the revival of Sanskrit Study, the Theosophic Movement, the conversion and activity of Mrs. Besant, the remarkable lectures of Max Muller, the Great Parliament of Religions and the timely appearance of Swami Vivekananda have all been unswervingly tending to the dissemination of those great truths, Kripananda, Abhayananda, Yogananda and a whole host of converts to Vedantism are springing up everywhere. Science itself has become a willing tool in the hands of our ancient philosophy. The word Vedanta is nearly as familiar on the shores of Lake Michigan as on the banks of the Ganges.

So asserted the (largely Tamil) Brahmin editors flamboyantly in the first volume of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, a monthly journal started in India in 1896 to popularise Vivekananda's work on Hinduism in India and abroad. The introduction claimed how Vedanta – code for Hinduism - had been steadily making 'converts' in the West: tracing its illustrious lineage from Immanuel Kant and the 'Upanishad-intoxicated Schopenhauer' to the prominent personalities of Theosophist Annie Besant and Orientalist Max Muller. Vivekananda provided the 'telos' in such a narrative, fulfilling the role Vedanta/Hinduism was destined to play on the world stage. The conversion of American men and women such as Kripananda (Leon Landsberg), Abhayananda (Mary Louise) and Yogananda [?], to the cause of Vedantic Hinduism was showcased to deepen that claim.

The continuous claims making that instrumentalised Western disciples, followers, networks and interlocutors of Vedanta were central in the magnified projection of Vedanta's success – from the 'shores of Lake Michigan' to the 'banks of the Ganges', as it were. Every volume of the *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Brahmavadin*, the two English journals started by Vivekananda's Indian disciples with generous

contributions from western patrons, covered in detail the various exploits of their master and his interpretation of Vedanta. Disciples in Madras were as active or even more than their Bengali counterparts, a point often under emphasised in situating either Vivekananda or Vedanta within India.¹ In their columns, Vivekananda's 'conquest' of the West became a distinctive metaphor that entered Indian public discourse and spoke to emergent forms of Hindu cultural nationalism.

6.1 Introduction: Vedanta and the World

The Western, or more prominently, American recognition that made Vivekananda and Vedanta's 'world' fortunes is acknowledged from within his monastic tradition as well. 'Swami Vivekananda is America's gift to India', remarked Swami Nikhilananda, an important monastic biographer of Vivekananda. I shall return to this 'Made in the West' aspect towards the end of the essay, building on the subsequent sections that detail how these western networks influenced his uptake and appropriation. This chapter asks why and how Vedanta came to occupy such a position among his western disciples and networks and the politics of representation surrounding it.

An earlier chapter has looked at the micropractices that constituted the making of deep discipleship out of sympathetic westerners. Along with Vivekananda as their guru/exalted figure, what did Vedanta provide as a personal and public creed to such interested seekers? How did Vedanta come to represent a convergence of the personal and ideological motivations of his followers? In what ways did their own approaches to Vedanta intersect with Vivekananda's aims to consolidate it? This chapter seeks to understand why Vedanta matters in understanding the politics of Indophilia and Indophile affections for projects that drew on Vivekananda and his tradition. Locating Vedanta in the wider cultural context of late 19th century India

¹ The volume of serious historical publications on Vivekananda's influence in Bengal is massive, compared to the rather cursory attention given to Madras, as an ancillary site. Major works such as William Radice (Ed), *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, (London, 1999); Amiya Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, (Oxford, 2000) do not dwell on the Madras connection. I have noted this elsewhere in Somak Biswas, "From Noble to Nivedita: Sister Nivedita and her Passages through India, 1895-1911." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, vol. 75, 2014, pp. 790-797. This scholarship tends to provincialise Vivekananda within a largely colonial Bengali setting that does not adequately explain the remarkable number of lay and princely patrons and disciples Vivekananda had already gathered in Madras even before his Chicago success. This essay acknowledges this problem but unfortunately does not fill that lack, partly due to constraints of language.

and the U.S/Britain, I look at how Vivekananda's western disciples and interlocutors were drawn to its appeal as a category of liberal religion that reconciled their disenchantments with western forms of Christianity.

In this, Western disciples' and interlocutors' quest for a liberal religious hermeneutic converged with Vedanta's own aspirations to be global. Their belief and investments in and for Vedanta were determined by Vivekananda's ability to consistently engage in favourable conversations with dominant narratives of rationality, ethics and science. Through Vivekananda and his cohort of fellow swamis, Vedanta became a master signifier of a Hindu civilizational and cultural form able to produce and sustain its claim to universality. As Vivekananda continuously harped about Vedanta: 'Make it an [sic] universal property. It cannot remain in the hands of a few narrow minded people' [Brahmins].²

Even as it sought to make itself a 'universal property, what kind of India did Vivekananda and his disciples help produce and imagine through Vedanta? Much like indenture, western networks became crucial to evidence the greatness of Indian high culture and civilisation through Vedanta. It heralded the moral superiority of an India that remained firmly under colonial subjection. Like Andrews, Pearson and Polak, western followers working under the sign of Vedanta remained engaged in a larger normalising-work, rescuing India and Indians from its heathen, colonised stereotype to that of an enlightened cultural representation.

Vivekananda and his Vedantic followers fought pitched rhetoric battles with critics such as Christian missionaries and Ramabai circles,³ among others, to consolidate its gains. The appeal and desire for 'culture and learned audiences' – a tactic to testify Vedanta's (and thereby India's) own claim to high culture and learning - remained a recurrent trope in the dealings of Vivekananda and his disciples in the West. The work undertaken under Vedanta represented aspirations for the

² Mahendranath Dutta, *Londone Swami Vivekananda*, p 150

³ Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922): Indian social reformer and pioneering women's educationist. Scathing critic of Hindu Brahminical orthodoxy (she was herself a Brahmin), she converted to Christianity in 1883. She was the first Indian woman to have received a medical degree. See Uma Chakravarti, *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, (New Delhi, 2013), pp 2-4. Ramabai's wide campaigns in support of Hindu widows in Britain and America led to the formation of Ramabai Circles, many of them supported by well-known suffragists. Vivekananda's attempt to preach the greatness of Hinduism often ran counter to the members of these circles.

realisation of that idealised state. Vedanta and its bearers became respectable by association with/in a cross-section of such middle/class white audiences.

The consolidation of Vivekananda's Western networks was closely tied to the mobilisation of Vedanta as a central discursive plank for his work in India and abroad. The success of Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta lay in its deft discursive ambivalence, a strategy that appealed to gather a wider variety of audiences and projects than his contemporaries.

Vedanta was therefore, as much an actors' as it was an analytic category.⁴ As an actors' category, it allowed its followers to pursue distinct but related activities that drew on their guru. As an analytic category, it performed important discursive work in relation to rationalising narratives of science (as in evolution and thermodynamics), while competing with other forms of religiosities. This chapter charts the coming together of disciples and dialectics in the making of Vedanta as a 'global story', with a variety of inflections, invocations and appropriations. Like indenture, western disciples' investments around Vedanta informed and (re)produced the intimacy of their relationship with Vivekananda and his wider community.

Unlike Tagore, Gandhi and their disciples' doings around indenture, however, an archival lack characterises a similar telling of Vedanta and Vivekananda's followers. Historical traces to connect these trajectories are only available to us in fragments, given the restrictive ownership the Ramakrishna Math and Mission asserts over the personal papers of these figures.⁵ The inaccessibility of the majority of personal papers and correspondence held by this organisation, in an attempt to preserve a carefully curated legacy of its founding figures, mean that we may never fully know the politics of intimacy attendant to their public investments around Vedanta and

⁴ I borrow these terms from the historian of science James Poskett in his recent work on Phrenology as a global science of the mind, though he uses them with a different set of emphases. For Poskett's interpretation, see *Materials of the Mind: Phrenology, Race and the Global History of Science: 1815-1920*, (Chicago, 2019), pp 2-3.

⁵ The Math and Mission's attempt to centralise most of its archival holdings spread across different Vedanta Centres in the U.K and U.S was prompted by the publication of the religious studies scholar Jeffery Kripal's *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago, 1995). Kripal portrayed Ramakrishna as a homosexual with paedophilic tendencies, an interpretation that caused widespread outrage and dismay after its publication in India, as well as a gradual tightening of institutional controls. There is much shoddiness in the Kripal's handling of the evidence that made his claims somewhat contested even in scholarly circles.

Vivekananda. In its stead is offered an array of narratives contingent to the coming of Vedanta through Vivekananda and his brother-monks in the West – its uptake and ‘worlding’ in certain contexts and mobilisation for a wide variety of uses.

I use the term ‘worlding’ to denote the dissemination of Vedanta as a series of practices among Western followers. The ‘worlding’ of Vedanta in certain western geographies is contingent to the practices surrounding its introduction – and gradual stabilising – to an interlinked set of audiences. I expand the term in the sense cultural geographers Anderson and Harrison suggest it: ‘a mobile but more or less stable [or stabilising] ensemble of practices, involvements, relations, capacities, tendencies and affordances’ that settles Vedanta as a discursive formation to these audiences.⁶ There is a productive tension between Vedanta’s claim to be a ‘world’ religion that takes the world as a macro-category and specific exercises in its ‘worlding’ that shape the smaller scale of movements for its actors and networks. Between the big discourse of Vedanta as a world religion and the wider community of Vivekananda lay the everyday practices – of personal realisations, affections, public claims and intellectual dialectics – that made possible its consolidation. These tentative practices of worlding Vedanta re/produced an India that was actively serviced in the politics of respectability that haunted colonial subjects and their migratory practices. Settling Vedanta, like indenture, was settling a particular idea of India for which Indophile investments were immensely instrumental.

6.2 Vedanta as a Modern Dialogic

The quest for a ‘universal’ religion to validate indigenous cultural forms was an intrinsic intellectual response to colonial modernity.⁷ A cursory glance at the intellectual history of modern Hinduism testifies to a continued fixation for a universalising narrative. From Rammohun Roy, it stretches over a century to include the likes of Debendranath Tagore, Keshab Chandra Sen, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Aurobindo, Tagore and Gandhi all of whom

⁶ B Anderson. & P. Harrison (eds) *Taking - Place: Non-Representational Theories and Geography.*, (Farnham, 2010), p 8. A more deviant, and distinctively queer trajectory is traced by Karl Scoonover and Rosalind Galt, whose work on ‘Queer Cinema in the World’ argues for a ‘queer worldliness’, that disrupt normative ways of cultural being and belonging in the world. See Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt, [*Queer Cinema in the World*](#), (Durham, 2016).

⁷ See Arvind Sharma for a detailed discussion of the precepts and texts of these thinkers for a dialectic of universal religion that drew from various traditions of Hinduism deeply. Arvind Sharma, *The concept of universal religion in modern Hindu thought*, (Basingstoke, 1998).

engaged in some form of Hindu universalist dialectics. Attempts to move beyond the disciplining categories of liberal knowledge, however, often relied on the very categories that were sought to be transcended. The dialectics around Vedanta's claim to universality demonstrate both the 'indispensability and inadequacy of European epistemic categories'⁸ that inhered in such representations. Narrative regimes spawned by discourses on ethics, evolution, rationality and psychology became sites to test and evidence such universalist claims.⁹ New disciples and audiences in the West were won for Vedanta through such dialectic moves. This is not to understate the affective aspect of discipleships and networks, but rather suggest how discursive strategies worked in tandem with them. Vedanta became an open signifier for a range of narratives that brought together the personal and the political.

Vedanta was one of the six original schools of Hindu philosophy that developed out of the Vedic tradition in ancient India. It enjoyed a long and illustrious lineage in the Sanskrit commentarial tradition since the seventh century onwards, continuing well into medieval and early modern times. A particularly monist and abstract school of philosophy, the Vedantic/Upanishadic tradition is often regarded as a source for indigenous secularism or pluralism, in which different points of view are allowed to co-exist as part of a hierarchized but unified system in its approach to divinity.¹⁰ The Advaita branch of Vedanta, espoused famously by the eighth century Sanskrit scholar Shankara, posited a strictly non-dualist and monist view of the world that argues for an absolute identity between man and their maker.

Vedanta was resurrected as a modern dialogic by the early 19th century social reformer Rammohun Roy. In Bengal itself, the seat of British colonial state and the centre for Roy's own activities, the influence of Vedanta was quite minor, given the prevalence of the devotional Gaudiya Vaishnavite bhakti tradition or the more didactic *Nyaya* (Logic) school of philosophy. Between 1815 and 1820, Rammohun

⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p 22

⁹ Several historians have dwelt on the rationalising of Vedanta modern science and Vedanta. See Dermot H. Killingley, *Yoga-sūtra IV, 2–3 and Vivekānanda's interpretation of evolution*, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (JUNE 1990), pp. 151-179; historians of science Dhruv Raina and Irfan Habib place it within a wider context of bhadrakok engagements with modern science, Dhruv Raina and S. Irfan Habib, *The Moral Legitimation of Modern Science: Bhadrakok Reflections on Theories of Evolution*, *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Feb., 1996), pp. 9-42.

¹⁰ Christopher Minkowski, 'Advaita Vedanta in Early Modern History', *South Asian History and Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 2, April 2011, 205–231

translated key texts of Vedanta, the *Brahmasutras* in Bengali and English, for wide circulation.¹¹ Its remarkably monist bearings was honed to great philosophical effect to rationalise Hinduism, a tradition that Vivekananda and his interlocutors continued when responding to missionary critics and other detractors. Contemporary Anglican missionaries thought of Vedanta as a new kind of Hindu apologetic that precluded 'disillusioned Hindu' members from being drawn to Protestant Christianity.¹² Vedanta emerged as a modern dialogic that lent itself readily to the conceptual inflections of Enlightenment rationality.

For a newly mobile class of Bengali elites, Vedanta was not only an attempt to rationalise Hindu religiosity but also to legitimate their material concerns. As Brian Hatcher argues, Vedanta emerged as a *bhadralok* cultural project – a bourgeoisie discourse for middle class Hinduism – that justified their members' material aspirations.¹³ Yet, even as Vedanta sought to claim itself as more monotheistic than Christianity while also making space for bourgeoisie aspirations, it was strongly disputed by many major contemporary and later Hindu commentators. It included the likes of pundits like Mrityunjay Tarkalankar of Calcutta (1762-1819), Sankara Sashtri of Madras or socio-religious leaders like Debendranath Tagore, Vidyasagar, Bankim Chattopadhyay and Dayanand Saraswati.¹⁴

The early liberalism of Bengali intelligentsia gradually gave way to the strident emergence of pronounced cultural nationalist forms of Hinduism by the end of the 19th century. The latter half of the 19th century exposed the limits of liberalism, part of a wider crisis due to 'effects of industrialisation in Europe and in the non-European

¹¹ Dermot H Killingley, 'Vedanta and Modernity', eds. C.H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright, *India: Society and the Beginnings of Modernisation, c. 1830-1850*, (London, 1976), pp 133-134

¹² Indeed, attempts to grapple with the challenge of Vedanta was evident in contemporary advertisements that awarded monetary prizes (up to £300) for essays that could prove its fallibility to learned Hindus.

Proposal for a Prize of £300, for the Best Essay in Refutation of the Errors of Hindu Philosophy according to the Vedanta, Nyaya and Sankhya systems, 1 April 1853, *The Times of India*, Accessed through Pro-Quest.

¹³ Brian A. Hatcher, *Bourgeois Vedanta: The Colonial Roots of Middle-class Hinduism*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), p 306.

¹⁴ Dermot H Killingley, *Vedanta and Modernity*, *Ibid*, p 137. A handful of Brahma Samaj members, however, continued on Roy's line: Anandachandra Vedantavagis translated Shankara's commentary on the Brahma Sutra into Bengali and Chandrasekhar Basu wrote a Bengali 'Introduction to Vedanta'.

world, deindustrialisation'.¹⁵ This marginalisation of Bengali capital from global capital networks led to an introverted response of the intelligentsia to seek indigenist categories of thought not dominated/influenced by the West. Crisis in capital and changing relations of property, land and enterprise in the late 19th century catalysed the 'abandonment of liberal reformism' and the embracing of Hindu cultural nationalism.¹⁶

From the 1880s, there emerged, as the historian Andrew Sartori has observed, a new culturalist politics that drew deeply from abstracted Hindu theological traditions. The west became a powerful signifier of an exclusively materialist and commercial society, at odds with an Indian civilization whose cultural axis rested around spiritual knowledge and religion.¹⁷ In such a schematic, India became a cultural repository of eternal values, spirituality and religion that would always exist in tension with a crude materialistic West.

Vedanta transformed, under these circumstances, from a liberal religious discourse (of the Roy variety) to embody a muscular Hindu project within India. It continued its life as a 'world religion' outside of India in the West, drawing devotees from a cross-section of dissident religious subcultures. Yet, it is Vedanta's dual move – its ability to world itself in both 'universal' and 'nationalist' terms that made it an extraordinarily powerful signifier. Western followers drawn to Vivekananda and Vedanta were connected to the larger stake of authorising and raising India's profile in the world – as a bearer of civilisation, learning and high culture. Within India itself, this authorising and mobilisation of western networks formed a significant moment in the nationalist invocation of Hindu politics and publics.

6.3 Vedanta in the West

Vedantic ideas had already entered American intellectual circles through the Transcendentalists and Quakers in the mid -19th century. It included the likes of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Jon Edwards, Henry Thoreau and Walt Whitman who engaged with texts/traditions such as the Bhagvadgita, Vedas and Upanishads. They

¹⁵ C. A. Bayly, *South Asian Liberalism under strain c. 1900-1914*, <https://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/happ/Discover/WilesLectureSeries/Secure-access/Fileupload,695534,en.pdf>

¹⁶ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, (Delhi, 2001), pp 1-2

¹⁷ Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the age of Capital*, (Chicago, 2008), pp 136-142.

found a fulfilment of their own transcendental quests through their philosophies, but ritual aspects of Hinduism played almost no part in them.¹⁸ In the years immediately preceding Chicago, the influence of Theosophist networks and teachers such as Mohini Mohun Chatterjee in New England were also important in drawing followers such as Bull and MacLeod.

The interlinked expansion of modern scientific knowledge, combined with a historical criticism of Biblical scriptures had been producing a growing interest and awareness of religious pluralism outside of Protestant Christianity in late 19th century Britain and North America. In the U.S specifically, evangelical pietism had transformed the dynamics of religious affiliation based on an individualised denominational culture by the mid-19th century.¹⁹ A logic of liberal universalism deeply informed the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893.²⁰ Its attempt to curate and catalogue a variety of religious traditions from the non-West was an eclectic exercise that testified to the diverse secularisations at work in American public discourse. If the Parliament embodied this eclecticism to treat all varieties of thought equally, respective speakers often used it as an opportunity to present the superiority of their apologetics.

This heterodox fringe – in Europe and connected to north America - saw the coming together of such diverse movements as vegetarianism, spiritualism, anti-colonialism and women’s suffrage, among others.²¹ Subcultural networks informed and sustained the interests of disciples like Noble, Bull, MacLeod, Goodwin, Sturdy and many others, as also their avowals for Vivekananda and Vedanta. Sensitive to new ‘waves of spiritual enthusiasms [that] periodically wash[ed] over American religious sensibilities’, as the historian Ruth Harris has observed, they responded eagerly to Vivekananda’s personality and teachings.²² Frances Leggett, MacLeod’s niece noted that she and her sister Betty were part of the ‘American women hungry for culture,

¹⁸ Travis D. Webster, , Secularization and Cosmopolitan Gurus, *Asian Ethnology*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (2016), p 332

¹⁹ Travis D. Webster, *Ibid.* 330. It is interesting, though, that only one representative of Islam attended the World Parliament.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 49. It is interesting how the Chicago Parliament – aimed at celebrating the eclectic religious diversity in the world and seeking to ‘condemn sectarianism, fanaticism and bigotry’ – ended up empowering such narratives in specific nationalist discourses, particularly Vivekananda in Hindu nationalism and Anagarika Dharmapala in Sinhalese nationalism.

²¹ Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*.

²² Ruth Harris, ‘Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, and global spiritual transformations in the fin de siècle’, p 179

for ever going to lectures, trying each new thing as it appeared on the limited horizon. It was the order of the day'.²³ In these circles, eclectic discussions of heterodox religion could blend fruitfully into limited critiques of race, class, gender and imperialism. The tensions between alternative religiosities and a dominant Protestant Christian majority would however, continue to simmer in public discourse. Bull was claimed to have been driven insane by Vivekananda and his circle's elaborate psychic conspiracy, while Sarah Farmer, another American woman who had initially sought Vivekananda's discipleship but later submitted to Abdul Baha and the Persian Revelation, was 'incarcerated as a madwoman'.²⁴

Vivekananda's audiences in the west comprised primarily of a cross-section of those disenchanted with institutional forms of Christianity – former Theosophists, spiritual seekers and suffragist women, whose personal religious and spiritual quests evinced a curious interest in Vedanta. They responded eagerly to intimations of alternative religiosities and spiritualities owing to personal experiences of disenchantment.²⁵ As an editorial comment of the *Prabuddha Bharata* observed while reporting on the influence of Tibetan mysticism on American New Thought: 'mysticism is growing like mushrooms in America. Her virgin soil seems to take anything'.²⁶

Vivekananda and Vedanta were, therefore, part of a wider import of gurus and teachers preaching forms of 'eastern' philosophy, medicine, faith-healing, religion and spirituality. Vivekananda was quite aware of these circles with which Vedanta jostled for success with spiritualists, Theosophists, Christian Scientists, in a state of

²³ Frances Leggett, *Late and Soon*, pp 95-96

²⁴ The Ole Bull will gave away most of her wealth to various Indians or India centred activities: Margaret Noble/Sister Nivedita, prominent British Hindu disciple of Vivekananda; Jagadish Bose, eminent scientist; Swami Saradananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission; and Mohini Mohun Chatterji, a lapsed Theosophist. The will was contested by her daughter Olea Vaughan Bull, who challenged her Hindu bequests, and eventually won the trial, though she died hours after the victory. 'Ole Bull Will Contest', *New York Times*, 13 Feb 1911; 'Spirits urged \$25,000 Gift, Said Mrs. Bull', *Boston Herald*, 15 June 1911. Ruth Harris elaborates on this in her essay on 'Vivekananda, Sarah Farmer, and global spiritual transformations'.

²⁵ See Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities*; also Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'From civilization to globalization: the 'West' as a shifting signifier in Indian modernity', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Volume 13, Number 1, 2012 of how Asian religiosities influences various eclectic movement in late 19th century metropolitan British culture.

²⁶ *Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1902, p 110. All copies of Prabuddha Bharata has been accessed via archive.org. <https://archive.org/details/PrabuddhaBharata-July1896-Dec2001/page/n16>

ambiguous antagonism.²⁷ The Chicago Parliament itself had launched many international careers alongside his, including Jehangir Cola, the Parsi preacher from Bombay and Dharmapala, the Theravada Buddhist preacher from Ceylon. Vivekananda's letters to his brother disciples often tellingly reveal the extent of this contest for valuable resources and networks between the West and their own countries: 'the whole American nation loves and respects me, pays my expenses, and reveres me as a Guru... Dharmapala is a nice boy. He has not much of learning, but is very gentle. He has a good deal of popularity in this country'.²⁸ Garnering western disciples, networks and resources were extremely valuable for both Vivekananda and Vedanta's success.

To this heterodox array of individuals in the West, Vivekananda's success as an eloquent speaker on Hinduism in 1893 had generated considerable interest. Bull had been active in the Woman Suffrage movement and the National Women's Temperance Union in the U.S, and donated generously to various progressive establishments, including Tuskegee Institute, Booker T Washington's first college for black Americans and Jane Addams' Hull House, an educational community for working women immigrants.²⁹ MacLeod was a regular at different non-conformist religious and cultural circles, travelling widely between U.S, Britain and Europe to cultivate her eclectic interests. Other important associates and patrons included Lewis Janes, President of the Brooklyn Ethical Society and Sarah Farmer, founder of the Greenacre conferences that showcased Transcendentalist thought, among others. British followers included Margaret Noble, a schoolteacher who moved in feminist circles and reading clubs that characterised fin-de-siecle London; E.T. Sturdy and Henrietta Muller, former members of the Theosophical Society; and Captain James Sevier and his wife Charlotte, the former having served in the British Indian Army for five years before turning to spirituality. All of them drew on Vivekananda and Vedanta in different ways.

²⁷ Vivekananda to Brother Disciples, 25 September, 1894, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, 2011, pp 139-140. Vivekananda compares them to the Kartabhaja sect in India. It was founded by Aulchand and became popular in 18th century Bengal, preaching literalist practices of worshipping the Master.

²⁸ Vivekananda to Brahmananda, 19 March 1894, Chicago, *LSV*, p 96. Dharmapala's gentleness would however, give way to a muscular pan-Buddhist propaganda over the control of Bodh Gaya in the later 1900s. In 1904, Sister Nivedita became actively aligned with the Hindu side in this contest. See Nivedita to Gokhale, 24 September, 1904, *LSN II*, p 682

²⁹ Prabuddhaprana, *Saint Sara*, pp 2-3

Many of these admirers and followers were already experimenting with heterodox spiritual practices, without openly disavowing Christianity. Bull, for instance, was in touch with Mohini Mohan Chatterjee, a former Adept and member of the Theosophical Society, who introduced her to the Hindu text *Bhagavad Gita*. She was experimenting with vegetarianism when she encountered Vivekananda and Vedanta.³⁰ Sarah Farmer was a Transcendentalist and strongly attracted to the Occult movement as represented by the Theosophical Society.³¹ Miss. Henrietta Muller and Mr Edward T. Sturdy, Vivekananda's hosts in England, were formerly high ranking members within the Theosophical Society. Both Sturdy and Muller became disillusioned with Vivekananda later, Muller in particular returning to Christian evangelism.

6.4 Consolidating Vedanta

The posthumous memorialisation of the 'Vivekananda moment' in the public life of Hinduism relied precisely on overstating the reach of his success. Beneath the bubble of rhetoric lay a tense recognition of the uncertainty of his own position as also the new interpretation of Vedanta he was offering. His Indian and western discipleships and networks proved crucial during the process of its early consolidation, acting on and affirming each other. The first few years after 1893 were characterised by continual aspersions on his character, authenticity and authority. An anguished Vivekananda chafed against the propaganda to malign him in the U.S:

... everything that is said by Christians in India is sedulously gathered by the missionaries and regularly published and they go from door to door to make my friends not give me. They have succeeded only too well for there is not one word for me from India. Indian Hindu papers may laud me to skies, but not a word of that ever came to America, so that many people in this country think me a fraud. In the face of missionaries and with the jealousy of the Hindus here to back them I have not a word to say... I came here without credentials. How else to show that I am not a fraud in the face of the missionaries and Brahmo Samaj? ... I thought nothing would be so easy as to hold a meeting of some respectable persons in Madras and Calcutta and pass a resolution thanking me and the American people for being kind to me and sending it over officially, i.e, through

³⁰ Bull to Chatterjee, 15 August 1893, *Saint Sara* ..., pp 86-87

³¹ Stefanie Syman, *The Subtle Body: The Story of Yoga in America*, (New York, 2010), pp 51-52

the Secretary of the function, to America, for instance, sending one to Dr. Barrows [Chairman of the Chicago Parliament] and asking him to publish it in the papers and so on, to different papers of Boston, New York and Chicago. Now after all I found that it is too terrible a task for India to undertake. There has not been one voice for me in one year and every one against me...³²

This hankering for the recognition of his authority, a desire to legitimise his assumption of guru-hood delineated several absences. The lack of affiliation to any major sects or *samajik* networks from within India acted as a major deterrent to his claim to represent Hinduism. The Ramakrishna Mission hadn't been yet formalised as a sect (formally founded only in 1897), and its uncertain location in the Hindu monastic hierarchy deprived him of any immediate support from institutionalised Hindu traditions and structures. At home, his Brahmin followers in Madras were engaged in defending their guru's neo-Hindu positions:

Such of his critics as call his views "Neo-Hinduism.", "Vedaless Vedantism," ... will be immensely benefitted by perusing these lectures [Lectures on Gnana Yoga, the newest of his published volumes], for they will soon learn that the Swami's views do not differ in any respect from the grand practical teachings of the Upanishads.³³

That his interpretation of Vedanta differed significantly from canonical positions was acknowledged even by his admirers: 'His view of Vedanta was....a great deal different fromtraditional. His complaint appeared to be that Vedanta had been treated too much as the possession of a sect competing for the loyalty of the Hindu along with other sects, and not as a life giving perennial source of inspiration that it really was.'³⁴ In various parts of India and outside, his *kayastha*³⁵ caste status was cited as a permanent disqualifying mark against his representative ambitions as a Hindu guru. Vaishnavite factions in Bengal and Madras bitterly contested his claims to represent Hinduism in any capacity, as he was not Brahmin by caste. Refuting such allegations hotly, an impatient Vivekananda emphatically traced his *kayastha* lineage to that of the Kshatriyas, a warrior/princely *varna* or caste that

³² Vivekananda to Madras Disciple, 28 June 1894, Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vol 2, (Calcutta, 1984), p 81.

³³ Prabuddha Bharata, Vol 1, Oct 1896, No 4, p 3.

³⁴ G.S. Bhate, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, p 61.

³⁵ A dominant sub-caste of indeterminate *varna* location. The kayasthas emerged and rose to prominence as a scribal/bureaucratic class under Mughal patronage in various parts of north India. Most of Brahminical orthodox opinion viewed Kayasthas as that of shudra origin.

‘apart from the other services in the past, ruled half of India for centuries’.³⁶ The *kayasthas*, claimed Vivekananda, were modern day descendants of the Kshatriyas, who ‘have equal right to be Sannyasins’ and ‘to the Vedas’.³⁷ Sarat Chandra Chakrabarti, a Bengali Brahmin and fiery defender/disciple of Vivekananda, clarified in his many ‘Letters to the Editor’ of *The Indian Mirror* that Vivekananda’s monastic credentials were beyond reproach. His knowledge of Vedic scriptures, he attested, was ‘more authoritative than almost any Brahmin pundit could muster’.³⁸ His own brother-disciples in India made light of the seriousness with which Vivekananda regarded his Vedantic mission:

At Baranagore Math [near Calcutta] he would say that their names would be recorded in history. Yogananda and other brother disciples used to make fun of him for this. ‘Swamiji retorted: "You will see if I am right or not! Vedanta is the only religion convincing to all. If you don't listen to me, I will go to the quarter of the untouchables and teach them Vedanta!"³⁹

Instances such as these show the severely contested nature of Vivekananda and his world claims in the early years of his Vedantic work. Being in the West afforded him some scope to consolidate his fledgling work but its vulnerability to allegations levelled at home also made it rather tentative. Potential disciples and patrons were forever cautious in verifying his authenticity and frequently encountered the series of allegations made against him. A frustrated Vivekananda wrote to his brother disciples in Calcutta of how rumours circulated in the U.S of him being a cheat, ‘committing every sin under the sun in America – especially ‘unchastity’ of the most degraded type!!!’⁴⁰ It revealed the reach of interlinked communication networks, even then, that facilitated the flow of such information quite extensively between India, Britain and America through different groups such as the Brahma Samaj, various missionary networks and Ramabai circles. Julia Ward Howe, a poet, woman’s rights activist and Ramabai Circle member told Vivekananda: if ‘your gods

³⁶ Swami Vivekananda, ‘My Plan of Campaign’, Madras, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, (Madras, 1897), p 123

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Sarat C. Chakrabarti, Letter to the Editor, *Indian Mirror*, 24 April 1901, *Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers* (Calcutta, 1960). Henceforth VIN.

³⁹ Swami Turiyananda, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, p 340.

⁴⁰ Brother Disciples to Vivekananda, March 1894, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, Vol 2*, p 90. This was attributed to P.C. Mazoomdar of the Brahma Samaj, who also spoke at the Chicago Parliament along with Vivekananda.

are so good, let your women come to tell us of them'; to which Vivekananda replied that 'our women do not travel'.⁴¹ Christian missionaries picked up Hindu orthodox and reformist denunciations and publicised them widely through established evangelical circles in the U.S.

Western seekers whose help Vivekananda sought were quite aware of the slew of slander made against him and Vedanta. Between 1893 and 1895, these potential patrons demanded attestations of his credibility, before investing in him or Vedanta more substantially. Pressed for proof, he and his followers discovered the system of 'credentials and character-certificates' on which accessibility to audiences was determined in the west, something that the Theosophical Society or the Brahma Samaj possessed amply. Vivekananda pleaded with his disciples and high Indian contacts – mostly *diwans* and *rajās* of Hindu princely states – to furnish him with such proofs, the burden of which rested almost solely on him. He and his disciples went to great lengths to vindicate his sannyasin status, without which his role as a teacher and interlocutor for Vedanta and Hinduism remained insecure. The fretting over credentials indicate how the Chicago Parliament was a key moment in the proliferation of pop spirituality mongers and 'fake'-gurus, along with more serious interlocutors like Vivekananda and Dharmapal, whose mobilisations on Hinduism and Buddhism were tied to an expanding scale of cultural nationalist politics.

Alasinga Perumal, a prominent Tamil disciple, assured Vivekananda that he had appealed to the Raja of Ramnad (near Madurai) to refute the deceitful slander peddled by missionaries and fellow Hindus.⁴² Detractors sought to sway prospective patrons of Vivekananda and Vedanta. Lewis Janes, one of the organisers of the Cambridge Conferences that provided Vivekananda with a valuable platform to present and consolidate his Vedanta work, noted with concern a letter sent by Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar, a prominent Brahma Samaj leader (under the Keshab Sen faction) and scathing critic of Vivekananda. Janes forwarded it to Bull, his co-organiser and future patron of Vedanta:

⁴¹ Hampton-Columbian magazine, October 1911, pp 405-406

⁴² Alasinga Perumal to Vivekananda, 28 March 1895, Cambridge Conferences papers, Bull-Curtis Papers, Cambridge Historical Society, Boston. Henceforth MSS/BC/F/CC.

I should be glad to know how it impresses you, and whether you think it can be used to any advantage in certain quarters where the impression of Mr. Mozoomdar's antagonism to the Swami has prevailed.⁴³

Early correspondence exchanged between Janes and Bull frequently refer to a string of allegations and misrepresentations rife in relevant American circles about Vivekananda. Jeanne Sorabji, a Parsi woman who presented Zoroastrianism at the Chicago Parliament on 'The Women in India' alleged that Vivekananda was a false guru, with no authority to preach. Janes, increasingly more confident about Vivekananda's authenticity, comforted an anxious Bull and her coterie, assuring that he received word from trusted sources in Detroit that the charges spread by Sorabji were utterly false:

You can assure all that the Swami Vivekananda has made a deep and most favourable impression in Brooklyn.... For myself, I did not need this added assurance – but it is well to be able to say "I know", and to give my authorities, if any of these slanders show their heads hereafter.⁴⁴

Often these rumours and scandals emerged from former gurus and associates of these Western patrons, suggesting the close knit world inhabited by these figures. Janes took the lead, once again, in defusing Bull's former guru Mohini Mohan Chattopadhyay's attempt to undercut Vivekananda's religious authority around matters of caste:

I return Mr. Sturdy's letter here... I have had a talk with Miss Waldo about the Chattopadhyaya matter, and she read me a letter from Swami Saradananda that Mr. C falsely reputed in England that the Swami Vivekananda belonged to the Sudra caste (as reported by Mr Goodwin).⁴⁵

The intricate system of checks begun and sustained by a diligent exchange of letters and consultation between western disciples and interlocutors located in the U.S. and England shows the everyday epistolarity that built up Vedantic networks in the West since the 1890s. Once established, this trust in Vivekananda and Vedanta were continually adduced in affiliated journals such as *Prabuddha Bharata* and *Brahmavadin* by disciples located in India. Letters and attestations from prominent western interlocutors and followers were sought, invoked and

⁴³ Janes to Bull, 5 Sep 1895, MSS/BC/F/CC.

⁴⁴ Janes to Bull, [undated], 1895, MSS/BC/F/CC

⁴⁵ Janes to Bull, 9 Oct 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC.

reproduced to underline Vivekananda's authenticity and influence, which then entered Indian newspapers in English and vernacular languages such as the *Indian Mirror* and *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. *The Indian Mirror* confidently asserted Vivekananda's success as a story of spiritual conquest: 'Truly, it may be said of Swami Vivekanand's work in America, that he went, spoke and conquered.'⁴⁶

Each issue of these journals reported in some detail the progress of Vedantic work undertaken in Boston, New York and London, among other places, and the various figures connected to them. They were curated to showcase the 'tremendous influence which his teachings have obtained over a large number of sincere and highly cultured men'. That his audiences and interlocutors in the west would be 'sincere and highly cultured' was a given. A letter reproduced in the *Prabuddha Bharata* hailed Vivekananda as a 'living example of Vedanta' and thanked him effusively:

The students of the Vedanta Philosophy in London, under your remarkably able instruction, feel that they would be lacking in their duty and privilege if they failed to record their warm and heartfelt appreciation of the noble and unselfish work you have set yourself to do.⁴⁷

Epistolarity was performed and repurposed for a larger public legitimisation. Letters of appreciation and praise from western followers were actively mobilised to authorise and consolidate work on the home front. They were regularly featured under the column 'News and Notes' in the *Prabuddha Bharata*, which also contained intense expositions of the Vedantic Hindu tradition. The following private letter to Vivekananda, signed by ten 'prominent American men and women' drawn to Vedanta through the Cambridge conferences, buttressed this politics of (trans)national recognition:

As members of the Cambridge Conferences devoted to comparative study in Ethics, Philosophy and Religion, it gives us great pleasure to recognize the value of your able expositions of the Philosophy and Religion of Vedanta in America, and the interest created thereby among thinking people...⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The Great Hindu in America, 8 Aug 1894, *The Indian Mirror*, *VIN*, p 31

⁴⁷ News and Notes, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol 1, Feb 1897, no 8, p 2

⁴⁸ *Prabuddha Bharata*, March 1897, p 96

The letter's appropriate referencing of learned societies, networks and individuals in the West made it a valuable testimonial for circulation and consumption for Hindu cultural publics. Other letters seem to be specifically customised for this kind of normalising task. A letter from the Brooklyn Ethical Society, signed by its office bearers Janes and his colleague Z Sidney Sampson, evidence prominently the coming of this learned and high cultured Western audiences in the wake of Vivekananda and Vedanta. Addressed 'To our Indian Brethren of the Great Aryan Family', the letter goes on to become a full endorsement, published in the *Prabuddha Bharata*:

To testify to our high appreciation of the value of the work of the Swami Vivekananda in this country. His lectures before the Brooklyn Ethical Association opened up a new world of thought to many of his hearers, and renewed the interest of others ... We *heartily endorse* the words of the Venerable Dean of Harvard School: 'The Swami Vivekananda... has been, in fact, a missionary from India to America. Everywhere he has made warm personal friends; and his expositions of Hindu philosophy have been listened to with delight. ...

We thank you for sending him to us... we earnestly hope that the new avenues of sympathy opened by his presence of himself and his brother Sannyasins will result in mutual benefits...⁴⁹ [Italicised emphasis mine]

The continuous soliciting of affirmative letters from generally white men and women index the racialised nature of these attestations, often used to overcome opposition from within India. Supporters in India eagerly vaunted and reproduced these attestations to cite Vivekananda's authenticity as a Hindu guru and his interpretation of Vedanta as canonical. They helped produce a perpetual refrain of conversion: 'Vivekananda has made a great many converts of the Americans', remarked an *Amrita Bazar Patrika* editorial in 1895.⁵⁰ *The Indian Mirror* trilled: 'Hundreds of men and women have enlisted themselves under the standard, which he unfolded in America, and some of them have even taken to the bowl and the yellow robes'.⁵¹ Provoked, Christian missionary societies made angry rebuttals to such claims of mass-conversion. Wilbert W. White, on behalf of the Young Men's

⁴⁹ *Prabuddha Bharata*, 31 Dec 1896

⁵⁰ 29 Jan 1895, 'Purushtwam Rao Telang', Editorial, *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, *VIN*, P 308

⁵¹ Swami Vivekananda in Ceylon, 21 Jan 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, *VIN*, p 124.

Christian Association, published an assorted volume of letters and media reports from 'prominent Americans' that challenged reports like that of the *Indian Mirror*.

⁵² Missionary attempts to play down the extent of his influence in India and emphasize his incompetence only spoke to Vivekananda's growing authority and renown. The public impact of missionary bad press was not lost on Vivekananda: 'Vituperation by the low caste missionaries [evangelicals] made my cause succeed better.'⁵³

The prolific consolidation work, launched collaboratively by his western and Indian disciples, contributed to stabilising the success of claims-making in authenticating Vivekananda's Hindu-ness. By 1899, Vivekananda was being referred to as 'an unconverted Hindu' in the 'learned circles' of Los Angeles, in contrast to the 'Christianised Hindus' represented by Brahma Samajis. As Alice Hansborough, a member of the New Thought denomination that supported Vivekananda recounts,

on one occasion when Swamiji was going to speak at the Green Hotel, Professor Baumgardt was talking with some other gentlemen on the platform before the lecture began. One of them asked him, regarding Swamiji, "He is a Christianized Hindu, I suppose?" And Professor Baumgardt replied, "No, he is an unconverted Hindu. You will hear about Hinduism from a real Hindu."⁵⁴

Bernhardt Baumgardt, introduced to Vivekananda by Josephine MacLeod, was then secretary of the Southern California Academy of Science and the chairman of the Math and Astronomy Sections. Being an 'unconverted real Hindu' was an important attribute for sustained access to western networks and disciples, even though that attribute did not generally require conversion. It is to this ambiguity that inhered in Vivekananda's presentation of Vedanta as a new metaphor for world religion that the next section turns to.

6.5 A New Metaphor

The years between 1893 and 1896 saw an intense period of grappling for both Vivekananda and Western followers to present Vedanta as a new metaphor that

⁵² The Christian Literature Society for India, *Swami Vivekananda and his Guru; with Letters from Prominent Americans on the Alleged Progress of Vedantism in the U.S.*, (London and Madras, 1897).

⁵³ 'The Missionary work of the First Hindu Sannyasin to the West and his Plan of Regeneration of India', 7 Feb 1897, (rep from *Madras Times*), *VIN*, p 131

⁵⁴ MRS. Alice Hansborough, *Reminiscences...*, p 312

merged their personal and intellectual aspirations. It was part of the larger consolidation work being undertaken vis-à-vis Vedanta as a category of 'world religion' in both India and the West. The core of Vedanta's following in the U.S and Britain generally came from its heterodox fringe; seekers and interlocutors who had already been exposed to eclectic non-conformist traditions and new discourses that disputed the superiority of conservative Anglo-American Protestantism. Outside of this, Vivekananda and Vedanta made little progress in conservative Christian denominations, in spite of its stated emphasis on non-conversion.

To this audience, Vedanta's appeal lay in presenting it as an eclectic world-religion deriving out of Hinduism. Vivekananda's own personal charisma exerted a definitive charm on his audiences, aspects of which had been already highlighted in the chapter on discipleship. Western admirers and followers – mostly women – have repeatedly described the breathless experience of listening to his expositions: 'Time and space had vanished for us'⁵⁵. Added to this personal charm was his mastery over eclectic hermeneutics that won for Vedanta much applause and many admirers. An effusive report of Vivekananda's talk in August 1894 on 'The Reality of God' attests to the realisation of this hermeneutics: 'a defence of Mohamet by a Hindu to a Christian audience; the lesson that all prophets are to be revered and their teachings studied reverently'.⁵⁶

Vivekananda's guru Ramakrishna was himself a master of eclectic religious practices⁵⁷: he pursued Muslim, Hindu, Parsi and Christian practices for brief periods of time to test their validity in realising God and declared them all to be true. Alongside this, Vivekananda's ability to cite from a wide range of sources belonging to different religious traditions and justify a comparable point was matchless. He was well-read and could move smoothly between a wide variety of religious traditions and texts; cite *Alice in Wonderland* to impress the Hindu idea of *maya* or illusion to his

⁵⁵ Sister Christine, recounting her experience of listening to Vivekananda at the Thousand Island Park and other places. *Reminiscences...*, p 106

⁵⁶ 11 August, 1894, *The Boston Evening Transcript*, p 11. Accessed through ProQuest Historical Papers.

⁵⁷ Sumit Sarkar has analysed the contradictions of Ramakrishna's rustic appeal to a group of urbanite bhadrals, framed by the disciplining regime of 'chakri' or clerical service. See Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga', 'Chakri' and 'Bhakti'.

audiences. Fluency in different traditions and texts made him an ideal interlocutor to present Vedanta to 'learned' audiences and recruit potential disciples and patrons.

Vedanta became the latest in a series of coveted cultural forms that spoke to ongoing discourses and desires for a universal religion that could be rationalised in modern scientific terms. Western collaborators representing the Ethical Culture Movement, New Thought and other eclectic religious experiments eagerly appropriated Vedanta to expand their own personal and intellectual aspirations. Vedanta was folded in a wider project of religious pluralism. Even as most of his disciples came from within a non-conformist tradition, a broad understanding of Christianity continued to operate as a cultural signifier. Vivekananda identified his audience in the following terms: 'In America one-third of the people are Christians, but the rest have no religion, that is they do not belong to any of the sects, but amongst them are to be found the most spiritual persons'.⁵⁸ Vedanta's appeal lay essential within this 'spiritual but not sectarian' set of audiences. Through Vedanta, Vivekananda and his brother-disciples engaged with this broad idea of a cultural Christianity.

Sarah Ellen Waldo, an early American disciple who served as his diligent transcriber notes the careful attempt to harmonise Christianity with Vedanta:

It must not be supposed that the teachings of the Vedanta are in any way antagonistic to Christianity. On the contrary, if we examine many of the sayings of Jesus by the light of its interpretation, we shall find how wonderfully they harmonize with this philosophy. For instance, in his teachings Jesus clearly recognizes and indicates the three stages of development into which the Vedanta divides its followers....

It must always be remembered that Jesus was an Oriental and as such naturally used Oriental figures of speech.⁵⁹

Vedanta was seen as enlightening Christianity to Christians, instead of taking away their beliefs. Waldo was later initiated into *Brahmacharya* as Sister Haridasi and the first woman to be authorised by Vivekananda to teach Vedanta in the West.⁶⁰ Even as Vivekananda did not advocate 'conversion' as essential, a small but steady stream of conversions like Waldo's continued to happen throughout from among American

⁵⁸ 7 Feb 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 131

⁵⁹ News and Notes, Vol 1, Jan 1897, No 7, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 3

⁶⁰ Amrita M. Salm & Judy Howe Hayes, *The Inspired Life of Sarah Ellen Waldo*, (Mayavati, 2019)

and British followers. Prominent among these included Leon Landsberg, a young journalist (with Franco-Russian Jewish origins) on the staff of *The New York Tribune*, who became Kripananda and helped set up Vedanta Society in New York; Mary Louise, who after being given monastic vows and the name Abhayananda, dissociated herself from Vivekananda. Both Kripananda and Abhayananda fell out with Vivekananda's other disciples early on in their career and took up a mix of teaching Yoga and other Hindu practices in the U.S. They constituted the first recorded group of 'white Hindus' operating in America. Those who remained faithful and came to embrace some form of Hinduism include the likes of J.J. Goodwin, Christine Greenstidel and Margaret Noble, all of whom became part of Vivekananda's Indian work. Greenstidel came to characterise Abhayananda and Kripananda as 'zealously fanatic' and the former in particular as 'unfit for discipleship, and useless as a worker in Swami Vivekananda's movement'.⁶¹

Given the sensationalism that surrounded the idea of conversion, a more preferred term of usage was initiation or *diksha*. Many long term western disciples seemed to have had been initiated in some form – ritually or more informally – by different swamis starting from Vivekananda. Initiating western disciples on auspicious Christian holidays was commonplace, an attempt to shore up the concurrence between Christianity and Vedantic Hinduism. News of initiation-as-conversion events were proudly advertised in the columns of the organisation's journals. In 1899, news updates from New York informed readers of four new western *brahmacharis*:

On Easter Sunday when the great festival is observed, Swami Abhedananda initiated four Brahmacharins. It seemed peculiarly appropriate that Western disciples should take their vows on this greatest of our religious festivals. ... After all the vows had been taken, the Swami gave to each Brahmachari a new name... These meetings of the disciples are most helpful and serve to make us more devoted to Vedanta and to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.⁶²

Initiation did the work of conversion with careful discretion. Alice Hansborough recounts how she was 'baptised' by Vivekananda, along with her brother and sister Ralph and Dorothy.⁶³ At the Thousand Islands Park spiritual retreat:

⁶¹ Sister Christine, *Reminiscences*, p 109

⁶² Our New York Letter', No 34, May 1899, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 79

⁶³ Alice Hansborough, *Reminiscences*, p 326

Every one of the students there, received initiation at the hands of the Swami [Vivekananda], thus becoming disciples, the Swami assuming towards them the position of guru, or spiritual father, as is done in India, where the tie uniting guru and disciple is the closest one known, outranking that of parent and child, or even husband and wife. It was purely a coincidence that there were just twelve of us!⁶⁴

Receiving initiation from the guru tethered them to a new mode of discipleship, the cultural practice of which was almost completely new to those being initiated. The everyday worlding of Vedanta for western disciples was embedded deeply with Christian celebrations, instantiated through continuous attempts harmonise the two:

In the Vedanta Rooms on the Sunday morning before Christmas, a merry group of little children was gathered about a wonderful Christmas tree. Laughter and cries of delight were heard; they sang songs, played and recited and altogether had a glorious time. Swami Abhedananda was there, merry and happy as a child, and ... gave them a beautiful little talk touching the origin of Christmas.⁶⁵

Christ was creatively co-opted within Vedanta and employed to make a case for its validation. Christmas and Janmashtami (Krishna's birthday celebration) were compared and emphasis laid on their similarity. Initiation – ritual or otherwise – did not negate or disrupt the personal relationships of western disciples to Christ; Vedanta was portrayed as being able to reconcile them.

Nevertheless, Vedanta was chiefly promoted as a 'non-conversion' experience by its proponents in the West. The identities and solidarities premised through such an ambivalent positioning might be fluid but also often unsure. The cohabiting of dual religious identities allowed for greater flexibility of acceptance among western followers, but limited the reach for an open avowal of Hinduism. Waiving away conversion made Vedanta an attractive evangelical proposition for potential members, leaving the path open to become voluntary Hindus in a broader sense. Religious pluralism was actively used as a framework to prove the superiority of Vedanta, and by implication Hinduism. It was claimed to be a master paradigm that could fit any and all kinds of religion in the world:

⁶⁴ Sister Christine, *Reminiscences*, p 81

⁶⁵News and Notes, No 58, Vol 4, May 1901, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 77

All of religion is contained in the Vedanta...in the three stages of Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita [Dualism], Vishistadvaita [Qualified Monism], and Advaita [Non-Dualism]; one comes after the other...Each one is necessary...The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe, is Christianity; as applied to the Semitic groups, Mohammedanism. The Advaita applied in its Yoga-perception form is Buddhism, etc.⁶⁶

The implications of such a master narrative was profound. Without suggesting any break from Christianity, Vedantic Hinduism could claim to be ‘the Mother of all religions’⁶⁷ in a coherent hierarchy of world religions. It also commended itself as a great alternative to institutionalised Christianity whose closures and limitations movements such as women’s suffrage had drawn attention to.⁶⁸ The desire for an open, eclectic and liberal religion had drawn disciples like Bull, Josephine MacLeod and Margaret Noble, and many others towards Vivekananda and Vedanta. The *Brahmavadin* emphatically published the reconciling role Vedanta provided for disillusioned Westerners in its columns. Noble’s account for instance frames Vedanta almost as a remedy:

Many of us had been conscious for years past of that growing uncertainty and despair with regard to Religion, which has beset the intellectual life of Europe for half a century. Belief in the dogmas of Christianity has become impossible to us, and we had no tool...by which to cut away from the kernel of Reality in our Faith. To these, the Vedanta has given intellectual confirmation and philosophical expression of their own mistrusted intuitions.⁶⁹

Vedanta was portrayed as ‘critical to the enlargement of western religious culture’, and not in antagonism to it. For Bull, her

first knowledge of Vedanta meant to me the vitalising of Christianity... I look to the Vedanta especially to meet the spirit of agnosticism towards Christianity rife among our students both men and women.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Vivekananda to Alasinga Perumal, 6 May 1895, *LSV*, p 222.

⁶⁷ Vivekananda to Alasinga Perumal, 29 Sep 1894, *LSV*, p 149

⁶⁸ Kali for instance could fit the quest for a ‘Divine Feminine’, as Divine Mother. Joy Dixon discusses the spiritual membership of Madame Blavatsky and other women followers in movements like Theosophy, Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England*, (Baltimore, 2001).

⁶⁹ Margaret Noble, Report on Vedanta Missionary Work, Wimbleton (London), The *Brahmavadin*, September 15, 1897, *Complete works of sister Nivedita, vol 2*, (Calcutta, 1967), p 399

⁷⁰ Bull to Macleod, 17 sep, 1896, *Saint Sara*, p 228

Almost everyone attracted to Vedanta saw it as resolving their own struggles with faith. MacLeod averred to this conciliation of the personal with the ideological:

And he had such a place for us Westerners whom he called "Living Vedantins". He would say, "When you believe a thing is true, you do it, you do not dream about it. That is your power."⁷¹

Attributing the spirit of Anglo-American enterprise as essentially embodying a living mode of Vedanta was part of a wider 'worlding' exercise on the part of Vivekananda and his fellow-swamis. Vedantic attributes, his disciples were told, already present in Westerners, all they needed was the affirming touch of a true guru to realise that. *The Indian Mirror* fervently boasted about this imputed proximity, and exhorted Indians to migrate to America:

The affinity between India and America is becoming clearer every day, and in the fact of the welcome that Hindu visitors obtain so readily on American soil, it is a matter of surprise that our Hindu countrymen do not repair to the so-called new continent in as large a number as they go to Europe.⁷²

America was portrayed as a natural site for Vedanta to flourish and take root, and for Hindu Indian migration along with it. This critical awareness of the possibilities afforded by America as a western and anti-imperial power [in that it gained freedom from the British] continued to increase further along the twentieth century, as Indian revolutionary (Ghadr) and anti-colonial networks (American League for India's Freedom etc) intensified.⁷³

The claimed compatibility of Vedanta with Christianity meant that an acceptance of Vedanta need not spell a rejection of Christ. By partly stripping away the cultural specificities that surrounded Vedantic Hinduism and presenting it as a world religion, Vivekananda exercised a wide theological latitude that asserted an easy co-habitation of multiple religiosities. Relativising other religious systems was a creative way of rationalizing Hinduism through Vedanta, an approach that would increasingly gain wide currency after him. In Vivekananda's Vedantic schema, the local, the particular and the specific could comfortably exist in perfect evenness with the general, the

⁷¹ MacLeod, *Reminiscences...*, p 158

⁷² 'The Great Hindu in America', 8 August 1894, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 31

⁷³ Harald Fischer-Tiné notes these intersections in his essay, Harald Fischer-Tiné. "Indian Nationalism and the 'World Forces': Transnational and Diasporic Dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement on the Eve of the First World War." *Journal of Global History* 2, no. 3 (2007): 325-44.

impersonal and the universal. Without denying the truth of their respective faiths, Vivekananda convinced important western audiences of Vedanta's universality: 'propound a philosophy which can serve as a basis to every possible religious system in the world.... my teaching is antagonistic to none'.⁷⁴ Testimonies from western disciples that affirmed this universality of Vedanta continued to be printed and reproduced in its journals well into the first decades of 1900s. As 'A Western Disciple' remarked: 'the aim of the Advaita Vedantin is to realise this substantial Unity'.⁷⁵

While neutralising its overt Hindu moorings in the West, its uptake was projected within India as a decisive moment of Hindu pride. Vedanta became a deployment to contend Hinduism's claim to be the only true world religion:

You hear of claims made by every one of the different religions as being the universal religion of the world. Let me tell you...that perhaps there never will be such a thing, but if there is a religion which can lay that claim, it is only ours and none else, because every other religion depends on some person or persons. All the other religions have been built round the life of what they think a historical man, and what they think the strength of the religion is really the weakness, for disprove the history of the man and the whole building tumbles to the ground. ...Ours is the only religion...that does not depend on a person or persons; it is based upon principles.⁷⁶

Vedantic Hinduism was presented as emanating out of an inspired divine tradition outside of history or human agency which made it superior to other religions. All religions were scaled in a broad framework without dismissing their specific truth claims.

Throughout the late 1890s, Indian disciples continued to conflate and publicise Western interest and the small number of initiations (a score at most) as 'conversion' to Vedanta, and by transitive implication, Hinduism. The belief in western conversion seemed to have snowballed rapidly, so much so that Janes had to clarify to Indian audiences that even as they had 'every high regard for Vivekananda and

⁷⁴ 'An Indian Yogi in London', *The Westminster Gazette*, 23 October, 1895, *The Complete works of swami Vivekananda*, Vol 5, (Calcutta, 1973), pp 184-186.

⁷⁵ A Western Disciple, 'Chasing the Shadows', *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol XIV, No 150, Jan 1900, p 8.

⁷⁶ Swami Vivekananda, *The Work before Us*, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, p 195.

Vedanta', they 'may not be so near to actual conversion as some seem to believe'.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the narrative of conversion as conquest seems to have only intensified and congealed:

The tide of conversion seemed to have rolled back from the East to the West – the tables were completely turned – and the Hindu mission in the West was crowned with a greater and more glorious success than what has ever been vouchsafed to Christian mission in the East.⁷⁸

While described as conversion, there was however, a recognition of its difference from other, more formal or explicit kinds of missionary conversion. Vedanta's uniqueness, according to Vivekananda and other swamis, was its ability to accommodate multiple religious identities. Lay followers believed and asserted that the embracing of Vedanta did not mean their 'giving up the religion of our forefathers, nor the Christ', but rather an aid that helped them to delve 'to the roots of all religions, leaving us free to worship in whatever form we choose.'⁷⁹ Hailed as superior for not creating any 'bitterness' unlike other missionary propaganda, this was attributed to the inherently 'universal' nature of his 'Religion':

If the Swami Vivekananda's work here may be called a missionary effort, it may be contrasted with most of the other missionary efforts of the day by its not having given rise to a single instance of ill-feeling or sectarianism. The reason of this is simple, and great is its strength. The Swami is not a sectarian; he is the promoter of Religion, not of one religion only. The exponents of single points in the vast field of religion can find nothing in him to fight.⁸⁰

Despite qualifications, the claim to hundreds and thousands converting to Hinduism persisted. An 1896 report, *The Indian Mirror* claimed that in 'America, the Swami has converted nearly 4000 persons to Hinduism', a figure that would not hold even if we consider initiation-as-conversion. Vivekananda's missionary work in the West was portrayed in this small but growing circle as a major moment in the public life of Hinduism. It flattened the nuances of the subtle conversion work being undertaken,

⁷⁷Janes and Z Sidney Sampson, Letter to 'Our Indian Brethren of the Great Aryan Family', 31 Dec 1896 News and Notes, March 1897, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 98.

⁷⁸'Swami Vivekananda in Action', Editorial, 21 January 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 125.

⁷⁹'Hindu Ideas Gain in America', 3 July 1896, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN p 103.

⁸⁰'Swami Vivekananda's Departure from London', 14 Dec 1896, Printed: 7 January 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 121

but this flattening yielded a rhetoric that was fruitfully yoked to emergent Hindu nationalist discourse in late 19th century India.

Occasionally there were bitter disillusionments, and a return to conservative Christianity, as with Henrietta Muller, a major British patron of Vivekananda. Noble notes how

She [Muller] has thrown *everything* overboard, Shri R.K [Ramakrishna]. – Swami [Vivekananda] – Meditation – University of Religions – everything. She does not hesitate to say that Hinduism is Eroticism to the core, and that its truths have been “kept from her”. By whom? “Oh names are useless” she answers. All, meditation included, is dirty.

She is now a Bible Christian of a virulent type, and tending towards millennialism.⁸¹

Inserted alongside public avowals of Vedanta and Vivekananda are also stories of withdrawal and dissociation in the making of western disciples, that include the likes of Sturdy, Kripananda and Abhayananda, among others. Its early years show how Vivekananda grappled in presenting and sustaining the interest of his western networks in the cause of Vedanta, without which his Indian work would have looked quite different. Even as Vedanta built on the networks of institutions such as Theosophical Society, there was often no love lost in this contest between different leaders. Particular care was taken not to associate with the Theosophical Society, whose links with mysticism and occult was not endorsed by Vivekananda, even though the Society claimed credit for making possible his success. The Society had suffered a general loss of credibility owing to the Judge scandal that broke out in the U.S in 1894.⁸² Sturdy, former Theosophist and then prominent British disciple of Vivekananda warned:

I hope your good work in America will not be spoiled by identification with the Theosophical Society there, as it is at the present time constituted... I am too

⁸¹ Nivedita to MacLeod, 7 Dec 1898, *LSN-I*, p 27

⁸² The public scrutiny faced by the Society over the forged letters purportedly sent by secret Tibetan Mahatmas to Judge authorizing him for the post of the President led to its widespread loss of appeal and membership. Disillusioned, both Muller and Sturdy, among many others, resigned from their primary memberships to the society. Things ‘Oriental’ and mystical linked even remotely to Indian spiritual/religious traditions were completely discredited in British and American intellectual circles for a while and any individual/institution propagating the same regarded as highly suspect. Dixon, *Divine Feminine*, p 55.

ardent a lover of pure Advaita philosophy of India not to be jealous when I see it threatened in its interpretation by Western bias or Western charlatans.⁸³

Vivekananda assured Sturdy that ‘Theosophy never had any place of respect in [his] soul.’⁸⁴ Newspaper adverts often clarified when introducing him that he belonged to ‘no society’. Yet, many Indian supporters saw Vivekananda’s success as made possible by the important earlier work undertaken by the Theosophical Society’s dissemination of eastern religions and philosophy in the West: ‘It is due to the Theosophical Society to admit that its presentment of the higher doctrines of Hindu philosophy and religion has inspired the Americans with respect for the whole Hindu race.’⁸⁵

Vivekananda and Theosophists were placed in the same tradition – of introducing and representing Hindu/Indian religion – to the West. Vedanta’s appeal lay very much in the tradition of European Orientalism; reproducing a kind of spiritual (but not occult), rarefied ‘East’ that would somehow circumvent the material reality of India’s colonial subjection. Vivekananda’s denunciations of Theosophy were met with dismay and dissent by a section of the English educated Hindu public. Many letters to the Editor pointed out that the ‘Swami’s utterances ... have been purposefully ungenerous’.⁸⁶ Another quipped that Vivekananda should ‘make up’ with Annie Besant instead of fighting with her⁸⁷, who was then President of the Theosophical Society based in Adyar, Madras and influential with members of the early Indian National Congress. Exchanges such as this underline the value that prominent western sympathisers brought to emergent discourses of cultural nationalism and the affirmation they provided. Meanwhile, Madras based journals supporting Vedantic work continued to advertise events related to Theosophical Society. This was probably because of its close proximity to Adyar, where the Society was headquartered and a possible overlap in its audiences.

⁸³ E.T. Sturdy to Vivekananda, 30/3/ 1895, *SVW*:3, p 218

⁸⁴ V to Sturdy, 24 April 1895, *SVW*:3, p 219

⁸⁵ ‘the Great Hindu in America’, op. cit, p 31

⁸⁶ A. Krishnamachari, Letter to the Editor, ‘Swami Vivekananda and Theosophy’, 2 March 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 166

⁸⁷ ‘Letter to the Editor, ‘Swami Vivekananda and the Theosophical Society’, 20 Feb 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 145

6.6 Seeking Cultured Audiences

Vedantism in America – We learn from the latest American cuttings that Mr Edward Day and Miss Mary Philips have an interesting programme before them for this season, the spreading of Vedanta in the **higher circles** of America.⁸⁸

The desire for ‘higher circles’ continued to characterise much of Vedantic deployments within America and England. American and English collaborators of Vivekananda supplied and often embodied these circles. The rallying of ‘respectable’ Americans to the cause of Vedanta served to normalise a form of Hinduism as also its bearers as distinct to the more common but less desirable ‘coloured’ immigration to the country. From the late 1800s, there emerged and grew within the U.S a consistent anti-immigrant rhetoric specific to Asian presence that ran parallel to anti-Black racism. Asian migration, as the scholar Nayan Shah has noted, was considered ‘invasion, subversion and unwelcome amalgamation that threatened to contaminate the superiority of European culture and civilisation’.⁸⁹ Immigrant Indian labour, employed in the expansion of railways and mills, was seen as part of the same ‘undesirable’ narrative. South Asian migrants came to work in the timber extraction industry and processing plants of British Columbia, Washington and Oregon. They were broadly labelled as Hindu, a referent for a largely Sikh but also smaller numbers of Muslim and Hindu populations.⁹⁰ From the 1880s to the 1910s, a series of anti-Asiatic legislation was introduced first to control - then prohibit – all Asian immigration into the U.S. Indians, like other Asians (predominantly Chinese), were subjected to severe anti-miscegenation, anti-naturalisation and property laws.⁹¹ Indian presence and their sexuality was seen as deeply threatening to white national purity and ways of life.⁹²

The avowed monastic celibacy practiced by Vivekananda and other monks of the Ramakrishna Mission might have helped in containing the fear of sexual contagion

⁸⁸ Vol 1, Nov 1896, No 5, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 3

⁸⁹ Nayan Shah, ‘Adjudicating Intimacies on U.S. Frontiers’, ed. Ann Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* Durham, 2006, p 119.

⁹⁰ Shah, *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Though unlike the scare of a ‘yellow peril’, there never emerged a substantial panic of ‘brown peril’ during these years. The first census that counted South Asians was in 1910, and the numbers Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, (Berkeley, 1998).

⁹² Seema Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny: Race, Surveillance, and Indian Anticolonialism in North America*, (New York, 2014), p. 8

for their disciples but cast it also them in a halo of rarefied purity, distinct from (male) Indian labour migration to parts of America.⁹³ For monastic gurus, the impossibility of sexual desire and its perpetual refusal made them alluring objects to a largely female led/based community of western disciples. Even as Vivekananda and other Asian gurus became famous in the 1893 World Fair, there continued a steady rhetoric and rise in the practice of exclusion against the assimilation of Indians within American culture. Saradananda, a brother-monk of Vivekananda and Vedantic preacher, remarked in a moment of racial identification while in New York as a guest of Lewis Janes that his 'sealskin cap...makes him look like a coloured driver'.⁹⁴ Elsewhere, Vivekananda is said to have regarded the company of white women followers a protection against unexpected assaults and insults on American streets: 'people hurling abuses and throwing stones' at him.⁹⁵ The high regard for Hinduism and broadly Indian religious forms such as Vedanta contrasted sharply with the everyday experience of exclusion and marginalisation attendant on Indian immigrants, lay or monastic. The company of distinguished white men and women brought with them a sense of inclusion and affirmation.

The anxious quest for 'higher circles' was an endeavour to rescue India and Indians from its 'undesirable' colonised immigrant narrative. It sought to represent a different kind of India that would raise its profile and stabilise its claim to civilisation and high culture. In this, Indophile investments around Vivekananda and Vedanta acted in a move similar to that of Indian immigrants and indenture. Most of Vivekananda's prominent supporters, patrons and disciples were upper to middle class white men and women, many of whom were part of influential networks that stretched internationally. The occasional entry of working class disciples such as Alice Hansborough in western Vedantic deployments and their claim on Vivekananda provide a sharp contrast vis-a-vis disciples such as McLeod or Bull:

Miss MacLeod set aside her superior airs when she was with us. It was principally with people who affected the same airs that she put them on. And she never made the mistake of putting on airs with Swamiji. He often told her "where to get off" when she had a tendency to be too high-toned. But the only time I

⁹³ Shah discusses the multiple usages of Hinduism around two separate legal contests in the early 20th century that questioned and advocated on the sanctity of Hindu marriage. See Shah, op. cit. p 130.

⁹⁴ Janes to Bull, 16 Dec 1896

⁹⁵ G.S. Bhate, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, p 314

ever heard him speak sharply to her was before class in the ballroom of the Green Hotel. She was expressing an opinion as to what should be done about some phase of Swamiji's work, and he suddenly turned on her. "Keep quiet about what should be done!" he said.⁹⁶

Not possessing the clout that either Bull or MacLeod had in terms of money or reach, they nevertheless provided valuable help in hosting, caring and tending to Vivekananda. Hansborough personally cooked and cleaned (his bath tub) for him; while her brother waited and shined his shoes.⁹⁷ Differences in class between disciples played out on their claims on Vivekananda. They zealously contested and laid claim on Vivekananda and his work, almost all of them citing personal intimacy to him as a legitimating factor.

Yet even as there was a degree of diversity within the cross-section of white followers, there remained a singular absence of African American followers or presence in this narrative. Tellingly, it reflects how the early cultural politics of Vedanta was imbricated firmly within a racialised politics of respectability. The use of white audiences and networks to consolidate Vedanta as a respectable discourse represented the tension that inhered in non-white representations emerging out of colonial locations such as India. Indian religious forms could be appropriated to bring 'inner peace and fulfilment' to western minds but immigrant bodies of 'colour' remained undesirable. In an attempt to settle Vedanta as well as Hindu Indians as 'respectable' examples of Indian high culture and civilisation, Vivekananda was influential in producing a transnational image of the tolerant, 'mild Hindu' for western consumption: 'I suppose a Hindu could never persecute. He never yet has done so; he is the most tolerant of all the races of men. ... In India, the Muhammadans were the first who ever took the sword.'⁹⁸

Hindu tolerance was paired with a belief in Aryan civilizational superiority. A 1900 address of Vivekananda sets up caste and race favourably for his American audience:

There is something in caste, so far as it means blood; such a thing as heredity there is certainly.If you mix up with Negroes and American Indians, surely this [western?] civilization will fall down. ..The Hindus believe..., and I do not

⁹⁶ Hansborough, *Reminiscences*, p 316

⁹⁷ Ibid, p 325 and 328

⁹⁸ 'Swami Vivekananda in London', An Interview in London, Vol1, No 3, Sep 1896, *Prabuddha Bharata*, p 2

know, I have nothing to say to the contrary, I have not found anything to the contrarythere was only one civilized race: the Aryan.... The Aryan gives his blood to a race, and then it becomes civilized....would you give your blood to the Negro race? Then he would get higher culture.⁹⁹

Built on the putative claim of an Aryan family that unified Europeans and Indians, a shared narrative placed Aryans as givers of high culture, Vedanta included, to which Untouchables and Blacks/Native Americans should be beholden to. It anticipated a trend in Indian diasporic politics of respectability that would continue to grow in the twentieth century: the predominant drive in South Asian immigrants and figures in an extended West (including settler colonies) to pursue their affiliations within a framework of liberal white respectability instead of identifying with strains of Black cultural politics.¹⁰⁰ The desire for respectability reproduced overtly and covertly the very logic for anti-Black racism. Shared visions of a pan-Aryan racial identification were, however, foiled when the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously decided that Bhagat Singh Thind, who self-identified as a 'high caste Aryan' was racially ineligible for naturalised citizenship in 1923.¹⁰¹

Nevertheless, a coterie of 'affirmative Orientalists' comprising of white men and women were instrumental in verifying Hindu greatness.¹⁰² Vedanta was carefully catered to appeal to specific white audiences, based on a range of hermeneutics that sought to make it commensurable to western epistemes of liberal religion, science and rationality. The political value of soliciting white collaborators through Vedanta was not lost on Vivekananda, who explained to his Indian disciples:

If you could send and maintain for a few years a dozen well educated strong men, to preach in Europe and America, you would do immense service to India, both morally and politically. Every man who morally sympathises with India becomes a political friend.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Swami Vivekananda, "Buddhistic India", *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* (henceforth CWS), vol 3, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 2002, pp 535-536.

¹⁰⁰ Vijay Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, (London, 2001).

¹⁰¹ The Supreme Court clarified that Thind was not 'Caucasian in the popular sense', as against an 'ethnological sense'. Constitutional Law. Naturalization. Hindu Excluded from Citizenship, *The Yale Law Journal*

Vol. 32, No. 6 (Apr., 1923), p. 625.

¹⁰² I borrow this term from Richard G. Fox, Richard G. Fox (1992), "East of Said," ed. M. Sprinker. *Edward Said: A Critical Reader*, (Oxford, 1992), p 152.

¹⁰³ V to Alasinga, 6 May 1895, *LSV*, p 221

Western scholarly interest in Vedantic tradition was greatly coveted, as for instance that of the Orientalists Max Mueller (Oxford) and P. Deussen (Germany) and later Romain Rolland (France).¹⁰⁴ Swami Abhedananda, a brother-monk of Vivekananda, enthusiastically reported from London that

he met two of the greatest European Vedantins, Prof. Max Muller and Prof Deussen, and had an interesting conversation with the latter in Sanskrit. He is now working with Swami Vivekananda, who is holding classes on Vedanta, at Wimbledon, which a large number of influential ladies and gentlemen eagerly attend.

The portrayal of prominent European Orientalist scholars as ‘European Vedantins’ became part of an instrumental rhetoric in mobilising scholarly and public support for Vivekananda’s work in India and elsewhere. ‘Higher circles’ or ‘cultured audiences’ in the West were habitually white populated spaces, some of which intersected with radical and liberal circles of activism. Scripting a ‘universal’ story for Vedanta was enmeshed in a series of such dialectics and lobbying for learned/cultured audiences.

Vedanta societies founded from 1894 onwards represented the start of an organisational consolidation of these circles with the help of American and English disciples. First established in New York in 1894, Waldo recounts of its hopeful beginnings in a humble part of Brooklyn: ‘Earnest people flocked to ... hear the constant lessons of the Swami on a world-wide, universal religious toleration’.¹⁰⁵ Apart from the New York and Boston Vedanta Societies that led this work in the first decade, major institutional and individual efforts included work undertaken under the Brooklyn Ethical Association in New York, Greenacre and Cambridge Conferences in Maine and Massachusetts. Together, they were at the forefront of presenting Vedanta and Vivekananda to western audiences seeking new forms of faith and philosophy. Several followers and interlocutors provided valuable introductions for Vivekananda’s work to grow in England and America. Referred to

¹⁰⁴ Several scholars have noted the importance of Orientalist scholars in the making of Modern Hinduism as a syndicated system. See Richard King, *Orientalism and the Modern Myth of "Hinduism"*, *Numen*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (1999), pp. 146-185. For its effects beyond India and particularly in Europe, see Sheldon Pollock (1993), "Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power beyond the Raj," in Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (eds.) *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, (Philadelphia, 1993), pp. 76-13. German Orientalism was used to create the myth of a pure Aryan race, Cited in King, *Ibid.* p 149

¹⁰⁵ Waldo, *Reminiscences*, p 79

as the ‘refined and educated’ of the West in Hindu Indian press, they spread ‘Universal thought and Wisdom’ under the tutelage of various Hindu swamis led by Vivekananda.¹⁰⁶ The following sections detail how Vedanta was placed and presented in these spaces as an intellectual project. Investments around Vedanta rose from the pull Vivekananda’s personality exerted on many western seekers who pledged discipleship. A service to Vedanta was a service for Vivekananda. Greenacre, Cambridge, New York and Harvard became related experimental sites to mobilise personal relationships into public projects that produced and presented a particular kind of India and Hinduism to the world.

6.7 Greenacre–Cambridge–New York–Harvard

Vedanta fit particularly well with projects of liberal religious universalism. Led mostly by various followers and interlocutors, the early years saw Vivekananda and Vedanta being appropriated for different projects:

My idea is for autonomic independent groups in different places. Let them work on their own account and do whatever they like. I do not want to entangle myself in any organisation.¹⁰⁷

Accepting the limited say he might exert over the Western work, his plans for India seemed far more decisive. Along with plans to build a monastery for his brother-monks in Bengal, he advised Alasinga to create societies for the study of Vedas and Upanishads in Madras. Categorically spelt out in a letter to Alasinga in 1895:

We must have a college in Madras to teach comparative religions, Sanskrit, the different schools of Vedanta and some European languages; we must have a press, and papers printed in English and in the Vernaculars. When this is done, then I shall know you have accomplished something.¹⁰⁸

His aim was to collect as much funds to realise his Indian work. For this, he depended on the goodwill and generosity of his western patrons. The trade-off between spirituality and money was tense but acknowledged: ‘I have come to America, to earn money myself....I give them spirituality and they give me money.’¹⁰⁹ This eventually

¹⁰⁶ 7 Jan 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 121

¹⁰⁷ Vivekananda to Bull [undated, 1895?], *Saint Sara*, p 171

¹⁰⁸ Vivekananda to Alasinga, 12 Jan 1895, *LSV*

¹⁰⁹ Vivekananda to Brahmananda, 19 March 1894, *LSV*

came, but only through a larger entanglement with western individuals and investments.

Influenced by the liberal ethos of the Chicago Parliament, Sara Bull had instituted the Cambridge Conference series in 1895 to forward the aim of religious harmony. Her identification with Vedanta enabled it to become an extraordinary testing site to fold it along with other eclectic discourses. Bull had come to know of Vivekananda through her collaborator Sarah Farmer's efforts at Greenacre, Maine where Vivekananda found an opportunity to follow up on his Chicago success as a prophet of eclectic religious discourse. Co-organised by Farmer and Bull in 1894, Greenacre was envisaged as a centre for spiritual discourse and discussion in the manner of the Chicago Parliament. Farmer wanted the Greenacre Congress to be an open-ended summer retreat – perfect for inviting multiple speakers to discuss a wide variety of eclectic themes and ideas. Vivekananda gave three formal lectures and daily classes on Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita and the Shankaracharya. Bull wrote of his effect on the audience:

The interest awakened has been very unusual and the effect is to be deep and permanent with many. We have urged him always to give the positive side of his Vedanta philosophy whatever topic was given him; for he can always lead up to that.¹¹⁰

Other speakers included the suffrage activist Lady Henry Somerset who spoke on 'Woman Suffrage', and Ernest Fellonosa, a Harvard philosophy professor who talked on 'Art as Related to Religion'. Participants included William James, the noted American psychologist of religion, Lewis Janes, President of the Brooklyn Ethical Society and Edward Henry Carpenter, prominent British socialist and homosexual activist.¹¹¹ Greenacre drew big names in speakers and audiences. Several poets, scientists, transcendentalists, suffragists, artists, scholars and preachers were in

¹¹⁰ Bull to Jane, *SVW*:2, p 230

¹¹¹ Pravrajika Prabhuddhaprana, *Saint Sara*., p 108-109. There is a studied silence on Carpenter in almost all quarters of Vivekananda scholarship, hinting at the deep-seated discomfort the tradition has had in dealing with homosexuality. This is also reflected in the Vedanta Society's strained relationship with Christopher Isherwood, who was a Vedanta Society member and went on to write a popular biography of Ramakrishna, allegedly pruned of its homosexual interpretations when published by monastic editors. Rowbotham's magisterial biography of Carpenter indexes the many radical movements he was involved in, a reflection of the intersections facilitated by fin-de-siècle radicalism. See Sheila Rowbotham, *Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love*, (London, 2008).

attendance. Farmer later drifted from Vedanta to the Baha'i faith after her encounter with Abdul Baha in 1900.

This scholarly-intellectual placing of Vedanta continued with the Cambridge Conferences in December, 1895. Bull roped in Dr Janes, a scholar of ethics and political science and member of the Free Religious Association as a co-organiser. Janes found Bull's 'conception of the scope and purpose of our proposed work in entire harmony with [his] own'.¹¹² At the outset of this initiative, Janes reiterated his belief in the grand-narrative of Evolution: 'the constructive side of scientific and evolutionary thought seems to me very great... which ought not to be left out of our discussions.'¹¹³ Vivekananda's endorsement of Evolution appealed greatly to Janes's social Darwinist beliefs. Vivekananda was placed as an important constituent in Bull and Janes's meticulously planned line-up. Between the two of them, they solicited scholarly interest with sufficient means to subscribe and attend these programmes. Both of them agreed on the need to make the Cambridge Conferences a public movement and 'have the Vedanta represented by a competent native teacher.' A 'native teacher' was the most desirable for reasons of authenticity; he also had to be sufficiently well versed in Sanskrit texts and English.¹¹⁴

Vivekananda spoke twice at the inaugural session in Dec 1895: first on 'The Vedanta Philosophy' and later on the 'The Rajpoot Women and Ideals of motherhood in India'. Both of them were statements on the greatness of Hinduism: the first in philosophy and the second in producing and preserving an unbroken tradition of Indian masculinity. His lecture was part of a programme that included a larger showcase of social and cultural ideas: 'Woman Suffrage', 'Orderly Thought and Personal Culture', 'Art as Related to Religion' etc.¹¹⁵ This would become a common practice of the conference, folding Vedanta along with other liberal pursuits of ethics, religion, politics or philosophy. When Vivekananda left to travel and lecture outside of the U.S – particularly Britain and India – his *gurubhais* or brother-

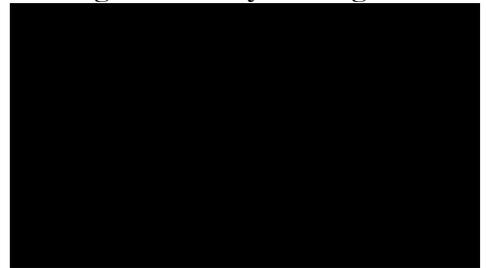


Figure 9: Cambridge Conference. List of House Residents.
Source: Bull Curtis Papers, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹¹² Janes to Bull, 4 June 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC.

¹¹³ Janes to Bull, 14 June 1895 author's emphasis, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹¹⁴ Janes to Bull, 4 June 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹¹⁵ Printed brochure of Cambridge Conferences, Dec 1895, *Saint Sara*, p 112

disciples were enlisted to carry on in his stead. This need for good native teachers, well versed in Sanskrit and English and approved by Vivekananda would be a recurrent concern to sustain the Vedantic work in America. Saradananda was instructed by Vivekananda to take up the London work, but fearing hardship, he was initially reluctant to come. Anxieties over the shortage of suitable swamis continued to haunt Vivekananda and his Western associates:

... I have sent for a Sannyasin from Calcutta, to leave him in London. I want one more for America. *I want my own man.* Can't you send a strong fellow from Madras? Of course I will pay everything. He must know both English and Sanskrit pretty well – English more. ...Again he must be a thoroughly trustworthy and obedient man...Gurubhakti is the foundation of all spiritual development. You cannot come I am afraid, leaving your paper [*Brahmavadin*]. Can G.G. [Narsimhachariar] come? I want to have two fellows in these 2 centres, then I can go to India and send fresh men to relieve them. I am really tired from incessant work. Any other Hindu would have vomited blood and died if he had to work as hard as I have.¹¹⁶

The emphasis on trustworthiness, Sanskrit and English knowledge was conjoined with the essential quality of devotion for the guru, without which, all was deemed fruitless.

¹¹⁶ Vivekananda to Alasinga, 18 Nov 1895, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*:3, p 302

Consequently, Saradananda and later Abhedananda took up the American obligations of Vivekananda, lecturing at New York, Greenacre and Cambridge, among other places. The demand for 'authentic' Indian swamis became a source of bitter rife

and rivalry within various contingents of Vedanta Societies. New York disciples threatened to hire an Indian Theosophist to teach Vedanta should Saradananda not join their activities.¹¹⁷ Overworked, Saradananda continued to participate and

present Vedanta and Hinduism in the broad eclectic programme at Cambridge 1896 onwards. His lectures satisfied Janes: 'I like the Swami's lecture very much. It will be an admirable contribution to our series and I am sure will be appreciated both in Brooklyn and in Cambridge'.¹¹⁸ Janes, following his interest in 'Ethical Ideas' promptly drafted Saradananda to speak at Brooklyn on the 'Ethical Ideas of

Figure 10: Cambridge Conferences Brochure, 1898.

Source: Bull Curtis Papers, MSS/B/F/CC

Hindus'. Vedanta was presented as part of a wider 'evolution of Ethics' programme at Brooklyn. Many other speakers were slated to speak on the philosophy of Parsis, Buddhists, 'Chinese

sages', 'Epicurean Philosophers', Greek Philosophers, Hebrews, Christian Ethics, Utilitarian Ethics, 'Ethics of Evolution'. Saradananda's brief was to cover 'the earlier

¹¹⁷ *Saint Sara*, p 215

¹¹⁸ Janes to Goodwin, 3 Oct 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC

Vedic period. Influence of Pantheistic religious conceptions on the moral development of the Indian races. The Vedanta and its ethical teachings...'¹¹⁹ Speakers at Brooklyn were generally invited to speak at Cambridge and Greenacre. Indian/Asian religions were often in focus, represented by their adherents. Featured recurrently on this list along with Vivekananda and Saradananda were: Dharmapala, Virchand Gandhi (Jainism) and Jehangir Cola (Zoroastrianism). Disciples and interlocutors appropriated Vedanta and its contingent of Hindu swamis to fit into universalist projects of pan-religious unity and ethics.

In Dec 1896 of the same year, Jane and Bull listed Saradananda as a 'House Resident' for the Cambridge Conferences. The near-complete financial dependence of these monastic gurus on their patrons often meant little choice in their lecture schedules. Janes for instance, instructed Bull to ensure that Saradananda perform the scripted spectacle of a native Hindu guru during his presentations: 'Kindly tell the Swami also that our Brooklyn audience will expect to see him in the orange robe and turban.'¹²⁰ These claims – made on native swamis – continued in tandem with the growing intimacy of women figures with several Indian monks. Saradananda effusively invoked the maternal role of Bull: 'Keep in your mind the position which you have taken yourself namely that of a grand-mother, not only of myself but of all the world.'¹²¹

Meanwhile, the claims-making in India continued on the strength of these connections. *Prabuddha Bharata* and *The Indian Mirror*, among others picked on reports from American and British newspapers on their activities and reprinted them as an index of their growing influence:

A writer in the Boston Evening Script under date July 14, says, "The Swami Saradananda of India continues his study classes under the pines... This evening the Swami will form and instruct a class in Raja Yoga practice; and if the secret of his serene and beautiful calmness of gaze and manner can be taught to the restless West, it will be a lesson well worth the learning."¹²²

As well as letters from western disciples: '[Saradananda] has fulfilled all the high words you spoke of him, and has been a great inspiration to us... As it

¹¹⁹ Brooklyn Ethical Association's 'Evolution of Ethics' Programme, 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹²⁰ Janes to Bull, 9 Oct 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹²¹ Saradananda to Bull, 27 Oct 1896, MSS/BC/F/CC

¹²² News and Notes, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol1, Oct 1896, No 4, p 3

was with you, the Vedanta philosophy seemed to meet all needs. The Swami Saradananda seemed ready to meet questions of all kinds and his patience knew no bounds. As he gained confidence, and understood our people better, he became quite fluent in speech'.¹²³

Vedanta was folded very carefully in such presentations as part of a wider eclectic engagement, though of course afforded much more space and time than others. Saradananda (and Dharmapala, whose reputation was growing in pan-Buddhist discourse) was scheduled to give ten lectures at the Monslavat School of

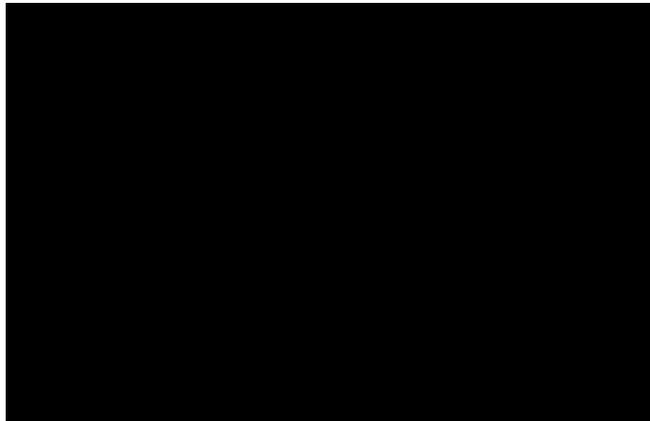


Figure 12 Brahmo Samaj, Zoroastrianism, and Evolution lectures.

Source: Bull Curtis Papers, MSS/BC/F/CC.

Comparative Religion at Greenacre, compared to less than half by Virchand and others. He was joined by his gurubhais Abhedananda and Turiyananda over 1898-1899. Janes wrote to Bull with evident satisfaction: 'I am glad of your good report from the Swami, and in regard to the Swami Turiyananda whom I hope to meet. It would be pleasant to have them all here when Abhedananda speaks on Ramakrishna'.¹²⁴

Abhedananda was promptly drafted to deliver a series of class lectures on 'The Vedanta Philosophy and Religions of India' at Cambridge. Each season sought to curate a range of non-western speakers discoursing on their respective religions, philosophy and ethics. The Cambridge Conference 1898- 1899 boasted several big names, including that of Nagarkar, a Brahmo Samaji from Bombay with whom Vivekananda was on rival terms. The mutual bitterness and contestation between rival organisations seemed to be have been subverted, if briefly, through these liberal projects abroad. Initiatives such as Greenacre, Cambridge and Brooklyn was able to script seemingly irreconcilable narratives as part of a more unified discourse on 'universal religion'. In London, Vivekananda and Vedanta was received

¹²³ Excerpt from Sara Farmer's letter to Vivekananda, News and Notes, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol11, No 6, Dec 1896.

¹²⁴ Janes to Bull, 19 Oct 1899, MSS/BC/F/CC.

enthusiastically to speak on Vedantic morality at Moncure Conway's Ethical Society at the South Place chapel in Finsbury, well-known as a bastion of freethinkers, agnostics, secularists, mystics and non-conformists. Conway had earlier welcomed several non-Christian religionists to address from his pulpit, including the Brahma leaders Keshab Sen and Protap Mazumdar, and Vivekananda was the latest addition to this illustrious repertoire.¹²⁵

6.8 The 'Right Kind of People'

Vedanta's networks continued to grow through the continued support provided by western disciples, primarily women and their influential intellectual connections. Coming closer to Vedanta was simultaneously coming closer to Vivekananda and his brother-monks – as mothers, daughters or sisters – desexualised forms of relationship with women. Their presence, participation and interventions significantly shaped the course of work along intersections of race, class and gender. Vivekananda seems to have tacitly accepted early the arrangement that his American work would be guided by the moves of his patrons:

you may do anything you please with my affairs, I will not even murmur; — I will be only too glad to take Miss Farmer's advice, in spite of ghosts and spooks. ... Even I will allow Landsberg to "monkey" with my affairs from time to time; but here I put a full stop. Help from any other persons besides these frightens me. ... I regard you as my mother and will always abide by any advice you may have for me — but only personally.¹²⁶

Vivekananda had to step carefully around the foibles of individual patrons in the early years. Yet, tensions emerged early around ways to present Vedanta and Vivekananda. They manifested in attempts to settle Vedanta in the 'right kind of people' – usually wealthy, white and respectable circuits – as a representative project. The association of predominantly white women with raising India's cultural profile abroad through Vedanta was significant in performing this representative work. While the Boston work undertaken by Bull and Jane preferred to place Vedanta within 'an international co-operation of scholars', the New York based Vedanta Society sought a more lay-oriented tactic. New York members, led by Waldo and

¹²⁵ Mary Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vol 3, (Calcutta, 1985), pp 264–267.

¹²⁶ Vivekananda to Bull, 25 April 1895, *LSV*

Mary Phillips, resented the elitist undertakings of Bull and her Boston centre. New York and Boston embodied the tensions of class that underlay Vivekananda's community of disciples. Bull's attempts to control Vivekananda's conduct had caused him to bristle at his patrons' attempts to control his 'message':

You are mistaken if you think I have a work as Mrs Bull thinks – I have no work under or beyond the sun. ...I will neither Hinduise my message, not Christianise it, nor make it any "ise" in the world. I will only my-ise it and that is all.¹²⁷

Anticipating the limits money would place on his freedom, he refused a donation of \$5000 from Bull. Unlike the hefty subscriptions paid by audiences in Boston to listen to Vivekananda in New York:

The Swami gave his services free as air. The rent was paid by voluntary subscriptions, and when these were found insufficient, Swami hired a hall and gave secular lectures on India and devoted the proceeds to the maintenance of the classes. He said that Hindu teachers, of religion felt it to be their duty to support their classes and the students too, if they were unable to care for themselves; and the teachers would willingly make any sacrifice they possibly could to assist a needy disciple.

The audience included the 'old and young, rich and poor, wise and foolish, stingy ones who dropped a button in the collection basket, and more generous ones, who gave a dollar bill or even two'.¹²⁸ He found greater freedom in the impoverished settings of New York, if not necessarily the required networks and resources. Living with Leon Landsberg in humble settings, later Kripananda, he found truer affinity with his monastic creed:

I am very happy now. Between Mr Landsberg and me, we cook some rice and lentils or barley and quietly eat it, and write something or read or receive visits from poor people who want to learn something, and this I feel I am more a Sannyasin now than I ever was in America.¹²⁹

The affiliation he felt with 'poor people' vindicated his own feeling of sannyasa, though only temporarily. The poor, however, fade away soon after from the

¹²⁷ Vivekananda to Mary Hale, 1 Feb 1895, *LSV*

¹²⁸ Laura Glen, later Sister Devamata, *Prabuddha Bharata*, Mayavati, April, 1932, p 132

¹²⁹ Vivekananda to Bull, 11 February 1895, *LSV*

narrative. For a brief period, he continued to refuse the comfort of financial security from wealthy patrons, fearing the obligations this would make him subservient to.

Every one of my friends thought it would end in nothing, this my living and preaching in poor quarters all by myself, and that no ladies will ever come here. Miss Hamlin especially thought that “she” or “her right sort of people” were way up from such things as to go and listen to a man who lives by himself in a poor lodging. But the “right kind” came for all that, day and night, and she too.¹³⁰

Vivekananda refusal to distinguish between the ‘right kind’ and ‘wrong’ amounted to a limited critique of class, if framed in abstract terms: “Shiva! Shiva! Where is the right kind? And where is the bad? It is all *He* [God]!!”¹³¹ Hamlin’s desire to push Vivekananda and Vedanta among the ‘right sort of people’ suggests the usual networks of wealthy patrons that Oriental gurus and religious forms generally moved through. For the most part, Vivekananda and the string of Vedanta societies established by their financial contributions would continue to pursue this course, notwithstanding the occasional disruptions posed by its seeming incongruity with sannyasa life. Pecuniary support imposed greater strings on the freedom of work but also brought on the realisation of its necessity. Within two decades, his Western work would spread even more widely. Prominent Indian Extremist leader Lala Lajpat Rai, while visiting America in 1916, attested to this proliferation:

Vedanta centres of [the Vivekananda Mission] ... are to be found in all the most important cities of the United States. He has personal knowledge of those at New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago and San Francisco and except that at New York, he found all the centres financially flourishing.¹³²

A widening network of European Orientalists, American interlocutors and wealthy patron-disciples were continually acting to justify Vedanta in the West. The anxiety for learned audiences on Vivekananda and his associates’ part found a new moment of fulfilment on his invitation to Harvard. Bull was able to secure an invite for the swami through her contact John Fox, an alumna of the Harvard Divinity School in March 1896.¹³³ Fox assured her that he will be speaking at the coveted Graduate

¹³⁰ Vivekananda to Bull, 11 April 1895, *LSV*

¹³¹ Sister Christine, *Reminiscences...*, p 110

¹³² [The Times of India \(1861-current\)](#); Bombay 18 May 1916: 6, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: TOI.

¹³³ Mary Louise Burke, Vivekananda’s biographer, contends that Fox was nowhere as influential in 1896 to be able to invite Vivekananda. Fox had graduated from Harvard in 1894 and in the first half

Philosophical Club instead of the Harvard Religious Union, ‘the most philosophical organisation at Harvard – so that the audience will be the best the University can afford’.¹³⁴ Vivekananda eagerly vaunted the Harvard lecture: ‘I will be only too glad to come to Boston for the Harvard lecture specially.’¹³⁵ It was touted to be one of the most ‘learned’ audiences he was addressing in several years since Chicago. Among the audience were expected John Wright, Professor of Greek Studies who introduced him to the Chairman of the Managing Committee of the Parliament of Religions in Chicago and William James, distinguished psychologist of religion at the Harvard University. Vivekananda’s lecture, entitled simply ‘The Vedanta Philosophy’, explained concisely the ‘origin, development, and meaning of Vedanta’ in its various phases’.¹³⁶

The lecture restated Vedanta’s claim to be ‘world religion’ through the usual epistemic gestures: its grand inclusive non-sectarian schema, its ability to reconcile science with religion and the universality of its tenets. His emphasis on self-abnegation while explaining Advaita, or the convergence of self with an absolute entity had an immediate resonance with Christian ideas of self-sacrifice and Unitarianism.¹³⁷ He declared:

you are a born Vedantist, each one of you. Every time that your heart goes out towards the world, you are a true Vedantist, only you do not know it.¹³⁸

The not-knowing self was unselfconsciously already a Vedantin, he was only making it known. The allure of a ‘hidden self’ waiting to be realised attracted the interest of the likes of William James, the noted psychologist of religion, who made a favourable impression of Vedanta.¹³⁹ Vedanta was carefully presented as a secular hermeneutic to such western audiences and such a presentation was critical to preserve its universal claim. That it was part of the Hindu tradition seemed to be incidental, and conversion was never a requirement for its practice: ‘It is quite possible for me to be

of 1896, was employed in his brother’s real estate business. She surmises he may have been a corresponding secretary for the Graduate Philosophical Club, though there is no record to evidence this. See Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: 4*, p 90. Nonetheless, he did play an important part in brokering Vivekananda’s invitation, though to what extent, is unclear.

¹³⁴ Fox to Bull, 15 Jan 1896, Cited in *Saint Sara*, p 175

¹³⁵ Vivekananda to Bull, Jan 1896, *SVW:4*, p 91

¹³⁶ Mary Louise Burke, *SVW:4*, p 92

¹³⁷ The Vedanta Philosophy: An Address before The Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, 25 March, 1896 by Swami Vivekananda, (New York, 1901), p 14

¹³⁸ Swami Vivekananda, *The Vedanta Philosophy*, p 24

¹³⁹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, New York, 1917, pp 504-505.

a dualist, and for my wife to be a monist, and so on. One of my sons may worship Christ or Buddha or Mohammed.’¹⁴⁰

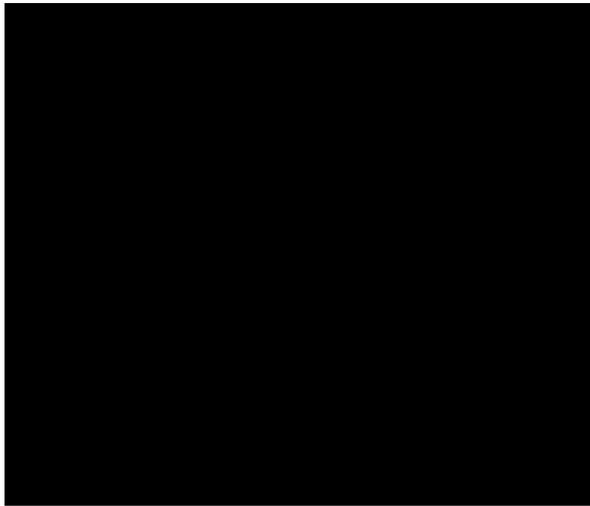


Fig 12: Cambridge Conference Brochure advertising Abhedananda’s lecture.
Source: Bull Curtis Papers

The Harvard lecture gained for Vivekananda lasting relationships and valuable resources. Within weeks, Bull commissioned its publication as a pamphlet.¹⁴¹ He secured two important allies in the Comparative Religionist Charles C Everett of the Harvard Divinity School, and William James, then the foremost psychologist of religion in the West. In these exchanges, Vedanta was offered as a potent hypothesis within wider metaphysical discourses of

eclecticism that ranged from ethics to ether.

The influential presentation of Vedanta as a largely intellectual dialectic and mission was cogently rationalised in an 1895 letter to Mary Louise, another disciple of Vivekananda, Bull spelt out what she expected Vedanta to perform:

Indian customs, titles or degrees may be helpful to individuals but the universal phase of the Vedanta, assimilated by and adapted to our life here, is what I would personally like to see incorporated more consciously by the general mind.¹⁴²

Her distinction between the universal and the narrow cultural specificities hints at the kind of denaturalised appropriation she sought from Vedanta. This was a bind that almost all non-western cultural forms entering the west from a variety of colonial contexts and a claim to ‘universal’ usually felt.

Universal religion became a category to manifest a politics of double move: if Bull and Janes wanted to present a discourse of ‘universal’ through a strategic

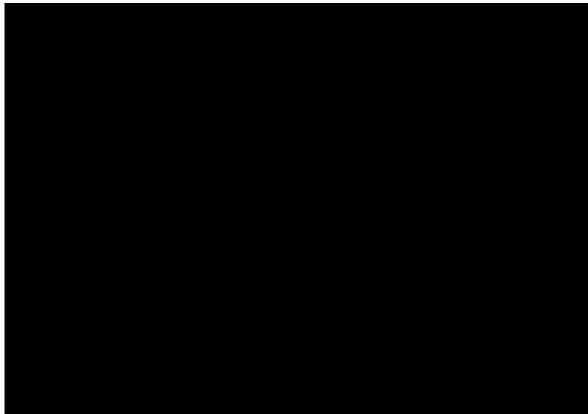
¹⁴⁰ Vivekananda, *The Vedanta Philosophy*., p 20

¹⁴¹ The Vedanta Philosophy: An Address before The Graduate Philosophical Society of Harvard University, 25 March, 1896 by Swami Vivekananda, New York

¹⁴² Bull to Mary Louise, August[?]. 1895, *Saint Sara*, p 150



Figure 13: Cambridge Conference Programme (Contd.); Source: Bull Curtis Papers



arrangement of different 'particulars', the swamis sought to use their particular (Vedanta) to make a case for its universality. The validity of Vedantic Hinduism was acknowledged as central by both sides. The need to have teachers who could defend Hinduism from various allegations was directly linked to the sustenance of its validity for the American audience. Bull and Janes

worried that Saradananda was 'too mild mannered for the American audience' and not combative enough to fend off virulent attacks on India and Hinduism as Vivekananda.¹⁴³ Nonetheless, Saradananda and Abhedananda, among others, continued to perform the double act of propagating 'world-religion' and representing 'Hindu Mission in America'.¹⁴⁴ Abhedananda's book 'India and her People', based on the lectures given at the Brooklyn Institute of Art and Sciences was published in 1906 during the Swadeshi Movement in Bengal. It was dedicated '[t]o the People of India with deep fellow feelings and earnest prayers for the restoration of their ancient glory and national freedom'. The British Indian Govt promptly proscribed it.¹⁴⁵ James Campbell Ker, in his confidential report on the proliferation of anti-British activities in foreign soil, mentions the nationalist tendencies of the Society under Abhedananda. He noted further that the convicted revolutionary nationalist Bhupendranath Dutta, also Vivekananda's brother, had fled to New York in 1908.¹⁴⁶

6.9 Epilogue: Made in the West

The language of 'world religions', as the historian of religion Tomoko Masuzawa has noted, popularised after 1893, had become a category to rationalise the relationship of Christianity to other non-Christian religions. Masuzawa argues that it preserved

¹⁴³ *Saint Sara*, p 195

¹⁴⁴ Saradananda delivered a lecture entitled 'Hindu Mission in America' on 23 April 1898. Audiences included Bull, Bose, (prob) Macleod, Nivedita and Mohini Chatterjee, from *Nivedita o Jagadish Chandra: Ek Achena Samparker Sandhan*, Debanjan Sengupta, (Kolkata, 2010), p 18

¹⁴⁵ James Campbell Ker, *Political Trouble in India, 1907-1911*, (Calcutta, 1917), p 218

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p 217-218

the claim to European superiority in a carefully articulated language of pluralism.¹⁴⁷ Vivekananda's Vedantic dialectics, however, show an intimate subversion of that same framework. Without displacing the category itself, he was able to fold Hinduism's claim to superiority within it. Both as an actors' and analytic category, Vedanta could reconstitute the hierarchies of East and West to demonstrate its vitality and superiority.

Popular Orientalist stereotypes in the early 19th century U.S portrayed India as an ancient land of idolatry, godmen, levitation tricks and Occult (largely contributed to by missionaries and some strands in Theosophy). This was an image that Vivekananda and his followers wished to challenge sharply, even as they built on its essential binary of a spiritual East versus a material west. What differed was an emphasis in the kind of spirituality that could be rationalised, modernised and polemicized to great effect. In comparison to the 'low-brow' pop Hinduism that was in widespread vogue in America, Vivekananda and his collaborators focused on particular interpretations of a high literary Sanskritic tradition. 'I must touch the brain of America and stir it up if I can', Vivekananda had asserted in 1894, soon after his Chicago success.¹⁴⁸ By the close of the century, Harvard, New York, Boston and other learned networks represented a coming together of 'the brain of America'. Assembled assiduously through the close personal and ideological intersections of a largely upper/middle class white base of followers, their participation made Vedanta go 'global'. It also marked the growing recognition of America as an alternative site to counterpose Britain's influence. Historians such as Ross Bassett has shown how the increasing technological superiority of U.S and Germany over Britain greatly appealed to cultural/nationalist opinion in India.¹⁴⁹ The *Mahratta*, a journal founded by the Hindu nationalist leader Balgangadhar Tilak, prophesied that Chicago will soon supersede London.¹⁵⁰ Columns in *Prabuddha Bharata* prominently featured world events pertaining to U.S and Japan.

The significance of the American 'west' in manufacturing a 'world' legacy for Vivekananda and Vedanta was recognised even in his life time. *The Indian Mirror*,

¹⁴⁷ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*

¹⁴⁸ Swami Vivekananda, Quoted in Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries*, (Calcutta 1966), p 161.

¹⁴⁹ Ross Bassett. *The Technological Indian*, p 15

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, p 19

along with others chimed: 'It is doubtful whether Swami Vivekananda would have become so widely known, if he had not visited America.'¹⁵¹ Vivekananda upheld this claim when he exclaimed in 1894 that 'America is the best field in the world to carry on any idea, so I do not think of leaving America soon.'¹⁵² The importance of the West as an ideal 'field of [missionary] work' was repeatedly stressed. Vivekananda's long exposure to liberal thought had made him particularly keen to the possibilities wrought by an emergent global order facilitated through imperial networks. He exhibited a critical awareness about this global order and the benefits to be reaped:

From ocean to ocean run the roads of England. Every part of the world has been linked to every other part... Under all these circumstances we find again India reviving and ready to give her own quota to the progress and civilisation of the world.... that I have been forced, as it were, ...to go over to America and preach to England is the result. ...everything looks propitious, and Indian thought, philosophical and spiritual, must once more go over and conquer the world...it is not only that we must revive our own country – that is a small matter; ...but my idea is the conquest of the whole world by the Hindu race.¹⁵³

Vivekananda was almost prophetic in his conviction that networks of global capital could be harnessed to export Indian spirituality abroad. He understood the value of U.S. for not being an imperial [the Monroe Doctrine still being operative; Philippine wars did not happen until 1898], but 'exceptional' land of opportunity. Vivekananda almost echoed the principle of 'American exceptionalism': 'I love the Yankee land... In America is the place, the people, the opportunity for everything'.¹⁵⁴ It was a different kind of 'west', but an increasingly important 'west'. His success demonstrated that 'universalist' claims need no longer be legitimised through the imperial metropole but could form its own axes of interlocution. The increasing importance of the U.S in shaping the cultural politics and trajectories of discourses such as Vedantic Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism attests to this expanding scale. This fracturing of the west, while not displacing existing Orientalist typologies, created possibilities of cultural encounter that could be different from Britain or other imperial European countries. The U.S became part of an extended west, whose racial privileges and

¹⁵¹ 21 Jan 1897, *The Indian Mirror*, VIN, p 124

¹⁵² Vivekananda to a Madras Disciple, 29 June 1894, *LSV*, P 118

¹⁵³ Vivekananda, *Lectures from Colombo ...*, p 191

¹⁵⁴ Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, Vol 4, p 312

presumptions to whiteness remained intact, but more open to ‘eastern’ forms of knowledge that spoke to its considerable non-conformist fringes. In later years, these circles would support a variety of anti-imperial initiatives including that of India and Indians.

The decades 1890s-1900s represented a gradual culmination of Vedanta’s intellectualisation project. They sought to make a certain kind of Hindus and Hinduism desirable in the backdrop of increasing anti-Asiatic immigration legislation and measures in north America in successive decades of the twentieth century. As a prescient communique from a Canadian labour minister to British leaders revealed: ‘the native of India is not suited to this country’.¹⁵⁵ In spite of their avowed discipleship or claims on Vivekananda, no American disciple ever took up or identified with the cause of Indian labour immigrants. Their investments generally remained fixed on a largely spiritual interest in India, reproducing an idea of India that was tethered to the high cultural imaginaries of an upper caste (rendered in casteless terms), upper class Hindu nationalising elite. Vedanta became formative in influencing their investments towards realising that idealised state of ancient Indian glory – be it science, religion, agriculture, education and national freedom. It informed their investments outside of the strictly spiritual, as with MacLeod who saw Vivekananda as making her free: ‘I’ve freedom. Freedom to see and help India to grow — that’s my job and how I love it.... It’s so curious to feel free, not needed any more in the West, but all my characteristics — in India.’¹⁵⁶ MacLeod, like Bull, contributed to projects that would ‘make India great again’. Her efforts to involve William Willcocks (irrigation engineer who built the Aswan Dam) in ‘the restoration of the Ancient Irrigation of Bengal or to the agricultural scientist Boshi Sen for his ‘Vivekananda Laboratory’ in Almora exemplified such appropriations.¹⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Nivedita and Bull provided personal and material support to Jagadish Bose, in the belief that his scientific work on the unity of ‘response in living and non-living’ would realise the premise of Advaita Vedanta. Science remained an important site to stake out truth claims for Vedanta.

¹⁵⁵ Cited in Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, p 43

¹⁵⁶ MacLeod, *Reminiscences*, p 164

¹⁵⁷ See Letters from 1928-1930 between MacLeod to Leonard Elmhirst, an English disciple cum collaborator of Tagore, Tantine MacLeod, LKE/IN/13/B, Dartington Hall Records, Devon Heritage Centre, Exeter

This symbolic coming of the ‘world’ in the vindication of Vedanta/Vivekananda/Hinduism was significant. Western recognition for Indians such as Vivekananda and Vedanta came to be coveted and magnified as a victory over the entire west, notwithstanding its limited bearings. Vivekananda put it succinctly: ‘These white faces will have more influence in India than Hindus’. It sustained the powerful claims making around aggressive forms of Hindu cultural nationalism during this time, speaking to narratives of deficit masculinity all over colonial India, particularly the desire to ‘manufacture men’ out of an India ‘only inhabited by women and eunuchs’.¹⁵⁸ Nivedita’s involvements in revolutionary terrorist and Hindu cultural nationalism in India testifies to this aggressive ‘man-making’ project. She embodied the very project as well as its lack, bringing masculinity to an emasculated nation: ‘I seem to be realising everyone of Swamiji’s opinions over again, and feel myself able to make the 10000 Vivekanandas of whom He was always talking.’¹⁵⁹ Vedanta continued to perform the dual task of raising India’s profile in the West and bringing masculinity to its own people – moves that converged in projecting and producing a respectable India for consumption at home and abroad.

‘The value of foreign appreciation is in rousing India up’, argued Vivekananda.¹⁶⁰ In seeking such appreciation, Vedanta internalised and recycled formulations of the ‘glorious Hindu’ narrative that actively resisted any identification with American Black politics even as many in the latter saw India and Indians as potential anti-colonial allies.¹⁶¹ Like indentured politics, Indophile movements around Vedanta essentially revolved around producing an India that is moral, high-cultured and representative of its stature. As the flow of Indian godmen and spiritual forms intensified over the 20th century to the West along with increasing migration of middle class Indians, transnational Hinduism became embroiled in the contest for an elusive respectability that sought to naturalise/normalise itself through continued appeal to white men and women. Vivekananda and his western disciples’ deployments around Vedanta represent an early if major episode in that history. Vedanta’s worlding was the worlding of a respectable, learned and cultured India and Indians.

¹⁵⁸ Vivekananda to Alasinga, 1 July 1895, p 242, LSV

¹⁵⁹ Nivedita to MacLeod [1902], *LSN-II*, p 535

¹⁶⁰ Vivekananda to Alasinga, 29 Sep 1894, *LSV*

¹⁶¹ As for instance W.E.B Du Bois. See his *The Dark Princess*, (New York, 1928).

Chapter 7

Conclusion

What Settles After

7.1 The ‘Ole Bull Will Contest’

I shall dwell briefly on a trial to flag some concluding themes covered by this thesis. February 1911 saw a curious contest in the religio-legal history of U.S, over the will of ‘one Mrs Sara Bull’ who died in Cambridge, Mass., on 18 January 1911. A prominent American philanthropist and widow of the famous Norwegian violinist Ole Bull, she was also a leading disciple of Swami Vivekananda in the West. Her last will and testament reportedly gave away the greater part of her \$500,000 estate to four Indian or India-based

individuals and institutions: Margaret Noble/Sister Nivedita (\$50,000), prominent British Hindu disciple of Vivekananda; Jagadish Bose, eminent scientist; Swami Saradananda, President of the Ramakrishna Mission; and Mohini Mohun Chatterji, a lapsed Theosophist.¹ Her daughter Olea Bull Vaughan challenged these ‘Hindu bequests’, blaming her circle of Hindu swamis and friends for a psychic plot that caused her death. Sherman L. Whipple, a prominent lawyer representing Bull’s daughter Olea declared that ‘the late Mrs Bull was the subject of a “psychic conspiracy” for some time prior to her death.’² The trial itself was nothing short of sensational, and was well covered by leading dailies such as *New York Times* and *Boston Herald*, sometimes making front page news.³

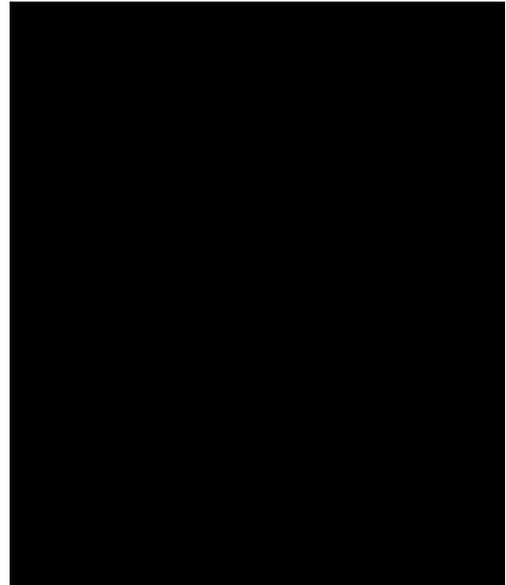


Figure 14: Psychic Plot Swayed Mrs. Bull
Source: New York Times ProQuest
Historical Newspapers

¹ ‘Ole Bull Will Contest’, *New York Times*, 13 Feb 1911, p 1; ‘Spirits urged \$25,000 Gift, Said Mrs. Bull’, *Boston Herald*, 15 June 1911, p 1. All newspaper items accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

² ‘Says Psychic Plot Sways Mrs. Bull’, *New York Times*, 23 May 1911, p 1.

³ ‘Mrs Bull’s Indian Tonics’, *New York Times*, 27 June 1911, p 5; ‘Bull’s Cook Tells of Indian Drugs’, *New York Times*, 17 June 1911, p 5.

The deposing lawyer accused the late Vivekananda for being the leader of an Indian cult that was behind this psychic conspiracy and his monastic and non-monastic disciples for spreading occult beliefs and practices that drove Bull insane.⁴

Vivekananda's death was reportedly blamed on his excessive dabbling in occult exercises that drove several of his American disciples insane (example Sara Farmer, who was institutionalised). Whipple frontally charged Vivekananda's disciple Sister Nivedita as responsible for her death:

Miss Margaret Noble, an Englishwoman converted to the Hindu religion and now living in Calcutta, was... the chief factor in this conspiracy... also produced a letter in which one of the members of the "Mystic meditation ring" had written to another member, alluding to Mrs Bull as the subject of a psychic conspiracy.⁵

On cross-examination, Siri Swanander, Bull's Norwegian caretaker, confirmed that Sister Nivedita was 'a priestess of the Hindu cult', who attended to Bull during her last days and administered unknown 'Indian medicine'⁶. Other witnesses said that the medicines were corrosive in its impact.⁷ Mention was made of a 'little black pill' which gave off a 'strange odor':⁸ 'Mrs Bull "would lie with her mouth partly open and her eyes partly closed".⁹ An 'East Indian Doctor' supposedly fed her 'pumpkin seed milk, Bread Made of Walnuts, Pepper and Wheat' (weirdly anticipating vegan/new lifestyle experiments undertaken much later).¹⁰ Mention was also made of one 'Yum' or Josephine MacLeod, a close friend of Bull and Nivedita and frequent visitor to the Bull household who was part of the 'mystic meditation circle'.¹¹ The case must have ruffled some serious official feathers in the British Foreign Office. A lively (and rather relieved) confidential despatch from the Criminal Intelligence Office in India to the British Consul General at Boston via the Foreign Office in London ensued:

⁴ Says Psychic Plot, p 1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 'Mrs Bull Objected to Indian Medicine', *New York Times*, 03 June 1911, p 3.

⁷ Mrs Bull's Indian Tonics, p 5

⁸ Could be *bhang gola*/hemp tablets, used to induce a feeling of spiritual transcendence.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, *New York Times*, Jun 3, 1911

¹¹ 'Says Psychic Plot', Ibid.

With reference to your Letter ... dated the 28th April 1911 regarding Miss M.E. Noble, better known as Sister Nivedita, I write to let you know that this lady died at Darjeeling on the 13th instant.

Perhaps this information would be of use to the H.B.M's Consul General at Boston.¹²

This is perhaps the only time Nivedita's name figures in Criminal Intelligence papers, who managed to evade official censure despite her suspected involvements in the Swadeshi revolutionary terrorist activities.¹³ Nivedita may have been 'wanted by the Police in India', though this is not confirmed by any of the parties. It was acknowledged that she had 'slipped quietly away from New York on March 1st' after Bull's death and financial bequests were revealed.¹⁴ On the margins of a communique, Herbert Risley, (of the First Census Commission in India fame) then Permanent Secretary of the India Office, had scribbled: 'I have always been sceptical as to Miss Noble's motives [?]'.¹⁵ Decades later, Rolland, recounting this episode in his diary, commented: 'The wife of Caesar – the great disciple of Vivekananda – must not be suspected. Vivekananda would never have allowed it.'¹⁶

It was ironic that despite having opposed 'occult' and 'esoteric' practices throughout his lifetime and his continuous demystifying of India (through acts of scientific rationalising), Vivekananda was portrayed as the yogic leader of a mysterious cult: 'Swami Vivekananda... died from excessive participation in the mysteries of the chamber of meditation'.¹⁷ Bull, Nivedita, MacLeod and many other western followers, had however, persisted in their indulgences in 'alternative medicine' that included practices such as magnetic healing. There was some truth in the allegations of Noble providing Indian treatments for her American friends: 'Tell Mrs Walden if there is any Indian drug or oil that she thinks she would like, I would be so happy to obtain it for her'¹⁸. Mrs Walden [or Mrs Melton] was a magnetic healer based in California who treated Bull, MacLeod and her sister Betty and even Vivekananda. Though Olea eventually won the case in her favour, she died

¹² Criminal Intelligence Office, Shimla to M.C. Seton, Assistant Secretary, Judicial and Public Dept, India Office, London, 25 Oct 1911, IOR/L/PJ/6/1124, British Library, London.

¹³ Aurobindo attributed this to her high official contacts within the British administration.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Seton to H H Risley, 30 March 1911, IOR/L/PJ/6/1124.

¹⁶ Rolland, 9 December 1938, *Inde*,

¹⁷ Says Psychic Plot, p 1

¹⁸ N to MacLeod, 7 Feb 1906, *LSN- II*

mere hours before the final settlement hearing on the same day, a point whose irony is still noted by commentators within the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition.¹⁹

The 'Ole Bull Will Contest' revealed what the religious studies scholar Stephen Prothero has termed 'Hinduphobia' and 'Hinduphilia' in American pop culture.²⁰ It revealed the cleavages of liberal white culture: Oriental Hindu menageries were appropriated as long as they did not threaten to destabilise the normative Anglo-Saxon Protestant national culture. The scare of non-white minority cultures overwhelming and contaminating the American nation was enough to exhort journalistic, popular and legal opinion to converge against any kind of symbolic power. 'White Hindu' converts were chastised, but the ultimate blame was laid on Asian gurus and swamis for taking advantage of rich, gullible western 'ladies'. The controversy illustrated the scope, limits and movements of transnational Hinduism, tied around larger anxieties about the representation of India in the West.

7.2 Anxieties of Representation

This thesis has shown how networks of western disciples were mobilised around specific projects led by prominent Indian figures that take India as their point of cultural reference. This India is not solely about Indians rooted in mainland Indian politics and culture but wherever Indians migrated for economic or social prospects. There were two broad sets of India that were being exported, received and represented, particularly in settler colonial societies. One was that of the impoverished labourer; the other that of a middle class bourgeoisie.²¹ India's emergence as a major labour supplier in the British imperial economy (and beyond) contributed to its common stereotype as a land of coolies or impoverished labour. Indeed, in post-slavery British political discourse, indenture was actively propagated as beneficial for civilising Indian primitive labour.²² Throughout the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, India emerged as the major source of cheap labour in imperial economy, after the abolition of slavery. Scientific racism was joined with free trade supporters that argued for indenture as a form of 'free

¹⁹ 'Bull Fortune Won, She Dies', *New York Times*, p 2

²⁰ Stephen Prothero, 'Hinduphobia and Hinduphilia in U.S culture', Ed. Ann Lannestrom, *The Stranger's Religion*, (Notre Dame, 2004), pp 13-27.

²¹ Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh*, (Oxford, 1977), p 8

²² Jonathan Connolly, *Indentured Labour Migration and the Meaning of Emancipation*, p 89

labour', justified as required for the project of slave emancipation.²³ Millions of labourers migrated to the sugar plantations of Mauritius, Fiji and Caribbean, to the railway mines and agricultural plantations of South and East Africa and increasingly to different parts of North and South America. Added to this was also a significant community of mercantile Indians, doctors and lawyers that represented more middle class aspirations in the lands they settled, an aspiration that was predominantly yoked to Indian nationalist politics but not native African/American anti-colonialism.²⁴ Indophile articulations verbalised this connection, arguing that the struggle for India's freedom is dispersed but not decentred:

The struggle for freedom and independence in India cannot be separated for a moment from the struggle that is always going on in the most distant colony where Indians are domiciled. A victory over there is a victory for India itself. A defeat... humiliation.²⁵

Even as Indians at home and abroad continued to demand 'equality with whites', the possibility of a mutual solidarity between Asian and African labourers against a shared anti-colonial inheritance remained absent in Indophile rhetoric for the community. It reflected the unease that inhered in middle class Indian racial and cultural identification vis-à-vis 'less civilised' or colonised communities.

The anxiety between dominant western stereotypes of India as a land of cheap labour or strange godmen and Indian self-image and aspiration of itself as a respectable, cultured middle class community of immigrants made possible a space for Indophile politics and practices to be useful. Indophile interventions were instrumentalised throughout the early 20th century to fulfil this supposed lack.

²³ Ibid, pp 113- 114

²⁴ Anti-Indian immigration laws were passed in the postcolonial decades in several east African nations that ousted significant communities of Indian settlers. 'Africa for Africans' became a sign to mobilise anyone complicit in an exploitative relationship with native Africans. Indians had long acted as sub-imperialists for British or other colonial powers in opening up inner African markets. In the mid 1920s, after Germany lost its African colonies, Indian groups in East Africa, through the local Indian Congress demanded a colony for themselves, carved out of that. C.F. Andrews had the good sense to advise them that they should abandon this plan: 'the more I think over Sir Theodore Morison's idea of a specially 'Indian' German East Africa the less I like it. I am afraid I shall have difficulty in persuading the British East African Indian Associations to share my view. I am quite certain it would be used as a lever everywhere to take away Indian rights in territory where Indians are already settled and domiciled.', Andrews to Gandhi, 29 Nov 1919, Folder 21, Letters from CFA to Gandhi (1914-1933), CFA Papers; File 1-26, 28 (ii), RBVB-018. Pursuing such a line of superior difference with regard to native Africans in effect made them similar to the British in India. This sub-imperialist role came to haunt Indians with vengeance in instances such as Idi Amin in Kenya who expelled Europeans and Indians and took control of their business.

²⁵ C.F. Andrews, *India and the Pacific*, (London, 1937), p 214

Vivekananda, Gandhi and Tagore's disciples and the institutional networks they were a part of remained invested in articulating, normalising and settling ideas of India and Indians that would make them respectable. Tagore's literary recognition, Gandhi's political renown and Vivekananda's project of a universal religion spoke to that transnational politics of respectability. Immigrant mobilities sought respectable embourgeoisement but their deep entrenchment as labour resource militated against achieving that status. Indophile deployments proved useful in legitimising claims to ancient civilizational greatness and high culture. Vijay Prashad has noted how Indian attempts at 'positing high culture before the eyes' of the white elite were a way to prove their self-worth.²⁶ Universalising narratives become important; Indophile support and association with projects around Indian high culture marked its arrival and (unsteady) consolidation as 'universal'.

Grasping this transnational move is important, for it also elucidates the effects of Indophile actors within India as well as a larger set of (settler) western geographies. Many scholars have highlighted what a transnational scale brings to our understanding of history and politics. Inderpal Grewal and Goldie Osuri, among others, see transnational as a way of transcending the 'fixity and boundedness of national space' in their study of Indian diasporic politics.²⁷ Vivekananda's Vedantic dialectics demonstrate how colonial cultural politics broke free from British imperial manoeuvres and was able to form a different kind of interlocution through extra-imperial circuits such as the U.S. The U.S became part of an extended west, whose racial privileges and presumptions to whiteness remained intact, but more open to 'eastern' forms of knowledge that spoke to its considerable non-conformist fringes. This fracturing of the west, while not displacing existing Orientalist typologies, created possibilities of limited cultural contact that contrasted sharply with the exclusivist racialised regimes of governance against non-white minority immigrants.²⁸ The 'Ole Bull Will Contest' instantiate these tensions of cultural representation. While 'white Hindus' remain relevant in both, pop Hinduism take

²⁶ Prashad, *The Karma of Brown Folk*, p 118

²⁷ Goldie Osuri, *Transnational Bio/Necropolitics: Hindutva and its Avatars (Australia/India)*, *Somatechnics* 1.1 (2011), p 138

²⁸ Kunal M. Parker, *Making Foreigners Immigration and Citizenship Law in America, 1600–2000*, (New York, 2015) p 153. Indians entering the U.S were classes as members of Caucasian race, an identification that only strengthened Indian immigrant desire for an elusive desire to whiteness. U.S Supreme Court was however, quick to assert the difference: "It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor . . . , but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences between them to-day.", *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*, 261 U.S. 204, 209 (1923), Cited in Parker, p 153.

very different trajectories in India and outside of it. 'White Hindus' and their sympathetic allies end up authorising forms of Indian culture and religion that were deeply hegemonic. Even as India and Indians try to rescue themselves through a high cultured universal-speak in the west, that discourse is one of a very limited 'cosmopolitanism'.

Yet, as the cultural geographer Stephen Legg reminds us, as an assemblage, transnationalism unsettles the nation, but also reterritorialises something after.²⁹ More importantly for this thesis, transnational moves also reify the nation, if only as an aspirational category. They recuperate extraterritorial Indian communities to tether themselves to notions of glory and greatness that align them in a position of discursive superiority, particularly in contexts of minimal political empowerment. As the chapters of indenture and Vedanta evince, Indophile actors are enormously instrumental in producing and territorialising an idealised India that is consumed eagerly within (cultural) nationalist politics. In this, their own Indophilia gets vindicated; as western men and women, their intimations to Indian-ness are affirmed by a (majoritarian) nationalist elite.

Indophile deployments around specific projects that broadly raise 'Indian honour' abroad re/produce this national, rooted in upper class/caste presumptions that were then generally invisibilised. Even as they are broadly anti-colonial in thrust and representative politics, Indophile actors un/wittingly end up reifying certain kinds of race/caste/class/community configurations as ideal and desirable. Essentially inspired by a (white) liberal understanding, they sustained a larger 'politics of respectability' in diasporic contexts. Black feminists scholars have written enduringly on the gatekeeping tendencies of such 'uplift politics' in African-American history, which generally take a middle class white self as its emulative ideal through which marginalised others seek to normalise themselves.³⁰

²⁹ Stephen Legg, (2010) "Transnationalism and the Scalar Politics of Imperialism," *New Global Studies*: Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 4., p 7.

³⁰ Paisley Jane Harris. "Gatekeeping and Remaking: The Politics of Respectability in African American Women's History and Black Feminism." *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 1 (2003): 212-220; Mikaela Pitcan, Alice E Marwick, danah boyd, Performing a Vanilla Self: Respectability Politics, Social Class, and the Digital World, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 23, Issue 3, May 2018, Pages 163–179. The authors explore the online world as the latest site of enforcing such a normative politics on young people of colour in New York. Also E. Frances White, *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*, (Philadelphia, 2001), among others. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmy008>. The foundational text for respectability politics in Black American history is of course Evelyn Higginbotham's influential book *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Harvard: 1994).

7.3 Conclusion

Affective politics produces an anxiety of excess. In Indophile subjects such as Mira, Nivedita, Pearson and Andrews, among others, this becomes almost cathartic experiences in their attempts to evince ideal discipleship. Yet, this moment of absolute transformation, into some utopian Indianised self, never really comes. Andrews, in spite of being beaten up and assaulted (by white settler supremacists) for representing Indian immigrants gets regularly accused of being a British spy by the same Indians; Pearson and Mira feel outsiderly in the same ashrams they sought to be part of; Nivedita finds herself isolated from the monastic community Vivekananda helped found. Nevertheless, it is this peculiarity of ‘not quite but still’ that opens up Indophile investments to a series of continual appropriations. In their death, they become part of a memorial politics used to consolidate the institutions of their guru. After Pearson’s death, Tagore issued an appeal for a Pearson Memorial Fund, used to build a hospital. Andrews assured Tagore:

I have shown Mahatmaji your appeal on behalf of the Pearson Memorial, and he was very deeply impressed by it. He and I will now be practically responsible for the amount and I am quite certain that we shall raise it. I do not think that you need now have any anxiety whatever about it. Indeed I hope that the amount needed will be exceeded by the donations. We ought to begin to build at once.³¹

A similar exercise followed Andrews’s death, wherein Gandhi raised five lakh rupees to aid Shantiniketan, whose finances were always precarious. Intimacy created narratives of embodiment that were not beyond financial/material use; indeed Indophile recognition and a success of their claim to Indian-ness could be measured by the amount of public memorialisation they attracted. Andrews and in particular, Nivedita’s popularity in Indian nationalist circles were beyond reproach. Indophile whiteness allowed them to inhabit both universal and the culturally particular modes equally. Andrews and Pearson could slip into a dhoti and kurta, Mira into a khadi skirt and Nivedita into a white (later saffron) *brahmacharini* garb – cultural appropriations that supposedly raised their estimation to both Indians and a section of westerners, a perverse sign of colonial universality that would not render the reverse equally true.

³¹ Andrews to Tagore, 6 April 1924, C.F. Andrews-I, LKE/IN/2/E, Dartington Hall Trust Papers, Devon

In this thesis, I have illustrated how Indophile affections for their mentors are produced in and through particular spaces such as letters, ashrams and religious pilgrimage. I have posited how Indophile enchantments are tied to an idealised form of India and Indians, informed by a desire for alternative modernities, even as they were themselves indelibly modern. These intimacies and enchantments, because of their firm positioning within a time of incipient nationalist politics, did not remain impervious to the larger anti-colonial ethos of their mentors' projects. Indophile intimacies were ascribed, avowed and authenticated through deployments that served to re/produce a 'nationalist' projection of India for consumption at home and abroad.

Participating in transnational projects that involved the politics of representation, these disciples became central figures in the story of Indian nationalism, espousing the Indian nationalist cause across the empire and beyond. This is not to deny that there were no other white men and women who supported some form of anti-colonial Indian project (Annie Besant and Edward Thompson), but very few made their definitive passages and careers in India and even fewer gained the wide currency and acclaim as these (notable exceptions such as Verrier Elwin). Between 1890 and 1940, they became involved in multiple projects around Indian representation that required the active deployment of their racial privilege for access to valuable networks, resources and audiences. In postcolonial decades, the political landscape changed and hence an earlier notion of Indophilia, divested of its anticolonial significance. As Indian immigration to the U.S and U.K increased in the decades after independence, many of these networks were instrumental in producing new forms of Indophilia, such as the growth of transnational Hinduism around the Indian Emergency in 1979 and after.³² Yet this Indophilia is not innocent. As I have argued in this thesis, they are invoked to insinuate projects of 'aggressive Hinduism' or an unproblematised nostalgic evocation of an Aryan/Hindu past whose present should be sought only in culture-bearing Indians; an act that delegitimised and disavowed contemporary labour or anti-caste movements, and made little attempt to move beyond the narrow disciplining logics of white solidarity.

³² Edward Anderson and Patrick Clibbens, (2018). 'Smugglers of Truth': The Indian diaspora, Hindu nationalism, and the Emergency (1975–77). *Modern Asian Studies*, 52(5), 1729–1773. doi:10.1017/S0026749X17000750

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