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## Aghoreshwar Bhagawan Ram and the Aghor Tradition

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## Abstract

Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Baba Bhagawan Ram Ji, a well-established saint of the holy city of Varanasi in north India, initiated many changes into the erstwhile Aghor tradition of ascetics in India. This tradition is regarded as an ancient system of spiritual or mystical knowledge by its practitioners and at least some of the practices followed in this tradition can certainly be traced back at least to the time of the Buddha. Over the course of the centuries practitioners of this tradition have interacted with groups of other mystical traditions, exchanging ideas and practices so that both parties in the exchange appear to have been influenced by the other. Naturally, such an interaction between groups can lead to difficulty in determining a clear course of development of the tradition. In this dissertation I bring together micro-history, hagiography, folklore, religious and comparative studies together in an attempt to understand how this modern day religious-spiritual tradition has been shaped by the past and the role religion has to play in modern life, if only with reference to a single case study.

My study is about Aghoreshwar Bhagawan Ram Ji's life, a biography gleaned from books published by the society he established, but given flesh, blood and continuity by the stories narrated to me during fieldwork, and by comparative analysis with practices found in other long-standing traditions of spirituality in India. It is also about his viewpoints on the nature and subject of worship, humanism, nationalism, universalism, and an astute manner of communicating ideas with efficacy. Such a study not only illuminates the rigors of the life of an Aghor ascetic, but also gives new insight into the workings of this tradition, as well as into what being a monk or a saint means to followers of this tradition in this age of modernity.

AGHORESHWAR BHAGAWAN RAM AND THE AGHOR TRADITION

by

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Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology.

Syracuse University  
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## Statement on Diacritics and Spellings

The style for my thesis is based on the AAA Style Guide.

1. a) Diacritics are not used in proper names such as Shiva, Vishnu, Kashi, Banaras, unless they occur within quotes and cited text.

b) Diacritics *are* used for proper names from classical Sanskrit and Buddhist texts such as Viśvāmitra, Vāmadeva, Vaśiṣṭha, Cuṛālā, Vikramāditya, Hariścandra, Aghorācārya, Bhairavācārya etc.

2. Diacritics are not used for proper nouns such as Shakti, Vaishnava, Baba, ashram, sadhu that can be found in Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

3. Diacritics are used for uncommon proper nouns, not found in Merriam-Webster Dictionary, such as Aughaṛ, Sādhanā.

4. Spellings of Hindi names which are common in English, are given in English, such as Ganges instead of Ganga.

5. All named texts have full diacritics, such as Rāmāyaṇa.

6. In the bibliography authors for Hindi/Sanskrit texts are first listed without diacritics, and then, with them.

7. All Hindi (Bhojpuri) quotes are in italics, and with full diacritics.

8. When quoting an author, the original style used by the author is represented.

Note on transliteration:

Certain terms are used interchangeably by interviewees as well as authors, which may create confusion for the readers, because the meaning of the words may be slightly different in each case. Such cases are illustrated below –

1. Aghor, Aghora, Aughar, Auḍhar, Aghori, Avadhūt. The words Aghor, Aghora, Aughar, Auḍhar, Aghori and Avadhūt can be used both as adjectives and as nouns. The word Aghor is a noun in that it derives from the name of the fifth face of Shiva, the Aghor face. It forms a compound noun with the word tradition, thus becoming “Aghor tradition.” It can be used as an adjective to qualify distinctions of philosophy, such as Aghor philosophy, or ascetic practices, such as Aghor Sādhanā. Followers of the Aghor tradition are typically referred to as Aughar in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh states of India, and Aghori more commonly in Bengal. Aghora is an English variant of the spelling and can be used as a noun, except when it is used in a Sanskrit scriptural sense, where the addition of an “a” at the end feminizes the noun. Auḍhar is a less common variant of Aughar, and is used mostly as an adjective, as in “Baba Auḍhar - dānī.” Avadhūt is the term given to accomplished ascetic practitioners who have achieved enlightenment following the Aghor path. I use the word Aghor to qualify ascetic practices and philosophy. To denote an ascetic of this path I prefer to use the term Aughar.

Note on Translation:

All translations, unless specified otherwise, are mine from the original Hindi or Bhojpuri text.

## Acknowledgments

I feel this dissertation cannot be regarded as complete till I have expressed my deepest gratitude and thanks to the many people who have actively helped or solidly stood by me even as my life meandered during the course of finishing this dissertation.

First, I have to thank Prof. Susan S. Wadley, my advisor and dissertation committee member, who not only never held back from helping me during my academic career with all varieties of advice and support, but also never gave up on me during the course of the two decades it has taken me to reach this point. Her experience in academic administration and her faith in the ultimate abilities of her students were instrumental to my completion of this dissertation.

My gratitude and thanks go to Professors Ann and Dan Gold for their friendship as well as concern. Ann, always gentle and encouraging, not only reinforced faith in my ability to write academically, she also reminded me of the importance of the doctoral dissertation in the academic field. Dan, with his quiet concern but with a view to push me along, never hesitated in asking me at the many conferences and workshops where our paths crossed if I had finished the dissertation yet! Their encouragement has a lot to do with the final form of this dissertation.

The administration of the department of Anthropology, especially Professor Christopher DeCorse and Kristina M. Ashley were instrumental in getting my paperwork restored after two decades of changes they had gone through. But for the hours of time Chris devoted to comparing and calculating the changes that the departmental policies had gone through over the years, I might still be wondering if I qualify to write the

dissertation. My unqualified thanks to both Chris and Kristina for making it happen. Equally invaluable are the suggestions and comments my dissertation committee members have given me, to all of whom I remain indebted.

There are far too many people at the various ashrams and in cities scattered throughout North India to name them individually, who were ready and willing to share their stories with me and to help me with my project. My heartfelt thanks go to all of them. At UT Austin, I am grateful to my friend and colleague Oliver Freiburger who has always been ready to help me with the dissertation, and Professor Patrick Olivelle who graciously agreed to help me with Sanskrit translations.

My final acknowledgement is to Sarkar Baba himself whose inspiration, insight and knowledge spurred me to feel strongly enough to write about him. Sarkar Baba devoted his life for others, I hope this dissertation may help others in their lives too.

## Chapter 1

### Baba Bhagawan Ram Ji and the Aghor Tradition

#### A Visit by Sarkar Baba

I have a very vivid recollection of a week from my childhood. It was the month of April and I was in fourth grade at school. Within a few days my final exams were due and I was worried about mathematics. While I loved language and literature, geography and biology, mathematics had always been my nemesis. I had gone to a friend's house to study, and when I returned home around one o'clock in the afternoon, I found the house abuzz with activity. I noticed there was a pile of shoes lying outside the doorway. It was hot, and I was hungry. As I entered the coolness of the doorway, the exhilarating aroma of eggplant and tomatoes roasted with garlic on a charcoal fire, fresh ground cilantro leaves mixed with lime juice and chopped green chilies seemed to pervade the air tantalizingly.

I headed straight for the kitchen saying *namaste* to unknown folks sitting in the living room and found Ma sitting on the kitchen floor on a *pīrhā* (a wooden slab used as a seat) peeling the skin off the roasted eggplant in preparation for *baiṃgan-bhartā* (roasted, pureed eggplant and tomatoes with garlic, cilantro and chopped green chilies). "Who are all these people?" I asked Ma in a hushed voice. "Sarkar Baba is here," Ma replied simply with a bright smile, without breaking her focus from the task at hand, even as sweat dripped from her forehead in the hot kitchen. "Sarkar Baba is here!" I almost squealed as I felt my heart begin to pound hard. "Yes, go say *praṇām*," Ma told me. "Where?" I asked. "In your room," Ma said, and I went in that direction tentatively. I had always known Sarkar Baba, it seemed from the very dawn of consciousness, for my

parents were his disciples, and I had visited his ashram in Banaras during *gurupūrṇimā* and *Māgh Melā* (January-February). But I had never got a chance to interact with him so close at hand.

As I entered the room I saw Sarkar Baba sitting cross-legged on the bed, talking to my father who stood respectfully to one side. I bent down on my knees and touched my head to the edge of the bed and heard Sarkar Baba's characteristic blessing, "Nārāyaṇ, kalyāṇ ho!" (Nārāyaṇ, may good things happen.). I looked up and said shyly, "Prašāṃ Baba." "Prašāṃ, praṇāṃ, praṇāṃ huzūr," Sarkar Baba said, and began to laugh gleefully. I loved that laughter. It was an honest, joyful laughter which exposed his gums as he laughed, as if his whole heart had opened up, and it had a most disarming quality to it. "Kuchh khāye haē?" (Have you eaten anything?) Sarkar Baba asked, and handed me a banana lying next to him on the bed. I realized how hungry I was, and yet, it did not seem to matter suddenly. My father asked me to make preparations for Sarkar Baba's lunch, and I got busy in setting the table and getting the water.

Ma had set the *thālī* (metal plate) with several small *kaṭorīs* (metal bowls) in it. There was thin *roṭi* (unleavened flat bread) hot off the *tavā* (iron skillet), *arhar dāl* (pigeon pea soup), *postā* (poppy seed sautéed with zucchini and onions), dry fried spicy *ālū-gobhī* (potato and cauliflower), mutton curry with chunks of potato, ginger and *garam masālā* (combination of hot spices) in it, cilantro chutney, and of course, *baiṃgan-bhartā*. Ma handed me the *thālī*, covered it with a clean, white handkerchief and I brought it to the small round table in Baba's room. My father had set a clean, large whiskey glass on the table, covered it with a piece of red cloth, and poured Chivas Regal scotch whiskey in it. When the glass was half full Sarkar Baba stopped him. He

removed the piece of red cloth through which the scotch had been strained, filled the rest with plain water, and drank it all down in one breath, leaving just a little bit at the bottom. “*Lī āvā ho!*” (Bring it, hey!) he said, and I set the plate down on the table. My father removed the handkerchief. Sarkar Baba looked at the plate and said, “*Bahut cīz hai.*” (There are many things.). He began to eat, still seated cross-legged, and made small conversation with my father.

I realized I was staring at Sarkar Baba’s plate, and so withdrew quietly behind the door so as not to stare, but also, not to miss any part of the conversation. Apparently, the Indian army was disposing of several of its junk jeeps at a throwaway price and Sarkar Baba was acquiring a couple of them for the ashram in Banaras. My father, who used to work then as the Joint Manager Vigilance and Security with the Food Corporation of India, had been negotiating with the Defence Ministry on behalf of the ashram, and now delivery had to be taken. From behind the door I watched Sarkar Baba sitting on the bed, a young man, almost boyish, wearing a white *lungī* (plain piece of two meter long cloth) tied around his waist and nothing on the upper half of his body, his smooth skin unaffected by the heat, his long arms that looked very strong, the ease and comfort of his sitting posture, the Bhojpuri language he spoke while talking to my father, the soft, melodious tone of his voice, the air of peace and quiet authority around him.

Sarkar Baba ate two *roṭīs* and then Ma sent in a plate of steaming, white Basmati rice. Sarkar Baba ate a little of that too, then indicated he was done, washed his hands, and stood up. I thought he was very tall (which he was, over six feet). He went over to the living room where the folks who had accompanied him to Delhi were sitting, asked them to eat too, and then retired to his room. I cleaned the table, brought the plate back

to the kitchen, and noticed that although Sarkar Baba had eaten a little bit from each *kaṭorī*, he had actually not finished anything on his plate. Ma looked at the plate quietly. Perhaps she thought Sarkar Baba had not liked her cooking. But when the rest of us, including the folks in Sarkar Baba's entourage sat down to eat, they asked if there was anything left on Sarkar Baba's plate. There was plenty, and all partook of a little bit as *prasād* (sanctified food). As we ate, I could hear cries of pain from behind the closed door of Sarkar Baba's room. It sounded like “*Āh! Māī re Māī!*” (Oh! Mother O mother!) as if someone was beating on Sarkar Baba. We were told it was fine, it was what Sarkar Baba did. As I ate, I thought the *baiṅgan-bhartā* had never tasted better, but I could not get the cries of pain out of my mind. I wondered what was hurting Sarkar Baba so much that he would cry out in agony, and if he was in so much pain, why didn't anyone do something about it. After about an hour, the cries subsided. I thought Sarkar Baba must have fallen asleep.

In the evening people began to arrive to visit Sarkar Baba. There were colleagues of my father, and some friends, business people from Delhi, government officials, and occasionally a politician. If, per chance, Sarkar Baba had gone out to visit someone, they would wait patiently till the time he arrived, meet with him, accept the *prasād* he gave them (usually cloves and green cardamom), and so it would go on. And Sarkar Baba did have lots of people and places to visit. A few of the names I remember were those of Babu Jagjiwan Ram, the then agriculture minister of India, Shri Hanumathaiya, another prominent politician, or just plain folks whom Sarkar Baba, somehow, seemed to know. An important place that Sarkar Baba would visit was the Nigam Bodh Ghat cremation ground on the bank of river Yamuna.

Late in the evening it was still very hot. So that night, Sarkar Baba's sleeping as well as dinner arrangements were made on the open, flat roof of our single storey unit. At night, after most of the visitors had left, Sarkar Baba sat on the cot in an apparent hugely humorous mood, cracking jokes yet advising people, so that no one wanted to leave his side. That included me. I did not quite understand all that was going on, but I sure was enjoying it. So it was almost grudgingly that I left that company when my father asked me to set the dinner table on the roof top. Then I felt something fantastic begin to happen.

I left Sarkar Baba's company to climb down the flight of about 30 stairs and as I picked up the table, it felt as if Sarkar Baba was still with me. I climbed up the 30 steps with the heavy table without even breaking into a sweat. Then flew down 30 steps to get the water. Then flew up again to put it on the table. Flew down to get the *thālī*. Up again to put it on the table. Down again to get more *roḥīs*. Up again to see what more was needed. Down again to replenish it. I climbed that flight of 30 stairs at least 30 times in the course of an hour, for somehow, Sarkar Baba would not let me stand still, and yet, I had no sign of fatigue. It was as if my feet had sprouted wings. It was as if an energy was emanating from Sarkar Baba and flowing through me. I ran up and down so fast, I did not miss out on any conversation either. I was barely nine or ten years old. I had the energy. And it seemed I had some inspiration too, but on that hot summer night in Delhi, despite all my hard labor, I did not feel fatigued at all.

That whole week flew by in a wink. Sarkar Baba had numerous places to go to, numerous places to visit. There was always someone waiting for him at home or things needed to be done. A few days later the jeeps arrived. That created another round of

excitement. I did not realize all this while that although I had not spoken much with Sarkar Baba, I had begun to nurture a certain bond of affection towards him. In the evening, as Sarkar Baba sat talking with someone, Ma sent me out to get some groceries. When I came back Sarkar Baba was not there. I asked where my younger brother was. Ma said Sarkar Baba took him along as he went to visit India Gate. I was devastated. All this week every moment had been so full of Sarkar Baba that now, for once, when it was quiet and still in the house, it seemed to radiate an aura of deep sadness akin to a cremation ground. I walked away, went to the roof top, and as I stood against its short balcony-like wall in the dark looking at the green compound leaves of the Gulmohar tree (Royal Poinciana) highlighted by the yellow light from the street lamp, tears welled up in my eyes. I felt choked. I could not understand how Sarkar Baba could go on an excursion and not take me along with him. Whether Sarkar Baba had intended to or not, I learnt a strong lesson that night – about human attachments, the joy and sorrow they embody, and that, a saint, a sadhu, an Aghar, is not bound by any attachments, he will do freely as appropriate according to the needs of the time and space, even if his actions are not liked by some. Standing alone in the dark, with the leaves of the Gulmohar tree as my witness, I swore to myself I would not be attached to anyone. From now on, I would cultivate detachment.

Sarkar Baba was leaving the next day. In the morning the usual rituals of food and greetings were performed. I was sad, but I was determined to be detached. I had barely been able to study the whole week and mathematics had begun to loom over me like a mushroom cloud. As rest of the folk said goodbye to Sarkar Baba I came outside and stood by the door. Sarkar Baba had put on a black robe that someone had given him,

over his white *lungī*. He had also anointed his forehead with *vibhūti* (sacred ashes) and I could see faint lines of it. Sarkar Baba put on his slippers and walked out, looked at me looking so downcast, and asked in the same tone that Ma used to ask me in, “*Kā, kā bāt bā?*” (Why, what is the matter?) What could I say? I blurted out with a choked throat, “Baba, I have exams!” Sarkar Baba smiled, “*ta kā, pās ho jaiba.*” (So what, you will pass.). And he left.

After the frenetic activity of the past week this small house felt like a tomb. I was not the only one feeling sad. My parents were too. So were both my brothers. The visitors who had come to say goodbye to Sarkar Baba were no different. It felt as if a close relative, or a very dear friend, had gone away. Gradually everyone left and the house became empty. I had to cultivate detachment, and I tried to practice that. I also had to study for my exams. When the results came, I passed. Even in mathematics. Just barely. But I did.

I have begun with a long narration of a simple episode to highlight the intense nature of people’s interactions with Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Baba Bhagawan Ram. No one could remain unaffected by his presence. At the time when I experienced this I had no clue about the Aghor tradition, or Sarkar Baba’s place in it. Over the years, through my interactions with him, and by exposure to academic and popular literature, I began to understand the depth of history, the web of folklore, the exposure of networks and interactions that were all assimilated in the life and persona of Baba Bhagawan Ram, whom we used to call Sarkar Baba, or just, simply, Baba. And so, I proceed to the more academic part of it.

### **Micro-history, Hagiography and Ethnography**

Wading through the serpentine, shape-changing, and sometimes controversial, history of Aghor, or Aghor-like groups and characters, it seems to represent an ancient body of practices which, while retaining a lot of practices of yore, has also changed itself according to the times. Davidson exemplifies wonderfully the complexities associated with such a subject in his most readable *Indian Esoteric Buddhism* (2002). Unraveling the exact nature of its course through history, as well as the nature of its present form, is no easy task. Multifarious problems present themselves to the student, even at the starting point, of how to go about studying this tradition. Talking about gaining a true understanding of the multiple pasts of Hinduism, David White contrasts the History of Religions approach dependent upon classical texts so favored by the colonialists as well as Hindu Nationalists, with the post-colonial approach of the subaltern studies school which treats the categories through which India interprets itself as an external imposition. He posits:

None of the approaches to the history of Hinduism ... can aid the historian in understanding the present in terms of the past, or in accounting for historical change, because none of them engages with the past in a meaningful way. The Hindu nationalist historians hark back to an extended Vedic golden age in which religious practice remained unchanged until the corruptions spawned by the Turkish invasions of the eleventh century. Many Western indologists and historians of religion specializing in Hinduism never step back from the unalterable ideal worlds of the scriptures they interpret to investigate the changing real-world contexts out of which those texts emerged. The colonial and postcolonial historians focus on the past two hundred years as the period in which all of the categories through which India continues to interpret itself—including Hinduism—were imposed upon it from without. ... For different reasons, each of these approaches chooses not to address human agency or historical change in its account of the pasts out of which modern-day Hinduism has emerged. In each case, human agency becomes subordinate to reified superhuman or trans-human forces: Vedic revelation, timeless tradition, colonial discourse, or “history” themselves become the sole true actors, with people either their witting vessels or their unwitting victims. ... Between the times of the Hindu nationalists’ Vedic

heritage and the colonial and postcolonial historians' British Raj lie some sixteen centuries of religious change. This is a period that is rich in non-scriptural historical data, data that can be "triangulated" from a combination of art-historical, archeological, epigraphical, and numismatic sources, as well as from Buddhist, Jain, and secular literature, accounts of foreign travelers, and, when such is done with care, from data from the ethnographic present. (White 2006:122-3)

Several points stand out in this brief excerpt, each equally important in its potential for contribution to our understanding of the Aghor tradition. First is the inevitable and unavoidable importance of history for understanding the present, for all things are subjects of a process that shapes them, whether the process be rapid or slow, whether it be clear or obscure, but it is a process nonetheless.

Second is the importance of human actors and their lived lives, as opposed to unalterable ideal worlds of the scriptures which may present an ideal-typical world-view, but may not be found on the ground in the way described. Aghor tradition illustrates this notion amply with many contradictory descriptions as well as universalizations, where the ground reality can be subject to so many interpretations that history itself becomes an artifact of sectarian, colonial or caste-biased interpretation.

Third is the importance of human agency in shaping history, as well as interpretations of history, even as the human subjects carry out their actions in the present. Narratives of history are replete with stories of exceptional or charismatic leaders who have acted in a manner that has changed the erstwhile "normal" social processes, and in this case, Sarkar Baba's actions are illuminative of changes made to the tradition in the present, which can shape its development in the future.

And fourth is the necessity of utilizing a variety of academic and non academic sources for constructing the fullest possible picture, including the data from the ethnographic present, to really understand the true nature of religious behavior. This

point, specifically, falls within the domain of the anthropologist because while descriptions of the historical events may portray universalisms or global generalizations, it is in the minute details that life happens, minute by minute and day by day, and that process, of life happening, is not an impersonal act. It is very much involved with getting down on your hands and knees, of getting dirty with the soil you sift. It is in these minute details that one can discern the products of shaping of thoughts, ideas and actions through history, as well as the emergence of tiny strokes of incipient changes that work to change history, not in the broad strokes that pass over millennia in the fleeting of a second. It is in these minute details that we see “both the human and divine economies of the local in the translocal and the translocal in the local” (White 2006:128). These minute details are what, in my mind, constitute the essence of a micro-history.

It is with this thought in mind that White advocates the writing of “micro-histories” but laments the fact that it is really not practicable in the absence of sufficient textual, archaeological and art-historical data. His concluding suggestion about the writing of the history of Hinduism is a logical one:

The one is thematic, and consists of tracing the history of a body of practice across time and space, attending to multiple human actors, voices, conflicts of interpretation, change over time and across space. ... The second consists in writing regional histories of Hindu religious lifeworlds, histories that are attentive to the lives and words and acts of human religious practitioners in relation to gods of the place, family, occupational group, landscape, and so on. (White 2006:128)

I would like to emphasize here, first, White’s mention of “a body of practices across time and space, attending to multiple human actors...” With specific reference to the Aghor tradition it is difficult to write a history which retains a neutral character owing to the sectarian nature of its critics’ descriptions due to the absence of its own resources.

What can be done, however, is to take their salient practices, and there are a number of

descriptions of those, then trace the history of those practices, as effectively as possible, comparing the uses they have been put to by various religious practitioners over the course of history. I make an attempt in this direction in juxtaposing Aghor practices with those mentioned in the Buddhist tradition, and then try to look at religious interchange between the two groups through the descriptions of those practices in their narratives.

The second point of emphasis from White's quote above is the importance of "...histories that are attentive to the lives and words and acts of human religious practitioners..." This raises an interesting idea. Surely, history is written not just by historians, but also by bards and accountants and soldiers and devotees who try to extol their cherished idols as they go about their daily lives, thus creating what will later be termed as history. Even as they go about their lives in this way, they "develop their own folklore within as well as around themselves" (Primiano 1995:48). Primiano calls the summation of this personal development of folklore with everyday life objects, events and persons as "uniculture," and posits it as a subset of the "vernacular religion," providing a further interesting elaboration of it:

Folkloristically, uniculture can be seen as the all embracing concept within which vernacular religion is a subset. Religiously, however, vernacular religion can be seen as the foundation which spiritually determines every human value within which uniculture is a subset. (Primiano 1995:50 n. 19).

It is because of this symbiotic relationship between uniculture and vernacular religion that Primiano advocates an inductive approach to the study of religion which gives importance to the inner experience and perception of the believer (1995:40), and therefore, stresses the study of "*individuals* living in human society" (1995:47), something that folklorists have not paid enough attention to. Such a focus on the individual becomes especially important because:

Vernacular religion is, by definition, religion as it is lived: as human beings encounter, understand, interpret, and practice it. Since religion inherently involves interpretation, it is impossible for the religion of an individual not to be vernacular. Vernacular religious theory involves an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the religious lives of individuals with special attention to the process of religious belief, the verbal, behavioral, and material expressions of religious belief, and the ultimate object of religious belief. (Primiano 1995:44).

To push the point further, it is worth hypothesizing here a scenario where the writing of this inductive approach to religion, "...based on criteria of religious validity established by the inner experience and perception of the believer." (Primiano 1995:40), was undertaken not by the folklorist, or the anthropologist, or the historian, but by the individual believer himself in the context of his own vernacular religious background and activities. Would it be, from a scholarly point of view, considered an ethnography, or would it be dismissed as a biography or hagiography? In other words, can the writing of an inductively self-conscious biography or hagiography be ethnography as well, and more importantly, would it provide a deeper insight into the religion than if an ethnographer who was theoretically removed constructed it? It can be an idea to chew on because as Primiano specifies, "Scholarship on lived religion is, however, never a purely objective position, but rather a subjective composite of various analytical vantage points." (1995:40). While a biography or hagiography can also provide detailed insights into the individualized workings of religious ideas, even if treated as non-ethnography, its value for ethnographers looking for authentic religious representations of folklife and lived religion is undeniable. As White stresses while referring to biographical or hagiographical writings on "living saints," "In the nature of primary sources such works are invaluable but remain unanalyzed." (White 1972:863).

In the Aghor context, I cannot but agree with both White and Primiano in focusing on the micro-history of the lived religion in a particular locality, with special

emphasis on individual players, actors and practitioners, to gain an insight into a tradition that seems as enigmatic today as it was centuries if not millennia ago. Consequently, my study is primarily about the life and work of Sarkar Baba with attention to his personality, thoughts, behavior and practices, as observed by me, and as observed and described by others around him. It is an account that is at once very personal, as well as comparative. It is personal not just through “my” personal experiences with Sarkar Baba, but also through personal accounts of others who had contact with him, and which led to their own notions of their relationship with him. It is comparative, in the sense of comparing the earlier descriptions of Aghor ascetics with descriptions of Sarkar Baba’s life, to look at continuity or divergence of tradition within it, as also for his human agency to give a transformative effect to the tradition, in effect, a view of the local vis a vis the translocal, syncretically as well as historically.

Sarkar Baba is the focal point of this study, first, because he was the most extraordinary human being I have ever come across. To his devotees, at least those who came to him later in his life, he was an embodiment of apparent dichotomies at first glance – at once a severe ascetic and a caretaker of thousands; a detached human being who loved all; a mendicant who had begged for his food and a king who ruled over numerous hearts and fates; a peasant farmer and a king-maker; a monk and an administrator; a renouncer and a property holder; a symbolic representation of Shiva as well as the mother goddess herself. And yet, as one got to know him, one realized the totality of his social persona which was beyond and transcendent to the sum of these dichotomies. He began his life as a very young, avid seeker of the truth, but he walked this ancient (and transgressive) path so well, knew its twists and pitfalls so well that to

keep it relevant according to the needs of the modern times, he gave it a turn that preserves its ancient roots and practices, yet establishes it firmly within the realities of the modern world. Sarkar Baba never referred to himself as anything other than a social worker, but those who were fortunate enough to receive his service realized that contact with him was a life-transforming event, not just the fulfillment of a physical, social or psychological need. Second, Sarkar Baba is the focal point of my dissertation because of the tradition that he hails from, the Aghor tradition, which, too, has an ambiguous understanding with the popular masses and scholars alike, at once feared and despised, envied and coveted.

To illustrate my point, I cite the story of Phokabir, whose real name was Kedar Singh, when he first met Sarkar Baba, and later became a prominent person in his organization. Meeting with an Aghar saint can be a stressful act for a well established caste-Hindu person, given the notions of non-observance of purity-pollution or caste distinctions, and transgressive behavior, which these monks are supposed to practice. It was at village Hariharpur a few miles south of the city of Banaras that Phokabir met Sarkar Baba. By the time I started my project Phokabir had long been dead, but fortunately, his memoirs were penned down by Dayanarayan Pandey (1984). This story of Phokabir's first meeting illustrates very nicely Sarkar Baba's mode of life and work, and the quiet influence he had over people, despite their chagrin over having to go to an Aghar saint. The quoted passage is intentionally long to present a word picture of the rural Indian village with the colors, sights and sounds one is likely to come across, as a way of establishing the geographical and social setting of my narrative, and therefore,

despite being long, well worth reading. Phokabir describes how, first, he met Sarkar Baba, and then, how he spent his first night at Sarkar Baba's place:

Possibly, it was the month of *Kārtik-Agahan* (October-November) in the year 1953. I had gone to visit the house of Maryad Pandey and there, I found out – some Aughar sadhu had arrived in the village Hariharpur -- about a kilometer and a half from Sakaldiha. He is a youth of little age... Unsought alms serve him. What he says can be depended upon...

As I was brushing my teeth in the morning my fresh mind began to nag at me – If all the people of Hariharpur are going in hordes to see that Aughar, what is so special about me that I should stay away from him, seeped in my ego? ... Why don't I go and just look at the circus? I will find out if he is a real Aughar or a fraud.

...On reaching there, I saw a hut made from sugarcane leaves. The small fallow land nearby had been enclosed with long bamboo poles. Right next to it was a mango tree. ... There was a concrete platform around that tree. People believed a divine spirit lived on it. Very close to the tree was a well. Adjacent to the well was a grove of bamboo that seemed to whisper "mar-mar" in the wind. From time to time, sweet as well as raucous bird sounds emanated from it.

I stood outside the hut for some time and looked at everything. The Aughar, as if, was lying in a corpse posture<sup>1</sup> inside the hut. Instead of waking or bothering him, I lay down on the rug lying outside... I prepared tobacco, then stuck it under my lip and lay down. The mild sunshine of the month of *Agahan* (October-November) was worth enjoying.

After resting on the rug for a whole hour I noticed that a considerable crowd was now sitting on it. I pretended to still be asleep. ... People began to gossip about me. Someone even said loudly – "Say, brother, have you come from an animal auction?<sup>2</sup> You are slumbering deeply." As the man made his sarcastic remark, I heard a voice from inside the hut, or shall we say, I heard an answer from inside the hut – "He is a *Thākur* (a high caste Kṣatriya) from Ishwargangi, a *Thākur*."

I sat up as if electrified on hearing about myself from the yet unacquainted Aughar. The Aughar asked from inside the hut – "Say, how is Chhedi Baba of Ishwargangi?"

I became suspicious as I told him about Chhedi Baba – perhaps this is the Aughar who used to live at Ishwargangi with Chhedi Baba. This is the same boy Aughar whose name everyone is discussing in my locality. This is a matter only a few months old. Perhaps he had seen me while he was wandering there. That is why he recognizes me. Otherwise how does he know whether I am a *Thākur* or something else? That is to say, I remained skeptical about the young Aughar's divine sight. Even so, out of courtesy, I went in front of that young form of Shiva<sup>3</sup> to greet him –

The line from the Sanskrit verse – You are fair and dignified like the Himalaya mountains, (O Shiva) the radiance of your body is brighter than a million gods of love<sup>4</sup> – came alive. The eyes of the young Aughar met mine – it

was as if I became spellbound. As if intoxication began to course through my veins. I tried to get out quickly after touching his feet but he stopped me and asked – “You will not stay anymore?”

“No Baba, I will go.” I said with my hands folded in supplication.

“You will come again, right?”

The magic of those sweet words has an effect on me even today. ...At that time, when the young Aughar said this to me, everyone began to look at me. I had become a subject of curiosity...

Phokabir came back to Banaras and narrated his meeting with the young Aughar saint to his mother. His mother, a woman of deeply religious propensities, encouraged him go to the young Aughar. The outcome was:

I took out my bicycle about a quarter hour before dawn on the third day after coming back from Sakaldiha... At that time the ever pleasing scene of sunrise was distributing the gift of a beautiful vision. The rosy border of the horizon was something like the clothes of an ascetic. From the trees on both sides of the road birds were as if expressing their ecstasy at the arrival of the sun.

An enemy of the poor, the [cold] month of *Agahan* (November) wanted to bite both my hands resting on the bike handle... So I ... started pedaling furiously... In Mughalsarai I put a *betel*-leaf in my mouth and sat down on the cycle again. ... Sitting on it, I began to look – dew drops looked like they were sowing pearls on the green clothing of the fields. At places, the rows of rice plants seemed to be preening themselves... I saw farmers drawing water from the wells. Again, feeling pity for the poor children standing against the sunlit walls of the village houses, I crossed Tajpur village.

By about nine, nine-thirty in the morning, my cycle came to a stop in front of the hut in Hariharpur. At that time a few marijuana addicts and three or four ordinary village people were sitting near the young Aughar . I bowed to him in greeting. His red eyes opened and he said in very sweet words –

“Say Kedar, you have arrived.”

“Yes Baba, I had left early in the morning.”

“Have you brushed your teeth?”

“Yes, I did that early in the morning.”

“You will stay here tonight, right?”

“That is what I am thinking.”

People sitting with this Aughar kept looking at me enviously. The low smoke gradually rising from the *dhūnī* (ascetic’s fire) as if wanted to say something to me, but the barrage of people’s questions [to Baba] began. I sat there for a long time, listening to the concerns of their hearts – the quarrels between mother and daughter-in-law, the acrimony between fathers and sons, the ugly dance of ill-feeling amongst brothers, and with all that, an insatiable hunger for money. The Aughar would neither look at anyone, nor say anything. Once in a while, he would use symbolic language such as “Fire does not leap up in flames when yelled at by the smoke.” ...

About seven, seven-thirty at night, I came back to be present at the hut of that little *yogi*...

“When will you go home?” He asked.

“When you will wake up in the morning.”

“I do not sleep.”

I fell asleep pondering over the meaning of that last sentence, and awoke only after a third of the night had already passed. I awoke and saw him sitting quietly. I began to enjoy again the sleep of the early morning.

In the morning I started to leave after touching his feet.

“When will you come back again?” He asked with affection.

“I will come as soon as I get some time.” I replied with my head bowed in respect.

“Come back soon,” he said as he opened his smiling eyes and looked at me.

I started straight for my home and as I reached the pontoon bridge at Rajghat, I realized my heart was still making circumambulations of the young Aghar . A long journey had passed, but ... “Come back soon” kept echoing in my mind, and with each echo, dripped an exhilarating intoxication. This is where my addiction to intoxication began. (Pandey 1984:18-23, emphasis added, my translation).

This was Phokabir’s initial meeting with Sarkar Baba, and how it led to further interactions. The meeting not only impressed him very much, it led to an instant liking bordering on devotion. This narration is illustrative of many points. On the one hand, it illustrates the geographical setting of Sarkar Baba’s life: a hut in rural India set amidst verdant fields, as well as the simplicity of his life: that of meditation and meeting with the village folk who came to see him every day, and consulted with him on various everyday domestic affairs. He spent time with them as needed, but did not eschew his meditative practices, as is testified to by Phokabir, who saw him sitting all night long without sleeping. He was not averse to socializing with marijuana addicts. He listened to all, but spoke little. And he had a magnetic charisma that kept people flocking to him. On the other hand, it also illustrates the beginnings of unicultural folklore formation where many individuals are focused simultaneously on one, and each entertains individualized notions of proximity to either a divinity or a supernatural power. Phokabir’s dilemma about

visiting an Aughar saint not only turned into a memorable experience, it led him to a new understanding of Aghor spirituality as he engaged with it.

### **The Logic, and Plan of Chapters**

Keeping this influence of his in mind I look at two aspects of study in this dissertation. One is the history, and historical representation of Aghor – the “historical data” – as posited by White. The other is the life of Sarkar Baba – the “ethnographic present,” the “local,” the “words and acts of human religious practitioners” – again, as illustrated by White. I conduct this second aspect of my study, the life of Sarkar Baba, in two ways. First by building a biographical sketch of his life through a collection of orally narrated stories as well as biographical literature and other material gleaned from books published by the society he established, but given flesh, blood and continuity by the stories narrated to me during fieldwork, and second, by looking at specific points in Sarkar Baba's own life where he seems to have deliberately created a transformative effect on the Aghor tradition. While some of my informants were his ascetic disciples, most were householder devotees. While constructing a biographical tale of Baba's life, I put it into perspective in juxtaposition to issues of relationship between religion, history, and modernity which, hopefully, will not only illuminate the rigors of the life of an Aughar ascetic, but also give new insight into the workings of this tradition, as well as into what being a monk or a saint means to these ascetics.

Besides the issues of the relationship between religion, history and modernity, as well as nationalism and universalism, I also discuss how the concept of liminality, and the consequent charisma it produces, makes it necessary to look at the micro-histories of

such groups. These micro-histories have far-reaching consequences for understanding the dynamics between religion and history, and whether or not religion has a socially useful role in the context of modernity. It begs an answer to the question, does modernity give rise to non-religious socially useful categories, or does religion adapt itself to be socially useful in the modern context? Also, if religion can adapt itself to be a stronger current in modern society, then what happens to the age-old ascriptions and prescriptions that are associated with religious groups which survive in contemporary times?

An exercise of this nature necessarily begs to be situated in a wider context. In the first chapter I introduce the topic and discuss the general representations of Aghor in classical, colonial and modern literature and media, employing theoretical considerations for clarifying our view of the topic. In chapter two, I provide one kind of context, that of history – historical time and developments that have taken place in this tradition as it interacted with the wider society. In this chapter I look at the history from which Aghor tradition of today has come to us, paying attention to how scholars have traced this tradition and its practices in juxtaposition to other traditions of its time. In chapter three I provide a comparison between Sarkar Baba's life and philosophy and that of the Buddha's, and discuss the similarities and differences between them. Chapters two and three, therefore, are primarily historical in content.

The other kind of context is provided by the contemporary time-frame where this tradition exists in juxtaposition to other traditions and groups simultaneously in the “modern,” contemporary, and not historical, time. The frame here is provided by the larger national issues and social processes that influence all traditions, including religious ones in the context of India that includes the time not too long after it gained its

independence, and moved towards developing into a cohesive nation. However, this development itself is influenced by the actors and traditions that led to its independence that molded it in very particular kinds of ways, to give it its distinct shape and form. These contexts, however, are not mutually exclusive. History, which leads to a particular kind of present, is then evaluated from the perspective of the present, thus creating a processual continuity of ideas and structures, which keep experiencing the momentum of history even as they situate themselves in the present where other structures around them change and transform.

Thus, the first one of these contexts, historical time, inevitably leads to questions of modernity (Shaw 2006:1) and the nature of religion and religious groups in the age of science and technology. I describe the practice of an ancient *sādhanā* tradition -- the spiritual quest of Sarkar Baba in the contemporary time -- in chapter three, and then, in chapter four, I discuss the nature of Sarkar Baba's communication -- his language, his colloquialism, his philosophy, the tradition of using veiled language that he employed, and how his language reflects his humanism, concern for civil society, as well as his special kind of guru particularism. In chapter five I discuss the issue of the nature of relationship between religion, mysticism, history and modernity with issues of nationalism and the life and times of Sarkar Baba. Using stories again as data, I illustrate Sarkar Baba's mode of actions as a mystic in the areas of nationalism, politics, civil society, and individual interactions. Often, such a contextualization treats religion as an anti-modern entity (Shaw 2006:4), even though social science studies provide evidence of change in religious bodies over time (Babb 1986). My project exemplifies this thesis with the example of the Aghor tradition. Thus, Chapter five of my dissertation looks at

the issue of modernity and the rise of nationalism in India through the colonial process, and where Sarkar Baba stands in relation to the nationalist project as envisaged by figures like Dayananda and Vivekananda. I then describe Sarkar Baba's perspective on nationalism, and his creation of the institution called Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, conceptualized as a society established to serve people of the nation, and broader humanity. Then I look at perceptions of his unbounded mysticism, and how it created and established faith in him through individual transactions. In chapter six I provide a culminating summation of the entire discussion in this dissertation of Hindu universalism as propounded by the nationalists, Sarkar Baba's take on universalism, as well as the notion of guru particularism, which is crucial to understand the micro-histories of religious groups even as they themselves interact with broader historical trends.

### **Baba Bhagawan Ram's Life: A Very Brief Sketch**

Let me start by presenting a very brief outline of Sarkar Baba's life. He was born on Sunday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 1937 (the year 1994 *Samvat* by the Hindu calendar, on Sunday, the seventh of the dark half of the lunar month *Bhādrapad* [August-September]) at 38 minutes past midnight to Babu Baijnath Singh and his wife Lakhraji Devi in the village of Gundi about eight miles north of the Arrah railway station in Bihar (Sinha 1988:4-5, Chaturvedi 1973:144). Already in his childhood the people of his village recognized him to be a natural healer whose behavior was out of the ordinary. At age five he lost his father, and by age seven he gave up his home and began to wander and live in the groves around the village. He was initiated in the Vaishnava tradition by the holy man and teacher, Shrikant Maharaj, in his village. But his spiritual thirst ultimately took him

to Banaras where he was initiated into the Aghor tradition at Baba Kinaram's Sthal at Krim-Kund. After a number of powerful experiences at this monastery he began to wander in the city of Banaras, and alongside the river Ganges with its many villages and cremation grounds, especially in Chandauli district.

In 1953, at the request of devoted people from the villages of Hariharpur-Tajpur near Banaras, Sarkar Baba established his first ashram there and called it “Ādi Ashram Hariharpur.”

Although he still used to wander constantly, Hariharpur ashram turned into a place where he would spend some time whenever he returned to the Banaras area. Stories of his severe ascetic penance began to circulate in Banaras and its hinterland. Those in his company used to experience miracles as if they were natural, everyday events in life. As Sarkar Baba's popularity grew, hosts of devotees began to flock to his *darśan* (holy vision, glimpse). Then something happened that would start him on the path to changing the nature of Aghor tradition itself. Sarkar Baba's own guru, Baba Rajeshwar Ram, wanted him to take charge of the Kinaram Sthal. This would make Sarkar Baba the abbot of this hoary place of traditional Aghor learning and practice. But Sarkar Baba did not want to do so. One of his disciples, Phokabir once said to him, "You will get the seat of Baba Kinaram." To this he replied, "Why wash an old sheet and make me sit on that? Make a new sheet." (Pandey 1984:21). And so, to give his motley gathering of devotees the force of a social institution, on 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1961 Baba laid the foundation of the organization called Shri Sarveshwari Samooh in the holy city of Banaras, an organization with a mandate to fight social evils like leprosy, dowry and illiteracy. Especially with reference to leprosy it was a revolutionary program for a monk to

undertake. It is a dreaded disease with immense social stigma attached to the word “leprosy,” and at that time even the Government of India did not have adequate programs to combat it. People who become afflicted with this disease are often ousted from home and left to fend for themselves on the streets. It is not just a physical disease that rots the body, it is also a social disease where the whole family of the patient is often stigmatized as “being punished for their sins” by suffering through an occurrence of leprosy in their household. Barrett (2008:105) characterizes it as “an illness of discrimination inclusive of its physical condition,” and describes the situation with empathy thus:

In contrast to the bacterium, the social mark of leprosy in India is highly contagious... friends and relatives of people with HD [Hansen’s Disease] risk severe social and economic losses for their affiliations. Consequently, many Indian families would rather banish their diagnosed relatives to a distant town or city than risk discrimination against the entire household... With poor chances of employment, and little if any support from home, these exiles have few options for survival. Typically, they must find subsidized living in an isolated colony, or else live on the streets and beg in areas frequented by tourists and pilgrims. Both of these subsistence modes contribute, in turn, to the stereotypes from which their discrimination originated. (Barrett 2008:105-6).

Given the Aghor practice of non-discrimination and treating even the most disfigured, downtrodden and persecuted as an equal, Baba had no difficulty stepping in to make his own those who had been thrown out by their own families. To fulfill the goals of the organization, Sarkar Baba started another ashram and a leprosy hospital by the name of “Avadhut Bhagawan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram” at Parao, Varanasi. In translation, this name means Avadhut Bhagawan Ram Leprosy Service Ashram.

Sarkar Baba’s work continued and grew, and so did the number of his followers. Even more than two decades ago Diana Eck, writing about the powers of Aghors in Banaras noted, “It is no coincidence that a modern Aghorī, Bābā Bhagavān Rām, has established the most active center for the treatment of lepers in Banāras” (Eck 1982:328). In

1983 Sarkar Baba fell ill and remained in various hospitals in Delhi and Banaras for quite some time. Ultimately, in 1986 he was diagnosed with kidney failure, whence he came to the US for treatment. In 1987 he underwent his first kidney transplant operation. This transplanted kidney failed within nine months due to cyclosporine intoxication, a condition where the immunosuppressant medication given to the patient acts negatively on the transplanted organ and renders it futile. In 1988 he had his second kidney transplant operation. This one lasted till 1992. At that point, due to ill health, doctors at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York city advised him to have a third transplant operation. Sarkar Baba refused. Early on the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> of November, 1992, Sarkar Baba relinquished his mortal frame at the Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) London announced the news of his passing away in their radio broadcast the same evening for their global audience.

### **Aghor: A Social Face**

It is because of Sarkar Baba's life work that the Aghor tradition has experienced a remarkable transformation in the past five decades, especially for his followers after the establishment of 'Shri Sarveshwari Samooh'. This gave the Aghor tradition a prominent social face where previously it had but a fuzzy one. Moreover, this new face is markedly different from the erstwhile image of the Aghar ascetic prevalent in popular conception, one that puts Sarkar Baba's followers in a curious position. While on the one hand it makes "Aghor" accessible to society, on the other it modifies the tradition in such a manner that some call it a reformist trend, a radical divergence from the transgressive practices attributed to Aghars. Followers of this tradition have to face the dilemma of

how to maintain their social persona and continue their social work while either defending, or negating, the very same practices that are said to accord special powers to them and to make them especially suitable for such social work.<sup>5</sup>

The transformation that Sarkar Baba has introduced to perceptions of Aghor in society has been presented to us earlier in several of his books (Chaturvedi 1973, Samooh 1981, 1982, 1984, Ram 1991) as well as in two doctoral dissertations (Gupta 1993, Barrett 2002), and, most recently, in a publication on Aghor healing practices by Ron Barrett (2008). I will stress here that merely changing how people view Aghor was never really a goal for Sarkar Baba. From personal experience I can say that he never cared for how people thought about him. However, if he had to do something, if he had in mind a goal he had to reach, then there was nothing that could stop him. How this worked out in his life comprises the core of my current project. For now, I will point out only this: it was due to his efforts that it is now widely recognized not only in the holy city of Banaras that Aghors have the ability to transform the socially polluting to the socially purifying, and, the socially sick to the socially healthy, it is recognized internationally too. The Guinness Book of World Records notes on its website that the largest number of leprosy patients treated anywhere in the world between 1962 and 1992, was at the leprosy hospital in the city of Banaras, run by the Aghor Bhagawan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram<sup>6</sup>. As Barrett qualifies, “While the *Guinness* book is certainly no substitute for census statistics, it is nevertheless a gold standard in the popular Indian imagination.” (2008:102)

### **Contrasting Descriptions of Aghor**

To elaborate on the perspectives outlined above, it is important to examine how the tradition of Aghor has been looked at, both contemporaly and historically, so we can get some idea of Sarkar Baba's specific contribution to this tradition in the present times. Aughaṛs, or Aughaṛ-like figures, certainly have a way of exciting the popular imagination. Central to the plots of prominent non-epical classical Sanskrit literature, they were as popular in novels like Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*, Mahendraverman's *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, Kṛṣṇamiśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*, and Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*, as they are in the Indian media today. Since I deal more extensively with the portrayal of Aghor practices in the second chapter, I will confine my descriptions here to colonial and contemporary times, except for a brief comment. Classical Sanskrit dramas are not uniform in their portrayal of the Aughaṛ like figure they describe, the Kāpālīka. Bāṇabhaṭṭa has a positive description in *Harṣacarita*, Mahendraverman has a benign, comical portrayal in *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, Kṛṣṇamiśra has both, benign and grotesque descriptions in *Prabodhacandrodaya*, and Bhavabhūti's portrayal, in *Mālatīmādhava*, of the Buddhist Kāpālīkā Saudāminī is positive, while that of the Shaiva Kāpālīka Aghoraghaṇṭa is fearful. The variations in these descriptions portray the sectarian affiliations of the respective authors, their need for theatrical effect in their drama, as well as politics.

Politics is certainly one reason for deliberately condemning such Kāpālīka practitioners. There existed dislike amongst the Jains for the Tantra based adherents owing on their specific practices, orthodox Shaivite writers probably wanted to distance themselves from the more radical practitioners, and Buddhists and Vaishnavas were commonly competing amongst themselves, as well as against Shaivites for superiority.

Thus, “It is significant, perhaps, that Kṛṣṇamiśra, a strong Vaiṣṇava, attacks a Cārvāka, a Digambara, a Buddhist, and a Kāpālika but neglects to mention any of the more respectable Śaivite sects” (Lorenzen 1972:50). In another text, Tāranātha (1970:100) depicts the battle between Buddhists and Shaivas, with a negative portrayal of the Shaivas. Bloomfield (1924:203 n. 2) writes that for the Jains, the very name Kāpālika is anathema, and for this reason, their own protagonists are portrayed in a self-consciously non-Kāpālika way. These are just a few instances of negative portrayal for an advancement of their own sectarian or political cause by the critics.

As an emic addition to the discussion above, I will add that Aghor practitioners themselves regard some of the best known spiritual personalities from Sanskrit literature to have been Aghor practitioners. One of the main indigenous books of contemporary literature on the Aghor tradition, Yagyanarayana Chaturvedi's *Aghor Bhagawān Rām* (1973:13-16) lists Viśvāmitra (especially with reference to the *Atharvaveda: Kauśika Sutra*, and the Hariścandra story), Vāmadeva and Vaśiṣṭha (from the *Rāmāyaṇa*), queen Cuṛālā (of *Yogavaśiṣṭha*), Vikramāditya (of *Vetāla Pañcaviṃśati*), Aghorācārya (700 A.D., text unclear), Bhairavācārya (of Bāṇa's *Harṣacarita*), and Abhinavagupta (of Kashmir, A.D. 950-1020), etc. from Indian literature and folklore as practitioners of the Aghor tradition. Let me conclude this section with a passage from Dyczkowski where, sourcing the late medieval work *Gorakṣasiddhāntasaṃgraha*, he indicates a more moderate picture of the Kāpālikas:

Travelling back in time we observe that Śaiva sects in the past have also associated themselves with the Kāpālikas because they resemble them. We should stress here that this resemblance did not necessarily imply that they advocated such a shocking life style. In fact, we more often find that the Kāpālika is thought to be a man who has shaken off all worldly ties (*avadhūta*) and his

antinomian behaviour is understood to be a meaningful visible expression of the liberated life (*jīvanmukti*) he leads. (Dyczkowski 1988:28)

Colonial Writers:

Let us move forward in time and look now at the descriptions of Aghorāṣ as found in the publications of the nineteenth century, administrative as well as academic records.

Reading these accounts simultaneously gives the reader an impression of two kinds of tones running through the text – one is the anecdotal and largely third person account of most narrations, and the other, a very high moral indignation which paradoxically, gets expressed in the severest uncivil language used to describe them, perhaps reflecting that the “... picture of the hardy peasant and his negative imprint manifest in the nefarious monk were central to the strategic—and for the most part unconscious – posturing of British colonial officials...” (Pinch 1996:5).

First, in “Life History of an Aghori Fakir” Henry Balfour points out the importance of finding “... reliable information regarding the very peculiar sect of ascetics known as Aghori ... especially since it appears that their numbers are diminishing...” (1897:341), adding in the same breath, “The interests of culture demand the suppression of such aggressively ascetic doctrines, but the interests of anthropology demand that they should be thoroughly investigated and studied before it is too late.” (1897:341). He then begins the description as supplied by Surgeon Captain H. E. Drake Brockman, who had kindly added these notes to the appropriated skull-bowl he had sent to Balfour at his request:

“The Aghori is a class of Hindu Fakir rarely seen now-a-days, and fast becoming extinct, who wander about the length and breadth of India, either singly or in pairs, and will often eat offal and filth of every description, including the flesh of dead animals, human and other excreta, and often human flesh when obtainable.” (Balfour 1897:341).

Although Balfour's zeal to maintain "the interests of culture" doesn't give credence to his anthropological honesty, or academic neutrality, his portrayal of the Aghor tradition is not nearly as disparaging when compared to Barth who accuses Shaiva practitioners of ascetic fanaticism, horrible and revolting observances, hypocrisy and charlatanry (1891:214) or Edward Balfour, who opens with "...a depraved sect of Hindu devotees, who practice the most disgusting, filthy and impure rites..." (1967:42). Wilson calls them "disgusting wretches" (1861:234), Tod hurls a Herodotian epithet at them, calling them "Troglodyte monsters" (1920:672). Russell starts his description in the same tone: "The most disreputable class of Saiva mendicants..." and makes the moral judgment thus:

Aghoris now represent their filthy habits as merely giving practical expression to the abstract doctrine that the whole universe is full of Brahma, and consequently that one thing is as pure as another." (Russell 1916:13).

Given the time when these articles were written, with its overtones of Victorian righteousness, moral supremacy, and the expediency of British rule it is not surprising that colonial administrators found the ascetic mode of Aghar's life so unpalatable, and the scholars, so disturbing, as to take every opportunity to discredit them. There does appear, though, to be an all consuming fixation with what Aghar eat, treating it as a normal dietary practice, not as a spiritual practice designed to overcome sensory revulsion. The writers are so taken by their disgust of Aghor victuals that they pay scant attention to the philosophy that it draws from, or, whether such behavior was also a ritual rather than ordinary public nuisance. The second common theme is that of Aghar, or Aghar-like figures displaying their practices in public to extort money (Martin 1838:493, Wilson 1861:233, Barrow 1893:202;). Again, this sounds odd for renunciate ascetics who are supposed to live on alms, unless it is performed by those who can

scarcely be called “ascetics.” It becomes apparent that the writers of the colonial times are all riding on the same “necrophilism, anthropophagy and coprology” (Oman 1903:165) bandwagon where what one writer presents is swallowed hook, line and sinker by the rest. It is a testimony to the power of the written word that the same text then gets quoted many times, with the same moral attitudes, in different publications, thus reinforcing the convictions which may have been based on a partial understanding of the truth. The antinomian practices of the Aghors are never put in the right context from which they derive. To be fair to Henry Balfour, though, he does make an attempt at a comparative study of the use of the skull as a bowl in other cultures, citing Nukahivans of the Marquisas (1897:347), the Iroquois, the Fijians as well as inhabitants of Kingsmill and Gilbert islands (1897:348), the Ashanti in Western Africa, the Scythians and Celtic Boii in ancient times (1897:349), Britain (1897:351), and South Australia (1897:352), etc. The difference here, of course, lies in the meaning associated with the use of the skull bowl. In these latter instances, it implied vanquishing an enemy.

One does not perceive in these writings at all the kind of inductive approach that Primiano advocates so sensitively, given the early nature of the development of anthropological writing, but one does see what he refers to as the “two tiered model” to the study of religion employed by scholars which creates distinct categories of “official” or “institutional religion administered by hierarchical elites” and “folk” religion (1995:39). When Balfour’s source (Dr. Drake Brockman) has to clarify issues dealing with Aghors, he consults “an intelligent pundit of Hurdwar” and accepts uncritically what he feeds him (Balfour 1897:342). Barth (1891) waxes eloquent textually, as his was not an ethnographical exercise to begin with. Tod treats a “body of pundhits, over whom

presided the learned Jetty Gyanachandra” (Pinch 1996:110) as his incontrovertible sources, the “Jetty Gyanachandra” being the Jain yati Gyanachandra, his own guru. Such a two tiered model – that of “institutional religion administered by hierarchal elites, and folk religion – leads to subconscious biases in treating fairly those religious groups that do not form a part of the “official” religion. This, coupled with the colonial administrator’s need to maintain law, order, and a steady flow of revenue through control of defined and settled communities, made dispersed itinerant communities probably not their favorites to begin with. As Pinch quotes Warren Hastings proclamation of 21<sup>st</sup> January 1773:

banishing “all Biraugies and Sunnasses [bairagis and sanyasis, or armed Vaishnava and Shaiva monks] who are travellers strangers and passengers in this country” from the provinces of Bengal and Bihar, save “such of the cast of Rammanundar and Goraak [Ramanand and Gorakhnath] who have for a long time been settled and receive a maintenance in land money...” (Pinch 1996:17)

Let us now contrast this description of diatribes with statements that the colonial scholars make that puts a different light on the Agharṣ. Discussing the Agharṣ in Banaras, Martin writes:

The Aghorpanthi ... by the Brahmans here are held in great abhorrence ... yet it is confessed, that the Rajas and their chief relations have a strong hankering after their doctrine. (Martin 1838:492)

And continues,

The chief of the sect resides at the Krimikunda, in Benares, where he has a house called a Math, with gardens and everything becoming a person of rank. In the holy city, many Brahmans, Kshatris, and high Sudras, take instruction from this sage; but do not venture to imitate his manners. (Martin 1838:493)

This narration is instructive in what Martin leaves unsaid in his first line, that Agharṣ are despised by Brahmans, but not necessarily by other castes. This, then, does not prevent them from frequenting the Agharṣ for instructional purposes. Russell,

discussing the mode of behavior of Aughaṛs, mentions a story originally cited by Barrow (1893:226)

“On the other hand, their good offices may secure benefits, as in the case of a zamīndār of Muzaffarnagar, who at Allahābād refused to eat a piece of human flesh offered to him by an Aghori; the latter thereupon threw the flesh at the zamīndār’s head, on which it stuck. The zamīndār afterwards became so exceedingly wealthy that he had difficulty in storing his wealth.” (Russell 1916:15).

This story, though it testifies to the powers attributed to Aughaṛs acquired by them precisely because of their practices that disgusts others, appears to be a part of a colonial fable told and retold many a times since its publication first in the “Panjab Notes and Queries, iii, 75” (Crooke 1896:172, n. 1) such that it acquires a life of its own, for we find an almost exact instance of it cited by Crooke about twenty years earlier:

... a curious story is told of a man who went to bathe in the Ganges, and met one of the abominable Faqīrs known as Augars or Aghorpanthis.... He saw the Faqīr cut off and eat a piece of the flesh of a corpse, and he then offered him a piece, saying that if he ate it he would become enormously rich. He refused the ghastly food, and the Faqīr then threw a piece at him which stuck to his head, forming a permanent lump. (1896:171-2)

In the light of the “civilizing the savages” tone that colonial administrators used while dealing with Aughaṛs, it is difficult to find accounts that are not disparaging towards them. Yet, we can glean a sentence here and a statement there, to put together a jigsaw puzzle that seems to have been let out almost subconsciously by these writers. For example, Reverend Sherring mentions cryptically that “Hindus of all castes may enter the order” (1872:269), thus testifying to the egalitarian world-view of the Aughaṛs, which probably made them even more despised by the Brahman informants of the colonial administrators. Balfour lends further credence to this egalitarian idea by quoting his informant Aughaṛ, Moti Nath: “I now receive food from every caste and tribe, and have

no caste prejudices, I can eat from everyone's hand." (1897:345). Regarding their spiritual practices and philosophy, Barrow cites:

One authority is of the opinion that originally the true Aghoris were a superior sect, of very holy saints "possessed of miraculous powers..." and continues,

Another learned person, Pandit Rama Shankar Misra, is of opinion that the reason why in former times the true Aghori resorted to the burning ghats was in proof of his indifference to worldly things and the desire of meditating on the vanity of worldly matters... (1893:216).

If we omit the disparaging negative adjectives, this is what Oman, almost grudgingly, mentions:

Strange as it may seem ... habits of the *Aghori* are a direct and legitimate ... outcome of a desire to push the pantheistic doctrines of the Vedanta philosophy to their logical conclusions in a certain direction. "If everything in existence is only a manifestation of the Universal Soul, nothing can be unclean!" So argues the *Aghorpanthi*, and he proves the uncompromising sincerity of his convictions by his ... acts. (Oman 1903:165).

Barrow lets out information about not so disgusting Aghoras by giving examples like:

On rare occasions the Aghorpanthi presents himself in a more amiable light, as when he contents himself with honest milk diet, thus:-- a grihastha of Junagad relates that an Aghorpanthi used to visit the grihastha's grand-father's house and ask for goras, i.e. a vessel of curds." (Barrow 1893:214).

Tod, in the account where he relates a Deora chief's story of an Aghor asking for a corpse saying that "it would make excellent *chatni*," continues, "He added, that they were not actually accused of killing people." (Tod 1971:84). This statement is worth noting because even though Sanskrit dramas are full of accounts of marauding cremation ground practitioners, the liminal nature of Aghor *sāadhanā*, as I discuss below, logically and philosophically, does not fit with killing a human being in so far as it endeavors to tame and internalize the cremation ground, not create it, although there is a whole plethora of Tantrik practices where sacrifices of various kinds are integral to the ritual.

So we have, now, two contrasting pictures from the writings of colonial scholars and administrators. On the one hand we see the Agharṣ disparaged and discredited in the strongest words because of their antinomian practices, and on the other, we see concessions being made towards them for the strictest interpretation and execution of a very trying spiritual practice, as also evidence that they are not all fearsome, nor all the time. Barrow's essay contains many instances of descriptions of court cases where Agharṣ were brought into court only for being a public nuisance or for desecration of grave sites, and many who were brought to court in the garb of an Agharṣ were simply imposters. He states "The *Aghoris, Aghorpanthis, and kindred sects* long continued to terrorise the people in different parts of India..." (Barrow 1893:205, emphasis added), and then again "... it would seem that Aghars are considered to be a respectable class, while Aghorapanthis are universally detested." (1893:219) A few pages down, he mentions again "From various causes the practices of Aghoris, Aghoripanthis, Kápálikas, Paramhansas, Bauls, and Báhikathas have been confounded one with another..." (1893:226). All these descriptions point to a state of confusion about who the writers were really talking about, and whether the statements given to them were based on fear or fancy by their timid, or ingratiating informants. As Douglas declares, "Fables, superstitions and extravagance. It does not require such monsters to exist, for the genius of the poet in all countries and ages will soon create them." (1893:358)

Gupta makes an interesting distinction between Agharṣ and Aghoris (1993:18). Citing Briggs in the Gorakhnath context who mentions an Agharṣ to be a Gorakhnathi initiate who has not achieved the status of a *kānpḥaṭa* (split ears) yogi (1982[1938]:31, 71), Gupta writes, "Not all *agghars* are *agghorīs*" (1993:17), continuing further, "any

*aughar* might for various reasons become an *aghorī*” (1993:18). The distinction here is between the most radical practices of the Aghori as compared to more benign practices of the Aughar. This further illustrates the internal distinctions between these ascetics, because Briggs also mentions, again in the Gorakhnath context, “Āughars of all *panths* (paths) are constantly met with... and have no intention of ever having their ears split.” (Briggs 1982[1938]:31). There is an interesting poem in *Aughar Bābā Gāilā Nū*, which sheds light on this distinction, and relates the one specific practice which is a hallmark of the particular practitioner:

Shiva asks Kali, where is Aughar,  
Kali replies to Shiva.  
Those who are Aughar, roam with the eternal spirits,  
Those who are Kāpālikas, are with their beloved women.  
Those who are Aghori must be sifting through the cosmos somewhere,  
That who was Ram was sold (fell in love with) at the place of Kina.  
Bhagwan Ram remained at my own place,  
[He is] an Aughar, he went to the cremation ground.  
Shiva asks Kali, where is Aughar. (Samoo 2003 *Vikram Samvat*:19).<sup>7</sup>

This poem is illustrative, if not in enunciating peas in a pod, at least in marking birds of a feather. Thus Aughar, Aghori and Kāpālika appear as three related categories, with practitioners crossing boundaries seamlessly according to the needs of *sādhanā*. It represents a fluid identity and therefore, perhaps, sheds some light on why it is so difficult to categorize Aughar.

Some of the narrative provided by Barrow is telling in its evidence of the creation of a “boogey-man.” His respectable source, Mr. Kedarnath Basu, Editor of the *Universe*, Berhampur, near Murshidabad, recommended enquiries into the “black deeds connected with the religion of the Aghoris” (Barrow 1893:228) based on the fear his friend and tutor Babu Khirodechandra Rai Choudhuri, M. A., experienced while visiting Delhi. This is how the story goes. While on a visit to Delhi, Mr. Rai Choudhuri entered a room at the

Ferozeshah-Kotla grounds (used nowadays for political rallies) where a lamp was burning and there were flowers and vermilion in the room. He had recently read a work of fiction, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel *Kapālakundalā* (1866, about a fearsome *Kāpālikā*), and so he felt fearful in the room. On consultation with residents in the city he was told it *could* have been a meeting place of Aghoris or dacoits. It was on the basis of that fear that he wrote to his friend, the editor of the *Universe*, who made a recommendation about making enquiries into the activities of the Agharṣ! However, the colonial accounts do, occasionally, mention those informers who knew something about Agharṣ, and who did corroborate to the merits of their practices, as also the fact that the fascination that the ruling elite had for their powers, was not fictional.

It is curious to note that in all this plethora of vitriolic diatribe one writer, James Douglas, is never quoted, because he did not agree with the prevalent views on cannibalism and the Agharṣ's role in it. With a novelist's penchant he writes:

But what we wish to impress on the reader is the fact that, among Europeans, Herodotus was the first to paint India black with cannibalism. He did not know India as he knew Egypt.... All that he has put together he has gathered by hearsay. He was never nearer to India than Babylon on the Euphrates, and even the India which he knew only from skippers or traders down the Gulf, or pilgrims to the black stones of Mecca, was a limited India... (1893:355)

On Agharṣ, specifically, he writes:

Our great authority on the Aghori is Tod, "the worthy and genial Colonel James Tod" of Dr. Wilson. Tod died at the early age of fifty-three.... This was in 1835. He had been eighteen years in Rajputana, made the acquaintance of the Williams, the Resident of Baroda, and from him heard of the Aghori. Williams only knew of the facts here stated as they were given to him by hearsay, and Tod knew nothing of his own knowledge.... A man writing in 1835 of what another man told him in 1822 took place in 1808, might easily give the wrong date (which may have been 1812, a year of famine) (1893:358-9).

Tod, apparently did meet an Agharṣ, and the memory of that experience never left him. It happened on a climb to the Girnar mountain, where he saw "the Aghori heaving

forth the outpouring of the spirit before the shrine of Gorakha..." (Douglas 1893:359). Tod's own description of that event is fairly tame, there is nothing horrifying about it at all, although his mention of the ascetic in question crying out "*Aluc! Aluc!*" (1971:386) in all likelihood refers to the "alakh, alakh" that is a trademark cry of Gorakhnathis, not necessarily all Aghars. On that climb Tod did not make it to the Kalika peak, the farthest on Girnar mountain, where the Aghars were supposed to live. Of course, "heaving forth the outpouring of the spirit" is no crime, and certainly not antinomian, but Tod, perhaps just like the impressionable Mr. Khirodechandra Rai Choudhuri, M. A., mentioned above, was quite inexplicably impressed by it. Douglas describes Tod's visit in a tongue in cheek manner, which, from one colonial writer on another, though long, is pretty readable:

The region to which the reader will now accompany us is that of Kachh and Kathiawar, the fertile parent of so many prodigies. Girnar, near Junagadh, from time immemorial has been the abode of the Aghori, and Tod resolved to visit the seven-peaked mountain. It is in truth a wild and desolate region—wilder and weirder by the gloomy associations with which it is invested: "Antars vast and deserts idle. Rough quarries, rocks and hills whose heads touch heavens." It is a stiff climb of over 3000 feet, but he did it and went over the Jain temples. The peak of Kalka, which the Aghori are said to haunt, is separated from the point which Tod visited by a deep valley—the Valley of the Shadow of Death—and I am not surprised that neither Tod (1822), Dr. Wilson (1835), Dr. Burgess (1869), Andrew Wilson (1875), Dr. Campbell (1888), nor Dr. Codrington (1890), paid it a visit. There are limits to human endurance. Tod fevered and his feet failed him; Dr. Wilson was too anxious to get down to the stone of Asoka: he never even mentions the Aghori, leaving them to his more imaginative son, who was never very good about the legs; Dr. Codrington, -- the subject completely escaped his mind when on Girnar; and Burgess, stout hill climber as he is, reached the Dattatraya peak, about 400 feet above the Kamandala Kunda, near sunset, too late to go farther... For us therefore the Aghori and Kalka are the vultures on their eyrie or veritable Tower of Silence on which the foot of European apparently has never trod—an uncanny spot when so many men have refrained from paying it a visit. He who furnishes us with an account of the unexplored Kalka will deserve honorable mention. (1893:860-1)

It is not only because of writing like this that Douglas does not get mentioned in the hallowed colonial halls of writings on Agharḥ, it is also because of his theory that cannibalism, if practiced in India, was a result of famines. This theory of his has not held favor with the writers of that time, neither can I agree with him, although, given the state of confusion presented here about who an Agharḥ really is, it is possible that such confusion got even more confounded during the times of famines.

#### Modern Writings and News Articles:

Let us look now at the present day media portrayal of what the media terms Agharḥ. A news report in the popular Hindi daily *Nai Dunia* titled “Fake Babas Make a Killing on Holi”<sup>8</sup> presents a juxtaposition of terminology which appears confusing in the absence of elaboration, and therefore makes a good jumping point for my analysis:

On the occasion of the Holi festival the business of Agharḥ Babas who deceive in the name of Tantra-Mantra is in full swing. Everyone is focused on celebrating Holi in their own way. It is an old tradition to embrace even enemies on Holi. Inspired these days by this belief, students fearful of examinations and lovers unsuccessful in one-sided affairs are resorting to Tantra-Mantra so that they may be able to play Holi to their heart’s content with their dream girl.

Reading advertisements posted in newspapers and walls of the city almost daily, well educated seniors as well as young folks are being beguiled by these Tantriks...

Sources report that the festival of Holi is being publicized in a slanted way, as a day when everything can be achieved through Tantra-Mantra... those who practice Tantra-Mantra make people fearful and extort money from them... when a youth goes to these fake Tantriks to learn... he is taught such difficult processes that he cannot fulfill them easily... (Rathod 2009, Metro Rang, March 9:1, my translation).

Another article in the *Hindustan Dainik* newspaper has the title “Even Tantriks are Active in the Election Season”<sup>9</sup> (Rawat 2009:11) with a subtitle in red: “Aghoris are guaranteeing victory!” The article goes on to describe Tantriks and how they are transacting with politicians. We get several interesting words here juxtaposed

indiscriminately: Aughar, Tantrik, practitioners of Tantra-Mantra, fake, deceivers, extortionists! This description of Aughar is a far cry from the sublime spiritual practices ascetics of all creed and kind are thought to pursue.<sup>10</sup> Nor is there a dearth of sensational shows in the media, especially on Z-TV, which sometime back, ran a show titled “Kāl-Kapāl-Mahākāl” (lit. Time/Death-Skull-God of death/Eternal time). Shows like this feed the popular hunger for magical solutions to life’s problems through skulls, bones and quick rituals in the cremation ground. Just the thought of being in a cremation ground in the dead of the night sends people’s hearts racing, keeping them glued to the TV for the next episode of the bizarre.

In marked contrast to this picture, here is another one from *Aghor Medicine* where lay people *do* testify to the positive efficacy of Aghor:

Lakshmi, a young college student... asserted that “whatever god has written, only the Aghori can defy that.” Rohit, a retired schoolteacher... spoke with similar confidence: “One hundred [people] are not one hundred [people] for them.... And by *sādhanā* they can even tame one hundred dead bodies... Nothing is impossible for them.” (Barrett 2008:132).

Now this sounds like an exact opposite of the earlier news item about the deceiving Aghoris. To make my point stronger, let me provide another quote, from Parry:

By his various observances the Aghori acquires *siddhi*, or supernatural powers, which give him mastery over the phenomenal world and the ability to read thoughts. If he is sufficiently accomplished he can cure the sick, raise the dead, and control malevolent ghosts. He can expand or contract his body to any size or weight, fly through the air, appear in two places at once, conjure up the dead and leave his body and enter into another. (Parry 1985:61)

How is it that presumably the same category of people are presented in two – diametrically opposite – ways? Or do we have here two very different categories of people somehow coalesced together in confused journalistic language? It raises a fundamental question: are Tantra, Mantra, and rituals associated with the cremation

ground a part of the sublime quest for the divine, or are they simply a tool for another kind of, if somewhat exotic, livelihood. If it is just another kind of livelihood with an ingrained profit motive, then do its practitioners merit the title of a true Aghor seeker pursuing genuine, sublime, spiritual *sāadhanā*, for it is as a spiritual seeker that classical Sanskrit literature portrays them, and this is the understanding that *sādhaks* (seekers) I interviewed have about themselves. If it is just another means of exotic livelihood, it amounts to no more than a certain facility with ways and means of manipulating presumed spirits, ghosts and other ilk of ethereal beings, a notion that can be likened to training a dog to fetch. If there exists greed for money or social recognition, can the practitioners really be called true ascetics?

Once we have made this distinction -- between the *sāadhanā* for a genuine spiritual quest, the hallmark of renunciate asceticism -- and the rituals of a contractual magico-social relation in a Van Gennepian sense, whether they be sympathetic or contagious (Van Gennep 1960:14) do we begin to understand, partially, why the media cannot distinguish between those who are contractual technicians of the cremation ground magical rituals, popularly branded as Tantriks in India, and the true Aghor renunciate who, ideally, should not be found flaunting his transgressive practices in front of the camera because of one simple reason -- they are transgressive practices! Those practices are guarded closely, and confined to the realm of the cremation ground. They pertain only to the advancement of the renunciate's spiritual quest, not for gaining fame and money by acting as bizarre clowns in the social realm which the renunciate is supposed to have relinquished. I am reminded of the story narrated to me by Chaman Munim, one of my prolific informants about Sarkar Baba's early life, of one Lahari Baba who came to

Sarkar Baba seeking initiation. Sarkar Baba stalled him for a long time, but when he saw that Lahari Baba was fixated on the initiation, he initiated him, and with that imparted certain minor *siddhis* (miraculous powers) to spur him on his quest. That did not turn out to be a boon for Lahari Baba who soon became egotistic and began to display his powers in public like a circus. Ultimately, to preserve his *sāadhanā* as well as the dignity of the ascetic's way of life, Sarkar Baba took those powers away.

Often, because of certain external commonalities, it is not easy to distinguish a genuine Aghar monk based just on their outer form, thus confusing them with other Tantra-based practitioners. Let us consider this point for a moment. During the period of their ascetic practices Aghars are supposed to wear a red *laṅgoṭī* (lower undergarment), and a black robe (Chaturvedi 1973:53-54). They are also required to smear their bodies with ashes from the cremation ground. They can also wear the shroud from a corpse as a robe. A red *laṅgoṭī* indicates celibacy and the practice of *brahmacarya* (sexual abstinence) and is, therefore, not exclusive to Aghars. Other ascetic mendicants and Tantra practitioners, as well as wrestlers in various parts of India use it too. A black robe, unlike a saffron robe for Hindu monks, is more specialized, but again, there are other ascetics, such as Tantra worshippers of Goddess Dhumavati who use it too (Tantrik 2005). Smearing their bodies with ashes is practiced also by Gorakhnathis and other yogis who want to emulate the lifestyle of their chosen God, Shiva. Since a lot of other Tantra practitioners conduct their practices in the cremation ground, it is easy to mistake an Aghar ascetic as an ordinary Tantra practitioner.

Sarkar Baba was well aware of the way media and popular imagination conceives of Aghars. Lest his disciples become swayed by such criticism, he says in *Aghor Guru*

*Guh*:

Listening to the call of his conscience and getting inspired by it if a noble person these days undertakes some program of social welfare, then people of perverse and uncontrolled minds and weak character, some managers of magazines and newspapers and their dependents, begin to evaluate such noble people also by the standards of ignoble persons, even though they may have nothing to do with these noble people or their social program. Without analyzing or investigating the relevant and important facts from the point of view of healthy journalism, without understanding or evaluating them holistically, these people begin to malign the devotion, intention, and character of these enthusiastic noble people, and indulge in their character assassination. Darshi! Noble persons are not affected by this, but by the interruptions of such baseless, unexpected, unreasonable attacks, nice people who put their first step on this good path can become demoralized and lose hope. (SSS 1982:88)

He then elaborates upon his notion of the weak character, with sardonic humor:

Darshi! You may ask what is the reason for this? Look, a person who is weak, also has a weak vision. You must have noticed that a person with a weak vision does not see clearly. He sees a red cloth as yellow, yellow cloth as red, and green cloth as yellow. In the same way persons of a weak speech, in the absence of a store of proper and relevant words, take the support of improper words to hide this shortcoming of theirs. You have seen that a person with a weak hearing does not hear clearly. They hear very different from what is said. It is natural for them to think wrong about the things they have heard wrong in the first place. (SSS 1982:88-89)

He then stresses the need for maintaining equanimity while following a path of social service, with a double meaning reference to the custom of singing “invectives” at marriage ceremonies in Bihar, India:

Son Darshi! We should not become swayed from the standards of our ideal conduct and duty because of such misuse of words by newspapers and magazines, authors or misguided people. We will not have to take recourse to feelings of either agitation or revenge. We will have to keep a benevolent sentiment towards the bantering of such people, as is done for the invectives that are sung on the occasion of wedding ceremonies. The person who can do this – and does it, lives the ideal life of a true saint, keeping his mind and heart in balance. (SSS 1982:89)

Sarkar Baba stressed the need for not being swayed by criticism because, apropos of the discussion above, clubbing together of Aghar and Tantrik in the Indian conception, is an easy step, achieved by the confusion of the distinction between the two. We need, therefore, to sort out the connection between Tantra and Tantriks, as well as between Tantra and Aghars, to have a clearer picture of the issue.

### **Tantra**

Tantra is a sacred system of spiritual awakening (Chattopadhyaya 1959; White 2000; Flood 2007). It is also antinomian (Kripal 1995; Urban 2001, 2003). Although scholars may have clubbed many different streams of Tantra into one catch-all phrase of the “Tantric tradition,” it is also true that significant internal distinctions exist within this tradition (Dyczkowski 1988:3). The ramifications of this system are such that it can be used in a myriad of ways, and it can be interpreted in a million ways. While there are numerous texts on Tantra, it is primarily a system of practice and practical experience, a system of action, not merely contemplation (Rawson 1988:14). It incorporates the use of wine, meat and sex (Chaturvedi 1973, Parry 1985, Urban 2003), and one of its facets includes practices of the cremation ground, which are regarded as transgressive and antinomian, and thus, lead to numerous interpretations, some expressing disgust, some wonder. Given the scope, vitality and variation of this system it is extremely difficult to define what Tantra really is, but valiant efforts have been made to that end. I quote below a good definition that White provides for Tantra:

Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that

universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways. (2000:9)

For consideration of Tantra in relation to Aghar I will draw attention to two points that stand out in this definition. One is the “ritual appropriation of divine energy within the human microcosm,” the other is its channeling in “creative and emancipatory ways.” Both Aghar and Tantriks seek to influence the divine energy through their practices. In that sense, Aghar are practitioners of Tantra, and by that logic, Tantriks, same as other practitioners of Tantra. It is in the goal of channeling that energy in creative and emancipatory ways that the difference lies. In Western scholarship we don’t necessarily talk in terms of the term – Tantrik. We talk of “practitioners of Tantra,” as different from, say the practitioners of Yoga. When the word Tantrik is used in Western scholarship, it is used as a value neutral term. In the popular imagination of the West, on the other hand, Tantriks are regarded as masters of sacred sexuality (Bullis 1998; Carpenter 2002), which is not the picture that Indians hold in their mind of them. In India, the term Tantrik has a specific connotation -- as a small time magic maker at best and a sorcerer at worst -- available for hire for monetary compensation. For contractual acts as described in the news items cited above, it is generally the Tantriks who will be the foremost suspect.

From an ascetic point of view an Aghar who just boasts of his Tantrik practices for non-emancipatory goals will be no different than the Tantrik who channels those energies for the same purposes. A true Aghar seeker, on the other hand, will have only one goal for his practices – unequivocal emancipation. Doing practices in the cremation ground then, is not just a theatrical act, or a one-time act, for that seeker. It is a way of life, it is his identification, it is what he is. He is an *Aghar masān* (an Aghar like the

cremation ground) or *masānī Aughar* (an Aughar of the cremation ground). True Tantrik seekers who have non-material, salvific goals in mind will, in that sense, have the same higher purpose that an Aughar has, but they may not necessarily identify themselves with the cremation ground in a total and complete manner. It is a matter of “internal self-definition” (Davidson 2002:179). Perhaps it is because of this reason that Sarkar Baba used to say, “*Aghar lōg Tāntrik nahīm hōtē, lēkin Tāntrik lōg unsē salāh lētē haē*” (Aghars are not Tantriks, but Tantriks do consult with them). (Personal Communication, September 8, 1988).

Given the antinomian formulation of Tantra, as a group of ascetics Aughar define themselves as walking embodiments of Shiva himself (Samoo 1984:10, Parry 1985:62), that ultimate fount of all divine transgressions. Like Shiva, the quintessential ascetic in Hindu thought, they inhabit cremation grounds, wander freely clad in the ashes of the cremation ground or scanty clothes, are prone to use intoxicants in meditation just as Shiva does, do not subscribe to the distinctions of, or discriminate between, pure and impure, high and low, Brahman or Shudra, love or hate, profit or loss, possess nothing except what the cremation ground provides for them, use a skull as well as their own excrement during their *sāadhanā* period, and live a life of absolute freedom. Being a part of the culture of cremation ground asceticism (Flood 2007), Aughar are not attracted by society and so, by extension, the views held by society towards them also do not interest them. Such an Aughar is a seeker, not a Tantrik, in terms of popular categorization.

My discussion of genuine ascetic practice as opposed to profit-motive generated ritual acts in the larger context of the relationship between Aghor and Tantra is not unfounded. The distinction between genuine spiritual practice and fake spiritual

posturing are important to understand for both lay people as well as anthropologists. This issue becomes even more important, or perhaps vexing, because within the categories of Tantra and Aghor it becomes difficult to draw the line between that which is genuine and that which is fake. Tantra generally and Aghor specifically are categories that have been occupied by both kinds of practitioners over time. As my discussion above illustrates, Tantra and Aghor have become ascribed over time with an inbuilt ambiguity where understanding the true nature of a practitioner requires the kind of anthropological study I am pursuing in this dissertation. Only with prolonged association with an Aghor or Tantrik can one discern whether they are genuinely spiritual or not. I quote Marshall Sahlins (1987) to understand this issue better. Talking about the notion of contradiction in a system or structure he writes:

Notably it entails a departure from the Sussurean principle of system as a purely synchronic state, a set of mutually contrasting, thus mutually defining, relations between signs on the plane of simultaneity... The structure has an internal diachrony, consisting in the changing relations between general categories or, as I say, a “cultural life of the elementary forms.” In this generative unfolding... the basic concepts are taken through successive stages of combination and recombination, along the way producing novel and synthetic terms... The Fijian king appears both as male and female; his ritual and political nature is dual, or contextually one or the other... it seems a “permanent ambiguity” or “inherent contradiction” of the system. Yet from the standpoint of a diachronic structure, it is a derivative effect, both principled and logical. There is a more general notion of structure, necessarily temporal, by which the contradiction is at once resolved and rendered intelligible (Sahlins 1987:xv-xvi).

And further:

...one can then account for the genesis of the contradictions precisely as partial or situational views on the global order, *taken from some interested standpoint* (either by the ethnographer or the people). It becomes clear that any given proportion (A:B:C:D) is a *partial and interested statement of the structure*. It assumes some determinate spectator or subject in a determinate relation to the cultural totality. (Sahlins 1987:xvi, emphasis added).

In my opinion it is this “partial or situational view” which gives us these diverse descriptions of the Agharṣ and Tantriks, for the stated views are entirely dependent upon the perspective from which the author is stating their point. The journalist writing about Agharṣ has a particular and interested standpoint, of perhaps making the news item more readable by putting in the sensational element of Agharṣ in it while I, as an interested ethnographer, am more focused on the value-neutral and diachronic aspects of it. This diachronical, temporal development of the category of Aghor will become even more apparent in the following section on liminality as well as in the next chapter as I discuss the relations of the Aghor tradition with those of the Naths, Sufis and Buddhists across historical time.

As a further elaboration of the partial or situational view, it will not be out of place here to mention that transgressive behavior has its own social merit when socially accepted, in defined spheres of activity. A soldier's violent actions on the battlefield are not transgressive because they are socially approved, and even more so, expected. Death, and the expectation of death, turns the battlefield into a *mahā-śmaśān* (a great cremation ground) where the threshold of life is crossed for a larger social good. However, the same kind of behavior outside of the battlefield, say in the domestic sphere, will not only be socially transgressive, it will be antisocial. Clearly there exist two different contexts of behavior. One is the domestic, socially ordained context of behavior and practice which we all practice in our daily lives, and the other is the context of behavior and practice to which ascetics of the cremation ground adhere. That is the reason why Aghor practices are referred to as *guhya sādhanā* (secret practices), and they are not broadcast to

the general public at all. When it *is* broadcast to the general public for material gain, it creates the kind of confusion we see in the newspaper articles quoted above.

I stress this because there exists a whole culture of cremation ground practices that can be applied not only to Aughar ascetics, but, as evidenced by our discussion so far, also to other practitioners of the Tantrik system such as the Vajrayan Buddhists (Changchub and Nyingpo 2002), Gorakhnathis (Briggs 1982), Odiyyas (Bhairavan 2000), Sarabhangis (Shastri 1959:9, 98), Vaishnava saints (McDaniel 1989) or other Shaiva or Shakta ascetics such as Ramakrishna Paramhansa (Kripal 1995:61). June McDaniel cites examples of several Vaishnava saints who employed marked Aghor-type of practice in their lifestyle at one point or another:

Siddha Gaur Kisora Das Babaji would wear cloth taken from corpses and worship in an outhouse; he used rejected pots and drank from old clay cups, and hid from disciples at a prostitute's house... Radharaman Caran Das had a death festival for his dog, Bhakta Ma. (1989:77)

McDaniel also writes about Ramakrishna Paramahansa:

He continued to throw earth and money into the Ganges (because he regarded both as worthless), and he took leavings of the poor, cleaned outhouses with his hands, and ate the excrement of others. He could not keep his clothing on. (1989:96)

Even websites devoted to the tradition of Shirdi Sai Baba portray ascetics who set up residence in the cremation ground<sup>11</sup>. However, since they are not identified as Aghor ascetics, these practices of theirs are not focused upon. A somewhat unusual reference can be stated of the Sikh warrior and martyr Baba Banda Singh Bahadur (1670-1718) who met an Aughar and learnt at least magic, from him:

... he came to Nasik, on the banks of the river Godavari. There he entered the hermitage of an old *Jogi* named Aughar Nath. He became his disciple. From Aughar Nath he learned the art of working magic and miracles... He spent his time in practicing *Jogic* exercises and developing magical powers. (Shall 2004).

Thus we see that as long as these two contexts of behaviors and practices remain separate, socially appropriate in the domestic context and transgressive in a liminal context, they can co-exist in juxtaposition to each other, albeit with some tension. It is when the two come together that we have either fodder for awe inspiring stories and legends, or criticisms and defense of the transgressive practices. From this point of view, it is perhaps unfair to criticize critics of this tradition because they have done what Tantra based practices want them to do, that is, consider these practices as antinomian. As Kripal writes, "Tantra defines itself as anticulture... for the moment it is accepted it loses its salvific power to free the aspirant from his or her social conditionings and becomes itself a conditioning." (Kripal 1995:244). However, that which is antinomian, is antinomian in relation to an established or accepted moral order of the society at large. Herein arises a quandary. Parry has pointed out the contradiction that exists amongst ascetics of south Asia, that while they need to renounce the world to follow their spiritual goal, they must, still, seek alms from householders for subsistence. This contradiction is resolved in the Aghar's lifestyle because:

His loincloth is a shroud, his fuel the charred wood of the pyres, his food human refuse. By scavenging from the dead (who have no further use for what he takes), the Aghori escapes the clutches of the living, and in theory at least realizes the ascetic ideal of complete autonomy. (Burghart and Cantlie 1985:67)

### **Liminality**

This ideal of complete autonomy, naturally, impinges on the notion of the human condition in general, and the notion of the human as a civilized being living in homes, habitations and communities which are, by definition, social. How do the practices of an Aghar relate to this? Sarkar Baba used to say, "*Aghar aur ghar ke hote haē*" (Aghars

belong to a different house) (Ram 1992:77). What does *aur ghar* mean in his statement, and why is it important to our discussion? Especially when we consider that the word *ghar* means home or house, and renunciate ascetics are not supposed to possess either. I think it refers not only to Aghor practices as different from renunciates of other traditions in Hinduism, but to a whole different conceptualization of belongingness in the universe which resonates of what Jesus means when he says “My Father’s house has many rooms” (John 14:2). The expression “many rooms” has been variously translated as “many dwelling places,” “many mansions,” “rooms enough,” “many abodes,” “many resting-places” and “many homes”. Of these, the terms “dwelling places” and “abodes” in an otherworldly sense come very close, in my opinion, to what Sarkar Baba means by the term “other house.” The term “otherworldly” is necessarily ambiguous in so far as it can imply the popular expression of exclamation “out of this world!” – as situated on a plane of existence all its own, incomparable to any other plane of existence, – or it can mean a world which is non-physical, or non-human, in the sense of being divine or ethereal. This ambiguous notion of “otherworldly” refers, in my opinion, to a value system which has a deep structure, a structure which can be understood through the notion of “liminality” as described by Turner (1967:93-111), elaborating on Arnold van Gennep’s (1960) idea of the *rites of passage*. I suspect the confusion about what an Aghar really is stems from their liminal persona. To illustrate my point let me start with a few dictionary definitions, and then discuss Turner’s statements on what liminality means. The Oxford English Dictionary Online (2007) defines “liminal” as “Of or pertaining to the threshold or initial stage of a process.” and marks it by the adjective “rare.” The Canadian Oxford Dictionary provides further insight by defining it as “a transitional or initial stage;” which

is the same as the Oxford English Dictionary definition, but further adds to it as “marginal, insignificant;” and “occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold” (Barber 1998). From the Canadian Oxford Dictionary, the first and the last definitions, especially the last one, are significant for our discussion because they situate Aghaṛs across boundaries in a dynamic way, rather than placing them at the boundary with a unidirectional movement.

In his seminal work on Ndembu rituals Turner considers the sociocultural properties of liminality. I quote several lines from his chapter titled “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*” (Turner 1967:93-111):

1. ““Liminality” as an interstructural situation ... that concretely express indigenous concepts about the nature of “interstructural” human beings.” (1967:93)
2. “...concern entry into a new achieved status, whether this be a political office or membership of an exclusive club or secret society... membership of a religious group where such a group does not include the whole society...” (1967:95)
3. “...initiation rites, whether into social maturity or cult membership, best exemplify transition, since they have well marked and protracted marginal or liminal phases.” (1967:95)
4. “A set of essentially religious definitions... define the structurally indefinable “transitional being.” The transitional-being or “liminal *persona*” is defined by a name and by a set of symbols.” (1967:95)
5. “The structural “invisibility” of liminal *personae* has a twofold character. They are at once no longer classified and not yet classified. In so far as they are no longer classified, the symbols that represent them are... drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism, and other physical processes that have a negative tinge...” (1967:96)
6. “Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.” (1967:97)
7. “...liminal *personae* nearly always and everywhere are regarded as polluting to those who have never been, so to speak, “inoculated” against them, through having been themselves initiated into the same state.” (1967:97)
8. “We are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss liminality, but with the essentially unstructured which is at once destructured and prestructured and often the people themselves see this in terms of bringing

neophytes into close connection with deity or with superhuman power...”  
(1967:98)

9. “A further structurally negative characteristic of transitional beings is that they *have* nothing. ... Their condition is indeed the very prototype of sacred poverty.”  
(1967:98-99)

10. “The arcane knowledge or “*gnosis*” obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being.” (Turner1967:102)

Each one of the ten statements quoted above pertains directly to the public conception of an Aghar, but not all of them, I feel, are equally clear in their understandability in the Indian imagination owing to the Aghar’s association with the cremation ground. In so far as Van Gennep (1960) conceptualized the *rite of passage* as a phase, a temporary temporal event executed by the use of rituals, points one through five, as also nine, would apply not only to Aghars but to all neophytes into ascetism as they enter the tradition through the ritual of initiation. At the moment of initiation they become “interstructural” human beings, liminal *personae*, as they “die” to their earlier existence, but have not been fully integrated into the new one. They receive a new name, and a Mantra (sacred chant) to meditate upon, but they are still “destructured” in terms of communicating with deities or superhuman power (point number eight), what Hausner (2007:42) calls their state of physical and ritual vulnerability. Point number seven, about ritual pollution, holds true in the case of Aghars because their practices become associated with the cremation ground, and by that reckoning, are disturbing to the caste conceptualization of purity and pollution as well as to a caste Hindu person. Point six, about infinite potential holds true because as the neophyte Aghar becomes established in his practices the realm of possibilities open manifold, and point ten, about becoming a totally different being holds true not only at the time of initiation, but also as their personal practice concretizes over time. The gnosis that they achieve through their

practices is a permanent one, one that transforms their persona from being a normal human being to a supernormal, or even divine, human being. Add to this the dictionary meaning discussed above where, in public thought, Aghar̥s are regarded as traveling beyond bodies and communicating with gods and spirits on a regular basis, and we have an interstructural fluidity of movement across boundaries, leading to a liminal state which is not temporary, but in fact, permanent. Parry stresses the state achieved by an Aghar̥ through inversion of the normal caste ideology thus:

...we might also note the relationship which exists between liminal states, the suspension of the hierarchical structure of everyday life, and a stress on a vision of an unhierarchized and undifferentiated humanity. By contrast with that of the initiand in tribal society, the Aghoris liminality is permanent – and it is also of a somewhat extreme character. It is hardly surprising, then, that he should represent something of the equality which is generally associated with those liminal to the routinely ordered structure. (Parry 1985:69)

Having established the permanent socially liminal nature of the Aghar̥, there is still something missing in this description of liminality as applied to the Aghar̥s because the mechanics of this assumption of permanent liminality still need some clarification. Van Gennep's stipulation in *The Rites of passage* is a three stage process – “preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)” (Van Gennep 1960:11) – which then finally completes the entire rite of passage. Separation or dissociation happens to a person who becomes liminal, and it happens, together with incorporation or reintegration, in a specific period of time, the liminal time. So we have the idea of a limial *personae*, and we also have the notion of liminal time because of the transient nature of these initiatory rituals. However, my thesis is that popular perception towards the Aghar̥s treats their liminal state as a permanent one because of their intimate association with the cremation ground, and so, we need a third liminal category, that of liminal space. The idea of liminal space exists in

Van Gennep's (1960:15-25) writing on the "territorial passage," an idea which I think is crucial for gaining a better understanding of the Aghors. To elaborate on this idea I parallel my short analysis to the detailed analysis Endsjø (2000) makes of the rite of passage in the Heracles story. Briefly, he states that the *eschatia* (geographical periphery), lying between the Greek *polis* (city), the land of the living and the Hades, the land of the dead, paralleled the mid state in a rite of passage, as liminal space:

There were also a number of mythological ties between the *eschatia* and this ritual mid state, the most basic aspect of both of them consisting of a simultaneous being and non-being that entailed a sense of profound confusion of all proper categories. Placed not only betwixt and between the land of the dead and *polis* as the land of the living, but also between an Olympian and a chthonic divine sphere, the uncultivated geographical periphery represented an ambiguous and primordial landscape, where men had still not been distinguished from the realm of the gods, the animals, and the dead. As the geographical periphery thus was considered to reflect a primordial quality, the intermediate phase of various rites of passage was seen as the ritual imitation of this area. (Endsjø 2000:351).

In the Indian context, for heuristic purposes, we can substitute the *polis*, the land of the living, with the Indian village (Marriott 1955) together with caste-based notions of purity and pollution (Stevenson 1954:46-7), Hades, the land of the dead with notions of the *mrityulōka* (world of the dead) and *devalōka* (world of the gods), and *eschatia*, where the "ritual carrying out of the deceased" (Endsjø 2000:364) was conducted, with the cremation ground. The attitudes that a caste Hindu person has for the cremation ground are very similar to the descriptions of the way *eschatia* was seen by those in the *polis*, as indeed also in Sanskrit literature, where the reader will find, in chapter two, Bhavabhūti's Mādhava walking in the cremation ground infested with ghosts and goblins (Shastri 1998:215-7). In the Hindu instance, the cremation ground, literally, is the liminal space between the land of the living and land of the ancestors who have left their mortal frames, and it is reflected in the caste ideology of pollution that officiants of the cremation

ground are ascribed with. For a normal caste-Hindu person, a death in the family would put the family in a twelve day period of mourning (Parry 1985:53-54), a liminal stage, where the family members, once they have returned from the cremation ground, give up their old routine of life and the closest ones mimic the life of an ascetic by not shaving and sleeping on the floor. The soul of the deceased, in the meantime, makes a twelve day journey from the land of the living to the land of the dead, where, on the twelfth day, it gets established amongst the ancestors. For the twelve days of mourning, family members make food offerings to the departed soul to replenish it on its way to the land of the ancestors. Although the person's death can happen anywhere, the actual journey to the land of the ancestors begins with the ritual cremation rites at the cremation ground. The cremation ground, thus, equates the *eschatia* where the soul of the deceased person, before starting on its journey to the land of the ancestors, is in a liminal state – it is not alive, and so, not in the land of the living, and it is not yet incorporated amongst the ancestors, so it is in a vulnerable, and polluting state. It is equated as a “non-being,” a *preta*, a ghost. Any person who enters the cremation ground, by association with this “non-being,” becomes polluted. It is for this reason that regular officiants at the cremation ground are termed *cāndāla*, and regarded as most polluted. By the same token, an Aghar who resides in the cremation ground and partakes of its offerings is, similarly, in a polluted state according to caste ideology because, “to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world.” (Van Gennep 1960:20)

So, for an Aghar, in terms of *rites de passage*, the separation from the normal world occurs at the time of initiation. Transition starts with it as he pursues his *sādhanā*, especially in the cremation ground. But when it comes to aggregation back into the

social fold, unlike other *rites de passage*, it never happens! The Aughar, in a sense, gets aggregated into the cremation ground, or, at least, into the concept of a cremation ground. One could say the Aughar achieves this by *internalizing* the cremation ground, where the process includes cooking on the pyre, sleeping in the cremation ground amongst the dead, eating from a skull, wearing parts of the shrouds strewn about, sometimes even ritually ingesting the flesh burning on the pyres. Since the cremation ground itself is a liminal space, their identification with it, their internalization of it makes them permanently liminal too.

This process of internalizing the cremation ground has a very physical expression in the external cremation ground, as “awakening the cremation ground.” A publication of the Samooh, *Aughar Bābā Gāilā Nū* (Aughar Baba Sings) lists some of the *bhajans* (devotional songs) Sarkar Baba used to sing. One of them, “Hemavant ke Bitiyā” (daughter of the Himalaya) has these lines in poetry:

Daughter of the Himalaya, made even me beg for alms...  
 With a begging bowl, smearing ashes, she made even me wander in towns and markets.  
 Because of you I lived in the cremation ground, *eating the dead awakened the cremation ground*.  
 I became crazy for the world, daughter of the Himalaya...<sup>12</sup> (SSS 2023 Vikram Era:38, emphasis added, my translation).

The awakening, actually, is internal to the Aughar. When the Aughar has attained inner perfection by subduing his senses and becoming like a cremation ground, the cremation ground awakens to him and yields its secrets and powers to him. The inside and outside, then become one.

Their internalized aggregation into the cremation ground is reflected, for example, in how they view the world thereafter. As Sarkar Baba said:

There is no place holier than the cremation ground... The hearth-fires of many homes and cities goes out but the fire of the great cremation ground always keeps burning, always keeps accepting the oblation of the bodies of the dead. Because they neglect their life-force, fearful beings beset by illusions appear to be burning in the pyre of their own worries. (Shukla 1982:22)

To put it within the frame of the Heracles story, it reflects the potential as well as the confusion of space as did *eschatia*:

With its continuous confusion of human, divine and all other elements of the Greek cosmos, the space of the *eschatia* and everything that it enclosed had apparently escaped the primeval separation of the elements into proper categories. While various aspects of the cosmos once had been sorted out of the original flux, this area had remained as something like a primeval rest, forever ambiguous and paradoxical. (Endsjø 2000:378)

Further, what White says about the Tantric mandala applies to the Aghor conception of the cremation ground:

The key to understanding Tantric practice is the mandala, the energy grid that represents the constant flow of divine and demonic, human and animal impulses in the universe, as they interact in both constructive and destructive patterns... the mandala is a mesocosm, mediating between the great and small (the universal macrocosm and the individual microcosm), as well as between the mundane and the sublime (the protocosm of the visible world of human experience and the transcendent-yet-immanent metacosm that is its invisible fount). (2000:9)

From the perspective of cremation ground based practices, I argue that the cremation ground can be understood as a poignant point in the center of this cosmic mandala, which mediates all the ultimate hopes, desires and ambitions of the living beings, and then transports the energy inherent in them to metacosmic realms through the act of cremation. From the Aghor point of view it is a mandala within itself, a sacred and supercharged landscape where resides Mahākāl (ultimate time or godhead), taking the oblation of dead bodies through the crematory fire, thus internalizing them into subtle dimensions.

It also makes the Aughaṛ ascetic integral to the mandala of the cremation ground, existing in total dependence to this field of energies, interacting with them while also internalizing them. It is this interaction with the energy forces of the cremation ground which accords *siddhis* (miraculous powers), to the Aughaṛ practitioner. Once their communication with these energy forces becomes natural and constant, they view the entire creation as a vast cremation ground where living beings keep burning constantly in the fire of their own desires and ambitions, and the need to be physically present in the cremation ground no longer exists. This constant state is recognized to remain with them whether they are present in the actual cremation ground or not. As *masānī Aughaṛs* (Aughaṛs of the cremation ground) their powers and perceptions are not destroyed even if they revert back to an ashram based way of life.

Recapitulating our earlier discussion of the social representations of Aghor, we see that both the contexts, historical as well as contemporary society ones, thus present us with the image of an Aughaṛ ascetic who has, through his or her practices while living in the cremation ground, acquired the ability to accept all that is considered impure and defiled by society, and to transform it into something that is wholesome, for our analysis, something for the social good. This notion of the transgressive Aughaṛ ascetic who, because of these transgressions has the power to handle elements which other ascetics cannot, is very much a part of the understanding of Hindu society, and most starkly evident in the city of Banaras, just as the legend of Nīlakanṭha Shiva<sup>13</sup> portrays him as drinking poison so that the gods and demons could rest at peace. It is this social recognition of the powers of the Aughaṛs to intercede on behalf of humans, their ability to assimilate and transform that which is regarded as most vile and polluting socially, which

brings to us this alternate image of the Aghors. In this view, they appear not as fearsome, transgressive ascetics of the cremation ground, but in fact accessible ascetics living in ashrams, working for the social good.

It is pertinent in this discussion of liminality to point out that Aghors are not the only ones to work with the cremation ground, or artifacts of death, to attain the constant companionship of the supernatural. It is a phenomenon that extends from the small-scale aboriginal societies to those regarded as complex and modern. Anthropological literature mentions the Yanomami (Lizot 1991:26)<sup>14</sup> as grinding the bones of their dead and partaking of them to honor their dead. Paintings of Francisco de Zurbaran depict Christian monks, especially followers of St. Francis, holding a skull in their hand with devotional adoration in their eyes (Gallego 1977). Several churches in Italy display skulls in a glass box in open view (personal experience, 1992); the chapel of Evora in Spain has a famous “chapel of bones,” and churches in Poland carry remains of the saint who founded that particular church (personal communication from Polish friends, 1999). Celtic traditions certainly have lore of sacrifices and dead bodies in their mythology (Matthews 2002). Even a simple search on the Net using Google.com brings up pictures and references of churches with skulls as a motif on display<sup>15</sup>. The difference between these and Aghor practices, in my mind, lies in that they are not regarded as a system of belief and practice which is either transgressive, or antinomian.

While these examples are quite disparate, I cite them here to mark them as practices associated with human remains or the cremation ground in order to point to the ways artifacts associated with the dead may endow living users with supernatural powers. In a sense, handling skulls and bones, or meditating in a church displaying skulls and

bones, creates a meditative cremation ground where powers imbued within the spirit of the dead can be tapped more easily for social or spiritual goals. In the Hindu and Aghor context, it also inculcates a mental frame of detachment from the senses, since all living beings ultimately succumb to the same fate in their physical form. In a word, I assert that handling or meditating with artifacts relating to the dead, or in an area associated with the dead, not only creates a liminal space in the world of the living, it also attributes the practitioner with a liminal character, a certain kind of charisma, where their abilities become “transcendent” to normal human abilities. This charisma, this perception of super-human abilities then accords the practitioner with a certain “spiritual authority” where he can act as a leader to possibly effect social change.

It is thus this fluidity of movement across boundaries, which accords also to the Aghar ascetics a certain special kind of charisma when compared to monks of other traditions in India, and this charisma places them in an ideal position to be charismatic leaders, as Max Weber has discussed (Parsons 1947:358-363). As he states, “Charismatic authority is thus specifically outside the realm of everyday routine and the profane sphere.” (Parsons 1947:361). This notion of charismatic leadership, when juxtaposed with Turner’s notion of “not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being” (mentioned above), is a useful perspective when looking at the life of Baba Bhagawan Ram, and his efforts to effect social change.

### **Householder, Renunciate and Community**

Apropos Sarkar Baba’s statement discussed above, "*Aghar aur ghar ke hote haē*" (Aghars belong to a different house) we can discuss "*aur ghar*" also in the context of the notion of the renunciate *vis à vis* the householder, as also, a solitary renunciate as

opposed to a community based renunciate. Especially when we consider that the word *ghar* means home or house, and renunciate ascetics are not supposed to possess either. Discussing the idea of asceticism and the concomitant idea of a solitary renunciate, we are immediately faced with the dichotomy between a householder's and a renunciate monk's way of life. The first refers to the value system of the "normal" home and household-based, domestic society. The "other" is the value system of a philosophy where the monk gives up home and household, and which makes that renunciate monk roam in jungles, riverbanks, and cremation grounds. However, it is not merely the relinquishing of home and hearth which is in question here, it is the whole worldview and life-way that ensues on relinquishing the householder way of life. Classical Hindu texts postulate four pursuits for a man: *artha* (wealth), *dharma* (meritorious acts), *kāma* (erotic fulfillment) and *mokṣa* (liberation) corresponding with different phases of life. As such, these are categories of pursuits, and I am not sure if they were ever adhered to very strictly, or in that order. Although all four hold true for a householder, the pursuit especially of *artha*, *dharma* and *kāma* are especially relevant to them. This is because they indicate a life based on the senses and their gratification, as well as social duty and its fulfillment. For a renunciate, however, there is only one goal, that of *mokṣa*. This goal requires the renunciate to give up a life based on the senses and their gratification, and the whole mindset of transient ambitions that it entails, as well as the performance of social duties which are regarded as fetters. This goal is driven by absolute devotion to achieve the deity of one's desire, with the ultimate aim of becoming one with it, transcending transient ambitions. Therefore, the cultural ethos of pursuing *artha*, *dharma*, and *kāma* with the aim of begetting and tending a family which householders

pursue, is supposed to be totally absent from a true renouncer's life, otherwise the mindset of that monk will remain tied to transient ambitions (for a delightful discussion of this issue see Gold:1992).

Thus, the two value systems, though juxtaposed, are mutually exclusive. One believes in living a 'normal' life, even if it portends a life of endless bondage, either to senses or to social customs, the other relates to renunciation and the "intense desire" of achieving one's favorite deity even if it is, as in the case of Aghors, through the cremation ground. It is the struggle to be free from the bondage of a householder kind of life that defines the life of an ascetic, and often involves leaving home and family, wife and children, wealth and property. If, however, the renunciate monk is not able to effect this separation cleanly, it leads, hypothetically at least, to psychological and social stress of epic proportions, as Gold has discussed through her study of the legends of Bharthari and Gopi Chand as performed by Madhu Natisar (Gold:1992). However, we have plenty of evidence that there are ascetics who marry and live in families, yet practice their meditations diligently (Chaturvedi 1973, Gold 1992, Hausner 2007), as well as ascetics who are not married, yet remain as a part of a community.

With this in mind, we can further expand the householder-renunciate dichotomy into a trichotomy, that of the householder, the community, and the renunciate. Hausner (2007) demonstrates very well how the idea of a totally reclusive ascetic is more of an ideal than practice, because just by following patterns of pilgrimage and festivals, even sadhus form communities whereby they do not remain isolated. The life-story of even the fiercest of ascetics, Buddha, shows how he went to various gurus and their communities, meditated with five other monks, etc., in this way, not remaining totally

isolated (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995). Sarkar Baba's life stories also portray how he would live in a cremation ground, but go begging for alms into the villages. It seems that most ascetics pursue seclusion during their *sāadhanā* period, and may even achieve it in short periods of times for particular kinds of meditations or rituals, but they do not remain isolated for long after that. Buddha, therefore, is credited as the first ascetic who institutionalized his monks into the monastic order of *Sangha* (Ghurye 1953:5), although even that seems inaccurate since Buddhist records state he went to learn from Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputra who had a considerable following of disciples who used to live together (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995). Shankaracharya in the 8<sup>th</sup> century C.E. established the *Daśanāmī* order of monks (Ghurye 1953:5-6), and Sarkar Baba also, later in his life, founded an ashram and lived there with a community of devotees and disciples. The ideal of isolation for an ascetic stems from, in classical terms, the degree of strictness with which a renunciate monk can keep his or her life untouched by temptations of *māyā*, the web of worldly illusions. It is considered easier for a household maintaining ascetic to be drawn to the powers of *māyā* and transient ambitions, while a renunciate monk, perhaps living in cremation grounds, is less likely to be pulled towards it.

The real ideal, then, is not necessarily isolation, but self-control. Let us look at it in Aghor terms. Sarkar Baba has always differentiated between "Aghor *Panth*" (the Aghor path) and "Aghor *Pad*" (the Aghor state). Aghor *Panth* can refer to the transgressive practices of the Aghor tradition, something that followers of other traditions can adopt too. But Aghor *Pad* refers to the Aghor state, a state of being that refers to non-duality and non hate towards everything in the world, a state which one can achieve

without necessarily going through transgressive practices, but in fact, by maintaining self-control (Ram 1991:74, 77, 81). He would say to his disciples,

A person's clothes, appearance and hard asceticism indicate his desire to be praised by society, his desire that society should call him good. I think we are 'devotees of God in the form of *Prāṇa*, and we are very close to him'. To be recognized in this way is a matter of pride for human beings. By smearing ashes on his body, carrying a wooden staff, wearing a loincloth of jute, is the young ascetic really searching for his *Prāṇa* in this way? Is he trying to look for God or to recognize his own soul? No, looking for praise, respect and recognition are his goal. This is false-knowledge. Praise, respect, and recognition make a place in your heart very easily but when they begin to leave, it really wrenches your heart out.

A person who has given up the desire for praise, respect and recognition does not need to wear ashes, burn himself (with hard ascetic practices) or expect recognition from society. He keeps himself free from the distinctions and limitations of class and lineage, as also of regionality, nationality and language. Human beings remain deprived of the Supreme God resident within this beautiful body because they are confined by these limits and are afraid of what the freedom from them might bring to them. (SSS 1982:18)

Normal householder's' lives, as opposed to those of Aghar renunciates are defined by dualities of good and bad, high and low, sacred and profane. Their normal activities are determined by objects of the sense organs, and social ambitions of wealth, power or prestige. Householder, then, pursue material objects or power and prestige which are regarded as ultimately transient by Aghar renunciates. For an Aghar seeker, pursuing those things that householders do, amounts to a waste of precious time, because desires are uncountable just like the waves of an ocean. Instead, their goal remains to transcend this divisive, desire dominated existence, to a state of holistic, non-dual existence where they become the ocean itself, and are no longer driven by the countless waves in it. This is achieved through a sense of detachment and sense-control.

It is important to mention two points here. One relates to what White (2006:6) typifies as the difference between the "soft core" and the "hard core" of Tantra. The soft core can be seen as a set of practices which anyone, including householders, can pursue,

and the hard core, as the one which renounces pursue. The other relates to, for example, the psychology of the householder devotees who used to visit Baba's ashram. Regarding the "cores" of Tantra, White is right in pointing out that a large part of Hindu -- and perhaps also Buddhist ritual and meditative practice -- can be described as being "colored" by Tantra. A householder may, while sitting down for *pūjā*, "tie the directions" for protection, and thus perform a Tantric ritual without even thinking about it. On the other hand there are practices such as the ones related to the cremation ground, or handling impurities and filth, which a normal householder is not likely to practice, but a renunciate ascetic must go through on the path to self-realization.

It is more likely, however, that transgressive ascetics of the Aghor kind are more likely to seek isolation than other renouncers who often live in monasteries or ashrams, and identify with a larger social group which has a very recognizable face. Such sects and religious groups are numerous in India such as the *Daśanāmī* (Shaiva sect) or *Rāmānandī* (Vaishnava sect) whose sadhus wander freely, yet more often than not, they belong to an *akhārā* (lit. gymnasium or religious compound) or *sampradāya* (religious order) base which looks after them when in need. Such monastic orders guide the lives of ascetics in their fold whether on the road or stationary in a community. In the present time, not only do these orders have elaborate support systems for their ascetics, there also exist philanthropic organizations that provide food and shelter to wandering ascetics in their *annachhatra* (food pavilion) (Ghurye 1953:107) or *annakṣetra* (food region). As Hausner describes:

The *guru*-disciple relationship ensures that a renouncer is never outside of the monastic social structure. Even a *sādhu* who chooses (and is permitted by his or her *guru*) to practice in complete isolation belongs to a social web, and is beholden to *sādhu* society, through his or her connection to his or her *guru*...

Through relationships with their gurus ... *sādhus* take their place in communal families of religious teaching and ritual practice, even during periods of solitary retreat. (Hausner 2007:74).

With sects such as the *Daśanāmī* or *Rāmānandī* a more symbiotic relationship with the larger society prevails, and often there also exists a whole hierarchy of monks within the monastery. Transgressive Agharṣ on the other hand, especially those of the Girnali tradition, have a less pronounced relationship with the wider society, and they are more likely to be itinerant mendicants than static ones, although Chaturvedi (1973:134) and Hausner (2007:40) provide examples of married Agharṣ sadhus too. In fact, Chaturvedi mentions two lineages of Agharṣ ascetics, the Girnali, which trace their line from Dattatreya, and Himali, who trace their line from Gorakhnath (1973:76). Although I don't have hard data to substantiate it, it appears that the prevalence of married Agharṣ is more prevalent amongst the Himalis than the Girnali Agharṣ.

While it is true that relationship to their *guru* is fundamental even for Girnali Agharṣ, in terms of community, there really is no organized Girnali sect to look after them during their period of *sādhanā*, and enjoined as they are from prolonged contact with any community, sadhu or otherwise, during their wanderings, they inhabit cremation grounds or isolated places, which ensures a lack of community but for the precepts of their *guru*. Once they have completed their period of *sādhanā*, in the case of Agharṣ like Baba's disciples, they can come back to the community of the ashram for further training and service. Those who do not follow Baba, take the course described by Hausner (2007), of inhabiting sacred places at specific periods of time.

### **Community, Charisma and Leadership**

It is in reference to this that one can look at the numerous householder devotees who would visit Baba's ashram, partake of the food and water in an "Aughar's" ashram without any qualms, sit and talk with people of all castes without being bothered by it, and yet, not actively conduct the practices themselves that Aughar ascetics perform in the cremation ground. In their psychological make-up, non-performance of those "specialized" activities did not take away from the ashram experience, it did not make them lose their own caste "purity" because they were in a saint's ashram, and yet, in some ways it added to their *darśan* of Baba because they could be proud to have given up caste and food restriction considerations while in the presence of a divine saint.

Max Weber has discussed in detail the principal characteristics of "charismatic authority" in his *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Weber:1947). His postulations can readily be applied to the life and activities of the Aghoreshwar, and the consequent transformative effect it has had on the Aghor tradition. Weber writes:

The term 'charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. (Henderson and Parsons 1947:358-359)

I look at the issue of charisma and leadership in Sarkar Baba's life in more detail in chapter five. The perception of Sarkar Baba as a divine, enlightened saint, accorded him the trust and faith of innumerable people, ascetic monks as well as lay disciples, where he became an instantaneous leader wherever he went. His charisma, and the resulting authority came not only from his status as an enlightened saint, but also from the fact that he was a charismatic leader who practiced what he preached in his own life. As a result, Sarkar Baba's unique contribution is that not only has he transformed what

are called transgressive practices into practices within the socially accepted structure of the ashram, he has also enabled the two different structures to coexist harmoniously, each supporting the other in a wholesome way. Parry has raised doubts about the “social” implications of the Aughar doctrine (Parry 1985:68)<sup>16</sup> wondering whether it applies to the society as a whole, or only to the Aughar ascetic. Sarkar Baba’s daily behavior, the policies and programs he instituted at his ashram, all point towards his effort to translate this Aughar doctrine into something that can be practiced by *all*, not just the ascetic. I illustrate this point with a narration from Ishwarchandra Sinha, a journalist in Varanasi for the *Aaj Hindi* newspaper, and a long-time disciple of Sarkar Baba:

Baba used to keep his life very simple. He used to use things which would be appropriate everywhere, whether it be in eating and drinking or whether it be for his *hukkā* and tobacco. He never used to be dependent upon anyone for anything. It wasn’t that he won’t eat if he did not get a particular kind of food, or he won’t smoke if he did not get a particular kind of tobacco. He would eat the simplest food as well as the choicest one, depending upon what was brought in front of him. He did not have any particular inclinations towards those. In this way, he used to live very-very simply. People used to gift the best things to him, whether they be clothes or other material, he used to distribute it all to his devotees. He never used to keep anything for himself. You must have seen, Baba had an old sweater of blue color. It was even ripped in a few places. Baba used to wear that even in America. Someone had given him a gown that was of blue color. He used to wear it all the time too. In this way, he never used to throw away things after using them only for a short while.

Baba’s eye was also very sharp. He was a great administrator. He would sit in his foyer in his chair, but his eyes would spot everything that was going on in the ashram, he used to keep everyone in check. No one could indulge in wanton acts throughout the ashram. Anyone who thought he could get away with improper acts in the ashram used to be sadly mistaken. And if Baba had entrusted any work to someone who did not live in the ashram but used to commute from the city for his work, he always made sure that that person was fully compensated. For example, Baba had given me the responsibility of getting the ashram’s books published. I used to notice that Baba was very particular the printer was fully compensated for his paper, printing, ink, labor, everything, even though the printer himself did all this out of devotion.

Baba took great care that he never asked anyone to work without paying him for it, either directly or indirectly. For example, the book *Aghoreśvar Samvedanśīl* was in print. Before that, one more book was in press, by the title

*Aughar Kī Gaṭharī*. But this latter book was not being printed by the ashram, Phokabir was having it published. When the manuscript was given to me, I gave it to the printer. Since I was looking after all the books in print, I brought a few pages also of that book to show to Baba. Baba saw that book and said to me, “Hey Sinha Sahab, even I have a book. Can you get it published?”

I became worried when I heard this. Only fifteen or twenty days were left for Gurupurnima, and Baba’s request meant that it had to be printed before Gurupurnima. I never did business through big printing presses, only small ones that I trusted. I said I will try to get it published, but then some people from the ashram suggested the paper for that book should come from such and such a place and the cover should be printed in Calcutta, etc. All this took a long time. My printer printed all the books, but binding was still to be completed, and I anticipated it would take a very long time. I decided to go to a big press in Banaras by the name of “Urban Local Press”. I met the owner and asked him to bind the book on his machine. He agreed readily, saying, this is Baba’s work, I will get it done immediately. He had the whole shipment bound in one day.

I asked him, “Its bill?”

He said, “We will see.”

The printed book reached Baba. I asked the press owner two or three times to take the payment for it. But he always refused to make the bill. He was a devotee of Baba’s and did not want to charge him. I went to Sarkar and told him, “Baba, he is not giving me the bill. Perhaps he does not want to accept money from us.”

Baba said, “Do this. Take Rupees 2500 and give them to him. Please tell him that Baba has sent it for him.”

I took the money to the press owner but he was very hesitant in accepting it. Occasionally, he used to donate clothes and other useful material to our hospital also. I said to him, Brother, since Baba has sent it for you, why don’t you accept it. Later, you can use it for some useful purpose towards the hospital or the ashram. So Baba used to be very careful that the ashram was never in debt to anyone. Baba was very punctual also. ... Now that I have mentioned punctuality, let me expand on it. In front of my house is a temple of red color on the other side of the road. In the *Puruṣottam* month they organize the daily recitation of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa* for the whole month. The organizers of the temple suggested it would be wonderful if Baba could come and inaugurate the recitation of *Rāmāyaṇa* that year. I told them that since Baba was not in good health those days, I was very hesitant to ask him, but since they were very keen on it, I came to the ashram and made the request to Baba.

Baba said, “I won’t stay for too long. I will start it and come back.”

I got his yes. I came and informed the organizers about it. I could not go to visit Baba for many days after that. One day before the event, I rang up the ashram and reminded Baba that the inauguration was scheduled for the next day at eight. Baba said, yes, he knew it.

The next morning I was sitting at home when a little boy came running to me and said, “Baba is here.” It was exactly eight in the morning. I was stunned. The event was at eight in the evening, how was I going to tell Baba he had come

twelve hours too early! I ran towards him. By then a couple more people of my block had joined him. I said, “Baba, you had to come at eight in the evening. How come you are here this morning?” I was feeling so hesitant I did not even feel like making excuses to him.

Baba said, “I don’t know where these people (his assistants) hid my diary. Okay, I am leaving.”

I did not know what to do. I could not even ask him to come again in the evening in his poor health. I did not remind Baba about the time again. In the evening, I reached the temple fifteen minutes before eight. Exactly at eight, Baba’s car came before the tent erected for the function in front of the temple. Baba spoke for about half an hour. And thus the event was inaugurated.

(Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, Varanasi).

There are numerous such stories where Sarkar Baba would not only treat people who came to him fairly, but also equally, and presented through his own behavior an ideal that others could follow. I cite some of those stories later in the dissertation. The outcome of this behavior was that visitors to the ashram felt like an equal part of the ashram, as if it was their own ashram, further reinforced by the feeling of being active in an “Aghor” ashram. The power of the erstwhile transgressive ascetics now becomes available for social consumption, and the domestic or lay participants now feel empowered to go beyond the limitations of their daily social lives by participating in something that previously was too set apart to be approached with social safety. Living with them, they realize, in behavior, that *all* men are alike, and that differences between them are human constructs.

It is worth noting here the issue that Parry had raised earlier about the notion of equality in Aghor philosophy. Parry himself answers the doubt he has raised a little later, and I can only concur with him. Like Nīlakanṭha Shiva, Aghor ascetics become an acceptable, even necessary part of the social structure that had previously regarded them as exotic or aberrant (Parry 1985:70).

### **METHODOLOGY**

My research into the Aghor tradition began, quite unawares to me, in 1985. I was a student of Masters in Sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University. While browsing through the library stacks I came across a book titled *Death and the Regeneration of Life* by Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry (1982). As I flipped through the book I saw the essay on “Sacrificial death and the necrophagus ascetic” by Jonathan Parry (1982:74-110). What I read in that essay intrigued me enough to catch a train to Banaras and mention the essay to Sarkar Baba. Baba made me read the whole chapter, in Hindi, line by line, word by word. His reaction to the article was fairly non-committal, but the ashram folks felt pretty offended by it. The result was that I became aware of the special place of Aghors in India’s religious smorgasbord, and began to read all that I could get my hands on Aghor, as well as observe all those who came to the ashram – monks as well as lay devotees – and Sarkar Baba’s method and mode of interacting with them. This, ultimately led me to conduct research on my own, and now, finally, to write it down as a dissertation.

Quite unintentionally, therefore, the content of my dissertation as well as the methods I used for the study can be called autoethnographic (see Reed-Danahay 1997). However, I would like to qualify what kind of autoethnography it is. Reviewing the many meanings associated with this term Reed-Danahay postulates two important categories which are rolled into one in this concept: one, ethnography of one’s own group and two, autobiographical writing that has ethnographic interest (Reed-Danahay 1997:2). I will claim that my dissertation falls within the first category, as an ethnography of one’s own group, because although there are snippets of my own life within the dissertation I

am certainly not the focus of it. Since my stress is on ethnography and not on my autobiography this dissertation can be further qualified either as “native anthropology” (where former subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group) or “autobiographical ethnography” (where anthropologists use personal experiences in their writing) (Reed-Danahay 1997:2). I will submit that the injection of my personal experiences into the dissertation as written text is so little that it best qualifies as native anthropology and not autobiographical ethnography.

The “native” nature of my writing is implicit in the text as well as the methodology. My research into the subject grew as a response to the writings I read about Aghor; I can write about several aspects of ashram life in India because I was a part of it; and I was able to observe Sarkar Baba and his activities very closely from the eyes of a follower when he would visit New York for nephrological treatment at the Mt. Sinai Hospital located on the upper east side of Manhattan. Since 1986, till he relinquished his body in 1992, I participated in caring for him at the hospital as a room-attendant, translator, mediator, impromptu nurse, author, and interpreter. I also spent significant amounts of time with him in New York, New Jersey and California at the homes of various devotees and well wishers, doing the same things I did at the hospital in New York.

Sarkar Baba’s passing away in 1992 dealt a terrible blow to the new tradition he had started. I had been involved in taking care of him at the Mt. Sinai Hospital since the beginning of 1991, and his passing away left me quite disoriented. I spent a few years in Syracuse trying to get used to life without Sarkar Baba’s physical presence, and it was in this period that the idea of the current study began to take shape in my mind. Ultimately,

in the summer of 1995, I packed my bags with audio-taping equipment, several sets of tapes and a Dictaphone, and batteries, flashlight, and a still camera, and came to the ashram in Banaras looking for people who would talk to me, narrate their experiences and viewpoints on the life of Sarkar Baba, and thus help me not only to fill the gaps in his life story left by the hagiographical material published by Samooh, but also to get a better handle on his ideas and activities in relation to the larger religious, nationalistic and mystical context.

I visited India each summer till 2000, for three months each time, contacting, first, old disciples who would have known him when he was still very young, to collect stories about his childhood. Through these contacts I got other contacts and traveled on foot, by auto-rickshaws, buses and trains to various villages, towns and pilgrimage places in and around the city of Banaras, to visit others who had stories to tell about Baba. Each time I met with someone, I would inform them that I wanted to know more about Sarkar Baba, and asked whether they would have any objections if I taped our conversation. Very few people had objections, and for those who did, I simply took notes. I had drawn up a set of standard open ended questions which began with – “How did you meet Sarkar Baba for the first time?” to allow them free expression. As they began their narratives, I would keep notes on more information to ask about, check upon or corroborate, especially about strands, events or dates in the story. If during the interview I came across points that referred specifically to issues of nationalism or modernity, I would make a note of it, and follow up later for further elucidation.

At the culmination of my project I had more than 100 hours of taped interviews to transcribe, sort, and connect, in languages ranging from standard Hindi to Bhojpuri,

Banarasi, Maithili and Chhatisgarhi dialects. My interviewees included doctors, engineers, civil servants, business folks in Banaras, Delhi, Calcutta, Lucknow and Raigarh, as well as villagers in the hinterland of Banaras and Madhya Pradesh ashrams of Sarkar Baba.

I envisaged this as a project on oral history, recording the folklore and narratives of people who had had a chance to share Sarkar Baba's life. I started, naturally, at the Kusht Sewa Ashram in Banaras, starting my tentative interviews with the old folks and officials of the Samooh. Through them, I got to know of many more people connected with Sarkar Baba in different parts of the country, as well as in the hinterland of Banaras.

My study looks intimately at Sarkar Baba's life, as told in stories by his devotees and disciples, highlighting the salient features of Aghor behavior, as well as the interpretation of such behavior in the minds of those who experienced Sarkar Baba's company. Then I relate these stories to issues of the relationship between religion and history, history and modernity, modernity and nationalism, and nationalism and universalism.

The two methods I have used to gather data for this project are quintessentially anthropological. I used participant observation as well as interviews to collect stories and perceptions about Baba Bhagawan Ram. My participant observation goes well beyond the prescribed time limits of fieldwork. My parents knew Sarkar Baba from the time I was three years old, and I grew up observing festivals, social work, rituals, worship, education, and the creation of a holistic spiritual environment in the ashrams of Sarkar Baba, especially the one in Banaras. That gave me a unique emic insight into the working of ashram dwelling devotees as well as monks. My awareness of the

significance of the word “Aghor” which began while pursuing bachelors degree at Delhi University initiated a quest for information and understanding which continues till today.

The findings from these conversations, with reference to published materials by scholars as well as followers of the tradition, as it pertains to Baba Bhagawan Ram, is the substance for my doctoral dissertation. My attempt in this dissertation is mainly twofold: to present the flavor of an Aghor ascetic’s life in the context of modernity and history, and to look closely at how meaningful communication takes place between an ascetic and devotees through simple everyday acts. Hopefully, this will also throw some light on the nature of the Aghor tradition as it, at least partially, exists today.

<sup>1</sup> The word is *Śava-āsan*, or a posture of yogic exercise where one lies as a corpse.

<sup>2</sup> Apparently, selling one's animals at an auction in rural India is a very tiring task.

<sup>3</sup> A true Aghar is regarded as Shiva incarnate, walking the earth in a human form.

<sup>4</sup> *tuṣārādrisankāśa gauram gabhiram, manobhūta koṭiprabhā śrīsariram*. A description of Shiva in a hymn titled *Rudrāṣṭaka* (Tulasidāsa *Rāmacaritamānasa*: Uttarakāṇḍa, after 107b).

<sup>5</sup> In a larger context, that of Tantra, Sanderson (1988:662-3) and White (1998:173) have noted the sublimation or “domestication” of Tantra by earlier practitioners, most notable amongst them being Abhinavagupta. Changes to the tradition, however, in the specific context of Aghars, to my knowledge, is the result of a lifetime's work by Sarkar Baba.

<sup>6</sup> The *Guinness Book of World Records*, lists the achievements of the Society in December 15, 1998, under the title “Most Leprosy Patients Treated” as:

The Awadhoot Bhagawan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram Hospital at Parao, India, has treated more leprosy patients than any other hospital. The total number of registered patients since 1961 has been 99,045 with full Leprosy and 147,503 with partial Leprosy – all of whom were fully cured. The hospital was established in 1961 and receives no government funding – it runs entirely from public donations and gifts. Patients are treated free of charge using Ayurvedic herbal medicines and the Fakiri system, a method invented by the Indian religious saints. (<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com>, accessed January 30, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> *Śiva pūchhat hai Kali sē Aghar kahān hai,  
Kali khatī Śiva sō.  
Aghar rahe so ādi Bhūtan saṃg ghūmat,  
Kāpālīka rahē so banitā kē sāth.  
Aghori rahē so kahīn ghorat hoihaē brahmāṇḍa,  
Rām rahē so Kinā kē yahān bikailaē.  
Bhagawān Rām rahē hamārē nija dhām,  
Aghar rahē so gayē masān.  
Śiva pūchhat hai Kali sē. (SSS 2003 VE:19).*

<sup>8</sup> Original Hindi title: *Dhoṅgī bābāō kī holī par pau bārah* (Rathod 2009, March 9:1).

<sup>9</sup> Original Hindi title: *Cunāvī mausam mē tāntrik bhī huē sakriya: jīt kī gāranī dē rahē haē Aghorī!* (Rawat 2009:11).

<sup>10</sup> I write this, of course, from the point of view of ascetic aspirations of liberation. Sanderson points out, though, that Tantriks can be divided into followers of the ‘Outer Path (Atimārga)’ and followers of the ‘Path of Mantras (Mantramārga).’ While Atimārga followers seek salvation, Mantramārga followers can pursue “attainment of supernatural powers (*siddhis*) and the experience of supernal pleasures in the worlds of their choice (*bhoga*)” (Sanderson 1988:664, 667).

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.shreeswami.org/shri-upasani-baba-maharaj.htm>, (accessed June 7, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> *Hemavant kae biṭiyā, hamahūn sē bhikhiyā māgavalū ho.  
Hemavant kae biṭiyā...  
khappar lēkar, bhasm lagākar, śahar bāzār hamahūn kē ghumavalū ho.  
toharē kāraṇa śmasāna mē rahlī, mari khā-khākar masān jagaulī.  
jagavā mē bhailī bāur ho, Hemavant kae biṭiyā... (Samoo 2023 VE:15)*

<sup>13</sup> According to Hindu mythology, when the demons and deities churned the Ocean of Milk, many jewels and rare artifacts surfaced. One of them was a poison, which neither the deities nor the demons would accept. Since the poison threatened to devastate the world, Shiva drank it without swallowing it, holding it in his throat permanently. The poison was so deadly it turned his throat became blue, which is why Shiva earned the title *Nīlakanṭha*, the blue-throated one (*Brahmāṇḍa Purāṇa* 25:45-98).

<sup>14</sup> The Yanomami of the Amazon jungles indulge in what anthropologists have described as “endocannibalism,” where the bones of a dead relative are ground to a powder after the body has been cremated, and ritually consumed over the course of the year by the closest relatives of the deceased (Lizot 1991:26).

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/czech-republic/sedlec-ossuary-kutna-hora.htm> ; <http://eternallycool.net/?p=728>;

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<http://www.worldwander.com/turkey/johnhead.jpg>.

<sup>16</sup> “The doctrine that the essence of all things is the same may clearly be taken to imply a radical devaluation of the caste hierarchy, since from this point of view there is no fundamental difference between the Untouchable and the Brahman. What is less obvious, however, is whether this teaching is one which relates only... to the ascetic (caste is irrelevant for *him* but not for the world at large), or whether the Aghori's devaluation of the social order is to be interpreted as a message for *all* men.” (Parry 1985:68).

## Chapter 2

### Situating Aghor: A Historical and Literary View

I looked at several contrasting descriptions of Aghor in the previous chapter, describing and commenting on the reasons for particular understandings, and portrayal, of Aughaṛs in the present time frame, which gives us two different pictures of the same group. In this chapter I work with a historical frame, the large canvass of Indian history where time runs like the flow of a river, and where Aughaṛs, or practices that they are known for, can be spotted on various banks and shores, through its specific currents and confluences as it goes around the bends and rocks of ever morphing particular groups like the Vaishnavas, Sants, Naths, Siddhas, Bauddhas, Kāpālikas, Pāśupatas, Ājīvikas, Vrātyas, and the Lokāyatikas, paying attention to their possible Aghor-like practice and philosophy, as well as their influence on the present Aghor tradition. I mention these names for a reason.

Although Aughaṛs believe their *sāadhanā* is an ancient one, as a group named Aghor they are not mentioned in the medieval or ancient texts. True, we come across names like Bhairavācārya and Aghoraghaṇṭa, but they are not described as belonging to a group or sect or order of Aughaṛs. Rather, those particular individuals are called Kāpālikas, or Somasiddhāntins, or Mahāvratins, or by the general term Yogi.<sup>1</sup> But just as we saw in the previous chapter even Vaishnava *sādhus* undergo practices that can be called Aghor, so historically too, we find many other groups conducting similar practices, especially the *siddhas*, the *Bauddhas*, as also other Shaiivite groups, all interacting and exchanging techniques, and perhaps elements of doctrine, with each other. Therefore when I look at the history of the Aghor tradition, what can be traced historically is not a

group called Aghars, but the actual practices that they are known for. Taking the cue from White's "a body of practices across time and space, attending to multiple human actors..." (see chapter 1, p.10) in effect, I trace the history of Aghor practices and look at how different groups or individuals, with possibly quite different philosophies, have made use of them, continuing the practices that define Aghor.

I will hasten to add here that in tracing the body of Aghor practices – and the existence of its practitioners through history – my attempt is not to make a statement about the issue of influence, or the notion of power or dependence between socio-religious groups that it implicitly generates. Such an exercise inadvertently treats one group as the source of the influence while the other, the influenced, as the recipient, and therefore, in some manner, dependent or secondary. As Ernst points out in the context of Hindus and Sufis:

The mechanical character of the influence metaphor obscures the role of selection and intentionality that takes place in any thinker's evaluation of previous formulations, and it privileges the superior position of the analyst who triumphantly announces the detection of decisive influence of one thinker upon another. (Ernst 2005:16-17).

Such, however, has been the essentialist assumption in studies of comparative religion (Ernst 2005:19). For my comparative purpose I choose to follow the "polythetic" approach which was pointed out by Needham (1975:352) and carried forward by Brooks (1990:52-3), an approach based on family resemblances which: "places together organisms that have the greatest number of shared features, and no single feature is either essential to group membership or is sufficient to make an organism a member of the group." (Needham 1975:356). My attempt here is to simply take a certain group of characteristics and to examine whether a particular religious group displays them or not, to allow for drawing some conclusion about possible interaction and

exchange between them. The boundaries can be quite fluid here and it is difficult to say where one group's practices end and the other's begin (see Kassam and Kent, in press).

So what are the practices and philosophies that define Aghor? In the rest of this chapter will flesh out this issue in detail, starting with an illustration of the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh Ashram and Baba Kinaram's monastery, both in Banaras. Then I look at Aghor philosophy as depicted in the book *Vivēksār* authored by Baba Kinaram. Once Baba Kinaram's Aghor philosophy is delineated, I look at the Aghor tradition in comparison with the Sant and Sarbhang traditions, its connections with the Sufis, the Naths and the Yogis, and then the connections with the tradition of Guru Dattatreya. Once these comparisons are filled in, I look at the connection of the Aghor tradition with that of the ancient Kapalikas, as depicted in Sanskrit novels and dramas. That section provides a further lead into the antiquity of the Aghor tradition, and what earlier scholars have had to say about it. I end the final section with how modern Hindi fiction writers have looked at this tradition.

So let me begin with descriptions of two institutions which are most prominently associated with the Aghor tradition in the city of Banaras, Sarkar Baba's ashram and the Kriṃ-Kund monastery, which bear witness to the lineage started by Baba Kinaram. Starting with these descriptions will allow the reader to make their own conclusions about Kinarami Aghor practices in comparison with other such historical practices. At the end of this descriptive section I will list the features I think are salient of them.

### **Shri Sarveshwari Samooh Ashram**

Coming down on the Grand Trunk road from Banaras (National Highway [N.H.] 2), after crossing the Ganges river on Malaviya bridge with its numerous hard bumps, one could easily miss the ashram if not looking out for it, and reach the junction of N.H.1 and N.H.7 just a short distance ahead. As the road curves left going east towards Mughalsarai, the ashram lies on the right hand side of the road. It is situated in a recessed area bordered on the north by the N.H.1, and to the south by the Kashi Mughalsarai railway line, forming part of a triangle pointing towards the Ganges river as the road and the train tracks meet at the Malaviya bridge.

A set of steps going down from the N.H.1 lead to a big gate -- the main entrance to the Shri Sarveshvari Samooh Devasthanam complex -- which, earlier, used to be called simply the Avadhut Bhagawan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram. Today, entering the gate one would pass the long row of residential rooms immediately on the left, the Kusht Sewa Ashram hospital on the right. Going straight ahead alongside a yellow boundary wall with Sarkar Baba's teachings hung on small plaques from its fence, one would pass the temple on the left, and then come to the entrance to Sarkar Baba's erstwhile quarters, again on the left, just after a bēl tree (*aegle marmalos*) with the Ganesh Pīṭh (seat) beneath it. Past Sarkar Baba's quarters would be the kitchen hidden from view from the gate by a row of bottle palm and banana trees.

On coming out from the entrance gate to Sarkar Baba's quarters, if one were to look left, in the southerly direction, right in front would be a white statue of Baba Kinaram gazing north, and behind it, the open air assembly hall, the *pandāl*. To the left would be the elementary school, more rooms for guests, and to the right, and behind the assembly hall, the fields in which potato, wheat, and vegetables are grown for the ashram.

In all of this there are only three elements that relate to Aghor – one, the name of the hospital as “Avadhut Bhagawan Ram Kusht Sewa Ashram,” two, the hospital itself which caters to leprosy patients, and three, the statue of Baba Kinaram. Of these three, the hospital can be regarded as a secular institution, so it can be taken off the list. The name “avadhut” is sometimes used by followers of other Tantrik paths also, so it is not exclusive to Aghor. It, too, can be taken off the list. That leaves us with the statue of Baba Kinaram – holding the pipe of a *hukkā* (water pipe for smoking) near his contemplative face. Nothing transgressive about this statue either. Since Baba Kinaram established four Vaishnava institutions and four Aghor institutions in his time, one could, if one were so inclined, divide his work fifty-fifty into Vaishnava and Aghor categories, thus making his Aghor identity non-exclusive. One could think of him as a Vaishnava saint who had Aghor practices. But that will only be a partial truth because he is credited with starting the Aghor lineage as it exists in Banaras today.

What we get with Sarkar Baba’s ashram, then, is a picture of an Aghor ashram that is only marginally related to Aghor in appearance, and definitely not with any overt transgressive symbols of the kind that the media and the historical literature focus upon. In the leprosy hospital patients line up outside the consultation room and are called in one by one by the doctor. In the open area behind the kitchen, herbs are sorted and medicines made. In the cowshed behind the open assembly hall cows are tended and milked for use in the ashram. In the fields behind the leprosy hospital and the assembly hall, people work to plough or plant or harvest, as need be. When Sarkar Baba used to sit on his chair in the foyer outside his room, people would constantly be sitting on the mat to see him, and he would, like any normal person, sit and talk with them about their friends, family,

occupation, village, problems, etc. Except for the fact that in the group of people waiting to see him one could find folks from all castes, classes and occupational groups, nothing would even remotely hint at any Aghor practice. People who lived and worked in the ashram, similarly, hailed from all castes and classes, but the work they did was all regular activity that would be needed for the upkeep of the ashram – a very quiet and serene picture overall.

Till 1989, though, there was one element within the ashram, visually, that could be labeled mildly transgressive. The temple building was tall. It had only two floors, a raised platform about twelve feet high, accessed through a set of white steps, open on all sides except towards the back of the platform, where there used to be an idol of goddess Kali with a huge *khadg* (a sword shaped like a sickle) about eight feet tall and three feet wide, as is sometimes depicted in the pictures of Goddess Kali. On the right side of this temple alcove was a long flight of steps, about twenty, going up to the floor where the ashram office was. On the yellow wall of that office facing inwards (south) towards the ashram interior, between two windows painted blue, was a huge picture of a monkey, and three lines of text. Two lines of text were above the monkey's head, in large letters, and one line below it, in smaller letters, all in deep maroon color. This picture of the monkey was such that it would stop new onlookers dead in their tracks, and then bring a smile to their lips with the thought, "is this for real!"

The rather large monkey had its tongue sticking out, which was held in the fingers of its right hand, and he displayed an erect phallus, which was held in the fingers of its left hand. The monkey seemed to smile, perhaps even sneer with a quizzical look, at the onlooker. The text above its head can be translated, roughly, as: "Word of wisdom from

the wild (or, in rut, or even crazy) elephant Mahadeva (Shiva). Please do avoid these when away from home.” The text beneath the monkey can be translated as, “It will be advisable to control these even at home.”<sup>2</sup> The message, one can surmise, was about indulgence control when away from home, but also, to remain in control even while at home. Holding the tongue could signify keeping one’s gastronomical fickleness, as well as the kind of speech one uses, in check. Holding the phallus, I believe, indicated abstention from sexual craziness. This message as I interpret it, however, was a secondary thing. It was the visual force of that picture which, as a child made me stare at it for long hours, wondering what to make of it. It was because of this painting that everyone stopped to read the text. I am sure there were many visitors to the ashram who snickered at it.

Before Sarkar Baba left for the US for the last time though, perhaps with a premonition that he was not coming back, he had the whole temple structure demolished. The temple and the office as they used to stand in his time, no longer exist. Instead, we have just the temple platform, with a mini-mountain made of white stones, titled “Chirkut Parvat.” This name, I think, has a double, triple, or quadruple entendre.

Interpreting this title from a Sanskrit point of view, it can mean “eternal mountain,” if we take the word *chir* (Sanskrit *cir* – eternal) separately from the rest of the word, and lengthen the vowel sound in the word *kut* making it *kūṭa* (Sanskrit – mountain). Or, using nice semantics, we can call it “the mountain of eternity,” symbolic, perhaps, of Sarkar Baba’s eternal presence at the pinnacle of being an Aghoreshwar (an enlightened Aghar). Another Sanskrit interpretation of it could be “a mountain of rags or strips,” since *cīr* means “cloth” and *cīr kṛtaṃ* means something which has been turned

into strips, or threadbare. This would make sense from the way Agharṣ subsist on cremation ground rags, or cloaks patched from them, except in this case, it would be the whole ensemble of the ashram cobbled together as one. From the Sanskrit point of view, it could also mean “that which was once wholesome, but has now been turned threadbare,” indicating the passing away of Sarkar Baba and what he stood for.

We can also interpret this title from the point of view of colloquial Hindi. Chirkut, then, would mean “idiotic,” or “nonsensical,” or “of little consequence,” thus rendering the ashram an “epitome of little consequence.” One could attribute it to Sarkar Baba’s sense of self deprecation, as well as his skill of meaning the opposite of what was implied. But I think it reflects Sarkar Baba’s earthy sense of humor, of using words of common parlance which could sound disgusting (since Agharṣ are often portrayed as using disgusting substances), but had a deeper meaning. For example, consider the title of one of his books, *Aghor Guru Guh* (SSS 1982). At first glance, it could mean “Aghor Master’s Excrement” in colloquial Hindi. But those who know the language, realize that *Guh* is simply the colloquial pronunciation of the Sanskrit word *guhya*, which means mysterious, or secret, or deep. The meaning of the book title in this reading becomes “Mysteries of the Aghor Master.” This reading sounds appropriate because one half of the subject matter of that book certainly deals with esoteric Agharṣ practices.

In whatever way we interpret the title of the temple, it holds testimony to Sarkar Baba’s ultimate act of renunciation in demolishing and totally effacing that which had been at the center of the ashram’s activities all through his own life, something which he had built with his own hands, with great love, care and devotion. Is that an act of transgression which made everyone who used to visit it to worship Kali wonder,

including his own mother who was still alive, what was Sarkar Baba up to? Perhaps. I have no way of commenting on it further.

At the Kinaram Sthal, the monastery started by Baba Kinaram, also known as Kriṃ-Kund because of the large water tank to which miraculous powers are attributed, however, one could still see till 2009 three huge skulls made of cement, that watched over the entrance gate to the complex. The word Kriṃ itself is a seed mantra for Kali, and the water tank is said to be charged with it. Now there is a white statue of Baba Kinaram in the center of the tank, with a canopy over his head. Inside the complex are a whole series of *samādhis* (tombs), fifty-six in number (SSS 1987:1) belonging to Aghor saints with the *Śivalinga* (phallic iconic representation of Shiva) erected on them, the most prominent of them being Baba Kinaram's *samādhi* on a high platform accessed through a set of spiraling stairs. There exists also the eternal *dhūnī* (ascetic's sacred fire) which still uses the wood brought from the cremation pyres at Harishchandra Ghat. Today, the three hundred year old open air assembly hall with its quaint pillars is surrounded by more modern structures which dwarf it in size. Its age, however, is clearly visible even to the casual glance. Now, this scene has changed too. A visit to the Sthal in January 2010 revealed that most of the old structures have been demolished and modern ones are being constructed in their place.

Baba Rajeshwar Ram (also known as Burhau Baba), Sarkar Baba's own guru, was the abbot at Kinaram Sthal during Sarkar Baba's lifetime. He had been active during India's struggle for independence, devoting himself wholeheartedly to the resistance in 1930, when he was arrested during the salt *satyāgrah* (struggle for justice) and sent to jail. On being released from jail he took to wandering in the Himalayan region, visiting

with monks and ascetics in lonely places. During his wanderings he visited Bhutan, Sikkim, Tibet and Burma, where he also learnt many secret (or transgressive) practices (Ashthana n.d.:gh-ng). He was initiated into the Aghor path by Aughar Baba Dalsingar Ram at the behest of Mahatma Gandhi (Ashthana n.d.:7). To dispel attachment with his family, one time he went to a feast at the Vaishnava seat established by Baba Kinaram, and began to lick the leavings from leaf-plates left by the participants. When Baba Rajeshwar Ram was still alive, he could be spotted lying, or sitting on his wooden cot, sometimes naked, sometimes barely covered, sometimes intoxicated, sometimes sober, but always with a reputation for sudden violent actions (thought to be beneficial to the recipient) which kept visitors as well as monastery dwellers at a safe arm's distance from him. Because of this, he is considered to be an old fashioned Aughar of the traditional school, although his description puts a question mark to this title:

The way of life of this great soul was of a contemporary rural nature. If he saw even the tiniest ostentation before him, he would root it out... no skull-bowl in hand, or begging bowl, no skull, nor ostentatious shroud, no corpse, no cremation ground. Occasionally when he would visit the cremation ground, to maintain the tradition (of bringing cremation ground wood for the *dhūni* at Kinaram Sthal) he would pick up a bamboo stick from the bier. (Ashthana n.d.:ṇa, gloss added).

It was his behavior that was thought of as transgressive. Things changed after his passing away. Now folks at the Kinaram Sthal follow similar services and programs to those at Sarkar Baba's Kusht Sewa Ashram, thus bridging the two Aghor institutions contemporaneously, one in the holy city of Banaras, the other across the river in the rural hinterland. Again, it will be difficult to spot transgressive Aghor practices here. Baba Kinaram's Sthal, however, is recognized in Banaras as a seat of Aghor learning, so let me start our journey back in time with Baba Kinaram, and then try to tease out the Aghor practices from texts and stories available from the ashram.

### **Baba Kinaram's History and Legacy**

The hagiography of Baba Kinaram (Chaturvedi 1973:99-140), founder of the Kinaram Sthal in Banaras, gives important clues to the lifestyle, practices, and powers of Aghor saints. Baba Kinaram was born in Ramgarh village near Banaras in the year 1658, month of *Bhādrapad*, day of *Kṛṣṇa Caturdaśī* according to the *Vikramī* (Vikram Era) calendar (approximately 1602 CE, Chaturvedi 1973:99, SSS 1987:4). Others, however, write his birthdate as nearabout *Vikram Samvat* 1684 (approximately 1627 CE) (Shastri 1959:137, Kaviraj 1963:197). The date for when he relinquished his mortal frame is given variously as *Vikramī Samvat* 1826 (Shastri 1959:139, Chaturvedi 1973:103), and 21<sup>st</sup> of September 1771 at the age of 170 years (SSS 1987:7). Chaturvedi lists his final age as 142 years (1973:103, which appears to be a mistake in calculation if we subtract VE 1658 from VE 1826, we get 168 years), and so does Kaviraj (1963:198). Whether we believe in the first lifespan or the second, or neither, rendering the dates symbolic, he is supposed to have lived a very long life. Baba Kinaram is regarded as a spiritually enlightened person who had taken a physical form to complete what he had not finished in his previous life. He was first initiated into the Vaishnava tradition by Saint Shivaram (sometimes referred to as Shivadas [SSS 1987:5]) of the *Rāmānuja* sect at Karo village in Gazipur, and later by Baba Kaluram into the Aghor tradition.

His life story is full of miraculous incidents where he acted on behalf of the poor, the oppressed, and women, without worrying about the consequences. A publication of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, *Brief Pictorial Life-History of Baba Kinaram*<sup>3</sup> (henceforth *Citrāvalī*, n.d.) lists some of these miraculous acts. These include the stories of freeing a

poor boy from the clutches of a *zamindar* (landlord) for non-payment of taxes at Naidih village (Chaturvedi 1973:101), and subsequently naming him Bijaram (*Citrāvalī*: plate 8); interceding on behalf of *faqīrs* (Muslim holy men) and saints imprisoned by the Mughal ruler of Junagadh by making all the stone mills in the jail turn by themselves (Kaviraj 1963:197, *Citrāvalī*:plate 9, Shastri gives the date for this event as *Vikramī* 1724 approx. CE 1668 [1959:138]); bequeathing four sons to an infertile woman (*Citrāvalī*: plate 19, Gupta 1993)<sup>4</sup>; curing the sick son of a Brahman woman by charging Kriṃ-Kund with the Kriṃ mantra and asking her to bathe her child in that tank (*Citrāvalī*: plate 20); saving a woman and her so-called illegitimate child from being thrown into the sea at Surat (Gujarat) (*Citrāvalī*: plate 22, Gupta 1993).<sup>5</sup>

There are other stories mentioned in the *Citrāvalī* which show us Aghor practices as are prevalent in the popular conception. After freeing the *faqīrs* at Junagadh, Baba Kinaram is said to have headed west for Hinglaj past Karachi (in modern Pakistan). After a vision of the goddess there, where she advised him to come to the Kriṃ-Kund in Kashi (older name for Banaras, *Citrāvalī*: plate 11), Baba Kinaram returned to Gujarat and went to the Girnar sacred complex. There:

...he saw siddheśvar Dattātreya in a frightening form, sitting on Aghorī Śilā, with a piece of meat in his hand. Taking a bite from that piece of meat, Ādiguru Dattātreya gave it to Mahārāj Śrī (Baba Kinaram) to eat. As soon as he ate it, he received a divine vision. Guru Dattātreya said, “The emperor of Delhi,” to which Mahārāj Śrī replied, “he is sitting on a black horse, he has a white shawl which is falling down.” (*Citrāvalī*: plate 13, my translation).

From Girnar, Baba Kinaram came to Harishchandra Ghat in Kashi after visiting Kashmir and Delhi. At Harishchandra Ghat he saw Guru Dattatreya in the form of Baba Kaluram, feeding chick-peas to skulls lying in the cremation ground. Baba Kinaram made the skulls still by *stambhan kriyā* (the act of making them physically inert) so that

they did not respond when Baba Kaluram called to them (Chaturvedi 1973:102). The two were introduced. Baba Kaluram saw a corpse floating in the river and pointed it to Baba Kinaram, who responded, “Maharaj, it is not a corpse, it is alive.” Baba Kaluram asked him to call it to them if alive. Baba Kinaram called out to the corpse which came ashore and stood up (Chaturvedi 1973:103; Shastri gives the date for this event as *Vikramī* 1754 [1959:139]). Baba Kaluram was impressed and took him to Krim-Kund at Shivala in Kashi (now known as Kinaram Sthal). One belief is that Baba Kaluram initiated him at Krim-Kund with the Aghor mantra, while the other belief is that he was already initiated into the Aghor tradition by Guru Dattatreya at Girnar. From that time on, Baba Kinaram began to live at Krim-Kund.

During his long life he is supposed to have travelled widely, from Gujarat to Kandhar in 1638 where he blessed Shahjahan to recapture the clay fort from Shah Abbas of Persia (*Citrāvalī*: plate 12), Kandhar to Kashi, then on to Darbhanga in Bihar where he induced Maithil Brahmins to eat meat and fish by performing the miracle of bringing a dead elephant to life (*Citrāvalī*: plate 17), then going to Ujjain on the banks of river Kshipra where he composed *Vivēksār*, his treatise on *Aghor Mat* (Aghor philosophy) in VE 1812 (1756 C.E.).<sup>6</sup> The theme of Kinaram as the protector of fallen women persists in Banaras as well where he has been looked upon as the patron saint of prostitutes. As recently as the 1950s, the prostitutes and dance girls used to make offerings at the Kinaram Sthala twice a year (Chaturvedi 1973:79).

As noted above, Baba Kinaram established four Vaishnava monasteries and four Aghor monasteries in his lifetime. This is significant because with the more recent changes in the social persona of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh they are accused of

revisionism (see Gupta 1993:123). I think it points to a deeper link between Kinarami Aghars and Vaishnavas, strengthening their synthesizing character, undermining strict sectarian differentiation. Baba Kinaram's first guru was a Vaishnava, saint Shivaram. Baba Kinaram pays homage to his Vaishnava guru first in the beginning of *Vivēksār* :

The kindness of my guru is like a wish fulfilling tree that grants wishes simply by being imagined. His holy name is Shivaram. With great grace he recognized me, and gave me the power to recognize him.<sup>7</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verse 7)

Chaturvedi speculates that it was to keep his link with saint Shivaram alive that Baba Kinaram retained the name "Ram" at the end of his own name (Chaturvedi 1973:105), although at another place he speculates it could be because of the name of the place where he was born, Ramgarh (Chaturvedi 1973:123). He also mentions that it is probable Saint Shivaram had given him the name of Rama as a mantra to meditate upon. That is why he writes:

Keeping Ram's name in heart, as well as the dust from my guru's feet,  
In the form of guru-disciple conversation, I am stating Vivekasar to you with  
great thought.<sup>8</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verse 1)

Further, Baba Kinaram extols the virtue of the name of Rama:

There is no other means (of salvation) without the name of Rama and the  
company of saints,  
This is a principle of the śrutis (scriptures that were heard), only one in a million  
realizes this.<sup>9</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verse 3, gloss added)

Only after praising his Vaishnava guru and extolling the name of Rama does Baba Kinaram go on to describe his Aghor guru:

I wandered to Purī (Jagannathapuri in Orissa state), Dwārakā (a city in Gujarat state), Gomatī (river in central India), Gaṅgā Sagār (place of pilgrimage in West Bengal state),  
In all those places I saw Dattātreyā, (whose glimpse) takes away the great sorrows  
of this world.<sup>10</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verse 9, gloss added)

He then describes Dattatreya as:

United with the power of the city of hopes (or of fulfilling desires, *Āśāpurī*), a Śīva, the lord of all *siddhas* (*siddhēśvar*),  
I have received this boon from him, of making true whatever I say.<sup>11</sup> (*Vivēksār*,  
verse 10, gloss added)

Let me dwell on this verse for a moment since this description of Dattatreya is curious. That he is described as Shiva, the lord of all *siddhas*, is straightforward. Calling him *Śaktiyut* (united with Shakti, or endowed with her power) is also a fairly natural description of Shiva. But describing him as *Āśāpurī Śaktiyut* (united with the power of fulfilling wishes, or united with the power resident in a place called hope) appears to be a conscious attempt by Baba Kinaram to indicate Dattatreya's association with the Hinglaj region of Baluchistan. I wondered about the significance of this word and how to translate it for a long time, then came across Briggs' (1982[1938]) description of the yogis' pilgrimage to the Hinglaj region. The context is Briggs' description of two kinds of very popular necklaces made from white nummulite beads found in this region. The necklaces made from larger beads are called *Hing Lāj ka ṭhumrā* (Hinglaj's offering, or *Hinglāj kā ṭhongrā* [Shastri 1978:50]), and the necklaces made from smaller beads are called *Āśāpurī* (Briggs 1982[1938]:104). The only difference between *Vivēksār*'s spelling of the word (with a small "u") and the spelling provided by Briggs (with a long "ū"), occurring because of the poetical rhyme in *Vivēksār*, however, makes the meaning different. *Āśāpurī* actually means a place of residence, the city or town of *Āśā* (hope), similar in structure to *Janakpurī* (the city of Janak) in the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. Briggs' *Āśāpurī* however, implies fulfillment of wish or desire, or one who fulfills wishes or desire. This becomes clear from Briggs' description:

Like other pilgrims, Yogis purchase these beads at Nagar Ṭhaṭha, and, upon reaching Hing Lāj offer them to the goddess. The *ṭhumrā* is then put on. When the pilgrim reaches *Āśāpurī* [*Āśāpūrṇā*] Devi's shrine at Nagar Ṭhaṭha on his

return journey, he offers the other rosary to her and then puts it on. (Briggs 1982[1938]:104 & fn2).

Now, the translation of *Āśāpūrī* into *Āśāpūrṇā* Devi, the goddess who fulfills all hopes and desires, becomes easy to see. Baba Kinaram's intent in *Vivēksār*, then, seems to be to communicate that Dattatreya was a veritable Shiva united with *Āśāpūrṇā* Devi of the Hinglaj region, or endowed with her *Āśāpūrī* (wish fulfilling) powers. I am quite sure my reading of this verse is right because of three additional, if incidental, pieces of information. The first piece is provided by Briggs as he continues with his wonderfully captivating description of the region:

Hiṅg Lāj is situated on the Makrān coast, about eighty miles from the mouth of the Indus, and some twelve miles from the sea. The shrine stands below a peak of the same name, on the banks of the Hiṅgol river, in the Las Bela State. The river breaks through the mountains in a gorge, about two hundred yards wide between cliffs, about a thousand feet high. Above the gorge the country is rich and wild. *Below the gorge the river is called Aghor.* Masson reported, in 1844, that he saw *figures of the sun and moon* hewn on the rocks in an inaccessible place. (Briggs 1982[1932]:105-6, emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

The reason, I think, river Hingol is called Aghor in the region of Hinglaj is because of its association with the Aghor tradition. The hewn figures of sun and moon, as Tantrik or *hathayogic* representations of the *Īdā* (left) and *Piṅgalā* (right) channels in the subtle body, confirms this view.<sup>13</sup> While the notion of the subtle body exists in all schools of Shaivism, in modern literature it is noted mostly in connection with the Nath tradition, and scholars treat the Hinglaj shrine as the most important center for Nath (Gold and Gold 1984:121). However, it has its own place even in the Kinarami tradition as we will see in Baba Kinaram's literature below.

The second piece of information comes from Devadatt Shastri's travelogue about his pilgrimage to the fiery Hinglaj in mid 1940. He met an Aghori Baba who had lived

there for decades and was, for all practical purposes, the officiating holy man at the site, leading pilgrims to the Hinglaj cave for their ultimate *darśan* (Shastri 1978:51-2).

The third piece of information was provided during my fieldwork in Banaras. As I stood talking to one of the old visitors to the Kinaram Sthal, he informed me that the goddess Hinglaj no longer resides at Hinglaj in Baluchistan. When I asked why, he informed me that Baba Kinaram had been directed by the goddess on his visit to the region to stay at Kriṃ Kund, because that is where she wanted to be (personal communication). This same story, however, is also published in various books by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh (for example see *Citrāvalī* n.d.:plate 11). There certainly does exist a *yantra* (ritual design or geometric figure) to goddess Hinglaj at Baba Kinaram Sthal, right next to the Kriṃ Kund.

The Vaishnava connection of the Kinarami tradition is a generalized one, deriving from the better known *Sant* (saint) tradition of north India. The book *Aughar Pīr kī Mastī* (Carefree Joy of an Aughar Saint, Ashthana n.d.) published by the Aghor Shodh Sansthan (Aghor Research Institute) lists five published books that were authored by Baba Kinaram. Of these only two, *Vivēksār* and *Unmunī Rām* are described as being of *Aghor vṛtti* (Aghor mood or sentiment). The other three, *Rāmrasāl*, *Rāmgītā* and *Bhakti Jaimāl* are described as being of the Vaishnava *vṛtti*. *Rāmrasāl* (SSS 1987) and *Rāmgītā* (SSS 1987) certainly do have compositions stressing single-minded focus on Rama, besides the ones on *bhakti* (devotion) and sense control. There does, however, exist another text authored by Baba Kinaram, *Gītāvalī* (SSS 1987), that is of the Aghor sentiment. The only major linguistic difference between the two kinds of texts is that while texts of the Aghor mood use words like tobacco or cannabis to denote god intoxication, and may

have a verse or two with Urdu words in them, the texts of Vaishnava mood use words like nectar and devotion to denote god intoxication. Chaturvedi stresses, though, that:

Like Kabir, Sarbhang and Aghar saints like Kinaram, Bhinakram, Bhikhamram have accepted Rāma in the form of Nirguṇa Brahma (formless cosmic principle), meaning, that Brahma is bereft of the three guṇas (characters), sattva (holy or subtle), rajas (active or passionate) and tamas (gross or inert). (Chaturvedi 1973:36, gloss added)

Bhinakram was actually a Kabirpanthi (follower of the Kabir path) before becoming an Aghar (Shastri 1959-IV:140), and Bhikhamram was a Vaishnava before joining the Aghor tradition (Shastri 1959-IV:142). Associations like this further highlight the synthesis between various *Sant* traditions, including that of Kabir. Highlighting the synthesis of various kinds of practices, Shastri mentions that:

The sādhanā of the Aghar tradition is primarily of two kinds: one Vaiśṇavī, second śmaśānī. In Vaiśṇavī sādhanā mother Durgā is worshipped and meat and wine etc. are prohibited in it. (Shastri 1959:239)

In fact, he lists Baba Kinaram and Baba Jayanarayana Ram (fifth in line of disciple descendants, sixth from Baba Kaluram) as *Gosāin* (master of cows) – Gosāin Baba Kinaram (Shastri 1959:250) and Gosāin Baba Jayanarayan Ram (Shastri 1959:248). As we know Gosāin is a quintessential Vaishnava title, a short form of *Goswāmī* (master of cows), as is evident in the title of Goswāmī Tulasidas, the sixteenth century composer of the *Rāmayāna* in Awadhi language. Nor is Shastri the only one to do so. In the *Dabistān* an incidence is mentioned of a Brahman named Gossain Tara Lochana who used to worship Kali. He went to Kashmir, performed worship with *pañcamakāra*, and through this worship helped the governor of Kashmir subdue the Tibetans (Shea and Troyer 1843:157).<sup>14</sup>

The synthesis of Vaishnava as well as Aghor elements, visible in Baba Kinaram's life, also occurs in Sarkar Baba's guru, Baba Rajeshwar Ram's life. Baba Rajeshwar

Ram's own elder stepbrother, Shankar Das, was the abbot of one of Baba Kinaram's Vaishnava monasteries in village Mahuwar (Ashthana n.d.:2). As a child Baba Rajeshwar Ram would often spend time at that monastery, also known as Koṭhārī Bābā kī Kuṭī (Kothari Baba's hut). It was from this place that he is said to have taken to ascetic wandering from the age of twelve. Ashthana mentions another relevant story. One time a woman came to Baba Rajeshwar Ram complaining that since she did not have a child, she was not treated well by her family. Baba Rajeshwar Ram was touched and he asked her to meditate on “*Śrīman Nārāyaṇa Nārāyaṇa*” (a name of Vishnu). He writes:

His reverence used to accord the same place to Aghor and Vaishnava which was traditional, because his predecessor great saints of the Aghor path had continued to establish both kinds of ashrams, Aghor as well as Vaishnava. (Ashthana n.d.:55)

Such a synthesis of Aghor with Vaishnava practices is found in the life stories of Sarkar Baba also. As a child Sarkar Baba used to worship a statue of Śrī Rāmacandra (hero of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, Chaturvedi 1973:148) which a south Indian sadhu had given to him (Sinha 1988:11). A little later he would visit the Yagyavatara temple in his village and spend time in meditation there (Chaturvedi 1973:149). He also would spend time with Shrikant Maharaj, a Vaishnava saint in the village, and took initiation with him. After this initiation he used to be known as Bhagawan Das (Sinha 1988:15). After that he also participated with his Vaishnava guru in a convention organized by the *Rāmānuj* sect (Chaturvedi 1973:151) in the Maner *kasbā* (a small hamlet) in Patna district of Bihar state (Sinha 1988:18). He was quite impressed with a sentence he heard there “*Rāmānuj pada binu tarihaō na bhāī*” (Chaturvedi 1973:151).<sup>15</sup> This sentence can have three translations. One, “no one attains salvation without going to Ramanuj's refuge,” two, “no one attains salvation unless the same position as that of Ramanuj is reached,” and

three “no one attains salvation unless they become like Lord Rama’s younger brother Lakṣmaṇa.” Sarkar Baba understood it as an exhortation to become like Lakṣmaṇa, the younger brother of Rāma.

Even after becoming initiated into the Aghor tradition he would associate freely with Vaishnava sadhus during his wanderings in the city of Banaras, as indicated by Chhedī Baba, a saint in the city near whose dwelling Sarkar Baba used to live:

For the purpose of satsaṅg (dialogue with saints) Chhedī Bābā introduced him to many saints. One amongst them was a bairāgī (detached) saint Bābā Vāsudevādās who used to live at Nakkhīghāṭ on the bank of river Varuṇā. On occasion he even used to visit this saint with Chhedī Bābā. Even today Mahāprabhu has good feelings and affection for this saint. (Pandey 1965:21, gloss added).

In the early days of his sainthood when Sarkar Baba used to wander in the rural hinterland of Banaras, people would often request him to conduct *yajñas* (fire sacrifice). The first one he conducted was around 1953 in the village Manihara near Sakaldiha railway station on the Banaras-Patna railway line. This was a Vishnu *yajña* (Sinha 1988:28). Sometime before 1956 he conducted another Vishnu *yajña* at the insistence of Babu Mukteshwar Singh of Village Hariharpur, again, near Sakaldiha. This, too, was a huge success after which a temple was built near the *yajña* ground where Sarkar Baba simultaneously established a Shivalinga (icon of Shiva), an idol of Krishna in the form of Gopala, and an idol of Kali on *pañcakapāla* (five skulls, Sinha 1988:29). Guard Sahab, one of Sarkar Baba’s devotees and my informant, corroborated the event of the Vishnu *yajña* and the establishment of Shaiva, Vaishnava and Shakt idols at the same place.

After some time when he used to live at Maruadih in Banaras, Sarkar Baba had “Vasant (Spring) *pūjā* performed by thirty vaidik (followers of the *Veda*) Brahmans belonging to all the scriptures” (Sinha 1988:31). When he left to visit Girnar in Gujarat

after this, he stopped at Pushkar (near Ajmer in Rajasthan) and conducted *sāadhanā* with the *tīrth purohit* (Brahman ritual officiant) of this pilgrimage site (Pandey 1965:34-35). I have personally observed Sarkar Baba advising his disciples to visit Vaishnava temples and sacred places without any discrimination. All these examples, I think, illustrate Sarkar Baba's non-sectarian attitude where, like Baba Kinaram, he did what was appropriate according to the time without distinguishing the sectarian nature of the event.

### **Aghor Philosophy and Practice: A Concretization with *Vivēksār***

I will use three sources as primary to delineate what Aghor philosophy, and Aghor practice are, according to the understanding of the followers of the Kinaram tradition, as well as the group of ascetics who are known as Sarbhang in Bihar, especially in the Champaran district of the state, but Aughaṛ elsewhere (Shastri 1959:I, 53-54 fn 186). For Kinarami Aughaṛ my primary sources are *Vivēksār* (Kinaram 1975, 2001) and *Aughaṛ Bhagawān Rām* (Chaturvedi 1973). For the Sarbhang Aughaṛ of Bihar, I use *Santamat kā Sarbhaṅg Sampradāya* (Shastri 1959). Shastri as well as Chaturvedi divide their discussion into three aspects – *siddhānta pakṣa* (doctrinal, ideological or canonical aspect), *sāadhanā pakṣa* (ascetic practice aspect) and *vyavahāra pakṣa* (custom, conduct or behavioral aspect) (Chaturvedi 1973:33). I will follow the same structure here.

#### Aghor Doctrinal Aspect:

Let me begin with the *Vivēksār*. This short composition, written in two line couplets or verses is divided into eight primary sections broadly similar, in structure, to *aṣṭāṅga* yoga (the eight limbs of yoga, although Kaviraj calls it a *ṣaḍaṅga* [six limbed] yoga text [1963:198]), and a ninth section on the merits of reading and practicing from this

composition. Baba Kinaram himself regards it as a text on eight limbed yoga, for he mentions so in verse 293,<sup>16</sup> hinting at the key to *tattva jñān* (knowledge of the essence). The eight limbs of yoga are generally accepted as *yama* (ethical standards), *niyama* (self-discipline and personal observances), *āsana* (posture), *prāṇāyāma* (breathing exercise), *pratyāhāra* (sense-control), *dhāraṇā* (concentration), *dhyāna* (meditation) and *samādhi* (union with the divine) (Carrico 2009). The eight *aṅgas* (limbs) of *Vivēksār* are named as: *gurupada stavan* (obeisance to the guru's feet, 25 verses), *jñyāna aṅga* (the limb of knowledge, 75 verses), *vijñāna aṅga* (the limb of perception, 54 verses), *nirālamba aṅga* (the limb of self-support or independence, 37 verses), *samādhi aṅga* (the limb of deep meditation on the divine, 9 verses), *ajapā aṅga* (the limb of natural meditation, 17 verses), *śūnya aṅga* (the limb of union or nothingness, 36 verses), *rakṣā aṅga* (the limb of protection, 29 verses; verses 269-282 on *koan* like paradoxical riddles) and *phala stuti* (limb of reflection on the merits of the text, 16 verses; verses 294-6 being internal dates of the text), which makes a total of 298 verses.

Although there does not exist a one to one correlation in the structure of *Vivēksār* to the eight limbs of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga, the subject matter dealt with does have such a correlation. The first limb of *Vivēksār*, *gurupada stavana*, can be correlated with the *yama* limb of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga because of the primary ethical focus put upon faith in the guru by Kinarami Aughaṛs. The verses I have translated below provide the reason for the unshakable faith in the guru:

The confusion between duality and non-duality vanishes on hearing the discussion of the five elements (of creation, viz. earth, water, fire, sky[or space], air). One who has received grace at the feet of his guru will understand it (*Vivēksār*, verse 21).<sup>17</sup>

Further:

Keeping that name (mantra, or name of God) steadfastly in my mind, heart and self (ego or I-principle), I describe *Viveksār*, always with my guru's help (*Vivēksār*, verse 23).<sup>18</sup>

These two couplets give us a glimpse of the *abhēd* (non dual or non distinct) ideology that Aghaṛs and Sarbhāngi ascetics follow, as well as its foundation in the *sāṃkhya* philosophy (Shastri 1959, I:19) which sees the creation as a result of the *pañcabhūta* (five elements) that create the universe as well as the resultant creation of the mind, the intellect, and the ego principle within the body. This idea is further elaborated in the verses about creation, and development of the universe and the body, in the *jñyāna aṅga*.

The *jñyāna aṅga*, also, broadly corresponds to *niyama* of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga because, while explaining the philosophy behind observances of practice, it instructs the seeker thus:

O disciple, I tell you the knowledge of the divine seed (or the seed mantra of divine knowledge), there is nothing large or small, you become egrossed in your Self. (*Vivēksār*, verse 34)<sup>19</sup>

Distinguishing between that which is related to the soul/spirit/self and that which is not, remain steadfast in *satsaṅga* (saintly company), I tell you about the divine soul/spirit, listen, O disciple, with intent.<sup>20</sup>

When understood it becomes knowledge, if not understood, it is ignorance. If one contemplates on the understood knowledge, then it becomes *vijñyāna* (processual or scientific knowledge).<sup>21</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verses 38-39)

Speak the truth, listen to the truth, contemplate upon the truth. There is nothing comparable to the truth, remain steadfast in the company of truth. (*Vivēksār*, verse 63)<sup>22</sup>

The Rest of the verses in this section can be categorized under three main headings: description of the divine (verses 43-51), description of creation (verses 52-60), and description of the body (verses 64-97). The divine is called *satya puruṣa* (the true being, verse 44) and then later, *Avadhūta* (see verse 52 below). Both these words, *satya puruṣa* and *Avadhūta* are important to note, the first because other saints of the sant

tradition use similar words to describe the supreme being, the second, because it can relate this text not only to the practices of Aghor Tantra, but also to the Buddhist *siddha* tradition, as we will see later.

Description of the creation process is detailed thus:

It (the *satya puruṣa*) did not have a name or a form, nor the distinction of male or female. Its form was indescribable in its formlessness, it remained in its own form.<sup>23</sup> For sometime the indestructible *Avadhūta* remained in this way. Then, of its own will, it emanated an unheard sound.<sup>24</sup> From it emerged three males and a most wise female. With them were produced *nāma* (space?), earth, fire, air and water with a view to create the world (*Vivēksār*, verses 51-53).<sup>25</sup>

There are two points of interest in this verse. One is that the way the verse is constructed it can also be translated to mean it is the wise female that conceived the elements of world creation. The second is the use of the word *nāma* as one of the elements of creation. Normally, the five primary elements of creation in Hindu cosmology are depicted as *kṣiti* (earth), *jala* (water), *pāvaka* (fire), *gagana* (sky or space) and *samīra* (air). The word *nāma*, although it means name, in the present case the divine being's name, is equated in this verse with the sky or empty space element, which is consistent with the formless nature of the *satya puruṣa*. Since the word *nāma* only hints at the conception of a name without actually mentioning it, the name remains formless, hence suitable to denote the empty formlessness of space. Dwivedi (1963) corroborates this interpretation by pointing out that of the five elements of creation, the first two are non-physical, while the last three are physical. *Nāma* is a representation of *śabd* (word or vibration), which is a characteristic trait of sky or empty space (Dwivedi 1963:79). The process of creation continues further:

Again, a woman emerged laughing, who created a beautiful lotus, from which emerged the trinity of gods Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha (Shiva) (*Vivēksār*, verse 54).<sup>26</sup>

That endless one was thus adorned with powers of will and action. Taking the five elements and three *guṇas* (primary essences of elements) it created the whole world (*Vivēksār*, verse 57).<sup>27</sup>

The third category of verses in the *jñyāna aṅga*, dealing with the description of the body or *kāyā paricaya*, describe the constituents of the body from the five elements and the three essences, as well as the presence of the entire creation in the body because of the similarity of the constituents thus:

The illusion (created by) that endless one is impossible to transcend. However, one who has the knowledge of the body, gets to know of it (*Vivēksār*, verse 64).<sup>28</sup> Disciple, I now tell you (about) the limb of *vairāgya* (detachment). Understand the *kāyā* (body) and always practice *satsaṅga* (good company).<sup>29</sup> All the matter that exists in the cosmos exists also in the body. Imbued with the mystery of the three essences, its purpose is to perform action.<sup>30</sup> The gross body is controlled by the subtle one, oh disciple I tell you the truth. Recognize (or change into) your subtle body, and become identified (engrossed) with that form of yours<sup>31</sup> (*Vivēksār*, verses 66-68).

Having established the veracity of one's divine nature by pointing out the presence of all the elements of creation within the body, the text then exhorts the disciple to proceed on the path of detachment, the necessary journey within the body away from the externally created world as perceived by the senses. The journey takes place from the outside world into the inside world. It does so by conjuring up images of that which exists outside, within the body thus: within the body exist the three bodies and the three worlds; Ganesha, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; the king of mountains, all elements of creation; the *saptaṛṣi* (seven enlightened ascetics of Puranic lore, also represented astronomically as the seven stars of the Great Bear); the sun and the moon; the beginning, middle and the end; all created worlds including heaven, hell and higher worlds; the flow of the river Ganges as well as sixty eight places of pilgrimage; the ten guardians of the directions, the causal effects of actions as well as time; many kinds of oceans, the scriptures and four wisdoms; a virtual treasure trove of mountains (or worlds) described

as being forty nine *koṭi* (about 490 million in number; or of forty nine different categories); confluence as well as cause for virtuous deeds; seven worlds as well as heaven; mount Kailash as well as the residences of demigods and ascetics; sky as well as the nether worlds; Śeṣanāga as also the demigods Varuna, Kuber and Indra; eight spiritual powers as also nine gems; all the directions and regions therein; and all mantras as well as yantras (ritual diagrams) (*Vivēksār*, verses 70-86).

After pointing out these physical manifestations within the body, the text then highlights the subtle aspects of the body thus:

within the body resides the infinite divine being as also knowledge and the master of illusion; four *antahkaraṇa* (conscience) as well as mind, intellect and *citta* (thought/intention/reflection); eleven senses (five of cognition viz. sight, smell, hearing, touch and taste; five of expression viz. speech, movement [feet], grasping [hands], reproduction [genitalia], excretion [anus]; one consciousness) whose goal is to perceive and to perform; five life forces and their twenty-five incumbent natures along with the illusion-bound being and the divine being; the incarnations; knowledge, detachment and wisdom; the control of it all in the hands of mind; the *anahad vāṇī* (unstruck primordial sound); and the faculty of true expression (*Vivēksār*, verses 88-97).

All of this familiarizes the disciple with the intricacies of the body, leading him to contemplate the relationship of the subtle elements within the body with the subtle elements in external creation in the third limb of the text, the *viññāna aṅga*. This limb does not correspond directly to the third, *āsana* limb, of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga because *āsana*, in yogic practice, implies a seat, or the posture or mode of sitting, while the *viññāna aṅga* describes more the state of existence, or the seat of the subtle elements within and without the body:

The guru showed me that mind is restless, but it is the most powerful in the whole world. Breath is joined with air, it remains ever detached. The light of the word (the primordial sound) lights up the void of the world, understanding it frees one from the bonds of creation. *Prāṇa* (the life-force) is ever detached (and restful), it has no passions or lack thereof. Brahma is ever compassionate, it is a true view, it remains unaffected by the agitations of the three essences. The *haṃsa* (soul) is

indestructible; it does not experience sorrow, joy or any other ailment. Understand the void to be a complete void in itself, hold steadfast to this seed of experienceable knowledge. *Kāla* (time or death) is greatly terrifying; one who understands it becomes whole. *Jīva* (fettered being) is bound in the causality of actions, one that has not yet realized the knowledge of the self imparted by the guru. Shiva is the one who is free of all causal binds of action; it is not bound by any particular region or nation. The omnipresent permeates everything, its name is *Nirañjana* (formless, place-less, invisible). The presence of no being is possible there; it remains within itself forever (*Vivēksār*, verses 113-124).<sup>32</sup>

The last section of the *viññāna aṅga* describes the seat of the various subtle elements within the body, and if I were to force an analogy, this last section could correspond to the *āsana* limb of *aṣṭāṅga* yoga – not as of one person sitting in an *āsana*, but as a whole host of subtle elements sitting in their designated positions: *mana* (creative will, desire) in the heart, wind or air in the navel, word in *anāhata* (the un-struck note), *Prāṇa* (the life force) in eternity, *Brahma* in the cosmos, *Haṃsa* in the sky (or emptiness of space, sometimes denoted as *śūnya*), *Anūpa* (the divine being ever anew) in *śūnya* (nothingness), *kāla* (time or death) in the lotus (of the body, probably hinting at the chakras), *jīva* in the body, Shiva in the moon, and God *Nirañjana* in the *suśumnā* vein (*Vivēksār*, verses 139-150. Although Baba Kinaram does not place these elements in specific *cakras* of the subtle body, the language indicates that that is what it is.). The disciple contemplates this and asks further questions which lead to the fourth limb of the text, the *nirālmba* (self-supported) *aṅga*.

This section, the *nirālmba aṅga*, not only describes the proclivities of the subtle divine constituents within the body, but also, how they can be realized. This *aṅga* can be subdivided further by the subtle themes that its verses portray. The first theme relates to the true nature of these divine constituents (verses 156-165), the second theme is that of what animates them, or brings them to life (verses 167-177), and the third theme is about how they emerge within the body (verses 180-190). However, these three sets of themed

verses, numbering 10, 11, and 11 respectively, appear related internally in the logic of their expression. If we were to create three columns with the aforementioned theme headings, verses in column one will relate directly horizontally to verses in column two, and verses in column two will relate inversely to verses in column three. Thus, verse 156, the first verse of column one, relates directly to verse 167, the first verse in column two, which relates inversely to verse 190, the last verse in column three, viz.:

Where the heart does not exist (with desire), there *Anūp* (the ever new, the formless god) resides in the *mahā man* (great heart or mind, *Vivēksār*, verse 156, hypothetical column one).<sup>33</sup> The life (or existence) of *man* (mind) is animated by *pawan* (breath), a wise one knows this (*Vivēksār*, verse 167, hypothetical column two).<sup>34</sup> Breath is (caused) by *pawan* (air), O disciple, this happens deliberately (or slowly) by itself (*Vivēksār*, verse 190, hypothetical column three).<sup>35</sup>

Here is another example:

Verse 159 (fourth verse from the top of the first column) relates to verse 170 (fourth from the top of the second column), which relates to verse 187 (fourth from the bottom of the third column), viz.:

When lord *Niranjan* (the formless god) was not there, *prāṇa* (the life-force) existed (or rested) in the unmanifested (*Vivēksār*, verse 159).<sup>36</sup> Second, such is the life of *prāṇa*, it is verily like the *Brahma* itself, the wholesome *Brahma* (*Vivēksār*, verse 170).<sup>37</sup> It was in the *prāṇa* that (it) created the *man* (mind, desire), and it remains eternal (*Vivēksār*, verse 187).<sup>38</sup>

The effect of such a relationship between the verses is almost like the inverted image through a pinhole camera, here the body, where what exists within the body does reflect what exists outside, but it is inverted in the refractions of its parts as it gets transmuted by the body. However, this inversion is not a simple upside down construction. No, the refraction and inversion is that of the subtle and gross formations. According to *Vivēksār* it was the most subtle which first gave rise to forms that were more concrete at the beginning of creation. In transmutation inside the body, it is the

concrete form first, and then the progressively more subtle elements deeper within, like the dust settled outside a meteor impact crater, to use a geological analogy – that which used to be on the surface gets buried deeper within at the rim of the crater as the dust settles.<sup>39</sup>

This brings us to the fifth limb of the text, the *samādhi aṅga*. In normal *aṣṭāṅga yoga* sequence, the fifth limb is *pratyāhāra* (sense-control), and *samādhi* constitutes the eighth limb. Not so in the *Vivēksār* where, once the inverted picture of the divine elements within the body is realized through the *nirālmba aṅga*, the disciple becomes ready to enter the state of *samādhi*. In the nine verses of this very short limb, the disciple rapidly loses body consciousness and attains divine awareness thus:

Having borne life, understanding the origin (of creation) remain steadfast in the true state. Now I describe to you this limb of absolute *samādhi*. Once the awareness of the *ghaṭ* (pot of the body) is lost everything becomes visible in the *paṭ* (the viewing screen of the mind). Losing the awareness of both *ghaṭ* and *paṭ* leads to the awareness of that which is eternal. (In this state) breath becomes one with *prāṇa* (the life-force), and *śabd* (vibration) becomes static within itself. Life force becomes one with itself, *Brahm* (the unmanifest divine) becomes one with *Brahm*. The *Haṃsa* (living being, soul) becomes one with itself, the *Avināśī* (indestructible) with the indestructible. *Kāla* (time, death) becomes one with *sūnya* (nothingness), and becomes fearless and detached. *Pawan* (air, breath) becomes one with itself, the living being goes to the abode of Shiva (becomes one with Shiva). And Shiva, in every way, becomes one with *Niranjan* (the unattached divine). When *Niranjan* becomes especially identified with *Nirākār* (the formless divine), *Nirākār* attains the unprecedented omniscient state. *Anahad* (unstruck vibration) remains undifferentiated from *Avināśī* (the indestructible one). *Avināśī* remains one within itself, as is the understanding of the *Vedas*. It is neither far nor near, nor does it have a (dwelling) place. Meditating naturally (or with the breath) with a steadfast *vēdī* (posture, altar of the body) one gets to know this. (At that time) one with itself, it meditates on itself. It remains engrossed within itself, this state is attained by but a few (*Vivēksār*, verses 192-200).<sup>40</sup>

After concluding the *samādhi aṅga*, the guru then teaches the disciple, in the *ajapā aṅga*, not only the way to meditate on the *ajapā* mantra – *so-haṃ* – but also, the lifestyle that should accompany the chanting of this mantra. This mantra is called *ajapā*,

one that is not formally chanted, because it happens naturally with each breath that one takes. With each inhalation, the breath runs into the body with a “so” vibration, and with each exhalation it comes out with the “ham” vibration. In this way a mindful disciple can meditate on this mantra naturally and continuously with each breath, despite being involved in variegated activities. Dwivedi points out that the number of these in and out breaths totals 21,600 in a twenty-four hour period. That is how many times one can meditate on the *ajapā* mantra in a given day (Dwivedi 1963:66). The lifestyle that should accompany this mantra is that of non-discrimination. The guru says:

Remain constantly absorbed within yourself, all is in you, it is in all. Constantly remember this thought, and remaining in solitude stay absorbed in Rāma (a *nirguṇa* reference to the popular god). Do not observe the distinctions of *varṇāśram* (caste distinctions), speak only simple and truth. Understand and attain the essence of the word *sa-ham*, burn up all (thoughts of) caste, creed, family (pride) and *karma* (causal cycles of actions) (*Vivēksār*, verses 209-212).<sup>41</sup>

This last injunction, of disregarding caste distinctions, pride in the family or lineage and all actions generated by such thoughts, is a substantial hallmark of the Aghor tradition.

At the conclusion of this sixth limb the disciple enters the seventh limb, the *śūnya* *aṅga*. Although the word *śūnya* implies nothingness or emptiness, it is an experience of absolute wholeness experienced by the disciple. On entering this state the disciple realizes his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence thus:

I am the living being imbued with divinity, I have created this world. My name is *Niranjan*, it is I who performs everything. I am the fearful death, I preside over all actions. I am healthy and strong, I am the one who is born, I am the one who takes away life. I am the one who supports everything, I uphold the sky. I am Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha, I am fear, I am freedom from it. I am the flower, the fragrance as well as the enchanted bumblebee. I am like the oil in a sesame seed, I am the bondage, I am the freedom. I am terror, I am poison, I am nectar, I am ambrosia. I am knowledge, I am ignorance, I am meditation, I am the light. I am cripple, I am lame, I am exceedingly beautiful and interesting. I am the limb which expresses beauty in everything. I am the low, I am the high, I am the blind, I am the one with beautiful eyes. I am opportunity, I am destruction, I am the water, as well as the vessel that uses it. I am the Kailash mountain where all

divine beings reside. I am the abode of Shiva, the *vaikunṭha* (heaven) abode of Vishnu, I am the truth for all everywhere (*Vivēksār*, verses 224-231).

In this way, the disciple experiences his presence in every follicle of creation, pointing out his presence in the oceans, the mountains, the wise, the fools, in happiness, in sorrow, the tigers, the jackals, the temple-the divinity therein-the worship itself, the king, the pauper, the thief, the police, the yogi-the meditation-the knowledge of the self itself, the leaf-the limb-the root-the tree itself, the asterism, the horizon, the pole-star, the progress of the equinoxes, the elephant, the ant, the ritual observations, the places of pilgrimage etc (*Vivēksār*, verses 232-251). Then the disciple states:

I don't arrive, and I don't leave, I don't live, nor do I ever die. Once the bondage of the three *guṇas* (essences) is lost, I remain eternal (*Vivēksār*, verse 252).<sup>42</sup>

Then, paying obeisance to the guru, the text proceeds to the eighth limb, the *rakṣā aṅga*, or the limb of protection. This limb is somewhat unusual in that it implies the knowledge received and experienced by the disciple still needs to be protected, or the disciple may lose it. It is unusual because the generally accepted axiom is that once this state is reached, there is no going back – knowing the divine, one becomes divine – as the limb of nothingness amply demonstrates. However, the eighth limb, the limb of protection implies that if the disciple loses his sense control and way of life outlined by the guru, he can lose the knowledge thus received. The guru propounds four ways of protecting this knowledge:

*Ātma rakṣā* (protection of the self) is easy to understand in four ways, oh disciple. Taking compassion, wisdom and thoughtfulness with you, keep the company of saints (*Vivēksār*, verse 255).<sup>43</sup>

The guru then elaborates on these four elements by exhorting the disciple to take away *para pīṛā* (the pain of others), distinguish between *saṅga-kusaṅga* (good and bad company) and to eschew bad company, to continuously remain engrossed in the name of

Rama (the deity of mantra) as a part of *satsaṅga*, to remain with patience and contentment, eschewing frustrations, to practice forgiveness, not to expect anything (from others), to abstain from all kinds of cunningness, to remain in a state of blissful love, to not worry about gain or loss, to experience the divine constantly, to look at everyone equally and to have faith in the guru's words, remain alone without thoughts of friends or foes, to give up the worldly notion of mine and others', to have equal compassion with all beings. If he always abides with this wisdom, he will never be destroyed (*Vivēksār*, verses 256-267).

Then the guru exhorts against pride in gaining such knowledge, imparting this awareness through a series of *koan* like paradoxical riddles which go in this way:

One who sang, has not sung, the one unsung (who has not sung), is like singing (is the one who really sings). One who knew really knew not, one unknown (one who did not know) is the one to be known (is the one who really knows). One who saw, really did not, one who didn't, really did and so on (*Vivēksār*, verses 269-282). Thus warning the disciple about the pitfalls of knowledge-generated ego, and outlining the wise person's way of life, the text moves on to the last section, which in *Vivēksār* is not called a limb anymore, perhaps in keeping with the framework of *aṣṭāṅga yoga*, but is simply titled as *phala stuti* (merits of venerating the text). It recaps the difficulty of crossing the ocean of the world, and that without a true guru, it is difficult to cross it. But one who reads, understands and internalizes *Vivēksār* will soon be free of the bonds of creation. One verse which is of particular interest to us is the one that mentions the tradition from which such knowledge comes:

This world is extremely *asāra* (vain, unprofitable, hollow), generated by the five elements of creation. That is why I have described this *Avadhūta* treatise according to the understanding in my mind (*Vivēksār*, verse 290).<sup>44</sup>

The word *Avadhūta* (see verse 52 above) is often used for realized practitioners in the field of Tantra, as well as in certain branches of *siddha* Buddhism. It has special implication with reference to the section on *kāyā paricaya*, or knowledge of the body, above. White documents that:

... the fourteenth century *Śārṅgadhara Paddhati* goes so far as to classify the two major forms of yogic practice, the “six-limbed” practice and the “eight-limbed” practice, as “Gorakhnāthī” and “that of the son of Mrkaṇḍa” (a reference to Dattātreya, inasmuch as it is this figure who reveals the yogic doctrine of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*) respectively. In the *Gorakh Upaniṣad*, Gorakh terms the former *akula* and the latter *avadhūta*. (White 1996:141).

### **Dimensions of the Categories of Sarbhang, and Sant**

Having perused through the Aghor tenets presented in *Vivēksār*, let us now look at how Dr. Dharmendra Brahmachari Shastri describes the special traits of the sect called Sarbhang in Bihar. Shastri has noted, rightly, that despite being widespread in Bihar as the Sarbhang sect, and throughout India as the Aghor tradition, our knowledge about the tradition is appallingly deficient. He writes:

Sarbhang-tradition has the closest relationship with the Śākta and Tantric branches of the Śaiva tradition, and Śaiva tradition is mutually related to the ‘Rudra’ of Ṛgveda and Atharvaveda... [I]n Śaiva literature and Tantra literature, of the names which have been used to propitiate Śiva or Rudra, many names have been prevalent since Atharvaveda. Some followers of the saint-tradition (*santa-mata*), through cremation ground practices (*śmaśāna-kriyā*) perform severe austerities to control ghosts, *piśācas*, *dākinīs* and *śākinīs*, and propitiate *Kāla-bhairava* and *Kālī*. (Shastri 1959 Background:8-9)

Shastri, who had met one Baba Raghunath Aughar Pir at Kamakhya mentions that the name of Baba Raghunāth’s guru was Anand Giri Aughar Pir, and this guru considered Baba Kinaram, the seventeenth century saint from north India, to be his *param guru*

(highest, or holiest guru). However, Baba Anand Giri considered himself to be a follower of the Sarbhang sect. Concluding from this, Shastri believes that the Aghor tradition is a link between the traditions of Guru Gorakhnāth and Ādiguru Dattātreyā:

‘Aghor’ is an ubiquitous name, and ‘Sarbhang’ indicates this tradition of theirs, which was adopted primarily in north Bihar (especially Champaran). The original fountainhead of this tradition is the thoughts of Baba Kinaram, which has its center in Kashi. The prominence that Aghors or Aghoris have of śava-sādhanā etc. is not so much among the Sarbhāngis. (Shastri 1959 Background:53-4 fn 186)

The details Shastri provides about the *sant* tradition’s Sarbhang sect in its ideological, practice and behavior (life style) aspects, are insightful. They also help us to correlate teachings in the *Vivēksār* to the larger *sant* tradition:

First, the ideological-aspect –

1. Supreme element (*paramātma-tattva*) and self-element (*ātma-tattva*) (*Śiva-tattva* and *Śakti-tattva*) are fundamentally undifferentiable and non-dual.
2. The physical world developed from the *Prakṛti* with three characters (*guṇas*) is also no different from supreme-element (*paramātma-tattva*) or Brahma-element (*Brahma-tattva*).
3. The perception of the triadic difference amongst God or Supreme Being (*Iśwar*), the living being (*jīva*) and the creative element (*Prakṛti*) occurs because of illusion (*māyā*) or ignorance (*avidyā*).
4. The Supreme Being (*Paramātmā*) is transcendent to the three characters (*guṇas*), that is to say, it is formless (*nirguṇa*).
5. The created world made of five elements (*pañcabhūta*) is endowed with the three characters (*guṇas*), that is to say, it is form-full (*saguṇa*).
6. The sublimation of duality (*dvaita*) in non-duality (*advaita*) is knowledge of enlightenment (*jñyāna*), and knowledge is liberation (*mokṣa*). (Shastri 1959 Background:1).

Second, we have the practice aspect –

1. The means of attaining liberation (*mokṣa*) is yoga.
2. Between *haṭha-yoga* and *dhyāna-yoga*, *dhyāna-yoga* is better.<sup>45</sup>
3. Through *dhyāna-yoga* one can perceive the cosmos (*brahmāṇḍa*) in the body (*pinḍa*), the Supreme Being (*Paramātmā*) in the Self (*ātmā*), and creative energy (*Śakti*) in inert matter (*Śiva*).
4. Devotion (*bhakti*) is essential with yoga, and in devotion (*bhakti*) name (*mantra*) and repeating that name (*japa*) are necessary.

5. There are two aspects to the path of *sāadhanā* – right (*dakṣiṇa*) and left (*vāma*). In the left hand aspect the five-M-s (*pañcamakāra*) help in attaining spiritual powers (*siddhi*). Therefore the female consort thought of as the mother element (*māīrāma*) can stay as a female ascetic (*sādhikā*) with a male ascetic (*sādhak*). Worshipping a virgin as a symbol of Śakti is also a part of *sāadhanā*.
6. Desolate places, primarily the cremation ground, are especially conducive for *sāadhanā*. Meditating on the corpse (*śava-sāadhanā*) is a prominent feature of *sāadhanā*.
7. For a traveler on the *sāadhanā* path, instructions from the guru are essential. (Shastri 1959 Background:1-2).

And third, the behavior aspect –

1. It is crucial to conquer the desire tendencies of the mind and the senses.
2. Truth (*satya*), non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), forbearance (*dhairya*), equal-vision (*samadrṣṭi*), humility (*dīnatā*), etc. are special characters of the devotees and saints. Therefore, from a point of view of social welfare (*loka-kalyāṇa*) the saint should have a knowledge of herbs, medicines, and *mantra* treatments (*mantropacāra*).
3. Caste and category distinctions, pilgrimage and fasting, etc. are external behaviors and regarded as fraudulent.
4. *Satsaṅga* (good company, specifically, listening to spiritual discourse) are prime activities of saints and devotees.
5. The *samādhis* (tombs, or canopies built on a saint's relics or remains) are things to be worshipped.
6. Being of a non-discriminating vision (*samadrṣṭi*) the saint should stay away from distinctions of edible or inedible, and caste or gender (*bhēda-bhāva*). (Shastri 1959 Background:2).

This exposition by Shastri helps us correlate his findings about the Sarbhang sect with the tenets provided in the *Vivēksār*. The precepts of non-duality, non-discrimination, faith in meditation, mantra and guru, all correspond between *Vivēksār* and the Sarbhang tradition. *Vivēksār* does not mention cremation-ground practices, but we know about those from a myriad other sources as well as personal observation. In an earlier work Shastri (1954) has described how terms such as *satpuruṣa*, *paramātmā*, *satnām* (1954 I:4), *haṃsa* (1954 I:12), etc. also occur with largely the same meanings as given in *Vivēksār*, in the writings of sant Dariya, a prominent eighteenth century figure of the saint tradition of Bihar. Other examples, mostly from the tradition of Baba Kinaram's

disciples or followers, include Radharaman (Shastri 1959 Background:54), Ramswarupdas (Shastri 1959 I:4), Anand, (Shastri 1959 I:37 fn 8-10), Motidas, Bodhidas (Shastri 1959 I:38 fn15-6) and numerous others. Most prominent among these is Kabirdas, about whom Dwivedi (1963) writes:

... the nirguṇa Śiva of Tantra is the same as the Satya Puruṣ of Kabir, saguṇa Śiva is Niranjan Puruṣ, and Śakti is Ādyā Śakti.” Further, “... great practitioners like Kabir caught the fundamental sentiment at the basis of mantra-sādhanā and the name. They never forgot the one who animates the mantra.” (Dwivedi 1963:46).

Kabir’s verses were definitely influenced by Gorakhnath (White1996:142), and although later saints of the *Sant* tradition have discussed the *cakras* a lot, fundamentally, it remains a conception of the Shakt and Nath ascetics (Dwivedi1963:36), an issue which becomes important to us as we look at the category of Nāth and Aughaṛ later.

Thus, Sarbhang and Aughaṛs are characterized by a belief in the Supreme element (*paramātmā-tattva*) and self-element (*ātma-tattva*), the five elements (*pañcabhuta*) and three characters (*guṇas*), belief that between *haṭha-yoga* and *dhyāna-yoga*, *dhyāna-yoga* is better, belief in creative energy (*Śakti*) and inert matter (*Śiva*), proclivity for desolate places, primarily the cremation ground, for *sādhanā*, meditating on the corpse (*śava-sādhanā*), and disdain for caste and category distinctions, etc. They are considered to be theistic, often regarded as either being a Shaiva or a Shakta ascetic.

During their *sādhanā* period they smear their bodies with the ashes of cremation ground. Often, they wear bones, or bone necklaces on their body. They wear the shroud remnants left behind by the grieving, eat by begging for alms, own nothing except, perhaps, a skull bowl from which they eat and drink. Some of them also go about naked. They are considered to be knowledgeable about alchemy, and to be adept at transforming the nature of elements (Chaturvedi 1973:73), often celibate, they use *pañcamakāras* (the

five Ms, viz *matsya* [fish], *māṃsa* [meat], *mudrā* [parched grains, physical postures], *madya* [liqor] and *maithuna* [sexual union]) in their *sādhanā*. They are supposed to be indifferent about with whom they associate, or what they eat or drink in daily life and sometimes denounced for ingesting foul substances, because they are also regarded as anti-vedic non-adherents of the caste system. Because of their dwelling and behavior, they are often understood to be dirty or terrifying in appearance, and equally as often, adept at Tantrik magic. Some of their *sādhanās* can be termed *Bhairavī sādhanā* (Practice that involves participation of a female partner), although how exclusive this practice is to the Aghaṛs is a matter of research. Aghaṛs are regarded as followers of the sentiment of non-duality, *advaita-bhāva*, where although the existence of a creator is accepted, that creative power is regarded as formless, as *nirguṇa*. Parry writes:

...suspension of time and conquest of death is also, the aim of Aghori asceticism. The theological premise on which their practice is founded would appear to be a classical monism. Every soul is identical with the Absolute Being; all category distinctions are a product of illusion (*maya*), and behind all polarities there is an ultimate unity. But what is peculiar to the Aghoris is a very literal working-out of this monistic doctrine through a discipline which insists on a concrete experience of the identity of opposites, and on a material realisation of the unity between them. It is a matter of a kind of externalised fulfilment of what is more orthodoxly interpreted as a purely internal quest. (Parry 1982:87)

To systematize the practices I have gleaned from Baba Kinaram's hagiography, the *Vivēksār* and Shastri's writings on the Sarabhang saints, let me present them here as numbered points. Such an exercise will also facilitate easier comparison with the practices of other ascetic traditions through history. This list is constructed on the basis of their appearance, dwelling, diet and practices:

1. they live in the cremation ground; they live in forests or thickets around river banks;
2. they intentionally avoid human contact during the period of their *sādhanā*;

3. they wear clothes picked from the cremation ground, such as pieces of the shroud; they also wear ornaments of human bones, and carry a skull with them;<sup>46</sup>
4. they subsist on what they can find in the cremation ground, as well as begging;
5. they ingest their own feces and urine during the period of ascetic practices;
6. they meditate and perform their rituals in the cremation ground;
7. some of their rituals and meditations are associated with corpses, such as sitting on a corpse and meditating (*śava sādhanā*);
8. they are indifferent to how other people treat them;
9. they do not believe in caste distinctions or the ritualistic *karmakāṇḍa* (rituals related to stages of life passage) propounded by Brahman priests, and hence, are called anti-vedic;
10. they believe in a state of non-duality;
11. they can perform *sādhanā* with a female partner, called *Bhairavī* or *Yoginī*.

Typically, Aghor practices are regarded as severely ascetic where the seeker gives up his household, possessions, etc. and after initiation, with a new name, does severe penance in cremation grounds, desolate places, river banks, etc. To exemplify, the *sādhanā* period of Sarkar Baba was a period of very hard ascetic practices, details of which we will see in chapter three. His life and teachings reflect a strict regimen of self-control, indifference to lures of the sense objects, cultivation of a non-body focused consciousness, practice of non-duality and non-recognition of social categories in practical life, faith in the words of the guru, and leading a very simple life. While his doctrine is definitely theistic, it also reflects a certain degree of ambivalence towards that which is normally regarded as God. In his philosophy, the object of worship is not an

external god, but one's own life-force, the *Prāṇa*, that animates the body, and which holds the secret to all that is knowable in the universe.

What needs to be stressed here, however, is that in the Aghor tradition and the Sarbhang tradition generally, along with the ascetic practice of self-control and focused meditation, there is an overwhelming element of cultivation of love as well as devotion (*bhakti*). This, I think is the real importance of meditating on the *nāma* as mentioned in the *Vivēksār* and other books written by Baba Kinaram, and one which, in my view, separates it from traditions based on *haṭhayoga*. Drawing conclusions about the Aghor tradition based only on the yogic practices described in the *Vivēksār* can lead one to view Kinarami Aughaṛs only as severe egotistic ascetics of the cremation ground practicing yoga. But that would be an erroneous picture because the element of cultivation of love is perceived in the daily behavior of these saints, and that is why in anthropological research it is so important to have readings of microhistory and hagiography, as mentioned in chapter one. Shastri stresses this point thus:

A Sarbhang saint of Champaran has postulated ten steps of the path of *bhakti* (devotion) – *śraddhā* (faith), *satsaṅg* (good company), *bhajan* (devotional music singing), *viśaya-virāg* (abstinence), *niṣṭhā* (determination) or *ruci* (deep interest), *dhyāna* (meditation), enjoyment of the *nāma* (name of the divine), *bhāvanā* (emotion), all encompassing *prema* (love), and *sākṣātkāra* (witnessing the divine). The virtue of love has been lauded in the entire literature of Aghor tradition or Sarabhang tradition. The path of love is the best. Only such a person walks this path who has Rām's name as a guide, who has banished lust and anger etc. from his heart, who is not afraid of living or dying, who has understood the fruitlessness of scriptural knowledge and understands the importance of his own behavior, duty and company to be even greater. Walking on the 'strange' (unusual) path of love as directed by the guru provides experience (of the divine) to the human being, and he begins to see the line between darkness and light. (Shastri 1959-II:25, gloss added).

It is because of this stress on love that Aghor *sādhanā* focuses on sublimating the natural human inclinations by prescribing practices that include feminine company and

participation on the lines of *sahaja* practices (often attributed to later Buddhism) rather than the somewhat austere and unnatural overpowering of these inclinations through *haṭhayoga*. However, love in feminine company ties it not only to Buddhist practices, but also to the field of Tantra in general. It also brings them closer to the devotional philosophy of other *nirguṇa* saints, as well as to the Sufi practices discussed below. As Gold and Gold state, “Hindi Sants ... beginning with Kabir in the fifteenth century, incorporated Nath esoteric techniques into a more devotional piety” (1984:121).

However, let me pause here the discussion of the Nath synthesis in the Aghor tradition because it catapults us into the world of Siddhas and Kapalikas and Pāśupatas, making us take a chronological leap that will leave behind associations that are closer to home, chronologically as well as socially. Let us look at Sufis first.

### **Dimensions of a Sufi Connection**

In the incident cited above, of Shastri’s meeting with the Sarbhang ascetic Baba Raghunath Aughar Pir at Kamakhya, we have before us a name which presents a curious assimilation of terms. We can surmise that the name Raghunath is of Vaishnava origin, the word Aughar denotes an ascetic of a Shaiva or Shakta tradition, but the word Pir reminds us of Sufi saints. The book title *Aughar Pīr Kī Mastī* (Asthana n.d.), published by Aghor Shodh Sansthan at the Kinaram Sthal about the life of Sarkar Baba’s guru Baba Rajeshwar Ram, has the same word in it. Another title, *Aughar Pīr*, a pamphlet published by the same institution in 1986, also incorporates this word. The first page of this pamphlet describes Aghor with numbered points, I translate the first four of them here:

1. Shiva's fifth face is the Aghor face. 2. By the union of Shiva and Shakti we have the condition of the Aghor tradition. 3. Himālī [from Gorakhnath] and Girnālī [from Dattatreya], both are names of this very tradition. At some places they are also referred to as Kaul or Sufi. 4. Viśwāmītra [of *Rāmāyaṇa*] and Tailangaswami were also Aghor *sādhaks*. (*Aughar Pīr* 1986).

Readers can be excused if they look at this description of Aghor incredulously! Is such a description of Aghor a product of the inherent diversity within the tradition as well as its synthesizing nature -- where the same saint can be regarded as Vaishnava and Shaiva -- at the same time; a single person's name can reflect Vaishnava, Shaiva and Sufi elements at the same time; and the tradition itself can be referred to in Shakta Tantra as well as Sufi terms without losing a beat? Or is there a yet still deeper historical connection? I think this issue beautifully exemplifies the necessity of looking at Augharṣ using the polythetic approach (Needham 1975) mentioned above. Augharṣ could be referred to as Kaula in some places because, as Ernst points out, "The early Nath jogis were associated with the erotic practices of Kaula Tantrism, and prominent in their pantheon are the feminine deities known as yoginis or female yogis." (Ernst 2005:22). This subsumption of Augharṣ through the framework of Nathṣ can lead them to be known as Kaulas. The title of Pir can also be explained thus:

The similarity between jogis and Sufis extended to the point that the heads of Nath jogi establishments became known by the Persian term *pir*, the common designation for a Sufi master. While it is sometimes suggested that this name was adopted defensively to deter Muslim rulers from wiping the jogis out, from the historical evidence it seems clear that many Muslim rulers were quite familiar with the characteristic specialities of jogis, and it is striking that the Mughals in particular became patrons of jogi establishments. Acculturation by the jogis to selected Islamic norms seems a more likely reason than the presumption of religious persecution for the jogis' adoption of such a title. (Ernst 2005:23-4).

Although historically astute, this comment still leaves us asking why did the jogis (and Augharṣ by the extension of diversity) acculturate to "selected Islamic norms"?

Although Ernst underplays the issue of persecution and highlights the issue of Muslim

patronage of yogis, both of them could be relevant in a carrot and stick kind of way. The story of Baba Kinaram's first capture, then reverence, by the Muslim Nawab of Junagadh mentioned above highlights this. Still, it does not provide a deeply satisfying answer to the issue. I think the answer to why the appellation of a Sufi is applied to Aghors (jogis) in some places lies in the perceived similarity between the practices of the two groups, as well as the nature of their interaction and exchange. Let us see what evidence we have of that.

I recall an incident from my childhood, sometime in 1970, when Sarkar Baba took the whole family to Ajmer in Rajasthan. We stayed at the Dak-Bungalow on the hill above the still, mirror-like blue waters of Anna Sagar Lake from where the green veneer of the moss along the lake shore and the play of herons feasting on it was clearly visible. The highlight of the trip was a visit to the *dargāh* (tomb complex of a Muslim saint) of Khwaza Muinuddin Chishti where I was, being little, enthralled by the sight of two gigantic *deg* (pots), fifteen feet high it seemed to me then, which were used for cooking *khicaṛī* (rice and lentils cooked together) at the time of *Urs* (annual feast marking the saint's passing away). My amazement knew no bounds when Sarkar Baba told me people actually jumped into those cauldrons to scoop up *khicaṛī* when the level went down, even as I visualized their feet and hands getting scalded by the hot *khicaṛī* underneath them. Now I know better. By the time people need to jump in, *khicaṛī* is no longer hot! Sarkar Baba took us around the *dargāh* pointing out the value of uncountable red threads tied to various pillars within the shrine. I did not know then that Sarkar Baba had travelled extensively throughout India. This was, obviously, not his first trip to the shrine.

That was where I saw, for the first time, *Malang faqīrs* (Muslim ascetics, generally without sectarian affiliation). They were dressed in black, appeared intoxicated, murmuring what I presumed then were their mantras. I know they were Malangs because Sarkar Baba pointed them out to be so. The scene must have made quite an impression on me, for I nearly fell out of my chair, more than a decade later, on seeing two chapters devoted to a dialogue between the Aghoreshwar and a Malang from Afghanistan in the book *Aghor Guru Guh* (1982, chapters 10-11). I wondered why, and then it clicked. In 1969 Sarkar Baba had taken a trip to Afghanistan and Iran (Chaturvedi 1990). The purpose of that journey, in my translation, is stated as follows:

Many of my disciples live in Kabul and Kandhar. There are many holy pilgrimage places in Afghanistan. It has been a place of ascetic practices for Indian seekers and saints. Many places sacred to Agharṣ are still present there in their original form. The primary objective of this journey was to visit Agharṣ monasteries and to create a link with Agharṣ of Afghanistan. Indian Agharṣ lost contact with Afghanistan after the creation of Pakistan. To reestablish that contact is one of the primary goals of this journey. Master! You know very well that the path of us Agharṣ is a hidden one. Agharṣ saints are called *gupt mārgī* (travelers of a hidden path) because their practices are extremely well guarded. One of my goals was to consult with Agharṣ of Afghanistan about those secret practices. It was my goal to create a mutual connection between the limbs and practices of the two countries. In this connection, I even obtained a lot. (Chaturvedi 1990:6).

During that journey he had met many Agharṣ and Malangs at Kabul as well as at Kandhar. It is possible that this Malang mentioned in the book knew one of those ascetics Sarkar Baba had met in Afghanistan. Two facts related to our topic stand out in reading this travelogue. One is that since Afghanistan is an Islamic country, even in 1969 the saints there were referred to as *Pīrs*. Baba mentions the *dargāh* of Agharṣ Pir Ratan Nath which he visited with Agharṣ Kabul Nath, the caretaker of the *dargāh* at that time in Kabul, and with whom he had lengthy discussions on the secret practices of Agharṣ

(Chaturvedi 1990:14). In relating the account to Chaturvedi (whom he used to call Master), Sarkar Baba says:

Listen Master! In the middle of this travel narrative I am telling you about Aughar Pir Ratan Ji. Listen carefully. Aughar Pir Ratan Nath's advent to Kabul happened about 200 years ago. At that time neither the present Shah nor people of his family were on the throne. It was the rule of another lineage. They used to respect faqir, Malang and Qalandar. (Chaturvedi 1990:14).

The way Sarkar Baba puts this statement reflects his own positive disposition towards faqirs, Malangs and Qalandars. Also, Pir Ratan Nath's name indicates that he probably belonged to the Nath yogi tradition which, according to the Kinarami Aughar view, will put him in the Himālī stream of the tradition. Sarkar Baba continues:

Now I will tell you about Pir Ratan Nath's virtues and behavior. Pir Ratan Nath was an awliyā faqir of a very high order. He was of a very generous disposition. Pir Ratan Nath Ji was a very gentle Kāpālīka Aghori. When he met with the Shah, the Shah was very impressed. (Chaturvedi 1990:15).

Here again, we have the curious juxtaposition, rather synthesis, of two traditions expressed in the persona of a single individual. One is the awliyā faqir referent, which harks to the Sufi tradition, and the other is the Kāpālīka Aghori referent, which hails from the Shaiva-Shakta tradition. Sarkar Baba's manner of stating it, however, makes it appear as the most natural thing in the world without even a trace of contradiction. Is it because Pir Ratan Nath was really a Sufi faqir who practiced Kāpālīka Aghor sādhanā? Or was it because he was really a Kāpālīka Aghori who lived like a Sufi faqir? In fact, Gupta mentions that during her fieldwork she twice mistook black robed Sufis for Aghoris as they were virtually indistinguishable in appearance (Gupta 1993:152). Perhaps readers will be able to draw their own conclusion by the end of this section.

From Kabul Sarkar Baba proceeded to Kandhar, visiting Aughar Bhola Nath Pir's *gaddī* (seat or monastery) where he stayed as a guest of the priest Chu Chu Maharaj. It is

when he reached Mashad in Iran that we find another notable observation pertinent to our discussion. Sarkar Baba went to visit the shrine mausoleum of the eighth Shi'ite Imam Ali Bin Moosa Al Reza, the great grand son of Imam Ali who was the cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Mohammad. Sarkar Baba speaks of Imam Ali with great sympathy and sensitivity:

Ali was devoted to his guru and kept faith in his leader. He was always ready to bring Muhammad Sahab's dreams to reality... Ali's mausoleum is in the city of Mashad, with whose family the Shi'ite people identify themselves. For all the Shi'ite people of the world Mashad is the foremost place of pilgrimage... I had a special experience there. Yogis understand quite a lot by the inspiration of the god within, Master! On reaching the mausoleum I had faith towards Ali because I had seen his history in the book called *Rahmat-e-ālam*. (Chaturvedi 1990:36).

Coming from a Hindu saint of Kashi, this is indeed high praise! It is especially remarkable because there are many places in the travelogue where Sarkar Baba is critical of the culture that he sees around him. But he finds himself disposed to recognize the sanctity of a holy place, as well as truly holy people, whatever religion they may belong to.

Such empathy with Sufis may be the reason why the aforementioned pamphlet states Aughar̄s are referred to as Sufis in some places. However, there is much other evidence to foster this feeling. Briggs cites the harmonious sharing of the same shrine by Muslims (read Sufis) and Nath yogis (read Aughar̄s also) at Hinglaj and Devi Patan (1982[1938]:151-2). Schimmel (1999) talks about Lal Shahbaz (Royal Red Falcon) Qalandar of Sehwan in Sindh:

As the word 'Sehwan' (or Sivistan) indicates, the town where he lived was the site of a Shiva sanctuary on the lower Indus, the main centre of the cult of the Hindu god Shiva found in the western part of Sind and Baluchistan. *Thus it is hardly surprising to learn that Shahbaz's mysticism took on strange forms, and that his followers became known as the bī-shar', or lawless, Sufis...* Sufi seekers from this area climbed its sacred mountain Hinglaj and visited the sacred cave in

Makran, *one may deduce that the Sufis had close relations with the Shaivites and Yogis who trekked there on their annual pilgrimages...* Thus, one cannot exclude the possibility of Shaivite influences on Sindhi Sufi poetry. These influences seem to be especially visible in the rites practiced at the sanctuary of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, where even today the remains of a *lingam* can be found. (Schimmel 1999:422, emphasis added).

There are many other places in South Asia where such coexistence occurs naturally, and therefore, interaction and exchange of ideas and practices. One such example is provided by Coomaraswamy pertaining to Sufi saint Khwaja Khadir (Khizr) also known as Pir Badar and Khwaja Kidār, popular amongst both Muslims and Hindus:

His principal shrine is on the Indus near Bakhar, where he is worshipped by devotees of both persuasions; the cult is however hardly less widely diffused in Bihar and Bengal. In the Hindu cult, the Khwājā is worshipped with lights and by feeding Brahmans at a well, and alike in Hindu and Muslim practice, by setting afloat in a pond or river a little boat which bears a lighted lamp. Iconographically Khwājā Khizr is represented as an aged man, having the aspect of a *fakir*, clothed entirely in green, and moving in the waters with a “fish” as his vehicle. (Coomaraswamy 1970:1).

He cites several versions of Khwaja Khizr’s story from various sources, but the archaic Indian folktale about the Persian king and his first son Kassab from a concubine and second son Mahbub from his true queen appear as a classic mythological tale of quest, journey and success, with symbolism that reminds us not only of the Heracles story discussed in chapter one, but also Aghor symbolism replete with a severed head (skull), dark nether-lands (liminal places of power), feminine angels (*yoginis*), conquest of adversities (*sāadhanā*), and acquisition of magical powers (*siddhis*) (Coomaraswamy 1970:2).

To provide a Hindu example, there is a version of Dattatreya in the Maharashtra state worshipped as Shah Datta by Hindus as well as Muslims:

In his Muslim form, Dattatreya is known in Marathi texts as the Malanga Fakir, or Shah Datta. That some devotees, including Brahmans, were able to accept a puranic Hindu deity in Muslim garb likely meant that they were able to accept

Muslims as an integral part of their world... The first interaction between Dattatreya and Muslims appears to date back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. *Gurucaritra*, the main scripture of the Maharashtrian Dattatreya cult, speaks about two dominant saintly figures, Shripada Shrivallabha (d.1350) and Narsimha Sarasvati (d.1458). Both are worshipped today as incarnations of Dattatreya, and both are also mentioned in connection with Muslims: Shripada Shrivallabha promised a poor washerman he would become a sultan in his next life, and Narsimha Sarasvati helped this sultan to overcome an illness. The story is set in Bidar, the second capital of the Bahmani kingdom and regional sultanate of central India in 1347-1538. (Deák 2005:20)

Later, Dattatreya was understood to be a Malang *faqīr*, to the extent that some ascribed him as the guru of saint Eknath as Malang Chand Bodhle (d. 1599).<sup>47</sup> Dattatreya appeared to Eknath in a Muslim form on more than one occasion (Rigopoulos 1998:144-5). Eknath's writings do have a number of Persian and Arabic words, and Muslim holy men are also present in his *bhārūds* (drama poems) (Rigopoulos 1998:160 fn 26; Zelliott and Mokashi-Punekar 2005: 261). It is because of this Sufi connection that Rigopoulos interprets Eknath's devotional ecstasy in Sufi terms:

Eknāth's absorption into the personality of his guru is similar to the discipline known as *fanā-fī-sh-shaykh* among Sufis: the personality of the pupil (*murīd*) is absorbed into the personality of the master (*shaykh*). (Rigopoulos 1998: 160 fn 26).

This dual identity of Dattatreya in Maharashtra, as a *trimūrti* (embodiment of the three Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) as well as that of a Malang *faqīr* became common. Later, followers of the *Anandasampradaya* thought of him as Shah Datta Allama Prabhu (Deák 2005:20).<sup>48</sup> This mention of Dattatreya in Maharashtra as a Malang *faqīr* is pertinent because Kinarami Aghars trace their tradition to Dattatreya, not to Gorakhnath.

Ernst cites an example of Sufis watching the breathing exercises and chantings of yogis with interest, as described in *Khayr al-majalis* of Nasir al-Din Mahmud "Chiragh-i Dihli" (d. 1356) and noticed similarities with their own meditative practices (b.

2003:205). Hatley documents the development of Sufi Tantrik practices and Sufi yoga in Bengal based mainly on Nath yogic practices and later, the Sahajiya Vaishnavism (Hatley 2007:351-2), although conceptions similar to the *Pinḍa-Brahmāṇḍa* dyad may already have existed in Sufi mysticism as evident in Ibn ‘Arabi’s thought that “all that exists in the human being has an analogue in the macrocosm, ‘the great human being’ (*al-insān al-kabīr*) (Hatley 2007:353). In Bengal there is documentation of homologization of *cakras* of the Tantrik subtle body with *maqams*, the stations of Islamic mysticism (Hatley 2007:355). He writes:

Sufi traditions, after all, embraced elaborate spiritual disciplines that, like those of Tantric yoga, required esoteric initiation and presupposed a mystical physiology as the locus for meditations involving syllabic formulas, visualization, and controlled respiration. Islamic adaptations of indigenous yogic disciplines are indeed by no means unique to Bengal: Sufi *silsilahs* and Ismā‘īlīs in South Asia attest multiple examples of experimentation (Hatley 2007:352-3).

Thus from the far west of Sindh with Lal Shahbaz’s bi-shar and Qaḍī Qādan’s Sufi poetry in local languages (Schimell 1999:422-5), to far east of India in Bengal, Sufis have selectively incorporated Hindu practices into their own, giving it a name, form and language that is still Islamic. Other similarities that can be cited with Aghors are their unorthodox, even antinomian behavior (Newman 1999:138-42), association with the poor and marginalized (Gold and Gold 1984:116-117; Gupta 1993:149; Andreyev 1999:291), teacher-disciple (*Shaykh-Murshid*) relationship (Ter Haar 1999:311-2), initiation into the order (Ernst 1999:348), use of music (*sama*) (Ernst and Lawrence 2002:34-36; During 1999:277), etc. As a documentation of Sufi unorthodox practice as listed in Muhammad Ardabili’s *Ḥadīqat al-Shī‘a* (1058/1648), Newman provides several lists of accusations against them. For example, for the Jumhūriyya order:

Members of this group allegedly considered that within everyone is something of the divine. Thus, Imām Ḥusayn and his murderer Yazīd, oppressor and

oppressed, Musā and Pharaoh are all “one and the same (*yak*).” Similarly pigs and dogs, unclean according to the law, are pure (*pāk*)... this group also believes in the unity of existence (*waḥadat-i wujūd*), predestination (*jabr*), and the comparability of God to creation (*tasbīh*), and espouse a doctrine of incarnation (*tajassum, sūrat*)... They call love for God ‘*ishq*, and claim that the religious sciences (‘*ulūm-i dīniyya*) are all merely exoteric (*zāhir*) disciplines to be disdained in favor of esoteric knowledge (‘*ilm-i bātin*). They have sex ... claiming, ... that thereby they are actually achieving union with God since everything visible contains some aspect of God... they act like crazy people, calling themselves the greatest of the saints of God (*akābir-i awliyā’-i Allāh*). They classify singing and songs (*ghina’*, *surūd*) as religiously permitted (*ḥalāl*)... in their ceremonies (*majlis*). They attribute to each other miracles and revelation (*karamāt va kashf*). Most of them wear unsuitable hats and clothes.” (Newman 1999:140).

Use of music as *bhajans* (devotional songs) is very common in India and Kinarami Aghaṛs are no strangers to it. A stylized color portrait of Baba Kinaram shows him smoking a *hukkā* with three of his disciples around him. One of them, Baba Bijaram sits on the floor, always holding a *sitār* in his hands, fingers curved to display he is playing it. During fieldwork I heard a revealing, if somewhat funny story, pertaining to Sarkar Baba’s time, from “Chhote Babu”:

Amongst Baba’s devotees at Haji Suleman’s garden used to be one Prachand Singh Champ. People used to call him Pandey Ji. Pandey Ji and Godai Maharaj<sup>49</sup> would both sing *bhajans* to Baba in the evening with *ḍholak* and *tabalā* (Indian percussion instruments). They would compete with each other in this *bhajan* singing. The result would be that almost every night, Pandey Ji would play the drum so hard his hand would rip through the leather and go inside the drum itself! He would become so ecstatic playing, that he would rip the drum every night. One of the *bhajans* that Pandey Ji and Godai Maharaj used to sing to Baba was:

What need does a heart, full of joy, have for a musical instrument?  
What need does a heart, to pray to God, in which you live, my beloved?<sup>50</sup>

(Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

*Karamāt va kashf*, similar to those attributed to Sufis, are also common in Baba Kinaram’s life story, as well as Sarkar Baba’s. To continue with fieldwork stories, a narration from Asthana Ji:

In 1951 at the time of lunar eclipse, Baba had performed one more *yajñya*. I was the organizer for it. Eight big colorful canvas tents were set up – four in which

raw materials were kept, and four in which cooked material was stored. There were four or six big coal ovens on which the cooks used to work. I used to keep the keys for all materials with me. Every morning, Baba would come to me at four in the morning, take the keys from me, and ask me to go take my bath and breakfast, and come back ready. I used to come back home and take my bath, eat some breakfast, and then I would return to take care of all the arrangements. About seventeen or eighteen thousand *sadhus* came to that *yajñya*. When I saw these many people coming, I got worried. I went to Baba and said, look, so many people are coming and I have only five kilos of each raw material. Now what should I do? Baba said, “Don’t worry. Do this. Lock the storage room. Don’t let absolutely anyone go in. And you keep working on the arrangements.”

So the *yajñya* was performed. And it was performed very well. Everyone ate till they could eat no more. The *sadhu*’s feast went on all day long, one line of diners after the other. *We served everyone from only that little bit of raw material, but it proved to be sufficient for everyone.*

When the last row sat down to eat, there was an old *sadhu* amongst them. He began to insist that he wanted to go inside and check the storage room. I was also of a rough nature. And then I was determined to do as Baba had told me. Since Baba had asked me not to let anyone inside the storage room, I did not allow this *sadhu* to go in. At this, that old *sadhu* became angry and began to address invectives at me. Finally, shaking with anger, he raised his hand high to curse me and said, “I will turn you to ashes.”

Now watch. *Baba was far away from where this commotion was taking place. From the place where he was sitting at the Rai Panarudas garden, he could not even see this row of sadhus that had sat down to eat. But as soon as that old sadhu raised his arm to burn me with his curse, Baba came running and stood like a wall between that sadhu and me. He raised both his hands and scolded the old sadhu in a very strong voice, “You want to show all your powers right here? Don’t do all this!”*

Meaning, that the old *sadhu* must have had the power to curse me and turn me to ashes, even if he did not have the power to keep his anger under control. It is very possible that I would have turned into a pile of ashes if Baba had not come down running and stopped him before he could actually curse me. This feast began at about one in the afternoon, and continued till about three the next morning. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi, emphasis added).

I have chosen to mention this story here because similar *Karamāt va kashf* stories can be found in Sufi chronicles also. Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti, for example, is credited with running an alms-house, a *laṅgarkhānā*, without having any means of an income. He used to do it by unfolding the corner of his *Musalla*<sup>51</sup> (see

<http://www.dargahajmersharif.com/Miracles.htm>, #5) and asking the chief of the alms-

house to take whatever he wanted. It is said the food was so abundant that all the poor of the city were fed with it. Another similar example comes from the life of Abu Bakr, the companion of the prophet. Hadith stories mention that Abu Bakr invited guests to his house and with little food, fed his guests. Miraculously, however, so much more food was left at the end of the meal that he took it to the prophet and gave it away (see <http://www.yanabi.com/Hadith.aspx?HadithID=150911>).

While critiquing the orientalist view of the emergence of Sufism, Ernst describes the problem of defining Sufism and cautions against statements that depict sweeping impact of one tradition on another because:

Sufism can refer to a wide range of phenomena, including scriptural interpretation, meditative practices, master-disciple relationships, corporate institutions, aesthetic and ritual gestures, doctrines, and literary texts. As a generic descriptive term, however, Sufism is deceptive. There is no Sufism in general. All that we describe as Sufism is firmly rooted in particular local contexts, often anchored to the very tangible tombs of deceased saints, and it is deployed in relation to lineages and personalities with a distinctively local sacrality. Individual Sufi groups or traditions in one place may be completely oblivious of what Sufis do or say in other regions. (Ernst 2005:22).

This is a revealing argument which relates in a peculiar way to the amorphous nature of the Aghor tradition where an Aghar may be referred to as a Sarbhang in one place, a *sant* in another, a Nath or a Kaul or a Sufi in the third. If there exists “no Sufism in general” except in local contexts often related to tombs of saints, it can also be interpreted as an Aghor behavior (and vice versa for Aghars, as Sufis) in the eyes of the populace, especially since Aghor tradition also defies concrete definition. This would become an even more compelling association if there indeed was a Hindu context to this formulation, as perceptible from Schimmell’s example of Lal Shahbaz above.

Documented evidence of the influence of Sufis on the Naths and Aghars (Ernst 2005; Gupta 1993:149; Gold 1987:208-9) is also plentiful, ranging on the one hand from

selective incorporation of Sufi language and specific words into the Hindu practice framework, to complete Islamization of the Naths, as is evident in Bengal (Hatley 2007:364). An example of language incorporation, the first end of the range cited here, can be found in this verse of Baba Kinaram:

*phikar chhāmṛi dē zikar kiyā kar, aḥab rangilā maulā hai.  
jab tum rahē odr (Sanskrit udar) kē bhūtar, vahān kharc kin taulā hai.  
ādhī chhoṛ ēk ko dhāvai, sir par māṭī gholā hai.  
Kinārām almast diwānā, dēnē wālā maulā hai. (Kinaram 1987:56, emphasis added).*

I translate this verse as:

Give up worries, practice the name (*dhikr/zikr*), what a strangely colorful master he is.  
Who looked after your expenses when you were inside the womb?  
Giving up the part, he runs for the (one) whole, puts dirt on his head.  
(alternatively, the last section of this line could also mean, in the Aghor context, he has put ashes on his head, or he has effaced himself.)  
Kinaram is a carefree crazy one, he is the master who gives all.

Although Baba Kinaram's language in *Vivēksār* is colloquial Hindi, it does not reflect Urdu color as this verse does, incorporating words from Sanskrit as well as idioms. Of particular importance is the use of the word *zikar* (*zikr*) because it seems to convey the same idea as that of Sufi *dhikr*, remembrance of the name of god. His use of this word is deliberate, for he could also have used *jap* or *jāp* or *bhajan* or any other way of expressing the idea. The rest of the verse also gives the feel of Urdu with words like *maulā*, *diwānā*, and *almast*, all of which conjure up the image of Sufi ecstasy. Anyone who has heard Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's rendition of "dam mast Qalandar mast-mast" in popular Islamic devotional music, can relate to this.

Having looked at the general reasons for similarities between Aghors and Sufis, and why one may be confused with, or incorporated into, the other, let us look at the

caveats to this kind of sharing, interaction and incorporation. Ernst is firm in pointing out that:

...Sufi engagement with yoga was not to be found at the historical beginnings of the Sufi tradition, and it was most highly developed, unsurprisingly, in India. Moreover, the knowledge of yoga among Indian Sufis gradually became more detailed over time. The most exact accounts of hatha yoga in Sufi texts, using technical terms in Hindi, occurred in writings as late as the nineteenth century, although these texts typically juxtapose yoga materials alongside Sufi practices without any real attempt at integration or synthesis. The Sufi interest in hatha yoga was very practical, and did not (with certain notable exceptions) engage with philosophical texts of Vedanta or other Sanskritic schools of thought. (Ernst 2005:21).

He provides a survey of Hindu religious texts translated into Persian, including the scriptures commissioned for translation by Prince Dara Shikuh, but he points out that to the Persian translators it did not have the religious significance that Hindus attached to it. It was more of a socio-political exercise, very practical in nature, for the benefit of the ruling regime, whether the translations were commissioned by the Mughals or by the British (Ernst 2003:183-190). Many Mughal rulers, especially Akbar, were interested in the knowledge and practices of the Jogis for personal as well as political reasons (Ernst 2007:412-4). For example, a letter was sent from the Mughal ruler Aurangzeb to Anand Nath, the abbot of Jakhbar in 1661 or 1662, asking for quicksilver (White 1996:1). In terms of its impact on the thinking of the Mughal religionists, however, it appears to have been negligible. Ernst does, however, cite another example, that of the *Pool of Nectar* (*Amṛtakunḍa*, also known as *Kamarubijaksa* or *The Kamarupa Seed Syllables*, in Persian *Hawd ma al-hayat*) translation, which was an early translation (1210 CE, in Bengal) into Arabic, Persian, Turkish as well as in Urdu, and which, apparently, was in wide circulation, in multiple recensions, with a recent copy found in Judeo-Arabic in Yemen. However, the text does not represent a euphoric acceptance of Hindu religious tenets. It

was a selective acceptance only of its practices, not philosophy, through a “process of Islamization involving scriptural Islamic themes, philosophical vocabulary, and the terminology and concepts of Sufism.” (Ernst b. 2003:202-3).

Although Ernst does not use the word acceptance in his essay, I use it here because it was perhaps due to its early date and wide circulation that some of the practices described therein, especially those involving breathing and visualization exercises, may have become a part of one of the many *dhikr* (continuous chanting of god’s name, Urdu *zīkr*) meditation practices in the Chishtiyya order (Ernst 1999:351).

We get further details on the *Pool of Nectar*:

This eclectic Persian text contained breath control practices relating to magic and divination, rites of the yogini temple cult associated with Kaula tantrism, and the teachings of hatha yoga according to the tradition of the Nath yogis (popularly called *jogis*). All of this was placed in a context of the supremacy of the goddess Kamakhya, with frequent reference to her main temple in Assam (Kamarupa). This text was adapted by an anonymous Arabic translator, who was trained in the Illuminationist (Ishraqi) school of philosophy in Iran, probably in the fifteenth century. (Ernst b. 2003:204).

It appears, then, that the Pool of Nectar was a Kaula Tantrik text with elements of Nath yoga in it, which brings it close to Aghor practices. Ernst mentions also that although Al-Biruni had translated *Patañjali’s Yogasūtra*, it focused primarily on doctrine and was not read widely. On the flip side, Paucity of an audience to Sufi literature in Persian because of difficulty in either comprehending, or relating to it, may have been a reason why Sufis began to write in local languages and dialects. They also incorporated Hindu local imagery and framework to relate better to their readers. The body of Sufi literature known as *Premākhyān* reflects it.

There are four works of the *Premākhyān* genre which exemplify early Sufi romances in Hindi (or rather Awadhī, the early eastern Hindi) namely *Candāyan* by

Mawlana Da'ud (1379), himself a member of the Chishti *silsila* (lineage or chains of affiliation); *Mṛgāvatī* by Shaykh Qutban<sup>52</sup> (1504), a disciple of the Suhrawardi Shaykh Burhan; *Padmāvatī* by Malik Muhammad Jayasi (1540), a Chishti; and *Madhumālatī* by Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri (1545), a Sufi of the Shattari order (Weightman 1999:468).

*Candāyan* narrates the love story of Lorik and Chanda, a story which still survives as an oral epic in northeast India (Weightman 1999:468) and in Bihar, eastern Uttarpradesh as well as eastern Madhya Pradesh (Flueckiger 1989:33). The story, in a brief outline, is this. An incomparably beautiful daughter, Chanda, is born to Mahar Sahadeva and Phula Mahari in Gowar. When four years old, she is married to Siuhar Bawan, who belongs to the same caste. Bawan, being short, ugly and impotent, ignores Chanda. At sixteen years of age Chanda feels very bad about it, so she is sent back home. Rao Rupchand of Rajpur hears of her beauty. Completely besotted, he attacks Gowar. Chanda's father sends for Lorik to come fight from his side. Lorik's wife Maina, and his mother Khoilin try to dissuade him, but he goes to the battlefield and routs Rupchand's army. After battle Lorik and Chanda fall madly in love with each other. Since social restrictions prevent their meeting, Lorik dresses up as a Yogi and spends a year waiting at the village temple to see Chanda. After a year he sees Chanda from afar, and faints at the powerful experience. Finally they meet surreptitiously in Chanda's quarters and consummate their love. Lorik's wife Maina finds out about it and gets into a fistfight with Chanda in the village temple. Lorik and Chanda decide to elope towards Haradīm Pāṭan. Chanda's husband Bawan comes after them and curses Lorik to reside in hell, and Chanda to die of snakebite. They reach Kalinga country, and there Chanda dies of snakebite. Lorik prepares the pyre and decides to die with Chanda, but a *Guṇī*

(talented, virtuous person) arrives on the scene and brings Chanda back to life. That night, Chanda gets bitten by a snake a second time and dies. After a day and a night Lorik prepares her pyre, but again, a *Guṇī* arrives on the scene, sprinkles water while chanting mantras, and Chanda comes back to life once again. They reach Haradīm Pāṭan and spend more than a year there, at which point, Maina and Khoilin send them a message to come back. Lorik and Chanda come back, Maina and Chanda become friends, and Lorik's mother is happy to have both daughters-in-law. The last part of this manuscript is missing, but according to local lore, Lorik either dies in battle or immolates himself in Kashi, at which point, possibly, Both Maina and Chanda also commit suicide (Da'ud 1967:16-33).

Although this story is written to clarify Islamic tenets and spread the Sufi concept of love as well as *fanā* (self-dissolution in divine love), Shaiva and Yogi figures play crucial roles at important parts of the story, acting as omens, or saving life. Lorik's wait for Chanda at the village temple, in the "second vision section" of the story, is in the form of an unmistakable Gorakhnath Yogi:

Lorik put on crystal ear-rings, headgear, and *rudrākṣa* necklace. (164:1)  
 Donning yogi's attire and wooden sandals, he became of the Gorakh sect. (164:2)  
 He put ashes on his face and sat on a deerskin with a yogi's bag, in the yogic posture. (164:3)  
 (Da'ud 1967:160-161).

In the "first snakebite section" we read the line:

(God) brought a *Guṇī* there, and he brought Chanda back to life. (310:7)  
 He said a mantra in Chanda's ear, and instantly people were amazed. (311:1)  
 In the first hour of the night Chanda had been bitten, and died instantly. (311-2)  
 There were numerous *Guṇīs*, all arrived so she may not die untimely. (311:3)  
 Now that *Guṇī* recited a mantra and weighed each word (*vācā*) like a precious diamond. (311:5)  
 Seeing Chanda's condition the *Guṇī* thought of reciting the mantra, (311:6)  
 So that, by guru's grace, god may give her life again. (311:7)  
 Lorik felt immense happiness when life began to flow in Chanda again. (312:1)

He said, one whom *alakh niranjan* brings back to life, receives life as written before. (312:5, emphasis added)  
(Da'ud 1967:307-10)

Again, from (312:5), with reference to *alakh niranjan* (a common cry of Gorakhnathi ascetics) we can deduce the virtuous *Guṇī* was a Nath Yogi, because curing snakebites is a special skill for both Agharṣ and Nathṣ. It is also notable that the line in (311:5) reads “*ab ‘so’ guṇī mantra ik bolai, ‘tisu bācā’ hirā kas tulai.*” Here, the reference to the word *bācā* (Sanskrit *vācā*) may not necessarily be to the words of the mantra, but actually an oblique reference to the format of the Agharṣ *śābara mantra* (mantras of colloquial language) which, typically, end in a line like “*phuro mantra Īśvaro vācā,*” a line of invocation which means, may the mantra be efficacious by god’s grace. Often times, the word *Īśvar* is substituted by a saint’s or *nonā camārī*, or *Hanumān*’s name. If so, it indicates Da’ud’s intimate knowledge of the mantra tradition of the Nathṣ and Agharṣ, because these are not easily revealed to non-initiates, if at all. In the “second snakebite section” the person who brings Chanda back to life is not referred to as *Guṇī* but as *Gāruṇī* (a country doctor or neutralizer of snake-bites, 327:1). There is no other reference to specify whether it was a Nath yogi. It is possible that Da’ud’s familiarity with this tradition was deep enough that he thought of this person as an Agharṣ, not necessarily subsuming him under the Nath umbrella.

This distinction becomes a little more clear when we see the “section on the description of Siṃhala island” in Jayasi’s *Padmāvat*. Jayasi, himself a Sufi, describes various kinds of ascetics present on Siṃhala island in these words:

In all directions there are monasteries and gazebos, where many kinds of ascetics conduct their practices. (30:3).

Some are *Ṛṣīśvar* (accomplished yogis), some *saṃnyāsī* (renunciates), some *Rāmāyatī* (Rama devotees), some of the *Viśwāsī* (believer) path. (30:4).

Some have adopted the path of celibacy, some, *Digambar* (sky-clad), stay naked. (30:5).

Some are devoted to *Maheśvar* (Shaiva), some are devoted to *Devī Satī* (Shakt). (30:6).

Some worship *Saraswatī* (goddess of knowledge), some are *Jogis* (Aughar or Nath Yogis), some are on the detached *Viyogī* path. (30:7).

There are *Sevarā-Khevarā* (Jain sadhus) and forest dwellers, as well as *Siddhas*, *sādhaks* and *Avadhutas*. Sitting in their (yogic) postures, they discipline their body. (30:8)

(Jayasi 1965:52, gloss and emphasis added).

In the quoted text, the distinction that Jayasi makes between Maheshvar, Siddha, Jogi and Avadhuta not only represents their distinct identities at that time, but perhaps also, Jayasi's familiarity with the subtle differences in their doctrine as well as practice.

White stresses further:

... the universal macrocosm and the microcosm of the subtle body. While the Nāth Siddhas mapped out these "static" homologies, in all their many splended detail... nowhere are they presented more dynamically and dramatically than in Muhammad Jayasī's *Padmāvat*, in which the storming of the fort of Simhala is made into an explicit allegory for transformations within the hathayogic body. (White 1996:260-2).

In keeping with this genre of literature, Weightman writes about Manjhan's

*Madhumālatī*:

Manjhan has intertwined three classic types of symbol: that of the traveller on the way, the *sālik*; that of the lover seeking the beloved, the *āshiq*; and that of the seeker of inner transformation, the *sādhak*. By the sixteenth century it had become a well-established convention in this genre that the lover separated from the beloved should set out on his search disguised as a yogi, and in particular as a Nāth-panthī... Manjhan uses a number of key concepts and terms. The highest mystical state is often termed *sahaj*, a kind of spontaneous emptiness, in which is experienced *mahārasa*, the great *rasa* – which significantly, is the name of Madhumālatī's city. Manohar has a nurse called Sahajā, and the name of Tārāchand's city is Paunerī... perhaps... indicative of *pavana* or breath, which is controlled in yogic disciplines. Citibisrāu can mean either 'peacefulness of mind' or 'forgetfulness of mind', and it is the home of Pemā, Love. Throughout the poem there are numerous images drawn from yogic usage, as for instance when Manohar tells Madhumālatī that he is the sun and she is the moon, which clearly refers to the *idā* and *pingalā nādīs* or psychic veins which are so important for reaching the highest state of *sahaj*. (Weightman 1999:476).

However, this is just a guise, which the hero, in this case Manohar, sheds before meeting the heroine, in this case Madhumālatī. He is the true Sufi, or in Sufi symbolism, the soul of man. Madhumālatī, then is the Divine Beauty. Intelligence (*'aql*) is symbolized by doctors who come to cure Manohar's illness of love. Manohar meets disaster, and then only finds Love, who becomes his guide (*murshid*) and leads him to Divine Beauty. Tārāchand represents not just breath but Sufi selflessness, the deserted wife represents *nafs*, the lower self or the world, and marriage represents the union of the soul to god after all goodbyes have been said. (Weightman 1999: 476-8).

Thus, when we discuss Aghors and Sufis, we can see there were similarities between them from the beginning, in principle, at the theological level, that of quest and unity with the divine. The practice of how that unity was achieved may have differed, but over the centuries, through various translations and interactions with Jogis, Sufis have incorporated elements of Jogi practices into the Islamic framework, and likewise, Jogis have taken on the lifestyle and language of Sufis. They coexist, I think, with mutual respect for each other.

### **Dimensions of the Nath and Yogi Legacy**

There is a curious story that occurs in one of the early publications of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, the *Brahmaniṣṭh-Pādyā*:

Once, when Mahāprabhu (Sarkar Baba) used to live at Baba Kinaram Sthal, a Kanphaṭā (one whose ears have been pierced through the cartilage) Yogi arrived. It was winter time. He (Sarkar Baba) was reclining in the foyer upstairs. Guava fruits brought by devotees were lying next to him. He (Sarkar Baba) got up and threw two or three guavas. The Kanphaṭā Yogi came up with a serious face. He (Sarkar Baba) again threw guavas as soon as he reached upstairs. The Kanphaṭā Yogi prepared to cut one of those guavas. But suddenly his reaction changed and he fell at the feet of Mahāprabhu. Then, having received appropriate

welcome from him (Sarkar Baba), he left with a happy heart singing his (Sarkar Baba's) praise. (Pandey 1965:22, gloss added).

This incident is curious because it depicts a certain kind of tension between Sarkar Baba and the *Kanphaṭā* Yogi. It is not as if the *Kanphaṭā* Yogi had come to test Sarkar Baba, although there were some who did try that. It was as if he wanted to explore his relationship *vis a vis* Sarkar Baba, or perhaps find out Sarkar Baba's feelings towards the *Kanphaṭā* Yogis. Once appeased, he left happy. While Sarkar Baba held respect for authentic saints and seekers of all traditions, figures like Matsyendranath, Jalandharnath, and Gorakhnath or the *Kanphaṭā* Yogis never found mention within the ashram, or in any of its literature, except the one under discussion. It was not as if their names, or discussion about them, were suppressed. Not at all. It was as if they did not exist in the inward looking, social service focussed life of the ashram. They did not belong to the stream that the ashram flowed with, and therefore, never referred to because they were not visible in the twists and turns of this stream. In his talks and speeches Sarkar Baba has mentioned Baba Kinaram, Baba Kaluram, King Hariścandra (of the Purāṇas); ashram's literature mentions Dattātreya, Antarikṣ (atmospheric or heavenly) Kāpālika, Viśvāmitra and Buddha. But not once the Nath yogis, except during Sarkar Baba's travels to Afghanistan and Iran, where a number of saints that he met with had the Nath appellation to their name. This is of interest because a lot of scholarly literature portrays Aghaṛs to be a subset of the Nath tradition, although in our discussion of the popular views about them in the last chapter, they were hardly ever classified as such. This seeming tension, or rather ambiguity in relationship, perhaps owes its existence to the formative history of the Nath tradition.

It is commonplace that most such Yoga-and-Tantra based traditions classify themselves according to guru-disciple relationships, therefore it is not surprising that Nathas are not mentioned in the Kinarami tradition. But this fact, of guru-disciple relationships could also indicate a proliferation of streams within a stream, where the way one thinks about their tradition becomes very specific. How those streams within streams come about is of interest to us. While I have noted in the last chapter Chaturvedi's mention of the two streams of the Aghor tradition, one following Dattatreya, the Gīrnālī stream, and the other following Gorakhnath, the Himālī stream (see page 65), most scholars have not paid attention to this distinction. In most writings the tacit assumption is that Agharṣ are initiated into the Nath tradition (of Gorakhnath) who have yet to get their ears pierced to receive the distinctive *mudrā* or Nath symbol of the *Kuṇḍal* (large ear rings). However, there also exist Agharṣ who are not initiated into the Nath lineage, such as the Kinarami Agharṣ, as well as Nath Agharṣ who either maintain their distinct identity such as the Paonathis, or have no desire to become a *Kanphaṭā*. For example, Drawing on Briggs, Dwivedi mentions that the tradition started by Jalandharpad was earlier known as the "Pā *panth* (the Paonathi tradition)," and this was separate and different from the Nath tradition formulated by his contemporary Matsyendranath, and later, by Gorakhnath. Jalandharpad was an Agharṣ while Matsyendranath and Gorakhnath were *Kanphaṭā* yogis (Dwivedi 1966:8). This indicates a cleavage within the Nath Siddha tradition (White 1996:474 fn 92) where, depending upon the earlier leanings of the sects that got assimilated into Nathism – whether they were yoga followers but not Shaiva or Shakta, or they were Shaiva or Shakta but not yoga followers (Bharati 1968:325) -- some scholars divide them into two parallel streams, Gorakh's celibate and

*haṭhayogic* stream and Matsyendra’s noncelibate, erotico-mystical Stream (Bharati 1968:324; White 1998:173), while others divide them into Gorakh and Matsyendra’s *haṭhayogic* stream and Jalandhar (Hāḍi-pā) and Kanapha (Kṛṣṇapād’s) erotico mystical stream (Dwivedi 1966:48-51). To this we can add a third way of slicing the cake when looking at Aughaṛs, that propounded by Chaturvedi, the distinction between the Himali tradition propounded by Gorakhnath, and the Girnali tradition propounded by Dattatreya (Chaturvedi 1973:76-7). Joshi mentions that “In Berar Nāthas comprise 18 divisions, of which the recognised or regular sub-sects are Avadhūta, Kānphateya and Gorakhnath” (Joshi 1965:191). Here, those who call themselves Avadhūta can, possibly, descended from Dattatreya. White corroborates that those Nathas who have descended from Jalandhara don’t wear earrings even after full initiation, and call themselves Aughaṛ (White 1996:100).

While some scholars assert it is highly unlikely that those Aughaṛs who do not get their ears split are associated with the tradition of Gorakhnath (Dwivedi 1966:9), the example cited above of the the Aughaṛ Baba at Hinglaj does not corroborate it, for he used to be the abbot of the Nāganāth compound in Karachi (now in Pakistan, Shastri 1978:51). What is important to note here is that not all Aughaṛs are Nathas, even though over the course of history they have become intertwined inseparably.

Popular understanding of this cleavage can sometimes be witnessed, if in a somewhat obscure way, in unexpected places. *Raja Nal and the Goddess* (Wadley 2004), an analytical description of the performative tradition of the approximately three hundred year old *Dhola* epic in North India, has various motifs that “have deep resonances in Indian (and other) cultural traditions” (Wadley 2004:56). Some parts of this unique epic

have, *prima facie*, at least a superficial resemblance to the ultimate spiritual quest disguised as a quest for love in the Sufi *Premākhyān* stories discussed above. Raja Nal's quest for identity, his hardships to obtain domestic (material and transient) happiness which, once found, is lost in a quest of a preordained love with further hardships, form changes, and continuous divine intervention, culminating in his (and his family's) ultimate submergence (*fanā*) in the Shiva temple pond at Magaghi, have a structural resemblance to the cultural motif of submergence in the divine after hard spiritual quest.

But there are episodes in the story that highlight the cleavage within the Nath tradition. Recall the heroine Chanda's death, twice, by snakebite in *Cāndāyan* of Dā'ūd, where she is revived by Nath yogis or *Guṇīs*. In the *Dhola* story there are two episodes of death by snakebite and revival. In the first instance Nal in the form of a leper, is imprisoned by Raja Biram's daughter in a dried well till such time that he is able to call on his friend, the snake king Basukdev to bite the king's children. Each time a child is bitten, Nal, as a *baigi* (exorcist), performs the *Ḍānk* ceremony to revive the child, thus gaining his freedom (Wadley 2004:35).

In the second instance it is Maru, Dhola's wife, who is bitten by the snake king Basukdev. Dhola builds a pyre for her with the help of shepherd boys, but at the last minute the spirit form of Nal's first wife Motini comes to the rescue and revives her (Wadley 2004:54). Motini herself was revived briefly by her flying horse when she dies on seeing Nal leave to marry another woman. The horse, a gift from god Indra, works on the principle "that life is ultimately only wind and water" (Wadley 2004:29), reminiscent of the *haṭhayogic* principle of raising the Kundalini via breath control *and rasa* (vital fluid, White 1998:4) as essential to spiritual life. Although, with reference to the Sufi

*Premākhyān* stories, Motini will be considered *nafs* (the lower self), in the *Dhola* epic she is anything but. She is a spiritual guide and protector in the true sense.

These episodes of reviving the dead, I think, lay down the groundwork for establishing one side of the cleavage, the *haṭhayogic* one (ascribable to Gorakhnath, although he is not named as such in the epic story presented in the book), as opposed to the other, the erotico-mystical side, attributed to Jalandharnath and his fourteen hundred disciples, who pursue Motini so Jalandharnath can marry her. Motini succeeds in killing him (Wadley 2004:113-6). The idea of the one side of the cleavage being *haṭhayogic* is strengthened by the episode where Motini and Nal disguise themselves as acrobats at Phul Singh's court:

Nal climbs a rope that disappears into the sky; he is seen no longer. Suddenly parts of his body fall to the ground – a leg, an arm, a torso – until his whole body lies in pieces before Phul Singh's court. (Wadley 2004:25).

I call this episode *haṭhayogic* to establish two sides of the Nath yogi cleavage in the *Dhola* story, although it can also be termed simply *yogic*, or *aṣṭāṅga yogic*, as contrasted to erotico-mystical. The reason I point to this is because in one of the books published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, *Aghorēśwar Samvēdanshīl* (1984), there occurs a peculiar story of Yogini Meghmala in the eighteenth chapter titled *Aṣṭāṅga Abhyās* (the eight limbed practice). Yogini Meghamala is visiting Sarkar Baba's ashram in Shakra Gram (Sogra, Madhya Pradesh) when at night she happens to pass by the dwelling of one of Sarkar Baba's disciples, the *murīyā sādhu* (tonsured monk). She says:

‘Gurudev! When at night I went near his hut I saw that all his limbs were lying separate. His torso was separate. His chest was separate. His arms were separate. His legs were separate. I suspected that some cruel person had dismembered my guru brother and separated all his limbs.... His hut is made of grills, so it is easy to see what one is doing inside. My desperation went so high that I yelled out suddenly – ‘Parammā! Parammā! (‘Parā’ Ammā, ‘Parā’ Ammā [divine mother, divine mother])! What has happened?’ As soon as my voice

ended I saw that my guru brother was sitting healthy in his yogic posture. Gurudev! Was I afflicted by illusion, or was it true?’ (SSS 1984:98).

Sarkar Baba then asks Yogini Meghmala if she had seen blood there too. On her answering in the negative he explains to her that it is a yogic practice as well as an art, one which Aughar-Aghoreshwars perform in solitude to achieve a special kind of joy (SSS 1984:99). This episode is strikingly similar to the *Dhola* episode presented above which, in my thinking, represents the cleavage of the two streams within the Nath tradition, ultimately proving the supremacy of the yogic stream represented by Motini and her magical powers, over Jalandhar’s erotico-mystical stream, for Jalandhar is killed, while Nal and Motini succeed against all odds. Motini could even be read as a Gorakhnath surrogate in the epic, for she is the most powerful character in the epic, succeeding even where the goddess cannot and acting as a protective guide to Nal at all times and places. I think this is another unique feature of the *Dhola* epic. While Sufi *Premākhyāns* illustrate the quest for (divine) love, nowhere do they deal with sectarian cleavage in the way *Dhola* implicitly does.

However, separating these Nath-yogi streams distinctly is a herculean task (and well beyond the scope of this dissertation), especially since the category of Nath itself is an amorphous one. Therefore, comparing Aghor practices to the overarching term of Nath practices forces us to consider, which Nath stream? One will be hard pressed to say there exists a single, monolithic body of practices which can be called Nath practices. This is because starting around thirteenth or fourteenth centuries CE, many kinds of divergent sects and spiritual traditions became assimilated within the Nath category. These included the Siddhas, who date back probably to the beginning of the common era (Dwivedi 1966:59, 183-4, 190; White 1996:3, 60, 61), the Kaulas (White 1996:73, 88),

the Pāśupatas (White 1996:97), the Kāpālikas (Lorenzen 1972:53; White 1996:97), the seventh to twelfth century founders of Buddhist Tantra -- Buddhist Mahāsiddhas or Siddhācāryas (White 1996:99, 101), the Vaishnava Avadhūta *sampradāya* (sect) founded by Dattatreya, Daśnāmī Nāgās, Jains, Sufi Muslims, and snake charmers (White 1996:99) thus:

... the Nāth *sampradāya*, a great medieval changing house for western Indian sectarian Śaivism, could not have emerged prior to the late twelfth to early thirteenth century A.D.... this was not a monolithic order, but rather a confederation of groups claiming a similar body of Śaiva and Siddha tradition, the basis for whose unity was and remains (1) the identification of the twelfth-through thirteenth-century historical Gorakhnāth with either historical, legendary, or divine figures named Gorakh or Gorakṣa; (2) the retrospective association of this or some earlier Gorakh – often in the role of guru or disciple – with founders of other Siddha or Śaiva sects and clans, many of which came to be absorbed into the Nāth *sampradāya*, (3) the transformation of the abstract concept of the Nine Nāths into a number of quasi-historical lineages; and (4) the continued appropriation, in later centuries, by groups outside the Nāth *sampradāya*, of the names Gorakh and other of the Nine Nāths as a means to integrating themselves into that order. (White 1996:90).

This view of a confederate assimilation becomes even more jumbled when we find that the traditions which got assimilated themselves had two or more variants, and these variations make the historical determination of their proponents and practices, a very difficult task. We could ask, so who were the original Shaivas and the Siddhas?

White stresses:

... we may quite safely characterize the emergence of the Nāth Siddhas as a marriage between Nāths (i.e. Śaiva groups – Pāśupatas, Kāpālikas, and Śāktas – for whom Śiva had long been called Nāth, “Lord”) and Siddhas (Māheśvara and Rasa Siddhas and Sittars, as well as the Buddhist Siddhācāryas) which took the institutionalized form of the Nāth *sampradāya*. (White 1996:99).

The distinction that White makes here between Nath as lord, a designation of Shiva for the Pāśupatas, Kāpālikas and Shaktas is an important one, because it points to the earlier existing sects and traditions, whose practices, while refined and assimilated in

the Nath sect, still retained their specific practices despite being labeled differently. Even as these earlier traditions became assimilated within the Nathas, their practices continued under one form or another, as they continued to synthesize these practices with those of the Buddhist Siddhas and south Indian Sittars. Even Raja Nal is helped at one point, out of the blue, by a Tamil woman drawing water at a well, who assists him against Phul Singh's daughter with her own magic (Wadley 2004:25). It is probably because of this that both Nathas and Aughaṛs can have cremation ground or erotico-mystical practices, yet call themselves and their practices, Nath and Aughaṛ respectively.

Nor is the category of Siddha (those who pursued perfection [*siddhi*] and bodily immortality [*jīvanmukti*]) any easier to get a handle on, comprising as it does, of Māheśvara Siddhas (Shiva's Deccan devotees), Sittars (alchemists in Tamilnadu), Mahāsiddhas-Siddhācāryas (Buddhist Tantriks from Bengal), Rasa Siddhas (alchemists of medieval India), and Nāth Siddhas (in north India) (White 1996:2). The Māheśvara, Rasa and Nath Siddhas, all three of them, also have traces of the Pāśupata and the Kāpālika systems, before they were all categorized under the Nath umbrella, and all three of these could be regarded, at least in part, as Shaiva practitioners.

Developments within these streams are similarly complex. For example, Matsyendranath is supposed to have founded the Yoginī Kaula system (Dwivedi 1966:3, White 1996: 73). He is also said to have founded the *haṭhayoga* system (White 1996:88, 228). The outline of his reconstructed history reads something like this: Matsyendra was a practitioner of the Siddha Kaula Yoga system (Dwivedi 1966:56). Somehow, he went to Kamarupa (or *Kadalī* [or *Kajarī*] *Van* [the plaintain forest]) and not just learnt, but became a practitioner of the Yoginī Kaula system, which had existed from much before.

Gorakhnath rescued him from this system, and he went back to his original path (Dwivedi 1966:63-4), systematizing *haṭhayoga* as well as Yoginī Kaula Tantras. But White asserts that the historical Matsyendranath (tenth century, Mallik 1954:9) predates the historical Gorakhnath (late twelfth to early thirteenth century) by about three hundred years! (White 1996:139). It also raises the question, does Yoginī Kaula system have elements of Matsyendra's earlier Siddha Kaula system, or does his later *haṭhayoga* system have elements of the earlier Yoginī Kaula system. Further, this Yoginī Kaula system was sublimated by Abhinavagupta in the eleventh century where the “messier” parts of the system were refined (in A.D. 1000 *Tantrāloka*), and relegated to the realm of secret practices for the “Trika Kaula virtuosi” (White 1996:88-9; 1998:173 fn 3, 4).

Another example is that of *haṭhayoga* itself. There exist two variants of *haṭhayoga*, one propounded by Gorakhnath (*ṣaḍāṅga-yoga* or the six limbed practice), and the one which predates him, propounded by the son of Mṛkaṇḍa (Markaṇḍeya, *aṣṭāṅga-yoga* or the eight-limbed practice) (Dwivedi 1966:138).<sup>53</sup> These two systems of yoga are pointed out as the *Akula* and *Avadhūta* systems respectively in the *Gorakh Upaniṣad*, and the Mṛkaṇḍa reference is to Dattatreya since it is he who reveals the yogic doctrine of the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (White 1996:141. Rigopoulos places it at seventh century, 1998:45). This issue is compounded when we learn that the Naths, with reference to *Gorakṣa Siddhānta Saṃgraha*, also regard their tradition as an Avadhūta tradition (Dwivedi 1966:2), and further, that the Avadhūta tradition is what is the best of the Kaula tradition! (Dwivedi 1966:5).

The word Kaula in the Kaula tradition also has two variants: the Kula system, which was the older Tantrik system and predated Matsyendranath's reformulations, and

the Siddha and Yogini Kaula system, which he refined and propagated. The earlier Kula system was cremation-ground based, while Matsyendranath's reform of it turned it into a system of erotico-mystical practices which were further sublimated by Abhinavagupta in the eleventh century (White 1996:136).

One more complication can be cited here in terms of the assimilation of Buddhist Siddhācāryas' practices, evidenced from within the history of the Nath tradition.

According to the *Mahārṇava Tantra* list of the nine Naths, Jalandharnath is one of them (Dwivedi 1966:27). He is regarded as a contemporary of Matsyendranath, perhaps even his *gurubhāī* (brothers by initiation by the same guru) (Dwivedi 1966:85), and initiator of the specific yogic posture within Nath tradition called *Jālandhar bandh* (Dwivedi 1966:86). According to the Tibetan tradition, he came in contact with Ghantapad's disciple Kurmapad, and became his disciple. Jalandhar (also known as Jalandharipad), has written a commentary text on Saroruhpad's *Hē Vajra Sādhan* called *Śuddhi Vajrapradīp*, associated with *Kāyā* yoga (Dwivedi 1966:85). In Panjab exists a place called Jālandharpīṭh, associated with Buddhist Vajrayānī Tantrik *sādhanā*, regarded once as the prime center of such *sādhanā*, the place where Jalandharnath is supposed to have been born. The chief goddess here is called *Brajeśvarī*, which could be a Brahmanized form of *Vajreśvarī* (Dwivedi 1966:87). Jalandharipad's disciple was Kṛṣṇapād (also known as Kaṇhapā, Kānhūpā, Kānapā, Kānaphā). This association of Jalandharnath with the Vajrayān center of Jālandharpīṭh, his commentary on Buddhist Vajrayān texts, the suffix *pād* attached to his name and that of his disciple, that his followers are still not regarded as belonging fully to Gorakhnath's tradition, and a sub-sect started by him is

still called Vāmārag (*Vāmamārg*, the left handed path) (Dwivedi 1966:90) points to a Buddhist association which probably predates the formation of the Nath tradition.

This notion is further strengthened by the *Kubjikānityāhnikatilaka* story about the formation of the original Tantrik *kula* tradition where the “nine Nāths, originally Buddhist monks, had converted when, through a miracle produced by Śrīnātha, the roof of their monastery had collapsed!” (White 1996:74). White also points out:

Seven of the figures whose names most frequently occur in enumerations of the nine “historical” Nāths – Matsyendra (Luī-pā; Mīna), Gorakṣa, Cauraṅgi, Nāgārjuna, Kaṇerī (Kānha-pā; Kāṇipā; Karṇarī), Jālandhara (Hāḍi-pā), and Carpaṭi (Carpaṭā) – figure in the Buddhist Siddhacarya lists (White 1996:106).

Based on a number of such parallellisms, while some authors feel that the Nathas were originally Buddhists of eastern India, White asserts that “since no extant tantric or Siddha alchemical works, either Hindu or Buddhist, emerged out of Bengal prior to the thirteenth century” (White 1996:109) Gorakhnath or the Nath Siddhas could not have originated from eastern Indian Buddhists. In fact, he underlines the post tenth century Siddha history as an invented one where “*entire founding lineages* were created or reappropriated by self-proclaimed Siddha traditions at several centuries’ remove from the time in which their founders may have lived” (White 1996:75). Given such complexity of parallel or invented traditions subsumed under the same name, it will be disingenuous to compare Aghor practices to Nath practices.

### **Aghor Tradition and Dattatreya**

With reference to the Kinarami Agharṣ, we also need to consider the place of Dattatreya in the Nath tradition *vis a vis* the Aghor path. We have already seen above that earlier, Sarkar Baba’s ashram was known simply as the Avadhūt Bhagwan Ram Kusht Sewa

Ashram, Baba Kinaram describes his philosophy as the Avadhūta philosophy in *Vivēksār*, *Gorakh Upaniṣad* calls the eight-limbed yoga practice propagated by Dattatreya as the Avadhūta practice (the practices delineated in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* by Dattatreya), White refers to the incorporation of the Vaishnava Avadhūta sect founded by Dattatreya into the Nath category, and *Gorakṣa Siddhānta Saṃgraha*'s statement that Nath tradition is the Avadhūt tradition. There are a few more references that need to be mentioned here.

There are two views about Dattatreya that we need to consider. One, which White points out, is that in western India Dattatreya is more of a god incorporating Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, “Yet, there was at least one historical Dattatreya, who authored a number of works on yoga and tantra in the twelfth to thirteenth century” (White 1996:141). Two, as Rigopoulos postulates, a distinction has to be made between a “proto-Dattātreya” identified as a great yogin, and a “deuteron-Dattātreya,” grounded in Puranic lore, thus giving us at least two Dattātreyas to work with (Rigopoulos 1998:45).

Briggs makes the categorical statement that Dattatreya was an Aghori (Briggs 1982[1938]:75). We do not have details for why he reached this conclusion, except that it is made in the context of the Lal Padri ascetics, so called because of their saffron robes. But Dattatreya's connection with Nathas can be elaborated further. As Rigopoulos writes:

According to a popular tradition, Dattātreya is the eternal Guru of all Nāthas and Śiva is the first Nātha. In this way, Śiva himself is made into a disciple of Dattātreya! Datta is also said to have been the first Aghorī... (Rigopoulos 1998:105 fn 35).

There exist many lists of Nine Nathas who are supposed to have founded the tradition. White divides them according to geography, all of which date from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries (1996:92). He writes:

According to a thirteenth- to fourteenth-century Maharashtra source, the divine founder of the clan is (Viṣṇu-)Dattātreya, who is the guru of (1) Matsyendranāth

and (2) Jvalendra (Jālandharnāth). Matsyendra is the guru of (3) Gorakhnāth, (4) Carpati, and (5) Revaṇa; while Jvalendra is the guru of (6) Karaṇa-pā (Karaṇarī-pā); (7) Bhartṛhari and (8) Gopicand. Gorakhnāth is the guru of (9) Gahaṇināth. (White 1996:92).

This list is cited from the *Yogisampradāyāviṣkṛti*, ascribed to Jñāneśvara's (late thirteenth century) translation into "Maharashtran" of a Bengali original (White 1996:408 fn 183). Further, "Unique to this Maharashtran tradition is an identification of these nine Nāths with 'nine Nārāyaṇas' of the Avadhūta *sampradāya* founded by Dattātreyā" (White 1996:396 fn 64). Dwivedi provides the list of these nine Naths who are identified with the nine Nārāyaṇas, but his list differs from White's list quoted above in that Gorakhnath does not figure in it since, according to him, the writer of the *Yogisampradāyāviṣkṛti* mentions explicitly that "Mahādevjī had produced the person known as Gorakṣnāth after the nine Nāths had been incarnated" (Dwivedi 1966:28). This is how his list reads:

|                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Kavinārāyaṇa        | Matsyendranāth                |
| 2. Karbhajananārāyaṇa  | Gāhnināth                     |
| 3. Antarikṣanārāyaṇa   | Jvālendranāth (Jālandharnāth) |
| 4. Prabuddhanārāyaṇa   | Karaṇipānāth (Kānipā)         |
| 5. Āvirhotranārāyaṇa   | ? Nāgnāth                     |
| 6. Pippalāyananārāyaṇa | Carpaṭnāth (Carpaṭī)          |
| 7. Camasnārāyaṇa       | Revānath                      |
| 8. Harinārāyaṇa        | Bhartṛnāth (Bhartharī)        |
| 9. Drumilnārāyaṇa      | Gopīcandranāth                |

(Dwivedi 1966:28)

Of these, the third name in the list of the nine Nārāyaṇas, Antarikṣanārāyaṇa, identified with Jalandharnath, is of unique interest (keeping in mind that Dattatreya's Girnali Aughaṛ stream is considered Vaishnava) because it rings of the name Antarikṣ Kāpālīka that literature published by the Samooh occasionally mentions. The names Antarikṣanārāyaṇa and Antarikṣ Kāpālīka generate a sense of ethereality or lightness which may indicate the goals of these practitioners towards a transmutation of the gross

body into something more subtle. White cites the story of a *siddhi* (power) contest between Gorakh and Allama-Prabhu (identified with Dattatreya above):

When Allama Prabhu takes a sword to Gorakh, its blade shatters on his adamantine body; when Gorakh does the same to Allama Prabhu, it passes through his body, which is wholly ethereal. Allama Prabhu then chides Gorakh, saying that such bodily density is merely the mark of a density of illusion. (White 1996:103).

Another instance of Dattatreya's complete mastery of subtlety comes from *Dabistān*, where, during a contest between Gorakhnath and Dattatreya, Gorakhnath hides in water as a frog, but Dattatreya is able to find him. When Dattatreya goes into water Gorakhnath can't find him because Dattatreya had turned himself into water (Shea and Troyer 1843, II:140; Briggs 1982[1938]:191; Rigopoulos 1998:197).

Sarkar Baba also states that sometimes, despite being *aśarīrī* (gross body-less) Aghaṛs transport themselves from one place to another through *vāyumārg* (the aerial pathway) (SSS 1982:24; Ram 1992:78), and that Aghaṛs have the ability to go through walls (Ram 1992:78), which corroborates the ethereal goal of the seeker.

Nor is the Maharashtra source the only one where Dattatreya's name is included amongst the founding nine Nath Siddhas. It is also found in the *Mahārṇava Tantra* list of the nine Nathas who should be propitiated in different directions (Dwivedi 1966:27).

A link is made between Gorakhnath and Dattatreya in the *Dattātreya-gorakṣa Samvāda* (A Conversation between Dattatreya and Goraksha), a text on yogic practice also known as the *Avadhūta Gītā*. However, this dialogue seems to be an incorporation into the *Gorakṣa Samhitā*, which was regarded as a work in five parts (White 1996:141). This text, *Dattātreya-gorakṣa Samvāda*, also claims to be a part of the *Tantra Mahārṇava* (White 1996:426 fn 122). Here, textual evidence supports the assimilation of divergent sects into the Nath tradition.

What is interesting to note is that while *Avadhūta Gītā*, a text of the Nath milieu ascribed to Dattatreya, propounds the philosophy of an ecstatic Avadhūta who “is beyond both dualism and nondualism (*dvaita-advaita vivarjita*)” (Rigopoulos 1998:198), it appears to have an interpolated chapter (number eight) which treats of women in a very harsh manner (reminiscent of Gorakhnath’s rescue of Matsyendranath from *Kadalī van*), as compared to another text that Dattatreya is associated with, the *Tripurā Rahasya*, where he “expounds the supremacy of Devī to Paraśurāma, that is, of the female as the highest manifestation of the divine” (Rigopoulos 1998:249). In the *Avadhūta Gītā* characteristic traits of an Avadhūta are listed, though not their distinguishing practices. This description applies equally to the philosophy and practice of the Kinarami Aghar seekers:

(7.1) Clad in a patched garment made of rags gathered on the road, he follows the path which is devoid of merit and demerit and stays in an empty abode, he, the pure and stainless one, plunged in equanimity.

(7.2) His goal is neither to aim nor not to aim at an object. He is skillful, being devoid of right and wrong. He is the absolute truth, stainless and pure. How can the Avadhūta engage in discussion and disputation.

(7.3) Free from the obstructing snare of desire, absorbed in meditation and devoid of purificatory rites, he is thus at peace, devoid of everything. He is the truth, pure and stainless. (Rigopoulos 1998:212).

In *Tripurā Rahasya* (composed between eleventh and seventeenth centuries, Rigopoulos 1998:169) chapter six, Dattatreya appears before Paraśurāma in a Tantrik form: “surrounded by Yogins and resplendent in his youth, he embraces a young woman and has a jar of liquor in front of him” (Rigopoulos 1998:174). Further, in the Mahānubhāva sect’s text *Sahayādri-līlā* (A.D. 1330-1400) Dattatreya appears before Paraśurāma as a hunter: “In his left hand Dattatreya held a pair of dogs... in his right hand he held meat and a coconut shell full of liquor... With him was a Devī with braided hair...” (Rigopoulos 1998:93). These descriptions can apply also to the erstwhile

Kāpālikas and the Aughaṛs who follow the erotico-mystical *sāadhanā*. The *Jābāla Upaniṣad* (composed possibly before the common era, Rigopoulos 1998:77) lists

Dattatreya as a Paramahaṃsa and describes a Paramahaṃsa as:

... He is clad as he was at birth. He is indifferent to the pair of opposites. He has no possessions. He is firmly established in the path of Brahman... Merely to sustain his life, he begs food randomly at the prescribed time... remaining the same both when he receives and when he does not. In deserted houses, in temples, on haystacks, by anthills, at the foot of trees, in potter's sheds, in sheds for fire sacrifices, on sandy banks of rivers, in mountain caves, in glens, in the hollows of trees, in lonely spots, or in open fields, he lives without a home... (Rigopoulos 1998:66).

Remarkably, this is how Sarkar Baba used to conduct his life when still a seeker on the banks of the Ganges. Further, the Paramahaṃsa is also known as an Avadhūta (see Rigopoulos 1998:51 fn 48). The documentation of these descriptions of an Avadhūta, and their similarities to an Aughaṛ, then brings before us yet another way of looking at Aghor. Although Baba Kinaram describes his philosophy in *Vivēksār* as the *Avadhūta mat* (*Avadhūta* philosophy or tradition), and although Aghor is written about as a tradition, Sarkar Baba has often said that Aghor is not a path, it is a state, and seekers of every tradition can achieve this state (Ram 1992:81). So also, Avadhūta can be regarded as a state, not necessarily a tradition, especially when we look at how the letters A-va-dhū-ta of the word Avadhūta have been defined:

From the *Avadhūta Gītā* –

(8.6) The significance of the letter “a” is that the Avadhūta is free from the snare of desire (*āśā-pāśa-vinirmuktaḥ*)...

(8.7) The syllable “va” is indicative of him by whom all tendencies have been renounced (*vāsanā varjitā*)...

(8.8) The syllable “dhū” is indicative of him whose limbs are grey with dust (*dhūli-dhūsara-gātrāṇi*)...

(8.9) The syllable “ta” is indicative of him who firmly bears the thought of the real (*tattva-cintā*)... (Rigopoulos 1998:213-4).

From the *Bṛhad-avadhūta Upaniṣad* 1.2 –

The Avadhūta is so called because he is immortal (*akṣara*); he is the greatest (*vareṇya*); he has discarded worldly ties (*dhūta-saṃsāra-bandhana*); and he is indicated in the meaning of the sentence “Thou art That,” etc. (*tat-tvam-asyādī-lakṣya*) (Rigopoulos 1998:214, 65).

From *Aghor Vacan Śāstra* –

a = *avināśī* (indestructible)

va = *sarvottam* (the best, the ideal)

dhū = *vidhi-niṣedha sē parē* (beyond prescriptions and prohibitions)

ta = *sat-cit-ānand* (truth-eternity-bliss) (Ram 1992:84)

Clearly, these are descriptions of an achieved state, not of rituals or practices. My point is strengthened further by Rigopoulos’ note that “The Nāthas, as well as the Rāmānandīs, designate themselves as Avadhūtas” (Rigopoulos 1998:51 fn 48). Thus we can have Nathas who can be Avadhūtas, Nathas who can be Aughaṛs, Aughaṛs who can be Avadhūtas, Ramanandis who can be Avadhūtas, and Avadhūtas who can be Aughaṛs, Nathas or Ramanandis. However, within the Shaiva-Shakta tradition, Gorakhnath is never referred to as an Avadhūta, while Dattatreya, more often than not, is. Elaborating on the Aghor *panth* (path) Chaturvedi cites *Mahānirvāṇatantra* to describe four different types of Avadhūta ascetics, namely, Brahmāvadhūta, Śaivāvadhūta, Virāvadhūta, and Kulāvadhūta. Of these four, the characters enumerated for the Virāvadhūtas, with long unkempt hair; wearing *rudrākṣa* (elaecarpus ganitrus) or bone necklaces; remaining naked, wearing a *kaupīn* (loincloth) or even saffron clothes; smearing ashes or red sandalwood paste on their body; carrying a stick, deerskin, axe, leg of a cot, hourglass drum, cymbals; smoking *gānjā* (marijuana) and drinking liquor, fit Aughaṛs very well (Chaturvedi 1973:76).<sup>54</sup>

Dattātreya, as a preceptor of the Shaivas, or *tīrthika-s*,<sup>55</sup> is mentioned also in Tāranāth’s *History of Buddhism in India*: “Now, during the time of king Pañcamasiṃha, there lived two brothers who were *ācāryas* of the *tīrthika-s*. One of them was called

Datta-trai (Dattātreyā). He was specially in favor of *samādhi* (Tāranāth 1970[1575]:225).” I assume it is the historical Dattātreyā that Tāranāth refers to because he also mentions Shankaracharya in the same line, as the second *ācārya* of the *tīrthikas*. His mention of *samādhi* as a recognizing feature of Dattātreyā certainly points towards Datta’s popular yogic understanding, corroborated by Bharati who mentions Dattātreyā can be related to the Buddhist *Dhūtāṅga sādhanā* according to some, but there is no doubt that it was of the yoga path (Bharati 1968:325).

As we can see, Dattatreya’s antecedents are quite old. While he is mentioned in the epic *Mahābhārata* as a powerful Ṛṣi who grants boons to the Haihaya king Kārtavīrya Arjun, and there also appears a certain Datta who was a Bodhisatta (*Bhūridatta-jātaka* no. 543, which may not be the same Dattatreya under consideration) (Rigopoulos 1998:28), it is the syncretic nature of Dattatreya that is of importance here. Beginning with his birth as the son of Ṛṣi Atri and his wife Anasūya (Rigopoulos 1998:27), he was later thought of as an embodiment of Vishnu as a yogi with Tantrik characters in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa* (Rigopoulos 1998:29), and then conflated into the *trimūrti* (three faced) of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Rigopoulos 1998:249). It is because Dattatreya can simultaneously be a Shaiva, Shakta or Vaishnava yogi can we perceive the sub-stream of Shakta Tantrism within the *haṭhayogic* Nath tradition, as well as the Vaishnava element within Kinarami Aghar, mediated via the *Sant* tradition.

The antiquity of Aghor practices, however, is not fully explained by stopping here. As noted earlier, Jalandharnath’s practices predate the formation of the Nath tradition, a notion strengthened further when we find that his disciple Kṛṣṇapād or Kānapā, calls himself a Kāpālīka, which is a Shaiva tradition although Buddhists are also

cited as performing Kāpālika *sādhānā* (see treatment of *Mālatīmādhava* below), probably by coming in association with the Shaivas. As scholars believe that by about the fourteenth century the Kāpālikas were probably absorbed by the Naths and the Aghoris (Lorenzen 1972:53), let me now turn towards the Kāpālika links with *Aghor sādhanā*.

### **Kāpālikas in Classical Sanskrit Fiction, and 19<sup>th</sup> Century Debates**

Lorenzen cites *Gāthā-Saptaśatī* (first century CE) as well as the *Yāñnavalkya-Smṛti* (100-300 C.E.) as texts which provide probably the earliest known references to Kāpālikas, the supposed precursors to the Aughaṛs, as a sect (Lorenzen 1972:13). Various texts describe the Kāpālikas as endowed with the six insignia, meditating with the conception of Self as seated in the vulva (Lorenzen 1972:2 quoting Ramanuja), besmearing the body with the ashes of a corpse (Lorenzen 1972:4-5), sometimes known as Mahāvratin, carrying a skull in their hands from which they eat and drink. The Buddhist text *Lalitavistara* mentions ascetics who smear their bodies with ashes, wear red garments, shave their heads, carry a triple staff, a pot, a skull and a khaṭvāṅga (Lorenzen 1972:14). Some of this description, such as shaving their heads and carrying a skull bowl fits Aughaṛs appropriately.

Varāhamihira, writing a century earlier than Bāṇa (that is, in the sixth century), delineates seven types of ascetics born under the influence of particular planets in his *Bṛhajjātaka*, identifying one of them as Vṛddhas, a name which is further defined by Utpala (in tenth century) as Vṛddhaśrāvakas or Kapālīs (skull-bearing Shaivite ascetics (Basham 2002[1951]:169). In *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* Varāhamihira mentions Kāpālika ascetics quite explicitly (Lorenzen 1972:14).

With these descriptions as a starting point, I will provide several examples of descriptions of Kāpālikas from classical Sanskrit texts ranging from the seventh to the twelfth century, to compare their appearance and practices with those of the Aghars. Towards the end of this section I will briefly discuss the confusion that prevailed in early to mid nineteenth century research about who the Kāpālikas really were. With reference to the classical Sanskrit fiction, I will also provide my brief comments based on their treatment of the Kāpālikas. For the sake of brevity I limit myself to a few examples, and more importantly, so as not to repeat the exhaustive descriptions already provided by Lorenzen (1972) from Sanskrit and epigraphical sources.

#### Sanskrit Novels and Dramas:

Let me begin with the timeframe of medieval India. I will consider four texts here – Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*, Mahendraverma's *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, Kṛṣṇamiśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*, and Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*, as these are the texts most popularly known and frequently cited. All of these sources are similar in that they describe the core identifying features of the sect known as Kāpālikas, “so-called because they vowed to carry a human skull (*kapāla*), are as well known to the common Indian as they are obscure to them” (Dyczkowski 1988:26). For a detailed survey of the classical texts pertaining to Kāpālikas, I will refer the reader to Lorenzen's *Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas* (1972). The difference between these descriptions lies in the particular portrayals of the characters in question, sometimes with appreciation and sympathy, sometimes with humor, and sometimes in a diabolical manner, depending upon the

sectarian affiliations and intended political or social agendas, of the authors who were, mostly, their critics.

The first of these descriptions comes from Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Harṣacarita*, an *ākhyāyikā*, "a historical, though literary, biography" (Warder 1983:2) believed to have been composed sometime in the early seventh century. The story deals with a remote ancestor (Kane 1997:xlvi) of emperor Harṣavardhan by the name of Puṣpabhūti, who was not only perhaps the original progenitor of the Vardhan lineage but also a devout worshipper of Shiva (Pathak 1964:20), and who becomes friends with a dākṣiṇātya mahāśaiva ascetic, Bhairavācārya, ultimately helping him to attain the status of a Vidyādhara (an ethereal being with supernatural powers). Lorenzen thinks Bhairavācārya was a Kāpālika ascetic because his disciple carried a *bhikṣā kapāla*, a skull begging bowl; Bhairavācārya's name implies that he was a worshipper of Shiva in the form of Bhairava, a deity propitiated by Kāpālikas; and because Bāṇa introduces him as a "second overthrewer of Dakṣa's sacrifice," Shiva as Kapāleśvar who had cut off the fifth head of Brahma being the divine archetype of the Kāpālika ascetic (Lorenzen 1972:20, Visuvalingam 1986:241)<sup>56</sup>. Bāṇa describes the first meeting of king Puṣpabhūti with Bhairavācārya in a respectful, even reverential manner, mentioning Bhairavācārya's eightfold offering of flowers to Shiva, his tiger-skin seat outlined with ashes, black cloak, knotted hair and rosary, crystal ear-rings, forearm bracelet, white ascetic wrap, bamboo staff with a barb of iron (Pathak 1964:175-7), etc. and writes:

'...Rarely speaking, slowly smiling; every man's benefactor, and chaste as a boy;<sup>57</sup> supreme in austerities, surpassing in wisdom; restrained in anger, unrestrained in kindness; graced, like a great city, with unfailing native nobility; delicately tinted, like Meru, as with the sprays of the Tree of Paradise; like Kailāsa, having his head purified by the dust of Paçupati's feet; like Çiva's heaven, the resort of Māheçvara throngs; like the ocean, cleansed by many a male and

female stream; like the Ganges flood, made pure by visiting many a sacred bathing-place: dwelling of dharma, *tirtha* of truth, storehouse of sincerity, burgh of purity, hall of high character, domain of patience, rice-plot of unassumingness, pedestal of constancy, support of steadfastness, mine of mercy, home of happiness, pleasance of pleasure, palace of propitiousness, mansion of venerableness, congress of refinement, genesis of good feeling, end of evil: such was the holy Bhairavācārya, a very Çiva incarnate.’ (Cowell and Thomas, 1897:263)

This is the description provided by Bāṇa when the king went to see him in a bēl-tree (*Aegle marmelos*) plantation ‘north of yon old temple to the Mothers’ where he was surrounded by ‘a great throng of recluses’ (Cowell and Thomas 1897:87). Bāṇa does not hold back in eulogizing the ascetic, minutely describing his body parts and possessions, often embellishing both with metaphors of emanating lights that dispel various kinds of darkness, etc. as well as the mutual joy the king and the ascetic felt on meeting each other. Their place of meeting, although on the outskirts of the city, was still a pleasant public place. Therefore I am not surprised by a lack of grotesque descriptions often employed by the Sanskrit poets to describe the cremation ground scenarios. So let us look at Bāṇa’s description of Bhairavācārya in a cremation ground setting:

In the centre of a great circle of ashes white as lotus pollen Bhairāvācārya could be seen, a form all aglow with light, like the autumn sun enveloped in a broad halo or Mandara in the whirlpool of the churned Ocean of Milk. Seated on the breast of a corpse which lay supine anointed with red sandal and arrayed in garlands, clothes and ornaments all of red, himself with a black turban, black unguents, black amulet, and black garments, he had begun a fire rite in the corpse's mouth, where a flame was burning. As he offered some black sesamum seeds, it seemed as though in eagerness to become a Vidyādhara he were annihilating the atoms of defilement which caused his mortal condition. The gleam of his nails falling on the oblation appeared to cleanse the flames of the pollution due to contact with the dead man's mouth, while his smoke-inflamed eye flung as it were an offering of blood upon the devouring blaze. His mouth, showing the tips of white teeth as he slightly opened his lips in his muttering, seemed to display in bodily shape the lines of the syllables of his charms. The lamps near him were imaged in the sweat of his sacrificial exertions, as if he were burning his whole body to ensure success. From his shoulder hung a Brāhmanical thread of many strands, encircling his form, like a multiple Vidyārāja charm. (Cowell and Thomas 1897:92-3)

Although the description here is a little more somber than the one in the Bēl-tree plantation above, with Bhairavācārya performing a fire-ritual in the mouth of a corpse, it is surprising that Bāṇa chooses to portray it in non grotesque terms, treating the whole scene as a normal, almost expected, way of a cremation ground ritual. Bāṇa uses metaphors of light, comparing Bhairavācārya to the halo of the Sun, the gleam from his nails as cleansing the very flames of the pollution incurred due to contact with the dead man's mouth, and the reflection of the lighted lamps off the glistening sweat on his body as a self sacrifice for success. Warder notes that “this is one of the earliest references in Indian literature to such a tantric rite, though Bāṇa sets this performance, presumably described from contemporary practice, in an apparently remote, though undated, past.” (Warder 1983:12)

What is even more surprising in the portrayal of this entire story is a total lack of blood, a total lack of bloody sacrifice. Although Puṣpabhūti fights with the materialized spirit Nāga Śrīkaṇṭha, he stops short of killing him on spotting his sacred thread. This act pleases the goddess Lakshmi who appears on the scene then, and grants him the boon of becoming the progenitor of an illustrious line of kings in which Harṣa would be born (Cowell and Thomas 1897:97; Pathak 1964:166).

The second description I am citing here comes from *Mattavilāsa Prahasan*, composed by the Pallava king Mahendravarman who ruled over Kanchi in south India between A.D. 600 and 630 (Lorenzen 1972:23). As its title indicates, this work is a *prahasana*, a farce, with hugely comic effects in a short and simple storyline. The story is about Satyasoma, a Kapālin who is wandering in the city of Kanchipuram with his companion Devasomā, both heavily under the influence of liquor, when he discovers that

his kapāla (skull begging bowl) is missing. Distraught, they both look for it and spot a Buddhist monk by the name of Nāgasena carrying a skull-bowl. When they ask him to show it to them, he resists, and they accuse him of stealing their skull-bowl. As their argument heats up, Babhrukalpa, a Pāśupata monk (an order of Shaiva ascetics) comes on the scene and mediates between them. Even as he does so, a madman enters carrying the Kapālin's skull-bowl, which he had wrested from a dog. After some coaxing he gives the skull-bowl back to Satyasoma and they all part as friends.

This farce is comical in its portrayal of the characters, and satirizes their doctrines as well as behavior. It does not at all have the kind of horrifying rites that Bhavabhūti has in his play *Mālatīmādhava*. Although the Kapālin and his consort are shown as highly tipsy, they are presented as harmless comical figures along with the Buddhist monk, and in fact, their character is depicted in a positive manner when compared to the conflicting behavior of the Buddhist monk. The Kapālin's doctrine and practice are the same, so his drunken behavior is in keeping with his spiritual beliefs, but the Buddhist monk longs for wine and women, while his doctrine prevents him from doing so. The Kapālin also displays strength of character and self-control when he loses his skull-bowl by not losing his equanimity despite being drunk, and expresses great human empathy at specific spots. For example, when he gets into an argument with the Buddhist monk his companion Devasomā asks him to have some wine, and he wishes to share it with the Buddhist monk, thus:

Devasomā: Master, you look as if you are tired. That skull-bowl cannot be got back by easy means; so take a drink of brandy from this cow-horn and strengthen yourself so as to carry on the dispute with him.

Kapālin: So be it! (*Devasomā hands the brandy to the Kapālin. He drinks it.*) My dear, you too must refresh yourself.

Devasomā: Yes, master, I will. (*She drinks.*)

Kapālin: This fellow has wronged us. But our doctrine lays chief weight on sharing our goods, so give the leavings to his reverence.

Devasomā: As you command, master. Take it, sir.

Buddhist Friar (*aside*): Oh, what a happy stroke of fortune! The only trouble is that folks will see. (*Aloud*) Nay, madam, don't speak thus. It is not proper for us. (*He licks his chaps.*) (Barnett 1930:708-9)

Not only is the Kapālin willing to share his booze with the Buddhist monk, he also displays knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and uses it humorously in argument, as when the Buddhist monk tries to hide the skull-bowl under his long robe and the Kapālin accuses him, saying that it is to hide such things that the Buddha has decreed the wearing of long robes. When the Buddhist monk replies “yes,” the Kapālin says, but this is just the relative-truth, I want to hear the whole truth<sup>58</sup> (Barnett 1930:708). That is because in Buddhist philosophy there exists the distinction between *saṃvṛti-satya* as “truth in concealment” and *Paramārtha-satya* as “absolute” or “transcendental” truth (Barnett 1930:708 n. 1).

Further, when Satyasoma regains his skull-bowl and realizes he had accused the Buddhist monk unjustly, he not only seeks his forgiveness but wishes happiness for him, and asks him to visit again! (*gacchatu bhavān punardarśanāya*) (Giri 1966:40).

Satyasoma's companion Devasomā is presented not as a bloodthirsty woman in this farce, but as a concerned companion who seeks welfare of the Kāpālika, helping him look for his lost skull-bowl, and offering him wine as needed.

With specific reference to ascetic practices, earlier in the text Satyasoma expresses his knowledge of the Jaina mendicant rites when he says in reproof that they “torture living beings with celibacy, plucking out hair, keeping the body filthy, fixing times for meals, wearing dirty rags, and the rest of it.” (Barnett 1930:704). It is to be noted that except for pulling out hair, all the other *sādhanā* points enumerated by the

Kāpālīka also hold true for what Aghor observe during their *sādhanā* period, and I surmise, a lot of the Kāpālīkas did too. What is remarkable is that he points it out as elements of *sādhanā* which, when forced upon the common folk, lead to sorrow for them. This highlights the “secret” or hidden aspect of *sādhanā*, where the practices are not disclosed publicly for they do not belong in the public sphere.

Satyasoma then describes the city of Kanchipuram and says:

Ha! the surpassing magnificence of Kāñcī Town ! The sound of its drums blends confusedly with the roar of the clouds resting upon the pinnacles of its temples, its market of flower-garlands may serve as a model for constructing the season of spring, and the tinkling of the girdles of its fair damsels is as it were the noise announcing the victory of the God of the Flower-Arrows. Moreover-  
 The infinite, eternal, unsurpassed  
 Bliss without check, which saints supreme, whose minds  
 Compass all being, have conceived, is here  
 Found in all fullness; and-what's very strange-  
 'Tis food for flesh, delight of woman's love ! (Barnett 1930:704).

Barnett’s poetic rendition of the Kāpālīka’s words, especially the last two lines, however, seem to give the wrong message from what the Kāpālīka intends. Giri’s Hindi commentary of this text can be translated as: “But this delight (sensory indulgence) is so strange that it pleases (only) the senses and leads one to carnal indulgence.” (Giri 1966:10). Reading between the lines, this statement actually belies the Kāpālīkas presumed fondness for the delights of sensory gratification. It points to his awareness and neutrality towards such elements which may please the senses, but ultimately lead only to sensory (carnal) pleasure, and no more than that. His intoxicated, amorous behavior, then, would seem more like a role play of seeming sensory joy, while in reality, he remains aware of its limitations. Perhaps that is why he lived in Kanchipuram where, despite living in the midst of such sensory delights, he could practice self-control by not being affected by them.

The third description from Sanskrit texts that I present here comes from an eleventh-twelfth century text composed by a contemporary of the Chandela king Kirtivarma (A.D. 1060-1100), Kṛṣṇamiśra's *Prabodhacandrodaya*. This is a *rūpaka* or *pratīka* (Agravala 1962:26-71), an allegorical drama, in six acts “dedicated to the defense of *advaita* [non-dualist] Vaiṣṇavism” (Lorenzen 1972:59). Most of the characters in this drama except the initial manager and his companion actress, and the religious sectarians – the Cārvāka (materialist), the Jain monk (Digambara), the Buddhist monk, the Kāpālika and his female consort – are abstract human qualities such as *viveka* (discrimination), *santoṣa* (contentment), *śraddhā* (faith) and *śānti* (tranquility) (Shastri 1977:23).

The storyline portrays the families of the children from two wives of *man* (mind) – *pravṛtti* (tendency, action) and *nivṛtti* (detachment) – warring against each other for supremacy. *Pravṛtti*'s family, called *mohakul* (lineage of delusion or attachment), comprises of *moha* (delusion), *kāma* (passion, desire), *lobha* (greed, avarice), *krodha* (anger), *trṣṇā* (strong desire), *hiṃsā* (violence) etc. while *nivṛtti*'s family, called *vivekakul* (lineage of discernment or discrimination), is favored by *viveka* (discrimination), *vastuvicāra* (reflection), *santoṣa* (contentment), *kṣmā* (forgiveness), *śraddhā* (faith), *śānti* (tranquility), and *karuṇā* (compassion), etc. It is forecast that *viveka* will produce two children with Devi *Upaniṣad* – daughter *vidyā* (Knowledge, wisdom) and son *prabodhacandra* (moon of enlightenment), who will then destroy the lineage of delusion. As the two sides war with each other, *śraddhā* (faith) is abducted by *moha* (delusion) with the help of *mithyādrṣṭi* (false vision). *Śānti* (tranquility), *śraddhā*'s daughter, looks for her with the help of her friend *karuṇā* (compassion), even searching

in the houses of heresy (*pākhaṇḍālaya*). It is there that they see false *śṛaddhās* (Shastri 1977:11-14, my translation).

At the place of the Jain monk, they see *śṛaddhā* as “depraved and ugly” (Shastri 1977:120). They attribute this to her being “*tāmasic* (gross) *śṛaddhā*” (Shastri 1977:119). They proceed to the Buddhist monk’s place and there too, they see *śṛaddhā* as *tāmasic* (gross) (Shastri 1977:124). Then they spot Somasidhhānta ahead, in the form of a Kāpālika, who describes himself as:

Adorned with a beautiful necklace of human bones, I live in the cremation ground eating food from a human skull. With eyes purified by the collyrium of Yoga, I view the illusory differentiated world as undifferentiated from God (Īśvara)<sup>59</sup>. (Shastri 1977:130).

When the Jain monk asks him about his Kāpālika faith, Somasidhhānta gives him a very gory picture of offering brains, entrails and fat into fire, concluding the rite by drinking wine from a *Brahmakapāla* (a bowl made with a Brahman’s skull, or Brahmā’s skull), and worshipping Mahābhairava with the blood of a freshly sacrificed human (Shastri 1977:131). The reader is forced to wonder here, is this all there was to the Kāpālika faith, or is this a caricature being presented in the play for discrediting this, and the other faiths in the cause of advancement of Vaishnavism? Why would a Kāpālika who, later, claims to have enviable spiritual powers of controlling the gods as well as the movement of the stars (Shastri 1977:132-133), start, and conclude, the description of his faith with something the horror of which could only disgust the unprepared listener?

The Jain monk then asks the Kāpālika about the nature of his liberation or salvation<sup>60</sup> (*mokṣa*). However, the expression Kṛṣṇamiśra uses is not just *mokṣa*, it is *saukhyamokṣa* (Shastri 1977:135), where *saukhya* can be translated variously as pleasing, enjoyable, felicitous, or happy. In itself the expression is quite innocuous in that it

embellishes the entity being enquired about, such as when people ask for a person's *shubh naam* (good name) rather than just the name, but it is a tool that can also be employed to cut someone down with sarcasm. So, in effect, Kṛṣṇamiśra makes the Jain monk ask the Kāpālika about his pleasurable-liberation, or, even as the audience might be chuckling with premonition, liberating pleasure. To this the Kāpālika answers, “who wants the stone-like joyless state (of the *vaidiks* [followers of the Veda]) called *mukti* (liberation)?” (Shastri 1977:135-136). Regarding true liberation he says, “a liberated being, in embrace with a woman like Pārvatī (consort of Shiva), becoming like a moon-crested Shiva, experiences joy for an eternity” (Agravala 1962:176).<sup>61</sup>

In the compactness of the Sanskrit verse, and the atmosphere of irony created by the poet, it is easy to overlook how the two participants in this embrace -- *Pārvatyāh pratirūpayā* and *candracūḍavapu* – can be mistaken for ordinary lovers. Shastri's commentary indicates that *Pārvatyāh pratirūpayā* refers to a woman who has attained the state of Parvati, the consort of Shiva in the Hindu pantheon, and *candracūḍavapu* similarly refers to a man who has attained the state of Shiva, not just his appearance. A person who has attained such a state of the Shiva is liberated already, and then, like the *yin* and *yang* symbol, exists eternally in a diffused embrace.

This fact is further illustrated when the Kāpālika calls on his version of *śraddhā* to come forward, who is described erotically as:

with large eyes like blue lotuses, adorned with ornaments of human bones, walking slowly with the weight of her full buttocks and breasts, looking amorously beautiful with a full-moon like face. (Shastri 1977:137-8, my translation).

*Śānti* (tranquility) and *karuṇā* (compassion) however, call her *rājasic śraddhā*, a notch above the *tāmasic śraddhā* of the Jain and Buddhist monks, but still, not true faith

yet. This, even though when The Kāpālika asks her to embrace both the Jain and the Buddhist monks, they both fall for her, while, illustrative of the point just made above, the Kāpālika remains unaffected. We saw the same theme in *Mattavilāsa* above where the tipsy Kāpālika, in company of his consort, does not hanker after beauty, while the Buddhist monk does, for the Kāpālika knows pleasures of the senses please only the senses, and no more. The Kāpālika, further, tells them that many spiritual powers are obtained in this faith easily, but the seekers do not hanker after them, as they can be an obstacle to true Yoga (Shastri 1977:147). As the story progresses, *Śānti* (tranquility) and *karuṇā* (compassion) find true *śraddhā* predictably, with *viṣṇubhakti* (devotion to Vishnu), *viveka* wins the battle, and produces *vidyā* and *prabodhacandra* with Devi *Upaniṣad*. *Vidyā* destroys *moha* (delusion), and *prabodhacandra* liberates the *puruṣa* (human being).

The last Sanskrit drama I am presenting here is Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava*, a *prakaraṇa*, fictional love story believed to have been composed sometime in the early eighth century. Bhavabhūti is regarded as being singularly insightful in the production of *rasa* (enjoyment, sentiment, mood) according to the rules of theatrics, and his compositions convey humanism as well as "a Brāhmaṇism strongly influenced by Buddhism" (Warder 1983:272). The storyline is fairly complicated, but for our purposes, this synopsis should suffice. Mālatī and Mādhava, children of imperial ministers, were intended to be married at the right age, by a promise made to each other by their respective fathers, a promise known to the Buddhist nun Kāmandakī and her disciple Saudāminī. However, Mālatī's father, Bhūrivasu, is pressured by his king into giving her to his court jester, Nandan. By now, through Kāmandakī's initiative, Mālatī and

Mādhava have fallen madly in love. On hearing of Mālatī's impending wedding to Nandan, Mādhava goes into the cemetery to sell human flesh to effect an immediate solution to his dilemma. There he discovers that Kāpālika Aghoraghaṇṭa and his disciple Kapālakuṇḍalā are about to sacrifice Mālatī to the goddess in the temple of Karālā. Mādhava rescues Mālatī, kills Aghoraghaṇṭa, and after several more episodes producing various kinds of *rasa*, the two are united through Kāmandakī and Saudāminī's efforts to end the story happily.

The portrayal of Aghoraghaṇṭa and Kapālakuṇḍalā in this text is definitely cruel, enhanced by the gory descriptions of the cremation ground where Mādhava himself, in a desperate act of cruelty, walks about with “human flesh in his left hand dripping thick blood” (Shastri 1998:205-6; Wilson 1901:51). In fact, the notion of cruelty as characteristic of the Kāpālika is already introduced in Act IV of the play when Mālatī laments her being given to the court jester by her father as a Kāpālika act (Shastri 1998:192). However, Mādhava is said to be hawking flesh from a corpse he had not killed<sup>62</sup> (Shastri 1998:216) (how, then, the dripping thick blood?) in pursuit of his love, while the Kāpālika is going to sacrifice an innocent woman to conclude his religious rites. Warder notes that Bhavabhūti was perhaps himself a Shaiva, going by his name – Bhava, which implies Shiva – and that he was protesting “against a perversion in religion, not against Śaivism” (1983:273). This may be true, since one of the protagonists of the play, Saudāminī is said to be “observing the Kāpālika vow at Śrīparvat” (Shastri 1998:31), and Kapālakuṇḍalā is described as “endowed with great accomplishment” (Shastri 1998:32-3).

Putting all these classical Sanskrit descriptions into perspective we see a whole range of portrayals of the Kāpālikas. In *Harṣacarita* Bhairavācārya is looked upon reverentially, as “a worthy ascetic and a friend and confidant of the founder of the house of Bāṇa’s patron” (Lorenzen 1972:22). In *Mattavilāsa*, Satyaoma and the Buddhist monks are described comically for their attributes, but not necessarily denigrated. In *Prabodhacandrodaya*, all sectarians, Jain, Buddhist and the Kāpālika Somasiddhānta are ridiculed equally in comparison to *viṣṇubhakti*. In *Mālatīmādhava*, two pictures are presented simultaneously – of kindness and cruelty -- of Saudāminī as a kind Kāpālikā working for the cause of love, Kapālakuṇḍalā as an accomplished Kāpālikā working for the success of her guru, and Aghoraghaṇṭa as a Kāpālika about to perform a human sacrifice.

The reasons for these particular portrayals of Kāpālikas seem to be many. They vary according to the particular authors’ own sectarian proclivity, the need to produce a suitable mood (*rasa*) in the text, and also, undeniably, politics. Regarding Bāṇa’s portrayal, it is worth noting that Bāṇa himself was “especially devoted to Shiva” (Kane 1997:143), and perhaps also a Shakta is as much as he composed a hymn of hundred verses to Devi Chandika (Warder 1983:26), Harsha is a devout worshipper of Shiva (Kane 1997:xlvi), and his ancestor Puṣpabhūti is certainly so (Kane 1997:xlvi), so that it brings to a harmonious meeting of the minds on all fronts to depict Bhairavācārya positively. But sectarian proclivity aside, it also seems true --

that by the seventh century tantric religion, even of the so-called ‘left-hand observance’ (*vāmācāra*) type, was accepted and supported by many persons of learning and high social status. As a corollary to this, it must also be assumed that the behavior of most of these ascetics was considerably more circumspect than their critics would have us believe. Two epigraphs from western India show that

even the Kāpālikas had at least some official support in early mediaeval period. (Lorenzen 1972:22).

It is easy to see, also, the portrayal of the Kāpālika and other sectarians in *Prabodhacandrodaya* as an undisguised attempt to discredit them and their philosophies, to the advantage of Vaishnavism. To achieve that goal, the poet Kṛṣṇamiśra uses the tool of generating fear and disgust by describing horrible acts, as is natural according to the theory of *rasa*, to create specific kinds of emotions in the audience. “In skilfull hands this technique could achieve striking ritualistic effects, but it also militated against any form of realistic expression” (Lorenzen 1972:54). A similar use of this tool, the dramatic rendition of the horrible and disgusting, is made by Bhavabhūti in *Mālatīmādhava*. Bhavabhūti was himself a Shaiva, a highly learned one at that, and his language shows “Vedic undertones.” But Warder emphasizes “his learning is so thoroughly assimilated and distilled, as well as blended with Buddhism, that no doctrinal tendency is visible” (1983:276). Therefore I am, like Lorenzen, led to conclude that his particular portrayal of the Kāpālika is motivated by the needs of producing the “sentiments of terror (*bhayānaka*...) and horror (*bībhatsa*) (Lorenzen 1972:54).

Mahendravarman’s *Mattavilāsa*, on the other hand, reflects the very human motivations of individual ascetics belonging to different sects, and the particular nature of interactions between them, without passing a judgment on any. It is also a comical representation of the religionists of its time where “Since hedonism lends itself easily to comic treatment, farces such as *Mattavilāsa* ... feature Kāpālika sybarites” (Lorenzen 1972:62). All this is not to say that the portrayal of the Kāpālikas was totally wanton and false by their authors. This characterization was probably “intermittently correct” (Davidson 2002:178), but it is exaggerated by the sectarian or political proclivities of

their critics. It also, in all probability, indicates subtle strands of Kāpālika practice, one devoted to the erotico-mystical, the other blending erotico-mystical with cremation ground practice.

### **Antiquity of Aghor Sādhanā: Tracing the Ancient Aghoris**

The term Aghor is mentioned in one of the oldest Indian texts, the *Ṛgveda* (10.85.44),<sup>63</sup> this term, then, certainly has an ancient past and a long history. The *Ṛgveda* (approximately 1200 BCE)<sup>64</sup> describes a fiery and terrifying God named Rudra, a god who is fierce but rules benevolently over herbs and provides blessings. The chapter *Rudrādhyāya* of *Yajurveda* (*Taittirīya Samhitā*:4.5.1.1), as also the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* (16.2) describe Rudra's auspicious form, which is innately united with his feminine power called Śivā<sup>65</sup>. Within this feminine description Śivā is embellished with the adjective *Aghorā*. According to followers of the Aghor tradition, this illustration implies that Rudra is Śivā, and Śivā is *Aghorā*, a Sanskrit word which is known as Aughaṛ in the present times (Chaturvedi 1973:5).

With reference to the *Sant* tradition of which Sarbhang and Aghor are a part, the inspiration they took from the *Upaniṣads* is evident in the use of words like *puruṣa*, and *satpuruṣa* (Shastri 1959:Background 4-5). The word *haṃsa* can be found in *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad* 3.11<sup>66</sup> and *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.15.<sup>67</sup> The sixth chapter of *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* deals specifically with the concepts of *nirguṇa*, *kāla*, *nirañjana*, terms which I have discussed in connection with *Vivēksār* above, as well as the philosophy of non-dualism (Shastri 1959:Background 5). Aughaṛs propitiate Kāla-Bhairava and Kali to control ghosts and spirits, and it is expected that they may use this

power for social welfare. In *Atharvaveda* Rudra is depicted as a healer, propitiated by ghosts and spirits, and dogs are supposed to be his companions (Shastri 1959

Background:9). Its *Kausika Sūtra* mentions three goddesses, Īḍā, Sarasvatī and Bhārātī, who could be related to later channels *Īḍā*, *Piṅgalā* and *Suṣumnā* (Shastri 1959

Background: 12). Within this text there are lines which could be related to *śmasāna sādhanā* as well as discussions of eight channels and *prāṇa* and *apāna* etc. (Shastri 1959

Background: 14). Shastri emphasizes that *Sant* tradition's closest relation is with the Shakt and Tantrik branches of the the Shaiva tradition, while the Shaiva tradition is itself related to the Rudra of *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* (Shastri 1959:Background 8). In this connection it is important to mention Sanderson's observation that in the 'Path of the Mantras (Mantramārga)':

The basic cult of the Mantrapīṭha is that of Svachhandabhairava ('Autonomous Bhairava') also known euphemistically as Aghora ('the Un-terrible'). White, five-faced (the embodiment of the five *brahma-mantras*) and eighteen armed, he is worshipped with his identical consort Aghoreśvarī, surrounded by eight lesser Bhairavas within a circular enclosure of cremation grounds. He stands on the prostrate corpse of Sadāśiva, the now transcended Śiva-form worshipped in the Śaiva Siddhānta. (Sanderson 1988:669).

Through careful textual analysis Sanderson, in fact, convincingly demonstrates the links between the *Svacchandatantra*, one of the main texts of the Bhairava-Kapalika Tantra corpus (around 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, see *History Through Textual Criticism* 2001:18), with its preceding *Niśvāsaguhya*, a text which incorporated elements "derived from the yet earlier sources of the pre-Tantric system of the Pāśupata Śaivas known variously as Lākulas, Pramāṇa[pāśupata]s, Mahāvratas, Mahāpāśupatas, or Kālamukhas" (Sanderson 2001:29). Here, the Pramāṇa or Lākulas branch of Pāśupata is supposed to have derived from the Aghora face of Shiva (Sanderson 2001:29 fn 32.2). McEvelley contends that the Pāśupata system existed from before the time of Lakulīṣa, perhaps to the time of Ajivikās

and Makkhali Gosāla, around the sixth century B.C. (McEvelley 2002:225). Commenting on *Pancārthapramāṇa* in Kṣemarāja's commentary on the *Svacchanda*, Sanderson points out it confirms that the Pramāṇa system is the basis of the *Niśvāsamukha*, which itself is "an analysis of the Aghoramantra, one of the five Brahmamantras which are the mantras of the Pāśupatas." (Sanderson 2006:175). The close association of Lākulas with the Pāśupata is further corroborated by a 7<sup>th</sup> century copperplate from Chhatisgarh:

The Kāpālikas, also called Somasiddhāntins, were in fact, as a number of Śaiva sources assert, a division of the Atimārga, and a seventh century copper-plate inscription recently discovered in Chhatisgarh confirms this tradition, revealing enough of their doctrine to establish that they were a variant pre-Mantramārgic Śaivism closely related to that of the Lākulas. (Sanderson 2006:210).

With reference to the Aghor association with the Kāpālikas, Sanderson demonstrated the Kāpālikas to be a tradition belonging to the Vidyāpīṭha of the Bhairava Tantras, (1988:670). Sanderson himself regards the *Picumata-Brahmayāmalatantra*, a part of the corpus of *Yāmala-Tantras* (Union Tantras) (Sanderson 1988:672), as well as the *Jayadrathayāmalatantra*, a part of the corpus of Kali worship (Sanderson 1988:674) to be strongly Kāpālika texts. However, *Jayadrathayāmala* itself draws on an earlier work *Āgamaśāstra* of Gauḍapāda (c. A.D. 550-700, Sanderson 2001:16-17), which pushes the dates of its contents further back. Such strong clarity, however, was not the case in the early to mid-twentieth century research on the subject, when there existed considerable divergence on views about who the ancient Kāpālikas were. Based on F.W. Thomas' *Bṛhaspati Sūtra* (impossible to date but philosophy dated to B.C. 300-400, Dasgupta 1952 Vol. III:531-2) published from Lahore in 1922,<sup>68</sup> Haraprasad Shastri understood Kāpālikas to have been adepts in the science of erotica, and took them to be non-Aryan ritual practitioners very similar to the Lokāyata (Shastri 1982:16f).

...the Kāpālikas represent a phase in the development of Indian culture. The Kāpālika rituals are not an excrescence on the general body of Indian cultural tradition, nor are they merely temporary phenomena appearing at a particular time, and dying shortly afterwards. On the authority of Guṇaratna, Haraprasad interprets the rituals of the Kāpālikas as the faiths and practices of the non-Aryan people, who believe in the reality of the physical body (*deha*). And since they are anti-vedic in their attitude towards the world and life as a whole, they represent, side by side with the vedic tradition, a vital current in the general stream of Indian history; and that current, according to Haraprasad, manifests itself in the Sahajia cult of the present day. (Shastri 1982:16-7).

Bandopadhyay argues that just because of a belief in *deha* (body), Sahajiyas cannot be equated with the Kāpālikas because the Sahajiya's body focus is not for *kāma-sādhanā* (erotic practice), but on the attainment of Sahaja-Kāyā and ultimately, to a state of *mahā-śūnya* (a state of highest bliss). To think of them as limited *dehavādins* (body focused) interested only in *kāma-sādhanā* would be wrong (Shastri 1982:17).

The fourteenth century Jain author Guṇaratna, in *Tarka-rahasya-dīpikā*, also understood them to be the same as the Lokāyata (Chattopadhyaya 1959:52):

...the Lokāyata-view. The nature of the *nāstikas* first. The Kāpālikas, who smear their bodies with ashes and who are Yogins, are some of them, degenerate Brāhmaṇas. They do not recognise virtue (*puṇya*) and vice (*pāpa*) of the creatures. They say that the world is made up of four elements. Some of them, the Carvakas and others, consider *ākāśa* (empty space) to be the fifth element; they view the world as made of five elements. According to them, consciousness emerges in these elements in the manner of the intoxicating power. Living beings are like bubbles in water. Man is nothing but body endowed with consciousness. They drink wine and eat meat and indulge in indiscriminate sexual intercourse, even incest. On a specific day of each year all of them gather together and unite with any woman that they may desire. They do not recognise any *dharma* (religious idea) over and above *kāma* (the erotic urge). They are called the Cārvakas, the Lokāyatikas, etc. To drink and to chew is their motto; they are called Cārvakas because they chew (*carv*), that is, eat without discrimination. They consider virtue and vice to be merely qualities attributed to the objects... They are also called Lokāyatas or Lokāyatikas because they behave like the ordinary undiscerning masses. They are also called Bārhaspatyas, because their doctrine was originally propounded by Bṛhaspati. (Chattopadhyaya 1959:51)

Here, Guṇaratna has included within the category of the *nāstikas* three different names, those of Cārvakas, Bārhaspatyas as well as Kāpālikas, and equated all of them

with the Lokāyatikas. Some scholars, such as Dasgupta thought that Lokāyata was originally an ancient Sumerian belief that was imported into India, and then went through modifications (Chattopadhyaya 1959:13ff). Dasgupta reached such a conclusion because in the Sumerian civilization the custom existed of adorning the dead and the doctrine of bodily survival after death. This idea of bodily survival after death is to be found also in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, where this view was attributed to the Asuras (Chattopadhyaya 1959:14). But Chattopadhyaya himself identifies the Kāpālikas as Tantrikas, where the Yogi smears his body with ashes and uses *madya* (wine), *māṃsa* (meat) and *maithuna* (sexual intercourse) (Chattopadhyaya 1959:52). According to him, Tantra is neither Hindu nor Buddhist, but could be older than the *Vedas*, and infact, pre-dates all other systems to a time when ideas were not even described as spiritual at all. He writes:

The *deha-vāda* of the *Upanisads* and the *Pitakas* could have been genuinely Lokayatika. But it could not have been the *deha-vāda* of Madhava's description, because... Lokāyata was also characterised by its distinctive spells and rituals. In order to understand the Lokāyata standpoint, therefore, it is necessary to raise a new question. Do we come across in the cultural history of ancient India any *deha-vāda* which was at the same time characterised by its distinctive spells and rituals? As a matter of fact we do. It was the *deha-vāda* of those obscure beliefs and practices that are broadly referred to as Tantrism. (Chattopadhyaya 1959:48)

Comparing the cosmogony and rituals of the asura-view found in the *Gītā* with the Lokayata view of the asuras found in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad* and the *Viśṇu Purāṇa*, Chattopadhyaya reaches the conclusion that Lokāyata cosmogony and the cosmogony of the Tantras is the same and that, therefore, Lokāyata and Tantrism were probably the same (Chattopadhyaya 1959:50).

We can deduce at least two facts from this debate. First, just because a group believes in the reality of the *deha*, it does not naturally follow that they are also committed only to hedonistic pleasure. Second, even though Guṇaratna takes Lokāyata

and Kāpālika to be the same, the *Bṛhaspati Sūtra*, a much more ancient text, takes them to be two separate streams.

Dakshina Ranjan Shastri, too, traces the progression of Aghoris from the amorphous Lokāyatikas (1931:125-137). Simply put, his contention is that in the beginning there existed a set of practices that “a class of people of ancient origin” lived by. They were “pure at heart and blameless in action. These people were probably the forefathers of the Lokāyatikas.” However, these people were not alone. Alongside with them existed the vedicists, as well as another group who were given to sensual pleasures, the Śiṣnadevas or the Vāmadevas, who worshipped the phallus, and despite subscribing to the vedic view, they had no faith in the *Vedas*. He classifies this class of people as the forefathers of the Kāpālikas, who later became Shaivas of the left hand order. As he writes:

There is evidence to show that the non-religionists passed through five distinct stage of development in the course of their evolution. In the initial stage they were pure at heart, blameless in action, and free from all conventions, having neither virtue nor vice. In the second stage they developed a spirit of intolerance and opposition accepting the authority of none, yet having no positive problem of their own to solve. The third stage revealed some positive theories – Svabhavavada, recognition of perception as a source of knowledge and the theory of Dehātmavāda. It was at this stage that they came to be known as the Lokāyatatas. In the fourth stage an extreme form of hedonism... formed the most important feature of this school... It was now that they got the description of Cārvāka... From this time forward the non-religionists leaned gradually towards spiritualism, they developed the theory of Dehātmavāda and tried gradually to identify the sense-organs, breath, and the organ of thought as well with the self... In the fifth stage they came to be at one with the Buddhists and the Jains in opposing the vedicists and got the common designation of Nāstika. At this stage all anti-vedic schools came under one head – the Lokāyata. (Shastri 1931:126-8).

The Śiṣnadevas, he contends, began to worship Rudra during this period and began to carry a skull in their hands, thus becoming the Kāpālikas. These later turned into Shaivas, practising yoga, and became endowed with many kinds of spiritual powers.

From this group grew another sect, that of the Kālāmukhas. Later, these were absorbed by Aghoris (Shastri 1931:134). Shastri continues that after the Kālāmukhas the Tantrikas came on the scene, as a modern, and modified version of the Kāpālikas:

Thus it appears that the Lokāyatikas, the Vāmādevas, the Śiṣṇadevas, the Kāpālikas, the Kālāmukhas, the Aghorins, the Vāmācarins, the Sahajiyās and the Tantrikas all walk along the same track with slight differences. (Shastri 1931:135)

This statement, as is quite evident, is a sweeping generalization which does not account for historical particularities. For example, nowhere in his essay does Dakshina Ranjan Shastri mention the Ājivikas whom Basham regards as precursors, or cotemporary to other renunciate traditions (Basham 2002[1951]:94, 162), nor does he consider the possibility that the Tantrikas could have had a long standing tradition of their own. All through the article, his tone betrays a vedic proclivity where his historical representation appears as a rationalization to disparage the non-vedicists – *odium theologicum* (Basham 2002[1951]:Foreword xiv) – to use the colorful term used by Barnett. While his statement of similarities between the Kāpālikas, Kālāmukhas and the Aghoris is valid, he does not mention similar practices among the Buddhists, as I have been discussing in relation to the Nathas and the Vajrayān exchanges. This is even more striking if, by his own contention, the earlier “Lokāyatas” became one with the Buddhists, and the Buddhists adopted at least some of their ways and practices, an idea I will discuss in more detail in chapter three.

The association of Agharṣ with various Shaiva schools is discussed well by Lorenzen (Lorenzen 1972) and reiterated by Gupta (Gupta 1993). Although the discussions of Agharṣ's links with other Shaiva-Shakta schools are fascinating, the exact links amongst them are mostly conjectural (Chaturvedi 1973; Lorenzen 1972; Gupta 1993) as I have discussed above in relation to the Nath tradition. And yet, scholars agree

to a great extent that there are elements of similarity in the Aghor, Tantra, and Buddhist philosophy and practices that provide a definite link between them.

The antiquity of Buddhism is self-evident, and clearly, goes back to the fifth century B.C., to the time of the Buddha. Regarding the antiquity of the Aghor, the mention of the word Aghor as one of the five faces of Shiva in the *Ṛgveda* as the fiery or Rudra face of Shiva (Chaturvedi 1973:34) in its iconic detail leads to the surmise that it reflects a tradition that must have existed prior to its inclusion in the *Ṛgveda*, whatever actual time frame academic consensus imputes to it.

### **Literature and Fiction, Munshi and Paraśurām**

Now I consider an example of contemporary fiction writing to see the linkages between ancient renunciates and Aghors as they exist in the popular conception, via the writings of Dr. K.M. Munshi, who was himself a well known scholar of ancient India and Sanskrit, if somewhat nationalistic in his orientation (Thapar 2005:181). Munshi writes about Daḍḍanāth Aghori and Paraśurām in his novel *Bhagawān Paraśurām*. Munshi dates Paraśurām, the son of Ṛṣi Jamadagni and Reṇukā, as around 1500-1000 B.C. (Munshi 1941:97). In his novel *Bhagawān Paraśurām* he depicts the historical figure Paraśurām as an adopted son of Daḍḍanāth Aghori who used to live in the Aghor forest near Mahiṣmatī, and from whom Paraśurām had learned Aghor practices of flying through the air, etc. (Munshi 1991:141-189). In the introduction to his novel he states that some people accuse him of writing a novel glorifying the deeds of Paraśurām because he belonged to the Bhṛgu lineage of the Aryans (Munshi himself was a Bhargava Brahman). Even if such a contention be given weight, it does not take away from the

character of Ḍaḍḍanāth Aghori in the novel, which in fact shows him in a better light as being a guru of the Bhargava Brahman that Paraśurām was. In the same introduction Munshi explains his reasons for writing the novel, to show the life of the historical figure of Paraśurām, how he became the foremost of the warriors, how he became respected by the Aghoris, how all the tribes recognized him as a master of weapons, how places of pilgrimage were established in his name, what was so special about him that he was considered as an incarnation like Rama and Krishna, despite being a descendant of ṛṣis, why he was not known as a ṛṣi, etc. In this explanation, Munshi's mention of how Paraśurām, the historical figure, became respected by the Aghoris makes, I conjecture, the existence at least of Aghor-like practices at the dawn of Aryan civilization a historical possibility.

Munshi depicts Ḍaḍḍanāth Aghori as living in the *Aghor Van* (Aghor forest), across from Candratīrth on river Narmada. Guru Bhṛkuṇḍa describes to Lomāvatī the location of *Aghor Van* as:

Everyone knows this. If you stand on the bank of river Narmadā in the morning, you will see the mountain<sup>69</sup> in the distance in front of you. Aghor Van lies in the plain before it. It is not possible to reach it by river, because one thousand crocodiles protect it. No one has found a land route yet; one hundred thousand Pisāc (ghosts) protect it. (Munshi 1991:154, gloss added, my translation).

Munshi portrays the Aghoris living in this forest as a non-aryan, aboriginal community that live in caves, wear little or no clothes, smear ashes on their body, hunt with basic implements,<sup>70</sup> wear bone ornaments, and intermingle freely with each other (Munshi 1991:184). In a portrayal of the first meeting between Ḍaḍḍanāth and Paraśurām, Munshi has Paraśurām reply to Ḍaḍḍanāth's question of why Paraśurām thinks he has superior knowledge, thus:

I can make better weapons than you have. I can kill wild beings much more easily than you do. This is one kind of knowledge. Second, I can make you powerful (*tejasvī*) and pure (*viśuddh*), I can teach you to be an ārya (*āryatva*). (Munshi 1991:179, my translation).

As the story progresses, Aghoris learn the ways of the civilized society from Paraśurām. Paraśurām, in his turn, learns from them spiritual knowledge. Ultimately, all the Aghori groups that used to visit Daḍḍanāth on the occasion of full moon, via Amarkantak, also begin to view Paraśurām, now renamed Bhārgavanāth by Daḍḍanātha, also as a guru (Munshi 1991:188). The treatment of Aghoris as an aboriginal tribe is reinforced in the story by the reactions and emotions of Jyāmagh, a prince of the Śāryāt tribe, who is an Aryan and feels total disdain for the aboriginal ways of the Aghoris.

Another interesting episode in the novel concerning Aghoris of ancient times is the meeting of Vitihotra, the king of Avantigotra and the guru of the Kāpālikas, Mahādevī Mahādantī, who used to live in the jungle nearby at a place called Siddheśvarī Tekrī. “She had been alive for thousands of years by eating only ashes; she used to be focused in undisturbed Samādhi, and was endowed with omniscience” (Munshi 1991:202). What is interesting here is that Munshi is, at one level, treating Aghoris and Kāpālikas as belonging to the same group, and at another level, he is treating them as separate. As ritual specialists who use bones, skulls, ashes, etc. he treats Kāpālikas a little different than Aghoris. But he mentions that Mahādevī Mahādantī was dear to both Aghoris and Kāpālikas, with Aghoris celebrating in her honor:

This Mahādevī of Kāpālikas and Aghoris was endowed with all powers like Mahādantī (Lord Ganesh). It was believed that she had been practicing penance for thousands of years, and was immortal. One could derive great (spiritual) powers from her mantras. She would remain in constant samādhi, and when she would awaken once in three years, the Aghoris used to organize a huge celebration. (Munshi 1991:203, gloss added, my translation).

It presents a curious picture: Aghoris are portrayed as a primitive tribe with their guru Daḍḍanāth and Kāpālikas are presented as ascetics with their guru Mahādevī Mahādantī. However, Aghoris seem to be a whole ethnic group, Kāpālikas seem to be a subset: an intriguing picture based, as Munshi states, on the Puranas (Munshi 1991:7).

If we pay any credence to the ideas expressed in Munshi's novel, clearly, Aghoris appear as a simple, ethnic group of people who practiced their way of life before, or at least simultaneously with, the Kāpālikas. Munshi is not the only scholar who has tried to trace the history of Vedic personalities and to provide a geneology and a date them. For example Pargiter attempted to provide a date and geneology of Dattatreya (Rigopoulos 1998:28), as well as for Paraśurām (Munshi 1941:78 fn 24). Both of these personalities are connected with the figure of Arjuna Kārtavīrya, a Haihaya king who could be of Scythian origin (Rigopoulos 1998:20 fn 45, 28). However, Rigopoulos criticizes Pargiter because his historical constructions are based on myth (Rigopoulos 1998:29), while Munshi states his geneologies to be wrong because he has treated Vedic personalities as Puranic personalities, thus placing them much later chronologically, than when they actually existed at the time of the *Vedas*.

### Conclusion

What we have here, chronologically, is a mention of Aghor in the Vedas, Aghor-like practices of the Lokāyats and Ājīvikas who either pre-dated or were contemporary with the Buddha and the Kāpālikas, Aghor-like meditative practices ascribed to Buddhists (and the Buddha, discussed more fully in chapter three) in the Pali Canon, Shaiva Pāśupatas and Kāpālikas performing their cremation ground practices, Buddhist Siddhas

and Nath Siddhas practicing similar penance, the two streams of Aughaṛ saints, Himālī as well as Girnālī, with Shaiva Shakt *and* Vaishnava elements in them, that exist today, together with Sufis and other saints of the *Sant* tradition. The associations I have presented here using the polythetic approach mentioned above where all features of a category are not essential for a particular item to belong to a group, to highlight the underlying connection in this whole chronology are, at this point, largely conjectural. While the esoteric cremation ground practices seem to have continued since the time of Buddha, or perhaps from even before him, and while the modern day Aughaṛs share that trait with him, the Aughaṛs themselves, historically speaking, seem to have been a product of early medieval India. They have come down to us in their present form bearing, largely, the impact of the siddhas, both Buddhist and Nath. That would perhaps shed some light on the Buddhistic philosophy of the Kinarami Aughaṛs, as well as their Shaiva itinerant nature.

As for the time before Buddha, and a continuity of Aughaṛs since that time, it is as much a matter of academic enterprise as of fiction. Certainly there are scholars who question whether an actual history of the Buddhist tradition can really be drawn from the Pali Canon at all. For one, none of the texts of the Canon were put into writing at least until two hundred years after the passing of the Buddha (Coningham 2001:69). That itself lends the texts to factual errors and errors of interpretation in the biography of the Buddha. As Skilton mentions (1994:74), some of the texts include events that occurred after the First Council, the council where the texts were supposedly recited by Upali and Ananda, while some others contain doctrines or formulations that developed after Buddha's time. Second, if we do treat these texts as historical artifacts, should we then

treat the canon itself in a similar way on par with such texts as, say, for example, the Jataka stories.

Their objection is valid, for certainly even today scholars are not certain of the date of the actual Buddha.<sup>71</sup> However, as Bergquist mentions, in a pluralist society meaning is a product of “negotiated consent” arrived at through a “bilingualism of discourse,” (Bergquist 2001:182) and this discourse leads to a generally agreed upon account of the historic event as generally agreed upon by scholars in the field. In our Buddhist and Aghor context, we certainly do not have foolproof sources to make iron-clad statements. We cannot be assured of the veracity of the practices described in the *Mahāsiṃhanāda Sutta*, we do not know for sure whether Buddha ever really did those practices. Although cross-tradition texts such as the *Mahāvagga* in the Pali Canon and the *Mahāvastu* in the Mahāsaṃghika tradition<sup>72</sup> attest to the existence of cremation ground practices, scholars are still not confident about building a biography of Buddha based on them. But looking at our various sources, some stronger than others, we can make a set of conjectural statements.

Certainly, Chakrabarti (2001:36) gives irrefutable presence of stones with vulva-like markings from the Baghor region in the upper Son valley, dating back to about 9000-8000 BCE, which *could* have been the earliest form of Tantra in the region. Chakrabarti further shows the presence of goddess worship in the Harappan civilization cities (Chakrabarti 2001:36ff). If these elements of Tantra were tentatively present about 2500 years ago, we can conjecture about the presence of other elements related to it, such as the cremation ground practices. We can conjecture that there was a certain set of beliefs which either the ancient Aryans transported with them, or which they encountered in

India and termed the Asura view. But those beliefs, and practices associated with them, continued through the ages as either the Lokāyata view, or the Kāpālika view, or the Ājīvika view, or the Buddhist view. We can also conjecture that although many leaders tried to systematize all aspects of this set of beliefs and to organize followers into cohesive units, not everyone subscribed to it and there remained free-floating practitioners who picked and chose from this set of practices those that they found most efficacious for their personal purposes. This is well-reflected in looking at the Ājīvikas, whom Makkhali Gosāla tried to organize but there always remained those who were free-thinkers and individual practitioners. This is also reflected in the traditions of Kāpālikas, and Buddhist Siddhas, who, more often than not are very loosely organized if at all, and practiced their penance in a solitary manner in desolate places. The case with the Aughar ascetics of modern times who are very loosely organized, one section being organized by Baba Kinaram and continued by Baba Aghoreshwar Bhagawan Ram, and yet numerous Augharas can be found, in ones and twos, in all parts of the country, who do not subscribe to any formal organization is similar. Those free-lance Augharas are free to reside where they wish, to choose whatever mode of penance they wish to, and to believe in whatever deity suits them. In that sense, they still continue the same tradition that Buddha experienced as an Ājīvika, and himself continued during his penance, imparting the same mode of practice to his own followers.

So here we have a picture that looks somewhat like a helix in time. Buddha begins his ascetic practices and acquires training under Alāra Kalāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Either under them or later on his own, he comes in contact with the cremation ground practices. Buddha attains enlightenment, but modifies the cremation

ground practices to mere observation of the corpses. Gradually, the Bhikkhus become settled in saṃghas, the saṃghas become static, and at least some Buddhists begin to seek the free, peripatetic life that *parivrājaka* Buddha had. With the inception of Mahayana, Buddhist Bhikkhus are again influenced by the Shaiva ascetics in their spiritual hinterland, this time, perhaps, by Kāpālikas who are also Tantrik adepts, and also, in turn, influence some of them. This exchange continues over the centuries and Buddhists acquire and develop Tantra in a full fledged way, sometimes incorporating Shaiva Tantras into their own tradition. From this milieu, the tradition of Siddhas gradually emerged. By now the Kāpālikas and other sects like them were on decline and the still peripatetic ascetics, the Aghaṛs, absorbed them. But in their own turn, the Aghaṛs also share their ideas with the siddhas, and get considerably influenced by the siddha philosophy and outlook on life.

<sup>1</sup> Variants of this word in traveller's accounts: Chughi (Marco Polo 1298), Jogī (Ibn Batuta 1343), Joghis (Abdurrazāk 1442), Joguedes (Lord Stanley 1498), Ioghe (P. Della Valle 1510), Jogues (Barbosa 1516), Jógues (De Barros 1553), Joguies (Pyrard de Laval 1567), Jauguis (Bernier 1667), Jougies (Fryer 1673), Yoguees (Southey 1810), Yogeas (Henry Martyn 1812). See Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson* 1903:461-2 for anecdotes, details and references.

<sup>2</sup> Original text in Hindi: Above the monkey, in large text -- *mattagajendra mahādēva kā bacan. grha sē bāhar rahanē par insē avasya bacē*. Beneath the monkey, in smaller text – *grha mē bhī insē bacanaṁ uttam rahēgā*.

<sup>3</sup> Actual title in Hindi: *Aghorācārya Mahārāja Śrī Kinārām Jī Kī Sankṣipt Jīvana Citrāvalī*

<sup>4</sup> The story relates an episode from the life of a barren Brahman woman who used to serve an old saint. She asked the saint for children but the saint told her that children were not destined in her fate. One day she met Baba Kinaram and when she asked him to be blessed with children, he hit her with his stick four times. In due course she gave birth to four children. (Gupta 1993:132)

<sup>5</sup> Kina Ram was also a defender of women. One day in Surat, Kina Ram found out that the people of the village were planning to throw a young widow and her illegitimate child into the sea. Kina Ram forbid them to do it but they insisted saying that she was a corrupt woman. Kina Ram said, “okay, but only if you throw the father of the child along with her. Just give me the word and I will name him for he is here and is one of you.” All of the men walked away with heads bent in shame. Kina Ram ordered the woman to live near the tomb of Nar Singh. Later on, a tornado destroyed Surat City, and to this day it is said that the people there fear the name of Kina Ram. (Gupta 1993:134) The original story can be found in Hindi in the *Citrāvalī* (n.d.: Plate 22).

Surat did have a major flood in August 1727 when the water of river Tapti “rose so high that the people sailed with [boats called] horrys [hodis] over the city walls as far as the Durbar (Stavorinus 1798, Vol. II:448). There was also a cyclone in Surat in the year 1782 (Dosābhai 1894:221), but that would be eleven years after the date for passing away of Baba Kinaram. If Baba Kinaram was indeed in Surat in 1727, he would have been approximately 125 years old.

<sup>6</sup> Baba Kinaram has given the date and place of his composition in three couplets at the end of the text as:

*śata aṣṭādaśa varṣa māh daśa dui ubhaya milāya  
vivekasāra viracyō tabai samujhī budh jana rāya. (Vivēkasāra, verse 294)*

(In the year eighteen hundred add ten and two on top  
It was then that I composed *Vivekasara*, wise folks will understand).

*nagra ujen avantikā viṣṇu caraṇa thala jāni  
safarākṣat anga sar tehi taṭa kahyō bakhāni. (Vivēkasāra, verse 295)*  
(Knowing it to be the sandal of the feet of Vishnu, the city of Ujjain (Avantika)

It was on the bank of the river Kṣīprā that I explained it).

*mahi suta vāsara lagna tithi abhijita mangala mūla  
ātma prakāśa rāmajas lahe harana traisūla. (Vivēkasāra, verse 296)*

(the day [date] was the twelfth, Abhijit asterism, Tuesday  
To dispel the three agonies [of the heart], to bring the light of self-knowledge). (Kinaram 2001:294-296, my translation).

<sup>7</sup> *kalpanahūn kē kalpataru guru dayāla jiya jāni,  
śivārāma hai nāma śuci Rāmakinā pahicāni. (Vivēkasāra, verse 7).*

<sup>8</sup> *rāma nāma ura rākhi kae guru pada raja ura dhāri,  
vivekasāra guru-śiṣa vacan kahañ so sumati vicāri. (Vivēkasāra, verse 1)*

<sup>9</sup> *rāma nāma satsaṅga sama sādhana aur na kōi,  
śruti siddhānta vicāra yah jānae virilā kōi. (Vivēkasāra, verse 3)*

<sup>10</sup> *purī dwārikā gomati gaṅgā sāgara tīr,  
dattātraya mohī kahā milē harana mahā bhava pīr. (Vivēkasāra, verse 9)*

<sup>11</sup> *āśapurī śaktiyut śivasiddhēśvara jāna,  
tinha sō yah vara hañ layo vacana siddha ko gyān. (Vivēkasāra, verse 10)*

<sup>12</sup> Annemarie Schimmell also visited the Hinglaj region. She does not share my enraptured vision of Briggs' description, calling it "definitely not the most attractive place on God's earth." (Schimmell 1999:422)

<sup>13</sup> Devadatt Shastri mentions an interesting story narrated to him by Aghori Baba Dharmnath, former abbot of the Nagnath Akhara in Karachi (now in Pakistan), that these figures were drawn by Lord Rama (of *Rāmāyana*) when he came to this place on pilgrimage to absolve himself of the sin of *brahmahatyā* (killing of a Brahman [Ravana, whom he had killed in Lanka was a Brahman]) (Shastri 1978:54-55). This legend is apparently still in vogue (See Jasol 2008:46, 66-7). White notes (Henry 1959 Vol. 1:136), "The site also features rock hewn images of the sun and moon, the description and location of which correspond, most intriguingly, to data found in the fourth-century B.C. *Indika* of Ctesias..." (White 1996:205).

<sup>14</sup> Gold provides a good distinction between a *gosāīm* and a yogi, highlighting the fact that while a *gosāīm* has an exalted pedigree and inherits an image of Krishna, the yogi reaches his accomplishment through meditative practices, thus becoming a Shiva himself. While a *gosāīm* has access to the power of one crucial *mantra* of the tradition, the yogi may know many (1987:30).

<sup>15</sup> This sentence can be variously translated as "it is not possible to attain salvation without attaining the position that (saint) Ramanuj attained," "it is not possible to attain salvation without taking refuge at (saint) Ramanuj's feet," "it is not possible to attain salvation without taking refuge at the younger brother of Rāma, Lakṣamaṇa's feet," or "it is not possible to attain salvation without becoming like Lakṣamaṇa."

<sup>16</sup> *aṣṭa aṅga ehi mäh kahyau samujhi lehu mativān*  
<sup>17</sup> *prāṇa pratiṣṭhā nāma lakhi Rāmakinā tattva jñāna. (Vivēksār, verse 293)*  
<sup>18</sup> *dwaitādwait sunat mitaē pañcākṛita kō vāda*  
<sup>19</sup> *so jānaē jākē kachū sataguru carana prasāda. (Vivēksār, verse 21)*  
<sup>20</sup> *man budhi citta ahaṁkāra mäh sōi nāma ṭhaharāya*  
<sup>21</sup> *Vivēksār baranō kachū śrī guru sadā sahāya. (Vivēksār, verse 23)*  
<sup>22</sup> *amara bīja ko jñyāna jo śiṣya sunāvō tohi*  
<sup>23</sup> *laghu viśāla nāhī kachū tū ātamarat hohi. (Vivēksār, verse 34)*  
<sup>24</sup> *ana-ātam ātam samujhi rahu satsanga samāi*  
<sup>25</sup> *para-ātam toso kahiya sunahu śiṣya citalāi. (Vivēksār, verse 38)*  
<sup>26</sup> *samujhihī tē jñyāna hai anasamujhē ajñyāna*  
<sup>27</sup> *samujhī samujhi vicara lahi so kahiye vijñyāna. (Vivēksār, verse 39)*  
<sup>28</sup> *sāñci kahiya sāñcō suniya sāñcō kariya vicāra*  
<sup>29</sup> *sāñca samāna na aur kachu sāñcō saṁga samhāra. (Vivēksār, verse 63)*  
<sup>30</sup> *nāma rūpa ēkau nahīn nāri puruṣa lahi cīnha*  
<sup>31</sup> *lēkha alēkha suvēṣa mē vāsa nirantara kīnha. (Vivēksār, verse 51)*  
<sup>32</sup> *kachhuk divas aiso rahyau avināśī avadhūta.*  
<sup>33</sup> *tāhi te ichhā prakṛta tab kīnhō śabda abhūt. (Vivēksār, verse 52)*  
<sup>34</sup> *tāmē tīna purusa bhayē param catur ek nāri*  
<sup>35</sup> *nāma chhiti pāvaka pavana jal racanā jagata bicāri. (Vivēksār, verse 53)*  
<sup>36</sup> *puni vihāsata eka nāri bhayī sumana kamala nirmāna*  
<sup>37</sup> *Brahmā Viṣṇu Mahēśa sur bhayē sakala yah jāna. (Vivēksār, verse 54)*  
<sup>38</sup> *icchā kriyā śakti saṅga śobhita bhayē anaṅta*  
<sup>39</sup> *pāca tattva guṇa tīni lai karyau jagat ko taṅta. (Vivēksār, verse 57)*  
<sup>40</sup> *māyā agama anaṅta kī pāra na pāvae kōi*  
<sup>41</sup> *Jo jānaē jākē kachū kāyā paricaya hōi. (Vivēksār, verse 64)*  
<sup>42</sup> *vē haī śiṣa vairāgya kī tōhi sunāvō aṅga.*  
<sup>43</sup> *kāyā paricaya samujhi kari karahu sadā satsaṅga. (Vivēksār, verse 66)*  
<sup>44</sup> *jo brahmāṅda so piṅda mäh sakala padāratha jāni.*  
<sup>45</sup> *tridhā śarīra bhēda lai kārana kāraja māni. (Vivēksār, verse 67)*  
<sup>46</sup> *paṛya adhīna sthūla hai satya kahō śiṣa tōhi.*  
<sup>47</sup> *sūkṣma dēha pravarti kai so swarūpa rati hohi. (Vivēksār, verse 68)*  
<sup>48</sup> *mana cancela guru kahī dikhāi.*  
<sup>49</sup> *jākī sakala loka prabhutāi. (Vivēksār, verse 113)*  
<sup>50</sup> *pavana sāṁsa yaha baṛī sāyogā.*  
<sup>51</sup> *so tau sab din rahē viyogā. (Vivēksār, verse 114)*  
<sup>52</sup> *śabda jyoti jaga śūnya prakāśā.*

- samujhata miṭai kaṭhina jaga pāsā. (Vivēksār, verse 115)*  
*prāṇa nivritti sadā tēhi jānau.*  
*bhāva abhāva na ēkau mānau. (Vivēksār, verse 116)*  
*brahma dayā santata mata sāñcā.*  
*tāpa tīna kī lahē na āñcā. (Vivēksār, verse 117)*  
*haṃsa jāsu nahī hōi vināsā.*  
*nahī dukha sukha jahā ēkau trāsā. (Vivēksār, verse 118)*  
*śūnya so param śūnya kari dekho.*  
*yaha vijñyāna bīja dṛiṛha lekho. (Vivēksār, verse 119)*  
*kāla vikāla mahā atibhārī.*  
*jēhi lakhi jīvai āpurī. (Vivēksār, verse 120)*  
*jīva so karma bandha tara mānā.*  
*sataguru ātam jo nahī jānā. (Vivēksār, verse 121)*  
*karma bandha gata śiva sata bhāntī.*  
*diśā dēśa nahī ekau kāntī. (Vivēksār, verse 122)*  
*vyāpaka vyāpya rahē jo vyāpī.*  
*nāma nirañjana tēhi asthāyī. (Vivēksār, verse 123)*  
*tahām nahīm jana sambhava kōi.*  
*rahai nirantara antara hōi. (Vivēksār, verse 124)*  
33 *hō to hrdaya nāhīm jahiyā.*  
34 *rahai anūp mahā man tahiyā. (Vivēksār, verse 156)*  
*man ko jīvana pawana pramānā.*  
35 *samujhi lehu yaha catura sujāna. (Vivēksār, verse 167)*  
*svāṃsā pawana māṃha tē hōi.*  
36 *hē śiśa akala atva gati sōi. (Vivēksār, verse 190)*  
*jab nahī hatē nirañjana rāi.*  
37 *prāṇa avyakta madhya ṭhaharāi. (Vivēksār, verse 159)*  
*dwitiya prāṇa kā jīvana aisā.*  
38 *brahma-brahma subrahmai jaisā. (Vivēksār, verse 170)*  
*prāṇa māṃha tē man pragaṭānā.*  
39 *sadā nirantara sō kari jānā. (Vivēksār, verse 187)*  
39 White provides a detailed statement of the absorption of the gross which emanates from the subtle, back into the subtle (1996:39, 207).  
40 *jīvana lahi udbhava samujhi sat pada rahē samāi.*  
*ab yah param samādhi kō aṅga kahō samujhāi. (Vivēksār, verse 192)*  
*ghaṭ vinasē tē vastu sab paṭ māh dēta dikhāi.*  
*ghaṭ paṭ ubhaya vināsa mē vastu nirantara pāi. (Vivēksār, verse 193)*  
*svāṃsa samānō prāṇa mō śabd śabd ṭhaharāi.*  
*prāṇa samānō prāṇa mō brahm brahm māh jāi. (Vivēksār, verse 194)*  
*haṃsa samānō haṃsa mō avināśī avināśa.*  
*kāla samānō sunna mē nirbhaya sadā nirās. (Vivēksār, verse 195)*  
*pawan samānō pawan māh jīva śiva ghar pāi.*  
*śiva nirañjana māh sadā sab vidhi rahyō samāi. (Vivēksār, verse 196)*  
*nirañjana jab nirākāra māh rahai samāi viśēṣ.*  
*nirākara avagati milyau jākō matō alēkh. (Vivēksār, verse 197)*  
*anahad avināśī māh santata rahē abhēd.*  
*avināśī tab āpu māh samujhi samānō vēd. (Vivēksār, verse 198)*  
*nahīm dūri nahīm nikaṭa ati nahīm kahūm asthān.*  
*vēdi pai dṛṛh gahi karai japai so ajapā jān. (Vivēksār, verse 199)*  
*āpu bicārai āpu mē āpu āpu māh hōi.*  
*āpu nirantara rami rahai yah pad pāvai sōi. (Vivēksār, verse 200)*  
41 *rahai nirantara antara khōi.*  
*sab tēhi māh sab māh hai sōi. (Vivēksār, verse 209)*  
*yah vicāra suni sadā duhēlā.*  
*ramai rāma māh hōi akēlā. (Vivēksār, verse 210)*

*baranāśram kō bhēd na rākhai.*

*bānī satya sahaja sō bhākhai. (Vivēksār, verse 211)*

*saham śabd samujhi sō gahaī.*

*jāti pāṃti kul karma kō dahaī. (Vivēksār, verse 212)*

<sup>42</sup> *nahī āvō nahī jāu marō jivō nahī kabahūṃ.*

<sup>43</sup> *trigunādika miṭi jāhī amara maī gāvō tabahūṃ. (Vivēksār, verse 252)*

<sup>43</sup> *ātam rakṣā cār vidhi hai śiṣ sahaja subōdh.*

<sup>44</sup> *dayā vivēk vicāra lahi santa saṅga ārōdh. (Vivēksār, verse 255)*

<sup>44</sup> *yah saṃsāra asāra ati pāṃca bhūta kī vāri.*

*tātē yah avadhūta mat viracyō swamati vicāri. (Vivēksār, verse 290)*

<sup>45</sup> Dwivedi mentions four kinds of yoga: *mantra-yoga* leading to the state of *mahābhāva*, *haṭha-yoga* leading to the state of *mahābodh*, *laya-yoga* leading to the state of *mahālaya*, and *rāja-yoga* leading to the state of *kaivalya samādhi* (1963:57). Shastri's *dhyāna-yoga*, in all probability, corresponds to Dwivedi's *mantra-yoga*.

<sup>46</sup> Buddha, in his time, is not thought to have carried a skull, but Buddhist Tantrik images certainly have plenty of skull bowls in them. The Sanskrit farce, *Mattavilāsaprahasana*, depicts a Buddhist monk who has stolen the skull-bowl of a Kapalika.

<sup>47</sup> Tulpule notes, Eknath's guru, Janardan, was initiated by the Sufi saint "Said Cāndasāheb Kādri" (Rigopoulos 1998:137).

<sup>48</sup> White documents lists of Nath Siddhas where the fourteenth-century text *Rasaratnasumucchaya* of Vāgbhaṭṭa lists him as Prabhudeva while Svātmārāma's fifteenth-century *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* lists him as Allama Prabhu (1996:83). The sixteenth-century Telugu text *Prabhuliṅgalīlā* of Piḍapatti Somanātha Kavi mentions him as a Vīraśaiva teacher who initiated both Gorakhnath and Nagarjuna into the alchemical art (White 1996:111).

<sup>49</sup> A famous *tablā* player of the 200 year old Banaras *tablā gharānā* (lineage of *tablā* players). Godai Maharaj was his nick name. His real name was Pandit Samta Prasad.

<sup>50</sup> *jis dil mē hai dīwānagī, usē kyā garaz kisi sāz kī?*

*jis dil mē tū hai dilrubā, usē kyā garaz hai namāz kī?*

<sup>51</sup> Most commonly, Musalla is understood to be a simple prayer hall, though not a mosque proper.

However, the way this word is used in the story, it implies a shawl, or a piece of cloth that can be unfolded.

<sup>52</sup> Gupt thinks Qutban's *Mṛgāvati* is the same story as *Cāndāyan* (Da'ud 1967:17 fn25).

<sup>53</sup> The eight limbs of yoga are commonly regarded as: *yama*, *niyama*, *āsana*, *prāṇāyāma*, *pratyāhāra*, *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *Samādhi*. In the six-limbed yoga, the first two categories, those of *yama* and *niyama*, are excluded (Rigopoulos 1998: 220 fn 34).

<sup>54</sup> Chaturvedī also mentions that the ten kinds of Avadhūta mentioned in the *Śaṃkara Digvijay*, namely, Tīrth, Āśram, Ban, Araṇya, Giri, Parvat, Sāgar, Sarasvatī, Bhāratī and Purī, are not related to the Shaiva Avadhūtas (1973:76).

<sup>55</sup> White glosses the word *tīrthaka* as Hindu (1996:107).

<sup>56</sup> Dyczkowski disagrees that Bhairavācārya was a Kāpālīka. Based on his reading of the *Bhairavāgamas* he writes, "But, however striking the resemblance may be, he is not a Kāpālīka." (1988:30)

<sup>57</sup> Lorenzen points out that Cowell and Thomas have made an incorrect translation of the Sanskrit expression *kumāra-brahmacāriṇam* (Lorenzen 1972:21 n. 40). He provides the correct translation as "He had observed a vow of celibacy since childhood." (1972:21)

<sup>58</sup> *idaṃ tat saṃvṛtasatyam. Paramārthasatyam śrotumicchāmi* (Giri 1966:19)

<sup>59</sup> There is a slight difference in the sense conveyed by the last line of this verse, *jaganmitho bhīnamabhīnamīśvarāt* (Shastri 1977:130). Lorenzen translates this verse as: "My charming ornaments are made from garlands of human bones. I dwell in the cremation ground and eat my food from a human skull. I view the world as alternately (or mutually) separate and not separate from God (Īśvara) through eyes that are made clear by the ointment of Yoga." (1972:60). Taylor translates it as: "My necklace and ornaments are of human bones; I dwell among the ashes of the dead, and eat my food in human skulls. I look with eyes brightened with the antimony of Yoga, and believe that the parts of this world are reciprocally different, but that the whole is not different from God." (Taylor 1886:38). I have based my translation on the comments provided by Shastri, and my understanding of the verse.

<sup>60</sup> Taylor translates this as "beatitude" (1886:41)

<sup>61</sup> The last two lines of this verse: “*Pārvatyaḥ pratirūpayā dayitayā sānandamāliṅgito, muktaḥ krīḍati candracūḍavapurityucē mṛdānīpatih*” (Shastri 1977:136) are translated by Lorenzen as: “One who has the appearance (*vapus*) of the Moon-crested (Śiva) and amuses himself in the embrace of his wife, the image of Pārvatī, is (truly) liberated.” (Lorenzen 1972:91). Taylor translates this as: “...the Lord of Mridani declares that he who resembles gods, whose crest is the lunar orb, and who with delight embraces women beautiful as Parvati, feels supreme bliss.” (Taylor 1886:41).

<sup>62</sup> *āśāstrapūtāṃvyājam puruṣāṅgopakalpitam* – body part of a man untouched by a weapon and already dead (Shastri 1998:216-7).

<sup>63</sup> *aghoracakṣur patighnyedhi śivā paśubhyah sumanāḥ suvarcāḥ* (*Rgveda* 10.85.44), translated as “Not evil-eyed, no slayer of thy husband, bring weal to cattle, radiant, gentlehearted...” (Griffith 1896:465)

<sup>64</sup> The four *Vedas*, the earliest-known Sanskrit literature from the Brahmanic period, are hymns compiled from an earlier oral tradition. The *Rgveda*, the earliest book, probably dates from between 1700 to 1200 BC; the fourth, the *Avtharva Veda*, dates from 900 BC and consists chiefly of formulas and spells; the *Brāhmaṇas*, associated with the *Vedas*, are ritual instructions from 700 to 300 BC. Hindu epics are popularly dated as: the *Mahābhārata* (500 BC), and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, between 200 BC and 200 AD.

<sup>65</sup> *yā te rudra śivā tanūr aghorā pāpkāśinī...* (*Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 4.5.1.1), translated as “That body of thine, O Rudra, which is kindly, Not dread, with auspicious look...” (Keith 1914:195). The same *śloka* (verse) from *Vājasaneyī Saṃhitā* (16.2) is translated by Griffith as “With that auspicious form of thine, mild, Rudra! Pleasant to behold...” (Griffith 1899:140).

<sup>66</sup> *hiranyamayah puruṣa ekahaṃsah* (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.11).

<sup>67</sup> *eko haṃso bhuvanasyāsya madhye sa evāgnih salilē sanniviṣṭah tameva viditvātimṛtyumeti nānyah panthā vidyateyanāya.* (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 6.15).

<sup>68</sup> Thomas himself dates the text to 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> C.E. (Thomas 1921:8)

<sup>69</sup> The name of the mountain is “Vaidārya Parvat” (Munshi, 1991:177).

<sup>70</sup> “The hunting process of the aghoris was like that of ancient human beings. They would insert a pointed stone at the end of a stick, and use it as a spear. They would take the strong and twisted branches of some huge tree and use it as their mace. Stone, stone hammer, sickles made with bones, these were their special weapons.” (Munshi 1991:181).

<sup>71</sup> Coningham provides several possible dates that scholars have been working with. A reasonable consensus seems to be to date the Buddha 484-404 B.C.E. (Coningham 2001:69).

<sup>72</sup> The Buddhist practice of picking rags from the cremation ground is found here too, where Yasodhara asks Rahul not to become a monk, for then he would have to “collect the discarded rags of a slave-girl from the cemetery.” (Jones, Mahavastu Vol. III:252).

## Chapter 3

### **The Buddha and The Aghoreshwar – Sāadhanā and Philosophy**

In the previous chapter I discussed relevant connections between Agharṣ and a variety of other religious traditions: Sant, Sufis, Naths, Kāpālikas, Ājīvikas, Lokāyatas, the Paraśurām tradition of the Vedic/Puranic period, and the Buddhists. In this chapter I look in some detail at the words and practices of Buddhists and Agharṣ as well as those of the Buddha and Sarkar Baba because, as we saw in the last chapter, the “helix in time” imagination of their ascetic practices allows us to hypothesize about interaction as well as continuation of ideas and practices between the two traditions. Also, when we begin to trace the history of these *sāadhanās*, it becomes apparent that the best composite description of these *sāadhanās* was provided by the Buddha himself, in his own persona, as a codified set of practices that he observed. True, we find isolated instances of practices described in the lives of other monks contemporary to the Buddha, such as Makkhali Gosāla who lived in the house of a potter woman called Hālāhalā, or Jambūka, the boy ascetic who took to eating ordure at a very young age, but these are not presented as composite systems of those practitioners.

As we saw while discussing the variety inherent within Nath tradition, there exist instances of Kāpālika and Buddhist interactions in all but Bāṇa’s example cited in chapter two. This is important to gauge the development of Buddhist, Agharṣ and Nath practices in later years. As Bharati (1968) writes:

... there is no similarity between the original Buddhism and the Tantras, and it is in no way possible that the Buddhist religion developed it within its own tradition and within its own area. In the later period of Mahāyān’s development it (Buddhism) assimilated the then prevalent practices (which were outside of Buddhism) and gave it Buddhist terminology. The reality is that later Vajrayāna thought is based on these very practices. To digest those practices, to authenticate

their veracity Vajrayāna preceptors gave Tāntrik meanings to trikāyā, bodhicitta, karuṇā, śūnya etc. (Bharati 1968:115, gloss added).

According to Bharati, these Tantrik principles had reached their pinnacle in the Kāpālika tradition, as a result of which the twenty-four Kāpālikas mentioned in the *Śabaratantra* contain several names of those who were Vajrayani Siddhas, and many Kāpālikas from these can be found even in the lists of the Naths (Bharati 1968:125). Buddhism, especially Vajrayana, assimilated heavily from earlier Kāpālika traditions. For example, certain forms of the Buddha are equated with Shiva, Vajrayana has a special “Māheśvar Bhavan” in the Buddhist *Akaniṣṭha* heaven where *bodhicitta* resided, Virupākṣa propounded a *sādhanā* of Mahākāla, and Avalokiteśvar was equated with Maheśvar, united with Halāhal (Bharati 1968:312). Even before Vajrayana, many of these practices had become a part of the Buddhist *yogācār* (yogic practice), as is evident from the focus on ten inauspicious things during *sādhanā*, namely, the various states of a decaying corpse (Bharati 1968:315-6). Further, strengthening our notion of the “helix in time,” after the twelfth century, Buddhist practices heavily influenced the Shakt Tantras so much so that the names of some of the Shakt Tantras are the same as the Buddhist ones, such as *Ambar*, *Jal*, *Śambar*, *Kālacakra*, *Mahākāla* (Bharati 1968:128).

The reasons that Bharati cites for such mixing of the traditions are many. I summarize them here. One, after the tenth century there were many preceptors who were considered versed in both the Shaiva as well as the Buddhist traditions, and were accorded respect by followers of both the traditions even if they chose to identify themselves with one primary tradition. At least three such primary preceptors were Matsyendra, Jālandhar and Kāṇha. Two, in some regions, Shaivas and Buddhists had joined forces to fight the growing prominence of Vaishnava as. As a result, there was

assimilation amongst their mutual deities, systems, and preceptors. Three, although the Nath tradition itself is considered a revolt against the Buddhist influence, before such a revolt there must have been Vajrayan Siddhas amongst the Nath. Gorakhnath can be cited as an example, who is considered a Vajrayan adept according to the Tibetan lore. Four, many times, a system propounded by a particular Buddhist preceptor was taken up by another, who chose a different tradition from that of the original preceptor, such as the Nath. In such situations, the new preceptor was assimilated into the Nath tradition as an *avatār* (incarnation) of the original preceptor. The name of Virūpā can be cited here, who was originally a Buddhist but was later endorsed by the Nath tradition as Virūpā or Virūpākṣa. Five, there were some preceptors who were well known and very popular. Other traditions assimilated them to gain more influence over the laity. Six, there were Buddhist preceptors who belonged to a particular category or caste, who accepted the Nath tradition *en masse*, such as certain forest dwelling groups (Bharati 1968:34-5).

The data evident in Tāranātha's *History* further illustrates such interactions between Shaivas and Buddhists, especially in the context of Mahayana Buddhism. More often, these interactions reflect a contest between the Shaiva and the Buddhist preceptors for one-upmanship on the basis of knowledge or spiritual attainments. It also reflects the Buddhist desire to establish supremacy as the dominant religion over the Shaivas. However, I suspect that this grappling of spiritualists, as it were, was also a process of sharing elements of each others' doctrines and practices, and, thus, the parties to this contest became colored with the characters of the other. In several of these stories provided by Tāranātha, Mahādeva (Shiva) is portrayed as paying reverence to the

Buddhists. In chapter thirteen titled “Account of the Period of the Beginning of the Extensive Propagation of the Mahāyāna,” he narrates the story:

There lived at that time in Magadha, two *brāhmaṇa* brothers called Udbhaṭa-Siddhi-Svāmin and Śaṃkara-Pati. They used to worship Mahādeva as their tutelary deity. Both of them were proficient in the philosophy of the *tīrthika*-s as well as of the Buddhists. But Udbhaṭa remained doubtful [of Buddhism] and even considered Mahādeva as superior, while Śaṃkara-Pati had reverence only for Buddha. Inspired by the words of their mother and having acquired the miraculous power of moving swiftly, they went to Kailāsa, the king among the mountains. In this mountain resided Mahādeva. They saw his white riding bull and also Umā-devī plucking the flowers. At last they saw Mahādeva himself, sitting on his throne and preaching religion. Gaṇesa led the two [brothers] by both hands to Mahādeva.

When five hundred *arhat*-s came flying from the Mānasarovara, Mahādeva bowed to them, washed their feet, offered them food and listened to the Doctrine from them. So he [Udbhaṭa] realized that the Buddha was superior. Still he made enquiries and was told by Mahādeva, ‘only the path of the Buddha leads to salvation, which is not to be found anywhere else.’ (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:100)

There are other such stories where either the God Mahādeva favors the Buddhists, or the Buddhists rout the Shaivas in contest, etc. Some citations will not be out of place here. Mahākāla (and we know it is Mahākāla the Shiva, because of his association with Goddess Chandika) is made to maintain the Mahayana Sangha at Sri Nalendra by Nāgārjuna (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:106-7); Avalokiteśvara grants services of Mahākāla to Nāgārjuna’s friend Ra-ra (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:112); Aryadeva arrives from the region of Shri Parvata,<sup>1</sup> manipulates Maheshvara, defeats *tīrthika* Brahmin Durdharṣa-kāla and converts him to Buddhism (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:125-6); Shantideva defeats the *tīrthika*-s in the south, thus allowing Buddhist doctrine to flourish there (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:219-220); in Kashmir Devapala defeats *tīrthika*-s to excavate Shri Trikuta vihāra, and the dwellings of the *tīrthika*-s fall to ruins (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:267-8); Ratnavajra defeats many *tīrthika*-s in debate and propagates Tantra-yāna (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:301-2). The stories are many, but these serve as a representative illustration.

There is also a reference to the pre-Mahayana period that sounds tantalizingly close to the Tantrik practices of Aghaṛṣ, and the earlier Kāpālikas. In chapter 10, on “Account of the Period of Arya Mahāloma and Others” he writes:

King Vīrasena died shortly after *ārya* Mahāloma and *ārya* Nandin started to look after the Law. His son Nanda ascended the throne and ruled the kingdom for twenty-nine years. He brought the *piśāca* Pi-lu-pa under control and, as a result, whenever he stretched his palms to the sky, these were filled with gems. (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:82)

Noting Brahmachari Shastri’s earlier quote about ascetics of the Sarbhang sect doing austere penance to control ghosts and *piśācas*, etc. in the cremation ground, King Nanda’s accomplishment appears similar. Chattopadhyaya mentions the existence of a Buddhist work called *Piśāca-pilupāla-sādhana* attributed to Prajñāpāla or Prajñāpālita (Tāranātha 1970[1575]:82 fn 2).

Davidson, tracing the history of the Buddhist Siddhas, associates them with Shaiva sects of Kāpālikas and Pāśupatas:

The siddhas, one may suppose, were unconcerned with allegiance of any variety, preferring the untrammelled existence of a psychic world in which ritual systems, social rules, lineage concerns, scriptural continuity, and the other paraphernalia of institutional Buddhism were simply jettisoned for personal liberation. Going naked along their own paths, devoted solely to their own subjective experiences, the siddhas – in this argument – represented a purity of religious expression devoid of scholastic hairsplitting or legalistic wrangling, which was so much the obsession of the great monasteries of the medieval period. The new variety of saint cannot have been on a continuum of sacrality with the rigidly observant arhat, the self-sacrificial bodhisattva, or even the monk employed in the mythology of institutional esoterism: he must have been above them. With their ornaments of human bone, carrying skullcaps and tridents, conquering demons, flying to the land of the dakinis, copulating in graveyards, *these personalities could only be associated with the heterodox Śaiva figures, like the Kāpālikas, the Pāśupatas, or analogous antinomian personalities.* (Davidson 2002:169, emphasis added).

Davidson exemplifies this with reference to the *Tīrthikacāṇḍālīka* where the siddha Acinta describes himself as a Kāpālika, the character Saudāminī in the

*Mālatīmādhava* of Bhavabhuti is a Buddhist Kāpālika, as well as the narrations of Kānhapā where he calls himself a Kāpālika (Davidson 2002:218). He further mentions that there were well known pilgrimage sites where the Buddhists and the Shaiva ascetics met, such as Devikota, Kamakhya, Bhubanesvar, Varanasi, Jalandhara-pitha, etc.

(Davidson 2002:217) But the time frame that Davidson is referring to is around the sixth to eighth centuries onwards. I feel that the tenets evident in the *yogācāra* as well as later Vajrayana seem to have had their roots within the dialogues of the Buddha, strengthened by the contiguous Kāpālika practices, which may themselves have been influenced by the practices then prevalent, those of the Ājīvikas and the Lokayatas, which some scholars regard as an earlier form of Tantra. Let us look at this issue a little more closely.

### **The Buddha's Gurus, Contemporaries and Tantra**

Chattopadhyaya (1959:48) considers Tantra to be even older than the Vedas. He writes:

...dehavada of the Upanisads and the Pitakas could have been genuinely Lokayatika... Lokayata was also characterized by its distinctive spells and rituals... As Kulluka Bhatta, the commentator on Manu put it, 'srutis are two-fold, the Vedic and the Tantrik.' (1959:48ff)

He contends that Tantra of the Lokayatas was probably a tradition of the asuras, or at least the ancient non-aryan groups, and that not only did they have a distinct cosmogony of the world as having originated from the union of the male and the female, but also, that they had ritual practices of their own. "This may also help explain the references to the Lokayata ritual found in the ancient Buddhist texts as well as the asura rituals referred to by the Gita" (Chattopadhyaya 1959:50). He qualifies that the sensuality exhibited by the aforementioned groups, in so far as it was assigned to a special day of the year, could not have been depravity, but would have had ritual

significance. “And if promiscuity was a ritual, so must have been the practice of eating meat and drinking wine” (Chattopadhyaya 1959:51)

As mentioned earlier, Aghoreshwar are known to have Tantrik practices. This is clear from their proclivity to the cremation ground, their use of the *pañcamakāra* (the five Ms – *Māmsa* [meat], *matsya* [fish], *madhu* [wine], *mudrā* [lentils or posture] and *maithun* [intercourse]), as well as acknowledgment of *bhairavī-sāadhanā* amongst their practices (Chaturvedi 1973:51-56). One can even surmise that the Ājīvika guru, Makkhali Gosāla, exhibited Tantrik traits in that he lived in the house of a potter woman, Hālāhalā, and at least some of his practices can be interpreted as those of a Shaiva ascetic (Basham 2002[1951]:36).<sup>2</sup> Further, we cannot but consider the possible influence of such ascetics on the Buddha’s own thoughts and practices during his long meditative career as a Bodhisattva. The Buddha is said to have practiced as an Ājīvika in the *Lomahassana Sutta*, as well as in the *Mahāsimhanāda Sutta* of the Pali Canon (Ñānamoli and Bodhi 1995).

Two other Jataka stories portray the Buddha as a Bodhisattva, born as, possibly, predecessors of Makkhali Gosāla. Basham mentions *Sarabhaṅga Jātaka* where Bodhisattva is born as a Sarabhang and lives as a famous hermit in the Kavitha forest. His chief pupil is Kisa Vaccha, a name that Basham thinks is a telescoping of the two names together, those of Kisa Sankicca and Nanda Vaccha. Kisa left the hermitage and began to reside in the city of Kumbhavati as a scapegoat (*kālakaññi*), removing people’s ills when spat upon (Basham 2002[1951]:29). This instance of the story is similar, as shown below, to the events in the Buddha’s own life when cowherd-boys spat and urinated on him (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:173-178), and of Sarkar Baba’s life where

young boys threw stones at him (Ram 2003:32). Kisa was obviously an ascetic of great merit because when he died his cremation ceremony was marked by a rain of heavenly flowers.

What is interesting to note here is the name of the Jataka itself, *Sarabhaṅga*, which is sometimes used in contemporary India as an adjective for those monks who shave their heads, and as a noun, to refer to Aughaṛ ascetics in the Bihar region of India (Brahmachari 1959). Basham has illustrated that Ājivikas shaved their head (Basham 2002[1951]:106). Frieberger cites *Gautama Dharmasūtra* where the renunciant was supposed to “be shaven-headed or wear a topknot” (Frieberger 2005:251), *Baudhāyana* where the renouncer “has his head shaven except for the topknot” (Frieberger 2005:251), and *Vaśiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* where the renunciant is supposed to “be shaven-headed” (Frieberger 2005:252). We know that Buddhist monks do it, as also Aughaṛ ascetics. Curiously, Barua also mentions the word *Sarabhaṅga* in connection with Ājivikas, calling them “typical representative of the Vānaprastha or Vaikhānasa order of Indian hermits, such as Sarabhaṅga” (Barua 1920:4), although Basham disagrees that Ājivikas could have existed that early because “no statements known to us in pre-Buddhist literature suggest the existence of any such order” (Basham 2002[1951]:98). Still, this statement does not imply an automatic denial that a group of ascetics called Sarbhang did not predate the Ājivikas. How similar were they to present day Aughaṛ and Sarbhang ascetics is a matter for further research. For example, we do have mention of this name in the *Araṇyakāṇḍa* of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, when Rāma visits the hermitage of Sarabhaṅga (Sanskrit Śarabhaṅga) Ṛṣi<sup>3</sup> during his peregrinations from Citrakūṭa (Vālmīki 1998:V:3-40; Tulasīdāsa 1968:675:4; Griffith 1895a:233).

Regarding the second Jataka, Basham writes:

A second *Jātaka* tells of the ascetic Sankicca, another incarnation of the Bodhisatta. He is the son of the chief brāhmaṇa of Brahmadata, the semi-legendary and ubiquitous King of Benares, and is represented as converting a regicide prince by a long description of purgatory. (Basham 2002[1951]:29)

He states that the two ascetics were probably looked upon with respect with both Buddhists and Ājīvikas, and this later developed into individual adaptations of the two traditions. What is clear, says Basham, is that the Ājīvikas, like the Buddhists and the Jinas “had a tradition of earlier teachers who had spread the true doctrine in the distant past” (Basham 2002[1951]:30).

Pali Canon mentions two of the Buddha’s gurus, namely Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta; as well as six of his contemporaries, namely, Purana Kassapa, Makkhali Gosala, Ajita Kesakambalin, Pakudha Kaccayana, Sanjaya Belatthiputta, and Nigantha Nataputta. The treatment of the Buddha’s contemporaries in the Canon is such that they are lumped together as six heretical teachers, their views are not as elaborately explained as, of course, those of the Buddha, some of them are stated to have survived centuries after the Buddha’s death, and the presentation of their teachings is often confused, views of one teacher being ascribed to another in another place (Basham 2002[1951]:10). However,

The philosophies there ascribed to them contain much that was included in later Ājivika teaching... (Basham 2002[1951]:11)

So, if the Buddha’s six contemporaries described as heretical teachers can also be described, broadly, as Ājīvikas, is there any possibility that the Buddha’s teachers could also have been Ājīvikas? It is possible, although in the *Mahāvastu*, a second century text regarded as the most authentic of the Mahāsaṅghika tradition, Jones mentions the Buddha’s gurus as Jina Sravakas (Jain ascetics, Jones 1949-56 Vol. 1:114 Fn8), although

he notes that the usual term for Jain ascetics was nirgranthas. Certainly, the Buddha's own mention in the *Mahāsimhanāda Sutta* that he used to wear blankets made of hair remind us of the heretic teacher Ajita Kesakambali, who got his name because he used to wear a blanket made of hair, and is lumped together with the other heretical teachers in the Pali canon. We cannot say for sure, especially because, as Basham has pointed out, the doctrine of Makkhali Gosāla, an Ājīvika, was based on *Niyati*, a deterministic worldview based on fate. But we do have some information on the Buddha's guru, Alara Kalama, whose views are more fully elaborated in the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghosa in the twelfth chapter. Rao states that Alara Kalama's philosophy exhibits very strong similarity to ancient Samkhya and Yoga epic schools, except that Alara's philosophy is that of atheistic Samkhya (Rao 1964:232). Although the Buddha did not accept Alara's teaching as final, because it did not explain the final state of the *ātman*, its principles certainly influenced the thought patterns of future Buddhism. As Rao states:

...the whole mode of Arāḍas teaching strikes one as having been taken (1) as a model of the atheistic way of thinking, ruling out all considerations of God in the scheme of things, (2) as emphasizing the irrevocability of the causal relationship of things, (3) as suggesting the destruction of the effect on destruction of the cause, and (4) as pointing to moral discipline and Yoga as the proper way to spiritual life. We have not only here the seeds of the future atheistic Sāṃkhya, but also of the future Buddhism. (Rao 1964:233)

Rao describes the main principles of Alaras philosophy as centering on the concepts of *Kṣetra* and *Kṣetrajñā* or *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, and the method by which the *Kṣetrajñā* attains deliverance. Here, *Kṣetra* is elaborated as:

...the twenty four principles classified into two groups, namely *Prakṛti* and *vikāra*. *Prakṛti* constitutes eight principles: *pañca-bhūta-s*, *ahaṃkāra*, *buddhi* and *avyakta*. *Vikāra* constitutes sixteen principles: five *viśaya-s* (objects of senses), five *indriya-s* of cognition, five *indriya-s* of action, and *manas*. All this is *Kṣetra*. (Rao 1964:234)

This list comprising of the *pañca-bhūtas*, *ahaṃkāra*, *buddhi*, five objects of senses, five senses of cognition, five senses of action, and *manas* is curiously similar to the list provided above by Chaturvedi as well as Shastri of the broad principles that Aghaṛs believe in. Elements of this list are also broadly acceptable to all Shaiva schools, whether they be Pāśupatas, Kāpālikas, Kālāmukhas, etc. Rao continues on Alara's explanation to state:

Here is the wheel of *saṃsāra*, the causes of which are *ajñāna* (ignorance), *karman* (action) and *tr̥ṣṇā* (desire). Whoever is caught by these three does not attain 'stability' or *samatva*. (Rao 1964:237).

This quotation, too, is very similar to what Baba Kinaram has said about *māyā*, *avidyā* and *upādhi* (see Singh 2001). It is appropriate to mention here that Wynne (2003:22) has tried to show by comparing various divergent sectarian texts that at least the events detailing the Buddha's visit to Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, and his training under them, appears to be a true account of a historical event.

There is further corroboration of the idea that the Buddha could have developed his own ideas with reference to the Upaniṣads. Wynne (2010:206-7) compares the teachings formulated by the Buddha in the *Alagaddūpama Sutta* as a possible response to the ideas expressed in the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, which incorporates the ideas about *ātman* as expressed by Yajñavalkya. Wynne writes:

... is it plausible to suppose that the Buddha formulated some of his teachings as a response to ideas contained within the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*? Other early Buddhist evidence suggests that it is. The *Pāsādika Sutta* states that the former teacher of the Buddha, Uddaka Ramaputta, taught the aphorism 'seeing he does not see' (*passan na passati*). This aphorism corresponds to a passage in the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (IV.3.23) where Yajñavalkya describes the nondual awareness of deep sleep as a state in which a person 'although seeing, does not see' (*pasyan vai tan na pasyati*), a state in which a person identifies with the nondual *ātman*. This correspondence suggests the possibility that the Buddha gained knowledge of the early Upaniṣadic thought through Uddaka Ramaputta. Since other evidence places Ramaputta in or around Rājagṛha, the ancient capital

of Magadha, it would seem that a religious group promulgated the teachings of the *Yājñavalkyakāṇḍa*, perhaps before it was incorporated into the *Bṛahadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, at the very centre of the ancient kingdom of Magadha during the Buddha's lifetime. (Wynne 2010:206-7).

Do we, then, have here a common source for what shaped the Buddha's view in ancient past, and what has continued in the present times through the Aughar ascetics? To look at this issue in detail, let us examine if anything similar to it existed during, or before, the time of the Buddha, to see if we can identify a set of practices that the Buddha could have learnt from others during his period of penance and wanderings. Such a statement will not be inappropriate since, as indicated above, even a cursory look at the Pali Canon exhibits a plethora of different kinds of ascetics, some with whom the Buddha interacted, and some that he knew about. As Bhikkhu Bodhi mentions:

The Middle Country of India in which the Buddha lived and taught in the fifth century B.C. teemed with a luxuriant variety of religious and philosophical beliefs propagated by teachers equally varied in their ways of life. The main division was into the Brahmins and the non-brahmanic ascetics, the *samaṇas* or 'strivers'... The *samaṇas*... did not accept the authority of the Vedas, for which reason from the perspective of the brahmins they stood in the ranks of heterodoxy. They were usually celibate, lived a life of mendicancy, and acquired their status by voluntary renunciation rather than by birth. The *samaṇas* roamed the Indian countryside sometimes in company, sometimes as solitaries, preaching their doctrine to the populace, debating with other ascetics, engaging in their spiritual practices, which often involved severe austerities... Some teachers in the *samaṇa* camp taught entirely on the basis of reasoning and speculation, while others taught on the basis of their experiences in meditation. The Buddha placed himself among the latter, as one who teaches a Dhamma that he has directly known for himself. (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995: 48-49)

In such a plethora of medicants, interactions between different sectarians is almost a given. For example, a startling example of Shaiva practice, very similar to Aghor practice, is provided by Gombrich from the Buddhist texts themselves. While writing about Angulimāla as a Shaiva monk, Gombrich mentions a Shaiva convert to Buddhism, by the name of Mahākāla, who took up practicing in a cemetery (*sosānikaṅgaṃ*

*adhiṭṭhāya susāne vasati*), one of the recognized ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) of Buddhist monks (Gombrich 2002:159). After providing a description of the cremation ground and goddess Kali from the Kali Tantra, he writes:

In the *Thera-gāthā* we find a pair of stanzas, 151-2, attributed to a monk with the *prima facie* surprising name of Mahākāla:

Kālī itthī brahatī dhaṅkarupā  
 satthiṃ ca bhettvā aparaṃ ca satthiṃ  
 bāhaṃ ca bhettvā aparaṃ ca bāhaṃ  
 sīsāṃ ca bhettvā dadhithālikāṃ va  
 esā nisinnā abhisandahitvā

Yo ve avidvā upadhiṃ karoti  
 punappunaṃ dukkhaṃ upeti mando.  
 Tasmā pajānaṃ upadhiṃ na kayirā  
 Māhaṃ puna bhinnasiro sayissan ti. (Gombrich 2002:158)

Gombrich then interprets the verse in the following manner:

Mahākāla must, like Angulimāla, be a Śaiva/Śākta converted to Buddhism. Mahākāla is the name he assumed in order to identify with Śiva. He used to visit cemeteries in order to visualize Kālī there, and the first verse describes such a visualization... The meditator sees her take limbs from corpses and garland herself with them. She takes a skull which is dripping with brains ... the mention of yoghurt may also imply that she is using the skull as a food-bowl, and consequently that that was what her worshipper was meant to do ... While or after doing his visualization he realizes (in the second verse) that as soon as he dies his own corpse may be similarly dismembered and his skull put to such use (Gombrich 2002:159-60).

Gombrich provides further examples of the mention of Shiva and Kali in the Pali canon, pointing out that while present in the texts, such as the mention of *siva-vijjā* and *bhūta-vijjā* in the *Dīgha Nikāya*; mention of *Iśāna* in the *Tevijja Sutta*; the reference to gods in the Canon with terms like *mahasakkha* (of great power, or called Mahesha) and *appesakkha* (of little power), they are not clear to see or well defined in meaning. Kali, he writes, is definitely mentioned because “in the *Māra-tajjaniya Sutta* (*sutta* 50), Mahā Moggallāna tells Māra that he, Māra, is (or was) the son of Kālī.” (Gombrich 2002:161).

But the most interesting description of what I am describing as Aghor *sādhanā* is the Buddha's *sādhanā* I have mentioned from *Mahāsimhanāḍ Sutta*. The same *sādhanā* is described also in the *Lomahaṃsa Jātaka*. As Basham describes:

For instance in Lomahaṃsa Jātaka it is stated that the Bodhisatta himself had once become an Ājīvika. Naked and solitary, he fled like a deer at the sight of men. He ate refuse, small fish, and dung. In order that his austerities should not be disturbed he took up his abode in the depths of the jungle. In winter he would leave his thicket and spend the night exposed to the bitter wind, returning to the shade as soon as the sun rose. By night he was wet with melted snow (*himodakena*), and by day with the water dripping from the branches of trees. In summer he reversed the process, and was scorched by the sun all day, while at night the thicket shielded him from the cooling breeze. (Basham 2002[1951]:110).

I deal with the narrative of this *sādhanā* in more detail below in the section under “Buddha's *sādhanā*.” Basham is careful to point out here that this description of the *sādhanā* probably did not fit all the Ājīvika ascetics, and that while it embodies a whole cornucopia of possible *sādhanās*, actual Ājīvika ascetics probably picked and chose some practices from these. To illustrate this point he gives the example of the boy Jambuka who had taken to nudity and eating ordure at a very early age, and for this reason, he was expelled by the organized Ājīvika community to which he had been given as a child (Basham 2002[1951]:113). This boy, later, became well-known as a “wind-eater” (*vāta-bhakkho*), and ultimately, he was converted by the Buddha. Mention of ascetics surviving on air alone occurs also in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*.<sup>4</sup> Basham insists that while there existed a whole host of Ājīvika ascetics, they were not, as a whole, an organized group. Makkhali Gosāla, regarded as a contemporary of the Buddha, did try, and succeed, in organizing a number of them under the Ājīvika umbrella, but there remained many others who were free-floating ascetics, and were widely understood to be Ājīvikas (Basham 2002[1951]:97).

### The Buddha's Sāadhanā

Pali Canon has it that towards the final years of his life when the Buddha had become eighty years old (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:177), his skin had lost its earlier luster, his limbs had become flaccid, his body had bent forward, and there was a change in the sense faculties of his eyes, ears, nose, tongue and bodily sensations (Ñāṇamoli 1992:274), one day his disciple, venerable Sāriputta informed him that an earlier adherent of the Dhamma, Sunakkhatta, a son of the Licchavis, was spreading rumors in Vesāli. Sunakkhatta was saying that the Buddha was no better than an ordinary human being, and that his philosophy was hammered out only by thought, and that this philosophy could benefit the individual practitioner, but nothing else. The Buddha replied to Sāriputta that these words of the misguided man Sunakkhatta were spoken out of anger, and then he went on to describe to Sāriputta how he had actually acquired the direct knowledge that he had practiced and preached all his life.<sup>5</sup> While the narration that the Buddha provides for Sāriputta in *Mahāsihanāda Sutta* is long, I excerpt here some of the salient practices narrated that are pertinent to my topic:

Sāriputta, I recall having lived a holy life possessing four factors. I have been an ascetic – a supreme ascetic; I have been coarse – supremely coarse; I have been scrupulous – supremely scrupulous; I have been secluded – supremely secluded. “Such was my asceticism, Sāriputta, that *I went naked, rejecting conventions, licking my hands, not coming when asked, not stopping when asked;... I was an eater of greens or millet or wild rice or hide-parings or moss or ricebran, or rice scum or sesamum flour or grass or cowdung; I lived on forest roots and fruits; I fed on fallen fruits. I clothed myself in hemp, in hemp-mixed cloth, in shrouds, in refuse rags, in tree bark, in antelope hide, in strips of antelope hide, in kusa-grass fabric, in bark fabric, in wood-shavings fabric, in head-hair wool, in animal wool, in owls' wings...* Such was my coarseness, Sāriputta, that just as a bole of tindukā tree, accumulating over the years, cakes and flakes off, so too, dust and dirt, accumulating over the years, caked off my body and flaked off. It never occurred

to me: ‘Oh, let me rub this dust and dirt off with my hand, or let another rub this dust and dirt off with his hand’ – it never occurred to me thus...

Such was my seclusion, Sāriputta, that I would plunge into some forest and dwell there. And when I saw a cowherd or a shepherd or someone gathering grass or sticks, or a woodsman, *I would flee from grove to grove, from thicket to thicket, from hollow to hollow, from hillock to hillock.* Why was that? So that they should not see me or I see them...

I would go on all fours to the cow-pens when the cattle had gone out and the cowherd had left them, and *I would feed on the dung of the young suckling calves. As long as my own excrement and urine lasted, I fed on my own excrement and urine.* Such was my great distortion in feeding.

I would plunge into some awe-inspiring grove and dwell there – a grove so awe-inspiring that normally it would make a man’s hair stand up if he were not free from lust. When those cold wintry nights came during the ‘eight-days interval of frost,’ I would dwell by night in the open and by day in the grove. In the last month of the hot season I would dwell by day in the open and by night in the grove...

*I would make my bed in a charnel ground with the bones of the dead for a pillow. And cowherd boys came up and spat on me, urinated on me, threw dirt on me, and poked sticks into my ears. Yet I do not recall that I ever aroused an evil mind... against them.* Such was my abiding in equanimity...

Sāriputta, there are certain recluses and brahmins whose doctrine and view is this: ‘Purification comes about through sacrifice.’ But it is not easy to find a kind of sacrifice that has not already been offered up by me in this long journey, when I was either a head-anointed noble king or a well-to-do-brahmin. (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:173-176, emphasis added).

This description, provided by the Buddha, is certainly an awe-inspiring one. So much so that it has also been referred to as the *Lomahaṃsanapariyāya* (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:1200 n 199) *Sutta*, or ‘The Hair-Raising Discourse.’ For our heuristic purposes I compare two snapshots frozen in time: one, the practices ascribed to the Buddha, and two, the practices ascribed to the Agharṣ. For this, I adopt a very simple methodology. I will describe the Buddha’s ascetic practices as the Pali tradition portrays them through examples from various discourses in the Pali Canon and relate them to a description of Aghor practices. With specific references to cremation ground practices, I will look at whether the two practices, which have similarities, ultimately have the same meaning for their practitioners. My comparative exercise will, I hope, help readers to

understand the two traditions better as we examine the overlaps and convergences in their practices.

To get back to the Buddha and an examination of cremation ground practices that he undertook, as well as the ideas about the body and the bodily, and references to the state of mind and social attitudes of the two sets of ascetic practitioners, let me list what can be called the terrific elements of the Buddha's practices:

1. The Buddha fed on wild rice, hide-parings, ricebran, rice scum, sesamum flour, grass, cowdung; dung of the young suckling calves, as well as his own excrement and urine.
2. The Buddha wore garments of shrouds, refuse rags, tree bark, antelope hide, strips of antelope hide, kuśa-grass, bark, wood-shavings, head-hair wool, animal wool, and owls' wings;
3. The Buddha used to go about intentionally looking filthy even as dust and dirt, accumulating over the years, caked off his body and flaked off;
4. The Buddha sought extreme seclusion by plunging into deep forests and awe inspiring groves that could make a normal human being's hair stand on end, and avoided all human contact while living there;
5. The Buddha would sleep in a charnel ground with the bones of the dead for a pillow;
6. The Buddha would be bothered by cowherd boys who spat and urinated on him, threw dirt on him, poked sticks in his ears, yet he showed no anger towards them; and

7. The Buddha had performed so many sacrifices that it was not easy to find a kind of sacrifice that had not already been offered up by him.

It is true that these were not the only *sādhanās* that the Buddha performed. There was the *sādhanā* of breathing in and breathing out, what we call *Prāṇāyāma* today; there was the *sādhanā* of eating very little, as little as a Kola fruit or a single rice grain a day; bathing three times a day; either sitting down for long periods, or standing for long periods; practicing kindness towards all creatures, even those creatures that dwelt in crevices of the ground; and many other ascetic activities. But it was perhaps, it can be surmised, because of these practices in the cremation ground, that the Buddha acquired the insight of focusing on the body for the principles of right mindfulness (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:173-178). These insights included being aware of the four postures of the body, full awareness of physical activities, foulness of the body parts, and the elements that constitute the body. This understanding is further reinforced in the Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations that he stated in the *Satipatthāna Sutta* as:

Again, Bhikkhus, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’...

Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms, a bhikkhu compares the same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’...

Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews...a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews...a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews...disconnected bones scattered in all directions – here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thigh-bone, here a hip-bone, there a back-bone, here a rib-bone, there a breast-bone, here an arm-bone, there a shoulder-bone, here a neck-bone, there a jaw-bone, here a tooth, there a skull – a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’...

Again, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, bones bleached white, the colour of shells...bones heaped up, more than a year old...bones rotted and crumbled to dust, a bhikkhu compares this same body with it thus: ‘This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.’ (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:148-149).

Although Bodhi mentions that these contemplations did not require an actual sight of the corpses in a charnel ground, they could be imagined in meditation (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:1192 fn 150), Wilson has described in detail, citing Buddhaghosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (dated to around CE 412), that a “meditator should go to the cremation ground and select a corpse in one of the ten stages of decay, from a corpse bloated with putrescence (*uddhumāta*) to a skeleton (*aṭṭhika*)” (Wilson 1996:16). In fact, chapter two of *Visuddhimagga*, called “*Dhutaṅga-niddesa*” (Buddhaghosa 1956:59-83), contains elaborate descriptions of these kinds of ascetic practices and what they involve. Of the thirteen kinds of practices Buddhaghosa lists here, two are called “the refuse-rag wearer’s practice” and “the charnel-ground-dweller’s practice” respectively. Even today, Wilson mentions, Thai and Sri Lankan monks are sent to post-mortem rooms to observe the fate of the body (Wilson 1996:195 n 6).<sup>6</sup> Also, Ñāṇamoli explicitly cites that Buddhist monks used to live, among other places, in charnel grounds, before the advent of Anathapindika on the scene:

The occasion was this. The Buddha, the Blessed One, was living at that time at Rajagaha in the Bamboo Grove, and there had been no pronouncement made by him about dwellings for bhikkhus. They were living here and there in the woods, at the roots of trees, under overhanging rocks, in ravines, in hillside caves, *in charnel grounds*, in jungle thickets, in the open, on heaps of straw. (Ñāṇamoli 1992:87, emphasis added).

Later, the same fact is repeated in the Buddha’s own words in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, in *Sāmannaphala Sutta*, where the Buddha extols the advantages of a bhikkhu’s life to prince Ajātasattu:

Then he, equipped with this Ariyan morality, with this Ariyan restraint of the senses, with this Ariyan contentment, finds a solitary lodging, at the root of a forest tree, in a mountain cave or gorge, *a charnel-ground*, a jungle thicket, or in the open air on a heap of straw. (Walshe 1995:101, emphasis added).

In *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa explicitly deals with the three grades of charnel-ground-practitioners:

Herein, one who is strict should *live where there are always burnings and corpses and mourning*. The medium one is allowed to live where there is one of these three. The mild one is allowed to *live in a place that possesses the bare characteristics of a charnel ground...* (Buddhaghosa 1956:77, emphasis added).

Such descriptions of the charnel ground occur at other places too in the Pali Canon. In *Mahādukkhakhanda Sutta*, while giving his discourse on the material form, the Buddha explains to the bhikkhus the dangers inherent in gratification from the material form by giving example of a beautiful, young girl of a noble class who becomes old, loses her youth and the beauty of her body, becomes sick and dependent on others, and is, finally, thrown in the charnel ground:

Again, one might see that same woman as a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, living and oozing matter. What do you think, bhikkhus? Has her former beauty and loveliness vanished and the danger become evident? – ‘Yes, venerable sir.’ – Bhikkhus, this too is a danger in the case of material form.

Again, one might see that same woman as a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms...a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews...a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews...a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews...disconnected bones scattered in all directions – here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a thigh-bone, there a rib-bone, here a rib-bone, there a back-bone, here the skull...bones bleached white, the colour of shells...bones heaped up, more than a year old...bones rotted and crumbled to dust. What do you think, bhikkhus? Has her former beauty and loveliness vanished and the danger become evident? -- ‘Yes, venerable sir.’ -- Bhikkhus, this too is a danger in the case of material form. (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi 1995:183).

This imagery of the dead body and the bhikkhus' meditative association with it is found also in the *Vitakkasanthāna Sutta*, where the Buddha advises bhikkhus on how to get rid of unwholesome thoughts by thinking of something that is wholesome:

...When he examines the danger in those thoughts, then any evil unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with delusion are abandoned in him and subside. With the abandoning of them his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. Just as a man or a woman, young, youthful and fond of ornaments, would be horrified, humiliated, and disgusted if the carcass of a snake or a dog, or a human being were hung around his or her neck, so too...when a bhikkhu examines the danger in those thoughts...his mind becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness, and concentrated. (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:212).

Again, in *Kāyāgatasati Sutta* (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:952), the Buddha provides the same Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations that have been quoted above, for bhikkhus to develop the right mindfulness of the body. A similar representation is found in the story of the clansman named Yasa, a rich person fond of sensual pleasures who wakes up one morning to find his attendants in various states of disarray, and the thought of the charnel ground arises in him. He becomes so disgusted with this that he puts on his clothes, goes to the Buddha, and becomes a bhikkhu (Ñānamoli 1992:48).

There is a further association of the Buddha and bhikkhus with the charnel ground with respect to the clothes they used to wear. Frequently, they would wear clothes made from refuse rags and shrouds. At least two examples of this can be cited from the Pali Canon, the first one with respect to the Buddha's explanation to Udayin about why his bhikkhus respected and honored him, and the second with respect to Nanda's clothes.

The first example comes from the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta*:

...Now there are disciples of mine who are refuse-rag wearers, wearers of coarse robes; they *collect rags from the charnel ground*, rubbish heaps, or shops, make them into patched robes, and wear them. (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:633, emphasis added).

The second example concerns the Buddha's half brother, Nanda, who becomes a bhikkhu, but comes to the Buddha dressed in all his finery. The Buddha says to him:

Nanda, it is not proper that you, a clansman who has gone forth out of faith from the house life into homelessness, should put on pressed and ironed robes, anoint your eyes and take a glazed bowl. What is proper for you, a clansman who had gone forth out of faith from the house life into homelessness, is to be a forest dweller, an eater only of almsfood got by begging, a wearer of refuse-rag robes, and to dwell without regard for sensual desires. (Ñānamoli 1992:84).

In the *Mahāvagga* there occurs a rather lengthy description of the monks not only collecting robes from the cremation ground, but bickering over them, so much so that the Buddha had to make elaborate pronouncements about them:

Now at that time several monks came to be going along a high-road in the Kosala country. Some monks went into a cemetery for rag-robes, other monks did not wait. Those monks who went into the cemetery for rag robes obtained rag-robes; those monks who did not wait spoke thus: "Your reverences, give us also a portion."

These spoke thus: "Your reverences, we will not give you a portion; why did you not wait?"

They told this matter to the Lord. He said: "I allow, you, monks, not to give a portion, if you are not willing, to those who do not wait." ||1||

Now at that time several monks came to be going along a high-road in the Kosala country. Some monks went into a cemetery for rag-robes, other monks waited.

Those monks who went into the cemetery for rag-robes obtained rag-robes; those monks who waited spoke thus: "Your reverences, give us also a portion."

Those spoke thus: "Your reverences, we will not give you a portion; why did you not go in?"

They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, to give a portion, (even) if you are not willing, to those who wait." ||2||

Now at that time several monks came to be going along a high-road in the Kosala country. Some monks went into a cemetery for rag-robes first, other monks went in afterwards. Those monks who went into the cemetery for rag-robes first, obtained rag-robes; those monks who went in afterwards did not obtain them; these spoke thus: "Your reverences, give us also a portion."

Those spoke thus: "Your reverences, we will not give you a portion; why did you go in afterwards?"

They told this matter to the Lord. He said, "I allow you, monks, not to give a portion, if you are not willing, to those who go in afterwards." ||3||

Now at that time several monks came to be going along a high-road in the Kosala country. These went into a cemetery together for rag-robes, some monks obtained rag-robes, other monks did not obtain them. Those monks who did not obtain them spoke thus: "Your reverences, give us also a portion."

Those spoke thus: “Your reverences, we will not give you a portion; why did not you obtain (any)?”

They told this matter to the Lord. He said, “I allow you, monks, to give a portion, (even) if you are not willing, to those who go in together with (you).” ||4||

Now at that time several monks came to be going along a high-road in the Kosala country. These, having made an agreement, went into a cemetery for rag-robbs; some monks obtained rag-robbs, other monks did not obtain them. Those monks who did not obtain them spoke thus: “Your reverences, give us also a portion.”

Those spoke thus: “Your reverences, we will not give you a portion; why did you not obtain (any)?”

They told this matter to the Lord. He said, “I allow you, monks, having made an agreement, to give a portion, (even) if you are not willing, to those who go in.”

||5|| (Horner 1971:399-400).

Similarly, Buddhaghosa has elaborations on what constitutes a refuse-rag, and how rags picked up on the charnel grounds are considered refuse-rags (Buddhaghosa 1956:60). Even *Mahāvastu*, the Mahasanghika Vinaya text, while not quite as elaborate as the Pali texts mentioned so far, certainly has references to cremation ground practices.<sup>7</sup> These practices, whether they be of dwelling in the cremation ground, meditating on the corpse state of the body and all the filth that is shown associated with it, to wear robes made of clothes picked up from rubbish heaps or from cremation grounds, and to subsist on alms food, however, bear a striking resemblance to Aghor practices.

It is true that these elements of the Buddha’s *sādhanā* are but a small portion of the Pali Canon, and perhaps none but the most ardent monks would even pay attention to these nitty-gritty details of *sādhanā*. What is important and revealing, however, is the fact that *sādhanā* forms the fundamental basis on which an ascetic’s success or failure, as well as the philosophical superstructure of his/her spiritual life, rests. It is this phase of life that continually inspires new aspirants to be like their preceptor. The Buddha constantly spoke about the principles and processes that can, and do, lead to the cessation of sorrow, with ultimate success in life being the state of Nibbāna. His has been described as a theory that is anti-vedic, materialist, non-theistic etc.<sup>8</sup> in so far as the

Buddha focused on the body for training his bhikkhus to lead to a deeper knowledge, a true knowledge, a direct knowledge of the nature of the world.

So far I have discussed practices delineated by the Buddha which are very similar to Aghor practices. It is, however, also true that there are elements of Aghor *sādhanā* for which we do not find corroboration in the Buddhist texts. Aghor practices which are different from those of the Buddha can be pointed out as:

1. They use pañcamakāras in their *sādhanā*, a feature associated with Tantra;
2. They are theistic in that they do believe in a Shiva, or Shakti or Brahma;
3. Like other Shaiva or Shakta ascetics, they smear ashes on their body.

Sarkar Baba did not talk much about his *sādhanā*, but was of the opinion that such hard *sādhanās* happen in the life of all serious ascetics. By this, he probably meant that such practices are undertaken by all ascetics, at least of his genre, in more or less similar degrees. Ñanamoli has mentioned (1992:357, fn1) that this *sādhanā* was prescribed for Jaina ascetics. However, Ñanamoli does not mention the texts which illustrate this fact. Jones, in his translation of the Mahavastu, mentions that the Buddha referred to his teachers Adara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputta as Jinasravakas, which is to say, Jina monks<sup>9</sup>. It does stress the point that this type of hard *sādhanā* was not exclusive to the Buddha. Basham has shown that this passage quoted by the Buddha himself refers to his *sādhanā* as an Ājivika ascetic (1951:110).

In comparison to this description of the action and philosophy of the Buddha, Aghor practices are also considered anti-vedic, and for their body-focused practices, they can be considered as materialists. Like the Buddha, they also take the body to be a representation of the reality of life, and seek to understand that reality through the

medium of it.<sup>10</sup> However, Aghaṛs also believe in the existence of a power beyond the body, a Brahma, or a Shiva, or a Shakti, that has created, maintains, and controls the world. Their *sāadhanā* involves not only focusing on the body, but also on awakening the Shakti latent within the body, and an investigation of the *Prāṇa*, the life-force, that animates the body through a divine connection, namely, the breath. Their body-focused materialism is not an ultimate goal in itself for hedonistic sense indulgence, but in fact, a discipline to train the body in such a manner that the *sādhak* rises beyond its limitations.

As the book *Brahmaniṣṭh-Pādyā* states:<sup>11</sup>

At the culmination of his *sāadhanā* an Aghori becomes like Shiva. According to Aghor philosophy *jīvātmā* and *paramātmā* become harmonized by the grace of the guru, and become one and undifferentiable. Another form of Aghor is *abhēd* (non-differentiation by category). (Pandey 1965:39f, gloss added, my translation).

### **Sarkar Baba's *Sāadhanā***

A lot is known about the places where Sarkar Baba did his *sāadhanā*, but little is known of exactly what that *sāadhanā* involved,<sup>12</sup> especially in the later years. What is known is that Sarkar Baba's penance period was a long and severe one. He is known to have wandered from one cremation ground to another, and lived for long periods in several of them. He also lived in wilderness areas, and in a cave at Vindhyachal in Uttar Pradesh for several years. He lived on alms that he begged for only once a day, and wore nothing but pieces of shrouds. His ascetic leanings were evident since the time he was a small child. In fact, even though Sarkar Baba's *sāadhanā* constitutes different phases of a single spiritual quest, in my opinion we can fruitfully look at it in three distinct time frames: one that relates to his childhood and village, the second when he began to travel outside the village to various pilgrimage places, and the third, the *sāadhanā* he practiced after coming

to Banaras. Let me start from his childhood then, drawing from the available hagiographical literature as well as narration from my field research.

During his childhood, after his father's death when he was about five years old, Sarkar Baba's little family began to be neglected by the larger joint family and community. Many a times, Sarkar Baba and his mother would not even have enough to eat, despite belonging to a prosperous family. Perhaps some members of the extended family even harbored ill intentions towards his landed property (Sinha 1988:10-11). Simultaneously with this, Sarkar Baba's thirst for spiritual knowledge began to break all bounds. When sent to school he would not attend classes. Instead, he would run away from school, gather his friends in one of the many gardens of the village, and sing devotional songs. Because of the lock of head-hair which he had from birth, his playmates began to call him Jaṭulī<sup>13</sup> (one with a yogi's matted hair or topknot), in jest, although his given name was Bhagawan. Since his childhood people also began to see examples of his spiritual quest reflected, initially, in his dislike for staying at home.

When Jaṭulī began to live outside his house he lived successively first in his own garden, and then in an underground room near the village Shiva temple, in a thatched hut in his family's fields, in a hut in the mango garden near the village school, in the haunted 'Nemua garden' under the *bargad* (Banyan, *Ficus bengalensis*) tree, and finally, under a *peepal* (Sacred Fig, *Ficus religiosa*) tree in his family's garden. Each one of these places has many stories associated with it, some of them found in the book *Aughar Bhagawān Rām*:

In the beginning he used to live in a small underground room that he had made near the Śiva temple near his home. Many times he would conduct his devotions in that room for two days without food or water. After that he began to live in an outside room of his house and began to worship an idol of Śrī Rāmacandra Jī with

devotion. His daily worship regimen was very difficult for a boy of his age. He used to observe a nine day unbroken fast during the period of both navarātris. He would drink only water for the whole period of nine days each time and remain engrossed in his worship, satsaṅg<sup>14</sup> and kīrtan<sup>15</sup>.” (Chaturvedi 1973:148, my translation)

On reading about Sarkar Baba’s childhood one is struck by two things. One is his popularity amongst his childhood friends and school children, who would congregate around him whichever tree he might be living under and whichever field he may have built a hut in. Then they would play, tell each other stories, or sing *bhajans*. This popularity always remained a hallmark of his life, I have observed it first hand on numerous occasions, and this perhaps was one more reason why he sought solitude after coming to Banaras, to pursue his *sādhanā*. The second interesting fact is his fearlessness, going to the extent of living in a haunted grove of the village at a very young age, as well as his healing powers, which were more popular amongst the women folk of the village (Chaturvedi 1973:148-150).

After Sarkar Baba had been living in that garden for some time, people forced him to go back and live at home. As Bindeshwari Bhaiya said, Sarkar Baba was adamant. He declined to live in the house but asked to create an underground room for himself.

So a hole was dug in the ground right in front of the house. Baba would sit in that hole all day long and perform his devotions and prayers. If he could not find *rori*<sup>16</sup> as an offering, he would take bricks and make a powder out of them as a substitute. One day he asked his uncle for a *Śivalinga* (stone icon of Shiva). He said he wanted to establish a Shiva temple there. With his own hands Sarkar Baba situated the *Śivalinga* and a small temple was built over it. In his village there is a temple of Yagyawatar Ji (a saint of the village). He lived there for some time. Parents used to send food for him from home. He would consecrate it with water and basil leaves and then eat it in the Vaishnava fashion.<sup>17</sup> He lived there for a month or two. Then he put up a little thatched hut in the village garden, by the name of Hatkaiyan, and began to live there. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

While still in the village as a child, Sarkar Baba's spiritual abilities would sometimes spill over into domestic life. Here is a passage from *Brahmanishṭh Pādya* that provides an example:

Meanwhile, the marriage of his sister was arranged. He had not seen the fortunate groom or his family members. His mother asked him to visit them once and meet with them. After his mother insisted about it, he said he had already seen the groom. 'I can show him to you also, but you will have to not discuss it with anyone'. His mother assured him. As she stood there a form appeared in front of her suddenly, and then disappeared after a few moments. At the time of wedding his mother saw that the groom looked exactly like the form Mahaprabhu had shown to her." (Pandey 1965:15, my translation)

It was in this period that little boy Jaṭulī took Vaishnava initiation from Shrikant Maharaj, a pious elder in his village. After initiation he was re-named Bhagawan Das. A saint of the village whose name was also Babu Baijnath Singh, and who was called Paramhans Ji by most people, kept helping Bhagawan in his spiritual progress (Sinha 1988:15-16). This led to the second phase of his quest when he began his travels beyond the bounds of his village, notably to Gaya in Bihar, Jagannathpuri in Orissa, and Maner hamlet in his own district. He was barely nine years old when one day he became totally disenchanted from home and started walking towards the town of Gaya (a distance of about 75 miles). It was the winter season and he did not know the way. He would spend his nights mostly in the fields of *arhar* (*cajanus cajan*) lentils. One night, weary from walking, he reached a village and went to the temple there, looking for a place to stay the night. It was late and everyone had already gone to bed, but he managed to wake up someone. Although he did not find any food, he was given a piece of burlap to cover himself with for the night. After spending the night with difficulty, the wandering Bhagawan set out again in the morning. On the previous night he had found a place to sleep but no food so exertions of the journey made him very hungry. When hunger pangs

became intolerable he entered a field and plucked some peas to eat. Sarkar Baba narrated this story to me in this way:

When I ran away from home, then I wandered all over the place. I did not have a single paisa in my pocket. One night I was helpless with hunger. Hunger was so acute that I could not bear it anymore. Now I got worried, what should I do! So, I entered a field at night and plucked peas and ate them. In this way I saved my life. When I ate those peas, then I felt whole again, I felt life returning back to me. (Personal communication, July 1988, Varanasi).

On reaching Gaya, Bhagawan visited all the pilgrimage places. By then, people from his home who had set out to look for him, found him. He was forced to come back to his village, Gundi. A few days later he went on a trip to Jagannathpuri. Bindeshwari Bhaiya, one of my prime informants about Sarkar Baba's childhood, narrated the episode:

After one year, he ran away from home. A *sadhu* (monk) had come to our house seeking alms, and Jatuli followed him out of the village without anyone noticing. Everyone searched for him but without success. A few days later another *sadhu* came into the village. When we asked him, he informed us that a child has been seen in Jagannathpuri (a distance of about 600 miles). People from my home went to Jagannathpuri. Jatuli was living there in the ashram of the Ramanuj *sadhus* of the Vaishnava tradition. When people began to bring him back, he said he would not return to his parent's house. He came back to the village but lived outside the house in various gardens and temples. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi, gloss added).

In the same period a convention was organized by the Ramanuj sect in the Maner hamlet of Patna district. Sarkar Baba went to this convention with his guru Shrikant Ji. There, he very much liked the teaching that, "Unless one achieves the state that was achieved by Ramanuj, no one attains salvation." He understood well that to become someone who can liberate himself from the laws of nature as well as do good to others, it was necessary to attain the state that Ramanuj had succeeded in attaining. Little Bhagawan Das had a most unusual experience on returning from this convention. This experience is described in the book *Aughar Bhagawān Rām* in the following words:

Maharaj returned from the convention. While resting on a cot, he saw a miraculous light. It was so bright that even in broad daylight he was forced to shield his eyes. At the same time, his heart began to beat very fast. According to him, this was the grace of God. He used to experience this heartbeat many times even after this incident....” (Chaturvedi 1973:152, my translation).

Little Bhagawan Das (Sarkar Baba) had become a Vaishnava initiated person, but his true path was waiting for him in Kashi. Here, in Gundi village, even Sarkar Baba must have had a premonition about it as is evident from an incident which happened one day while playing with a friend. His friend tried to pin him down on the swing but Sarkar Baba scolded him saying, “Are you Kinaram that I will be afraid of you?” (Chaturvedi 1973:147). He decided to go to Kashi on advice from Paramhans Ji. At that time his age was 15 years, the year was 1951, the month was *Sāvan* (June-July) by the Hindu lunar calendar, and the day was the eighth of the lunar month. Sarkar Baba left his village alone at night, came to Arrah station and jumped on a train. At one o’ clock that night he got down at the Banaras Chhawani station.

Before continuing further, let me add a snippet I had heard from Asthana Ji, whom I had asked about Sarkar Baba’s arrival in Kashi. He had said:

I know only this much about Baba’s arrival in Kashi that the abbot of the Viśvanāth temple (in Kashi) had a dream that Śiva himself is about to arrive in Kashi, and that mother Annapurna will also be with him. If you want to have a glimpse of him, go immediately. The temple will open by itself, mother Annapurna will help him do his *pūjā*, and he is Śiva himself in human form. The abbot woke up and came to the temple at three in the morning and stood at the gate at the western corner of the temple. Baba came with mother Annapurna and the temple doors opened by themselves, and then mother Annapurna helped him with his worship. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

From a social science point of view, this snippet conjures up the scenes from Hollywood’s mythical stories a la Harry Potter, where the arrival of the hero is somehow communicated to those in positions of power. But it is true that Sarkar Baba was

regarded very well by the priests of the Vishvanath Temple in Varanasi, a number of them were also his devotees, and their attitudes as well as comments often reinforced the idea of a walking Shiva present amongst people. It did add to Sarkar Baba's charisma as a divine figure, but not in a "handed-down" fashion where the hero is recognized immediately on arrival.

Sarkar Baba's own life as presented in the publications of the Samooh provides testimony to the fact that although "miraculous" things kept happening throughout his life, Sarkar Baba chose the path of *sādhanā*, the normal way of attaining spiritual powers, as any ordinary human being would do. In this context, let us continue with the story of how he reached Vishwanath temple from Banaras Chhawani station, another very interesting episode related to his arrival in the city of Varanasi. This story is narrated in detail in the book *Aughar Bhagawān Rām*. Here's a translation:

Coming out of the station, he asked the way to the Viśvanāth temple. Leaving the station behind he came to Chetganj. It was a rainy night and street dogs made his journey forward very difficult. So he lay down there on an empty cart by the side of the road and spent rest of the night. In the brahma-muhūrta (divine hour of the morning) when people began to go to the river Ganges for their morning ablutions, he also started in the same direction. He followed the straight road to Daśāśvamedha Ghāṭ, but stopped near the Deṛhsī bridge.

While he was standing there in awe of the city, a stately old woman, wearing a silk sari with a red border came to him and asked him with affection, 'Where do you want to go?' He said that he wanted to have a darśan (sacred glimpse) of Śrī Viśvanāth Jī. The old woman asked him if he had taken his bath?<sup>18</sup> When he said he had not, she indicated to him to go take his bath in the river Ganges flowing nearby. He went a little ways forward and took his bath at Ghoṛā Ghāṭ. While taking his bath he was wearing his *lanḡoṭī* (loincloth) and dhotī.<sup>19</sup> A thought came into his mind and he let his dhotī float down the river. He took his bath and wearing only his loincloth, came back to the old woman.

He found the old woman standing at the place where he had left her, carrying all the pūjā materials in a plate. The old woman walked forward and he followed her to have a glimpse of Viśvanāth Jī. On reaching the Viśvanāth temple he felt very happy and amazed, he felt drawn to the place. If he could stay in Kashi he would come to have a darśan of Viśvanāth Jī every day. The old woman helped him perform the puja of Viśvanāth Jī with great affection. At that

time, he did not ask for anything but that God's glory and its continuous presence should always remain.

After the darśan and worship of Śrī Viśvanāth Jī he went towards the Annapūrṇā temple with the old woman. Even as he watched, the old woman disappeared inside the temple. He waited outside for some time thinking that this was a rich person's house, and since he was in a very poor condition, it would not be appropriate for him to enter this house. When the woman did not come out for some time, finally he moved away and came to Derhsī bridge where again he saw the old woman standing! He was surprised because so far he had been thinking that the old woman was from a prosperous family and had mistaken the Annapūrṇā temple to be her home. On seeing his reaction, the old woman asked him affectionately, 'What is your purpose in coming to Kashi?' When he told her his purpose, she advised him to go towards Assī Ghāṭ. On the way, there is a maṭh (monastery, temple) of Paramhans seekers. Your desire will be fulfilled there. Before he could say anything more, the old woman disappeared! He began to wonder 'who was that kind woman?' Before he could think more, the thought came to him that he should walk on the path indicated by the woman.

Having made this decision he walked towards Harishchandra Ghāṭ. On going a little further he reached Śrī Kinārām Temple at Krin-Kunḍ at about 7:30 in the morning. At that time the current abbot Śrī Rajeshwar Ram Ji was sleeping. He sat down in the courtyard. (Chaturvedi 1973:152-153, my translation).

This episode begins the third phase of Sarkar Baba's *sādhanā*. Sarkar Baba had narrated a very short version of this story to Babu Khaderu Singh of Adalpura village, a reasonably prosperous Rajput gentleman who had spent time with Sarkar Baba in his younger days in the hinterland of Banaras, a version of the story which is somewhat different and with a more practical twist to it -- hunger, rather than the spiritual tone of the passage from Chaturvedi. It does represent Sarkar Baba's spiritual quest, but it couches it in terms of sheer physical needs. Again, I present the story in the language spoken by Babu Khaderu Singh for his language has a guileless simplicity about it:

So Babu, somehow I ran away from home at the age of nine. I would hide from children everywhere because they would throw stones at me and yell, 'the crazy one is going! The crazy one is going!' Somehow I spent those days. For three days I did not eat anything. I tried to steal cucumbers from a field and the old woman guarding it chased me away. I ran from there and reached the Temple (Baba Kinaram Temple at Krin-Kund). There, before the temple, I met an old woman dressed in red. I said to her, "Mother, I am very hungry." She said, go to the Temple, you will find food. When I came to the Temple, Ashu Baba (the then

deputy abbot) was here. I went to him. I said to him, “Baba, I am hungry.” He said, “Sit down.” I ate there, Babu, and then I stayed there for a few days. Then I left that temple and went to the cremation ground (Personal communication during fieldwork, July 1996, my translation, gloss added).

The day in 1951, month of *Sāvan* (July-August), when Sarkar Baba reached Krin-Kund, was a Saturday. The Aghor practices of this Vaishnava initiated seeker began from here. Ashu Baba gave him rice mixed with fish from the food that had been cooked at the Temple. Since Bhagwan was a Vaishnava vegetarian, he hesitated in eating it. He ate a little, and put the rest in the Kund (the Pond which gives this place its name). But then he determined that if he was to become an Aghori, he would have to stop feeling disgusted by eating meat. What Sarkar Baba has mentioned very simply at the end of his narration to Babu Khaderu Singh about going to the cremation ground is actually an impersonal summation of his life of hard *sādhanā*, because the knowledge, and powers which those led to, ultimately established his authority in the city of Varanasi as a living Shiva. However, it appears to me that this hard *sādhanā* became easy, or natural, for Sarkar Baba because of divine assistance. This can be seen in this story from the period when he still lived at the Kinaram Sthal in Varanasi:

One day he was lying near the *dhūnī* (ascetic’s fire pit) in a somnolent state. He felt that a divine man wearing *kharāuñ* (wooden slippers) was standing near him. He lifted his leg with the *kharāuñ* and put it on Sarkar Baba’s chest, simultaneously voicing a *mantra* (sacred incantation). Sarkar Baba repeated that *mantra* with an internal intuition, and that *mantra* became memorized by him. Since that day he meditates on that very *mantra*. By the unfathomable grace of guru another incident happened after a few days, which strengthened his faith in the aforementioned mantra. While sweeping at Baba Kinaram’s Samādhi when he went towards the south, he heard this same *mantra* very clearly, as well as a divine instruction to meditate on this mantra. He continued his *sādhanā* remaining at that place for some time. (Chaturvedi 1973:155, my translation, gloss added).

This notion of divine assistance is corroborated further by Chaturvedi:

He has had to practice most of his *sādhanās* himself. Necessities of *mantra-yantra*, practice and effort, began to come to him of their own. He himself realized intuitively that he was progressing in the right direction. During this time he came in contact with Avadhūt Baba Chhedi Ram of yogirāj (master of yoga) Kacca Baba's disciple tradition. (Chaturvedi 1973:155, my translation, gloss added).

### **Spiritual Authority**

Sarkar Baba's process of starting his life as a cremation ground mendicant is truly illustrative of the nature of cremation ground liminality. He was not simply asked to go and meditate in the cremation ground, he was actually evicted from the monastery, with nothing but the clothes on his body. The way this departure came about throws light on the recognition of charisma, and its use in the Aghor tradition for a seemingly negative act, to further the abilities of the novice seeker. This is how it is supposed to have come about.

During his devotions, Sarkar Baba would take a harmonium and *tablā* and sing *bhajans* for long. The abbot did not like all this. He began to treat his disciple severely. He would even beat him sometimes. One day an incident occurred that clinched Sarkar Baba's departure from the Sthal. It was the month of *Sāvan*. The abbot had gone somewhere giving the key to the storage room to Sarkar Baba. While completing his chores at the ashram, Sarkar Baba forgot where he had kept the keys. When the abbot came back he asked for the keys. Sarkar Baba could not find it. He asked for a day's time. The abbot became suspicious. He scolded Sarkar Baba and said that he wanted the keys immediately. When Sarkar Baba could not find any way out, in front of everyone he touched the lock and the lock opened by itself. The abbot went in and reassured himself that everything inside was as it should be. While in Manhattan undergoing

treatment in 1991, Sarkar Baba had told this story to me, but with a humorous social twist to it at the end:

At that time I was at Krin-Kund. Then Baba (the abbot) said, look, I am entrusting you the keys to the monastery. Keep them carefully. He had to go out, so he went. I remained here in the monastery. I cleaned up the place, organized everything. In that bunch was the key to the storage room. I locked the storage room and kept the key carefully. Got it! Now what happened that two days later Baba (the abbot) returned. He asked me what all had I done in his absence. Now came the turn of the storage room. When I went to open it, the key had disappeared. Now I was in big trouble. I checked the lock well, it was locked. Baba (the abbot) got very angry at me. He said open it, or I am going to teach you a lesson. I looked everywhere for the key, but it was not to be found anywhere. Then I thought, why don't I try out my muscle power here. So, fearfully, I went to the lock and, as soon as I touched it, it opened with a click! Baba (the abbot) was amazed! How did the lock open by itself! Now, I ran away from there because, (I knew) as this news would spread, so would the city's sheriff and deputies think that I had a hand in all the break-in robberies of the town! (Personal communication, October 1991, New York).

This incident made the abbot very suspicious whether his disciple had another guru besides him? He asked Sarkar Baba to leave the ashram. Chhedi Yadav, a wizened old man, little in stature with a flowing white beard, who was appointed as Sarkar Baba's teacher at the Kinaram Sthal when Sarkar Baba had first arrived at the monastery, told me of Sarkar Baba's condition when he left the ashram:

That day Baba came and knocked at my door. I asked, "Who is it?" Baba answered. I asked, "What is it?" When I opened the door I saw that tears were falling from Baba's eyes. I asked him, "Did the abbot say something to you? Has someone else said something to you? Should I come with you?" Baba said, "No Master Sahab." I said, "Then tell me why are tears falling from your eyes?" He said, "My guru's feet are slipping away from me. Guru Ji has said, go away from here." So Baba left and began to live in Hariharpur-Sakaldiha. The abbot had me write a letter to the villagers that this boy has been thrown out of the monastery, and that he has no esoteric knowledge, no powers. I said, "Oh Kinaram Baba! I will not write this, I am leaving." But he made me write this letter. I do not know whether he mailed that letter or not. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

Between the interlude of leaving the Sthal and going on to cremation grounds in the Hariharpur-Sakaldiha-Manihara area in the hinterland of Banaras, Sarkar Baba

remained in the city of Banaras for some time, at Ishwargangi, at the place of Chhedī Baba, who was a disciple of Kacca Baba, and was known as a good saint of the city. Sarkar Baba began to live at the *akhārā* (gymnasium) near Ishwargangi and began his ascetic practice. From here, Sarkar Baba used to go to the Dhumavati temple everyday for *darśan*. It was a completely itinerant lifestyle because Sarkar Baba, like the flowing wind, never stayed long at one place. Three more areas near Ishwargangi became points of his ascetic practice -- The garden of Poona Estate near Nati Imli, The garden of Rai Panarudas, also known as Rai Panarudas' Baradari, and Dhelwariya, which is a beautiful monastery north of the railway station at Chaukaghat. From Rai Panarudas' garden devotees of both persuasion, faithful and curious, began to come to Sarkar Baba. It was from here that people began to address him with the title *Sarkār* (lord, master). Just as he would keep moving between these points in the city, he would also leave the city and wander in its rural hinterland beyond the river Ganges.

Sarkar Baba spent a long time just wandering along the banks of the Ganges. He would eat the food that shepherds would give him, and wear the *malmal* cloth taken from the shrouds of the corpses. He would go seeking alms around noon to the doors of householders and call out “*Mā roṭī do* (mother give me bread)” (Chaturvedi 1973:156). For some time he lived in a cave on the banks of the Ganges near Sherpur village (north-east of Banaras, on way to Buxar). Then he walked up to the town of Buxar, approximately 100 miles east of Banaras. Wandering this way he reached his own village Gundi (about 45 miles east of Buxar) in his full Aughar regalia on the day of *Holi*. It was not an ordinary social visit. On the contrary, it was enacted to sever social ties and cross over into the realm of the transgressive. It is an instance where Sarkar Baba made a

determined effort to leave behind his earlier social conditioning, and succeeded. Here is a description of that visit from the book *Aughar Bhagawān Rām*:

...On remembering his mother's affection he used to become so emotional that for hours tears of love would not stop from his eyes. He had decided to break the *aṣṭ pāśa* (eight bonds). That is why he went to his village in his full Aghor form. His body was wrapped in a meter of shroud cloth. In one hand he carried the dead body of a dog, in the other, a bottle of alcohol. His form was fearsome. He was successful in his efforts because most people decided that day that he was no longer fit to be re-instated in the family. It is worth noting that his mother, bound by folk-decency, still could not get over her love for him, but on this visit he did not even go to meet her...(Chaturvedi 1973:160. My translation).

In the incident described above, Sarkar Baba, clearly, made a conscious effort to dissociate himself from family life and establish himself within an extra-social, or transgressive, world of the Aughar ascetic. Such a break was essential for him to fulfill his quest for he had always felt encumbered by family ties and social supervision. Now, here, he had cut his bonds in such an extreme manner that even if he wanted to come back, his family would not have accepted him. His adaptation to the world of the Aughar was complete. He *had* to present himself to his family and friends in this manner to break the social and psychological conditioning that had defined his life till then.

Although not exact, this story of Sarkar Baba's need to break his family ties to become a yogi has some parallels with the Gopi Chand birth story so wonderfully treated by Gold (1992), a story which belongs to the Nath tradition. Gopi Chand's mother Manavati narrates to him:

...how she obtained the boon of a son from Lord Shiva although no son was written in her fate. In order not to break his promise, Shiva allows her to borrow one of the yogi Jalindar Nath's disciples, and she chooses Gopi Chand. The loan has a limit: after twelve years of ruling the kingdom, Gopi Chand must become a yogi or die. As a wandering ascetic, however, he will gain immortality (Gold 1992:19).

This story has parallels to Sarkar Baba's birth story in several interesting points. For one, Sarkar Baba's birth is depicted as a gift from a yogi-like Baba Kinaram, for which his parents had to make a special effort. Second, as Gold writes, "In all versions Gopi Chand's mother is a religious adept – although her role may range from immortal, wonder-working magician to dedicated devotee" (Gold 1992:65). Later in his life, when Sarkar Baba's mother had become too old to live alone in the village, she came to live in the ashram in Varanasi. After some time, because of her austere devotional practices, Sarkar Baba named her Ma Maitrayani Yogini. Even today, her *samādhi*, in the same complex as Sarkar Baba's *samādhi*, is known as Ma Maitrayani Yogini Vibhuti Sthal. But the most striking point, the third point, is that the baby who became Sarkar Baba, just like Gopi Chand, was destined to be a yogi, for in the Gopi Chand story, unless the boy becomes a yogi after the age of twelve, he will die. Although we have no such prognostication in the case of Sarkar Baba, the need for a break from family life is intrinsically built into the structure of Sarkar Baba's and Gopi Chand's story.

To continue with Sarkar Baba's story, he spent the festival day of *Holi* at Gundi, and started walking along the bank of the Ganges again in the middle of the night. From there Sarkar Baba reached Mahraura cremation ground on foot. Now Sarkar Baba used to live alone, in complete solitude. He stayed far away from the amenities of modern life. Except for the light of the sun and the stars, he would not see the light of any other kind. And then came the day when his *sādhanā* would bear fruit. One day as he was wandering on the bank of the river Ganges at the Mahraura cremation ground, he attained enlightenment. This is how he described that experience:

One time I remained absorbed in meditation for three days and three nights. I became acyut,<sup>20</sup> I became ūrdhvaretā, I became ūrdhvagāmi.<sup>21</sup> Sitting at the bank

of the Ganges at Mahraura cremation ground I became one with my mantra. All my senses dissolved unto themselves. A circle arose before my eyes. In that circle I saw green, red, yellow, white, purple, blue and orange colors. Those eight colored concentric circles turned into an eight petalled lotus. I witnessed my life force risen in my consciousness. My voice, all my limbs, my deep vision, they all gained fulfillment within themselves. People of Mahraura, Kanwar, Manihara began to look at me with respect from that time on. They began to give me all that I needed. I would think of something, and before the thought was finished it would materialize in front of me. I would think I should see a particular thing, and before the thought was finished it would become visible to me. I would think something should come out from under the ground. As soon as I would remove the dirt, it would emerge. I would think I should remain standing next to the village people but they should not be able to see me -- it used to happen. I would think I should do some good for someone and my spoken words would do so. I would think I should touch tree-leaf-vegetation and give it to someone for his benefit, and it would become beneficial for him. This is the effect of that circle. All this happened when I became ūrdhvaretā. I had heard the stories of the Siddhas, Sudharma, it is not possible to narrate it... At that time my age was fourteen-fifteen years old. (SSS 1981:30-31, my translation).

It seems that Sarkar Baba attained enlightenment very soon after his initiation at the Krin Kund Sthal, almost within a year, as is evident from the age cited at the time of this incident. If this is the case, then it appears that he chose to continue his life of *sādhanā*, living like an ascetic, without the need to do so. While comprehensive data about Sarkar Baba's *sādhanā* days is not available, a few vignettes pop up as people who came in contact with him in those days narrate their experience. Guard Sahab, a long time devotee of Sarkar Baba, described his arrival to the Hariharpur-Tajpur villages in early 1950s, in this manner:

By a stroke of chance, in the summer month of *Jeth* (May-June) I heard that his hut near the pond at Manihara caught on fire. Baba was sitting inside the hut on a cot and the door was burning. People were imploring Baba, Baba please come out, Baba please come out, but Baba sat there calmly. People were trying to put the fire out but not with much success. And suddenly, he got up and left with such speed that nobody could even see where he went. In our village (Tajpur) there is a well-known pond by the name of Lehnra. It has very high ridges. So what Baba did was to come here in the blazing afternoon sun, and spent the day under the ridges in that pond. In the evening he came to a *bel* (Wood Apple, *Aegle Marmelos*) tree that had thorny bushes all around it, covering the base of the tree like an impregnable fortress. Its main stem had grown in a big 'Y' like a

catapult. Somehow, Baba managed to get inside those bushes, climbed the tree, and spent the night there. In Manihara, news spread like wildfire that Baba has left, Baba has left. By God's grace, a devotee saw Baba in the tree in the morning. He began to yell, "Hey, Baba is right here, he is hiding in the tree." The elders of the village went to meet Baba. They cleared the bushes around the tree and cleaned up that place. Many of the elders each began to invite Baba to their place, Baba come to my place, Baba go to that place, Baba I will build a concrete building for you, Baba I have land near a pond, come to my place. Baba said to one of them by the name of Member Sahab,

"Member Sahab, you want to settle me down?"

The village elder Babu Kalika Singh's father's name was Babu Harivansh Singh Ji. People used to call him Member Sahab. He said,

"Sarkar, who can settle you down. Yes, we will build a hut for you in your service, wherever you want us to."

"Well, if you want to settle me down, Hariharpur is a good place. Where will I go now leaving this place?"

So that place was cleaned up and two thatched huts were made, one for him and the other for all those who came to visit him. Slowly, that place developed into the first *ashram*, "Adi Ashram Hariharpur." Baba stayed there from 1953 till the month of *Phāgun* (February-March) in 1959. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

So this is almost two years after Sarkar Baba's attainment of enlightenment.

While he still continued his ascetic practices, he had begun to allow himself to become associated with society in a restricted manner, agreeing to have an ashram where he could spend his time when in the area. The conception of this ashram followed social will, in a sense. First, Sarkar Baba lived here and practiced *sādhanā* very hard. He would lie in the dry pond all day long in the blazing hot sun, meditating. Then the villagers requested him to perform a Vishnu-*yajñya*, a grand worship ceremony to God Vishnu. At the culmination of this *yajñya* where the participants had many mystical experiences, the owner of the land where the *yajñya* had been performed donated the land to Sarkar Baba. The ashram was built on that parcel of land.

Other aspects of Sarkar Baba's *sādhanā* were related by those who came in contact with him during that period. Here is an episode from the Chitreshwarnath cremation ground at Adalapura, near Banaras. In the year 1957 while wandering, one

day Sarkar Baba reached the Chitreshwarnath cremation ground near village Adalapura. When I visited Adalapura during the course of this research, I found it to be a very peaceful place. The scene of the Ganges here is quite captivating. The river flows with a very quiet, slow pace. On the far bank the sands stretch out for as far as the eye can see. There is a cremation ground, but no crowds in it. It was here that Baba came and sat under a *kanail* (*Nerium oleander*) tree. The priest of the Sheetala Mata temple had come to visit him, but had forgotten to bring *prasād* for him. It is a divinely charged place, many people come for a *darsan* of mother Sheetala here. In the rainy season, the whole area reverberates with the croaking of frogs. At night, when the stars begin to twinkle in the sky like so many blue points of light, one gets the feeling of a vast openness. The quiet here in the evening is disturbed only by the incessant whizzing and clicking of uncountable insects.

Shyamnarayan Pandey related his experience with Sarkar Baba at this cremation ground in 1957:

Now I will tell you the incident from Adalpura's Chitreshwarnath cremation ground. The year was 1957. Baba was living at the Chitreshwarnath cremation ground. We had been trying to find out for a long time, but had no clue as to where Baba was. When we came to know about Adalpura, three of us went to that place on a bicycle. At that time Baba did not maintain too many social contacts. At Chitreshwarnath, the bank is absolutely straight up, and the climb up that bank on the bike made us breathless. The Ganges flows west at this point. We had reached about two in the afternoon. There was a cave in the bank which was covered on the top with grass and hay. We spotted Baba's wooden sandals lying there. We began to feel relieved that Baba was indeed here. Baba came out from inside the cave and said, "Hey, where did you guys turn up from? I am not feeling well at all. I am sick." Saying this, Baba went back into the cave. When he came out again later in the afternoon, I saw him in a formidable form. His face was glowing with brilliant luster. When I touched his feet I felt as if I had put my hand on a burning pan. His feet were white, the way they become if you leave them under water for a long time. He was wearing a loincloth and a patched poncho.

He came out and sat with us and said, "Prepare some tobacco."

There was some tobacco in the cave. We prepared it and gave it to him. Baba smoked it. Then he said, “Okay, I will take my bath and then I will be back.” The flow of the Ganges is very strong there. Baba got down from the sheer bank, swam for a little while in the river, then came back and asked us, “You all must be very hungry?”

It was true. I was totally famished. I had ridden the bike for about 33 miles, with two other persons on it besides me! But I asked, “Baba, where will we get food here?”

Baba said, “No friend, a Pandit ji brings food for us. At that time the heat was so strong that if one threw popcorn on the ground, they would have popped. The earth was shimmering and roiling with heat. Some distance away we glimpsed a man walking towards us barefoot in that heat, wearing a small dhoti that he was half wearing, and had covered his head with the other half, with the mark of *roli* on his forehead, bringing food in a plate that was covered with a very clean cloth. Baba said, “Look, Pandit ji is bringing food. Bring it here.” When Pandit ji reached us Baba said, “Pandit Ji, please leave the food here. You won’t mind taking your pots and pans back later, would you?”

Pandit Ji kept the food down and went away. Baba said, “Look. What is in it?” We three were all watching the plate like vultures anyway. When we opened it we saw hot, sizzling *kachaurīs*,<sup>22</sup> two kinds of curried vegetables, one of squash and potatoes, the other of potatoes and jackfruit, two kinds of chutneys, one of mango, the other of mint, and hot *thokwā*!<sup>23</sup> It was sufficient for three people. There were only three utensils in it too, one plate, and two bowls. All three of us ate. Baba said, “You guys eat. I am not feeling well. I will not eat. Wash Pandit ji’s dishes after you have finished eating.” We did so.

Baba said to me, “Take your friends up the bank and let them go home.” I did that. When I came back Baba said, “I am not feeling well at all. I don’t think I will survive the night. There is only one doctor who can give me the right medication. There is an old mansion in Sonarpura, near Krin-Kund, where an old Bengali doctor lives. Bring him here any which way you can. If he gives me some medication, I will become okay. I said, “Okay Baba, I will see what I can do.”

I picked up my bike and pedaled furiously back to Banaras. In the city, I met the doctor. He understood some of what I said, and some, he did not.

He said, “Alright, I am giving you the medicine.”

I said, “Doctor Sahab, you have to come with me.”

He said, “My fee is ten rupees.”

At that time I did not have even ten paise in my pocket. But I said, “Okay Doctor Sahab, I will give you the fee.”

He said, “Okay, bring a car.”

Now I had to face the car-problem. One of Baba’s disciples, Dhannulal, used to live in the Maidagin locality of Banaras. He had a rickety old car. When I asked him, he fuelled it and gave it to me. I brought the doctor to Baba in it. When we reached Baba’s place, we saw four more doctors sitting there. Baba was given an injection. Some capsules were also given to him. Baba took them.

Then he asked me to go and drop the doctor back at his home. I did that and came back.

Baba said, “It is getting dark, and the doctor has asked me to take these medicines on time. Okay, take my bowl down.”

At that time Baba used to have nothing of his own except a loincloth and a bowl. There were no clothes, nor any other stuff. Baba put all the medicines in that bowl of his, all the capsules, tablets, injection, everything, and drank it. After drinking all the medicines all at once Baba came out of his cave. He said, “I won’t live here anymore. I am leaving.”

He pulled at the string that tied the roof to the cave, and spoke a line that I have not forgotten till today. He said, “I have pulled the string, goodbye brother ruin.”

Baba came out to the river and beckoned to a boat. The boatman came to the bank. Baba sat on the boat and in the growing darkness, disappeared in the direction of Chunar. We came back to our homes. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

This episode is interesting for several reasons. It illustrates clearly that Sarkar Baba maintained his ascetic practices and wandering even after attaining enlightenment, and despite becoming popular in the hinterland of Banaras. Also, his actions are most unusual from a normal physical point of view, otherwise, why would he imbibe all the medication, including those that were to be delivered intravenously, orally. In this region of India there is a notion that ordinary folk cannot fathom the purpose of an enlightened person’s actions. I am forced to ascribe to this notion as I look at the elements of the story and scratch my head in bewilderment. On the one hand, Sarkar Baba says he is sick and will not survive the night, yet he goes for a swim in the river. He says only the doctor from Banaras can save him, yet, when Shyamnarayan Pandey comes back with the doctor, he sees four other doctors sitting there! Where did they come from? Baba drinks all the medicine given to him in one gulp but, instead of resting as a sick person, he destroys his hut, gets on a boat and disappears in the night. Perhaps it shows the idiosyncrasies of an Aughar saint. I will have further occasion to talk about such events in the following chapters.

Things happened, albeit in a curious fashion, between Sarkar Baba and his guru, after his popularity spread. Sarkar Baba was invited by his guru, Baba Rajeshwar Ram to come see him at the Krin Kund monastery. When Sarkar Baba got there, Baba Rajeshwar Ram chided him for wandering free on the other side of the Ganges, and also told him in their own symbolic language, “I am thinking I should get you married” (Pandey 1984:55) to which Sarkar Baba said yes. It was only later that Phokabir, the narrator of this incident, realized that the marriage was to be with Goddess Hinguli, or Hingalaj (Pandey 1984:68). In the Indian context, getting married is symbolic of “settling down,” as a prelude to relinquishing a free-floating life-style. I cannot say for sure whether this is what Sarkar Baba was hinting at, but it certainly remains as a possibility.

### **Links Between Agharṣ and Buddhists**

Discussing the life of *sādhanā* that the Buddha had together with Sarkar Baba’s *sādhanā* brings out many similarities, although their lives after enlightenment appear quite different. There is, however, one similarity which must be noted, that the Buddha organized the itinerant mendicants of his time for the first time in history, and Sarkar Baba tried to give a new direction to the itinerant Agharṣ during his time. This may not be a unique event since Gorakhnath and Shankaracharya are also reputed to have attempted such organizations, but Sarkar Baba’s emphasis on “seva” as *sādhanā* in an ashram context certainly appears like a unique contribution in the Aghor field. But to look more carefully at these similarities let me examine some further connections.

That the Aghor and Buddhist traditions have had links in terms of philosophies and practices is generally accepted. But here arises the question of whether these similarities in practices and philosophies are a much later development, or whether they are a continuation of similar streams of thought from more ancient times pre-dating the Buddha. In this section I look at the similarities of Aghor practices with sources from Vajrayana and Mahayana to see if there are continuing connections. The core element of my investigation, as before, is the cremation ground *sādhanā*, and I will try to show how it runs its course through the practices of various Buddhist and non-Buddhist groups.

Since the fifth century onwards, with the coming to prominence of Tantra on the Indian spiritual canvass, it is easier to trace the history of development of the two streams through exchanges within the Tantric traditions. Snellgrove, in his introduction to the Hevajra Tantra, writes:

As for the charge that Buddhism ceases to be distinguishable from certain other types of Indian religious practice at this time, this was now no more true than it had ever been. It is indeed true that Buddhist and non-Buddhist *tantras* are based upon similar ideas and often contain similar material, and that many parallels may be obvious, but one may well ask at what previous stage of the doctrine was this not true. The Buddhists now as much as before garbed similar ideas in a distinctive terminology, not even can we be sure that they are following a lead in introducing these new notions and practices. The followers of non-Buddhist *tantras* may well have been as dependent upon those who called themselves Buddhists, as the *vedantists* were probably dependent upon the *madhyamikas*. (1980 Vol. 1:7).

Such ambiguity in the demarcation of boundaries reflects historical interactions and borrowing on part of both sets of religious adepts. The defining element here is *śmaśāna sādhanā*, the meditations in the cremation grounds, which can range from just sitting down to observe and meditate on the environment of the cremation ground, or it can include practices like *śava sādhanā*. The commonality of practices between Vajrayana adepts and Aghor ascetics is fairly easy to see through the elements of Tantra

present in both their practices. These elements of similarity not only seem to provide a link between the Buddhist and Aghor practices, but also between Buddhist, Aghor and Tantra related practices. As Wilson writes:

But there is a strong affinity between the Tantric path of the hero... and the path of the practitioner of cremation-ground meditations in non-Tantric Buddhism. Both perform their meditations in cremation grounds rather than in more auspicious settings. Both face the prospect of having to deal with the rapacious animals and demons who haunt cremation grounds in search of food as well as the prospect of being mistaken by civic authorities for criminals in search of refuge from the law. And it is a risky soteriological path that both practitioners embark on... Just as the practitioner of left-handed Tantric meditations must be a hero who is not readily subject of base desires as he engages in rites that activate sublime sexual desire as a means of transcendence, so too the cremation-ground meditator engages his desire with the awareness that the meditation may backfire on him should the female corpse he contemplates prove more appealing than disgusting to him. (1996:188-9).

To give examples, the famous Siddha Tilopa is said to have visited the charnel ground called ‘Terrifying Laughter’ inhabited by Buddhist and non-Buddhist dakinis, to visit ācārya Mātangi who practiced yogic discipline (Trungpa 1980:126). Padma Thodrengtsel, who taught Mantrayāna, took consorts “endowed with special qualities, from the highest heaven down to charnel grounds...” (Changchub 2002:3) Lady Yeshe Tsogyal, in the eighth century text, wears bone ornaments and practices austerities for a year (Changchub 2002:74). In fact, a whole host of the eighty-four Buddhist Siddhas were initiated in the cremation ground, and are said to have lived there (Dowman 1985). These names include Mahāsiddha Luipā, who is said to have ingested purtrid food as directed by a courtesan (Dowman 1985:35); Mahāsiddha Dombipā, who taught 500 yogins and yoginis in a cremation ground in Karnataka (Dowman 1985:58); Kankaripā, who was initiated in the cremation ground by a yogin over his dead wife’s body (Dowman 1985:73-4); Tantipa, who teaches Kṛṣṇācārya how to eat excrement like bread and butter and how to devour human flesh like a wolf (Dowman 1985:103); Khadgapa,

who took refuge in a cremation ground and took initiation from Carpati (Dowman 1985:108); Mahāsiddha Nāgārjuna, who took ordination on the far side of the cool garden cremation ground (Dowman 1985:112); Kāṇhapā, who was trained in a cremation ground to eat human flesh like a wolf (Dowman 1985:126); Syālipa, who built a hut in the cremation ground and lived there (Dowman 1985:149); Tilopā, who lived at a cremation ground in Kāñcī (Dowman 1985:151) and so on, the list continues.

Of these Mīnapā, Gorakśa, Saraha, Kāṇhapā, Carpati etc. have very distinct Shaiva connections, as we have seen in chapter two. Not only that, several of the Buddhist Siddhas, like Matsyendra, Gorakśa and Jālandhara, belong also to the Shaiva tradition's lists of Nāth yogis, thus showing a confluence of traditions in these figures of tantric adepts. White makes a strong argument to date the inception of the Nāth siddhas to the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, and shows that the one historical name that is common to all Nāth siddha lists is that of Matsyendranāth, whose name can be conflated with those of Mina nāth and luipā, because all three names mean "lord of fishes". White also mentions that the names of Matyendra-Mina, Gorakśa, Nāgārjuna, Carpati, Caurangī, Tanti/Tintini, Karnāri/Kāneri, and Kanthadi appear in all types of siddha lists, meaning, the lists of Indo-Tibetan Siddhācāryas, Indian Mahāsiddha yogins, and Indian Rasa siddhas (White 1996:91-2). White has argued well that the Nāth siddhas (from whom at least one stream of the Aghor tradition flows, that of the Gorakhnāthi, Himāli Aughaṛs) (Chaturvedi 1973:76) were converts from Buddhism to Hinduism after the ninth century A.D.<sup>24</sup> Briggs takes Aughaṛs to be followers of Gorakhnāth, with the characteristic feature that unlike other Kanphatā yogis, Aughaṛs do not pierce their ears.<sup>25</sup>

Chaturvedi has reaffirmed this fact, that Aughaṛs of the Himāli tradition trace their geneology to Gorakhnāth, and that this tradition probably originated amongst the Buddhist ascetics of Tibet. A very important point made by White is that the siddha figures were siddhas first, based on guru-lineages, and Buddhist or Hindu siddhas later, as is evidenced by both Hindus and Buddhists sharing the names of the same figures in their lists. A reading of the life of the Buddhist Siddhas shows that their lifestyle was very much the life of the present day Aughaṛs, like the lives of the *parivrājakas* who used to roam the countryside before and around the Buddha's time, in fact, the life that the Buddha himself had when he was a wandering ascetic seeking enlightenment.

Connecting the elements of Tantra found in Aghor practices with those of the Buddhist Siddhas, Mishra writes:

The word '*Sahaja*' has been used in the Tantras too. Sahajayān has been called the '*ṛju mārg*'. '*svar-sādhanā*' is necessary in the *ṛju mārg* too... It is notable here that Aghori saints have also stressed *svar-sādhanā* and *samarasatā* (non-differentiation in terms of tastes or states)... In the Aghor tradition is found the same forceful opposition to accepted traditions as in the Tantra scriptures. Such an opposition is a notable trait of the Siddhayān too. Edible-inedible, acceptable-unacceptable etc. are categorizations that the *siddhas* have considered as fraudulent. Amongst these siddhas Ḍombipā, Śabarpā, Kukkuripā, Sarvabhakṣa, Avadhūtī etc. are names that reflect a social movement against the false regulations based on the *varṇāśrama*, prestige and status consciousness, and denigrating treatment of the Śudras and women... That is to say, the Agamas and Tantras influenced Buddhism, and then Buddhism influenced the saint traditions. (Mishra 2001:25-26, gloss added, my translation).

Sanderson further demonstrates the close link between the texts of the Shaiva adepts and the Buddhist practitioners such that the Buddhist Yoginītantras have borrowed from the Shaiva Tantras, especially from the Vidyāpīṭha Tantras of the Bhairava section of the Shaiva canon (Sanderson 1995:94):

A comparison of the two groups of texts shows a general similarity in ritual procedures, style of observance, deities, mantras, maṇḍalas, ritual dress, Kāpālīka accoutrements, specialized terminology, secret gestures, and secret jargons.

There is even direct borrowing of passages from the Śaiva texts. Chapters 15 to 17 of the Buddhist Laghusaṃvara (Herukābhīdhāna), which teach a secret jargon of monosyllables [*ekākṣaracchoma*] (15), and the characteristics by means of which the Buddhist adept may recognize females as belonging to one or the other of seven Yoginī families (16) and seven Dākinī-families (17), equal the *samayācāraceṣṭāvidhāna* chapter of the Yoginīsaṃcāra section of the Jayadrathayāmala. Chapter 19 of the Laghusaṃvara, on the characteristics of the Yoginīs known as Lāmās, equals chapter 29 of the Siddhayogeśvarīmata. Chapter 43 of the Buddhist Abhidhānottara, on the rules [*samaya*] that bind initiates, equals chapter 85 of the Picumata. And the fifteenth chapter of the Buddhist Samvarodaya, on the classification of skull-bowls, is closely related to the fourth chapter of that work (Sanderson 1995:94-5).

Sanderson cites several other examples which illustrate clearly Buddhist borrowings from the Shaiva texts, and not a dependence on a common cultic stock, as had been postulated by Stephan Beyer (1973:42).

The Cremation Ground:

To expand on the similarity between the Buddha's practices and Aghor practices, even a cursory look at contemporary Aghor literature, especially that pertaining to the Kinarami Aughaṛs, presents a startling resemblance. I discussed in detail the Buddha's teachings to his disciples about meditating on a corpse in the cremation ground in the beginning of this chapter. Let me now begin with an explanation of the cremation ground as a suitable place for ascetic practices from the Aghor point of view, as explained by Sarkar Baba:

Young ascetic Sambhav seeker one day asked the Aghoreshwar — 'Dada! Is the cremation ground a pure place? Is the cremation ground a suitable place for meditation and worship?'

Laughing, Aghoreshwar replied — 'Oh innocent! There can be no place as pure as the cremation ground. No one can say the oblation of how many dead bodies has the fire in this cremation ground been accepting for decades. No one knows the number of great warriors, kings, emperors, merchants, traders, saints, gentlemen, thieves, idiots, egotistical leaders and scholars whose dead bodies have been offered as an oblation in the past, are still being offered in the present, and will be offered in the future too, on the tongue of the Mahākāl present in the form of the fire burning here. The fires of many homes and cities becomes quiet but the fire of the great cremation ground always keeps burning and continuously

accepts the oblation of the bodies of lifeless people. Neglecting their life-force because they are overwhelmed by attachment, frightened living-beings can also be seen burning in the pyre of their worries. There is not much difference between the two. The lack of a pure vision will automatically pull you towards the pyre of worry. There can not be two views about this; this is inevitable. The cremation ground provides a resting place for the bodies of life-less beings in the same way that the clean and pure heart of Yogis and Aghoreshwars provides a resting place for the Prāṇa of living beings... Your body keeps changing its form every moment from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to youth, and from youth to old age... Young seeker Sambhav! When you understand this you will not be frightened to see this fire in the cremation ground, or the exhuming of life-less beings in it. Young ascetic! The person who is attached to home and family, friends and relatives, can be found burning in the fire of worries even when alive. Can't you see, the pyre burns the dead, and the worries burn the living. Where there is attachment, till the point there is attachment, the fire lit by attachment burns living beings. From an ant to an elephant, from human beings to gods, from ṛṣis to munis, no one has escaped from it. Give up attachment, give up enjoyment in attachment, give up giving up too. When there will be nothing left to call your own — when there will be nothing of your own — you will be free of the fear and illusion that bothers you on seeing the bodies burning in the fire of the cremation ground. Young ascetic! Even this youth is burning, changing continuously. You must understand this, for this is the truth. (SSS 1982:22-23, my translation).

This passage illustrates not only the importance of the cremation ground as an apt place for meditative practice, but also resonates with the main points of the Buddha's Nine Charnel Ground practices, in terms of realizing the transience of life, as well as getting rid of attachment to all forms and ideas that burn human beings on a pyre of worries. Especially important here is the equation of a dead body burning on the pyre with a living being burning in the pyre of worries, ceaselessly consumed by the fire of mental, physical and emotional efforts that constitute what we call life. The metaphor is startling in that it turns the description of a normal life into the specter of a dead body consumed by unrealized fires, burning incessantly without letting on that that is what is going on. It is notable that such cremation ground practices, for the Buddhists, were called *dhūtāṅga* (Wilson 1996:42-3, Buddhaghosa 1956:61), a term which appears to have the same root as to the word *avadhūt*, used to describe accomplished Aghor saints.

The meaning, too, is very similar -- *dhūta*, an ascetic who has shaken off defilement by practicing one of the *aṅgas* (Buddhaghosa 1956:61-2, Buddhaghosa 1922:69 fn 1).

Further testimony to the merit of dwelling in the cremation ground, and wearing robes picked up from there is provided by this passage from *Aghor Vacan Śāstra*:

Aughar-Aghoreshwar are not a weight on society.... They are fond of wasted things, discarded clothes, they live in cremation grounds, they spend their lives with everyone who comes along. (Ram 1991:74, my translation).

Another reason stated for performing ascetic practices in the cremation ground is the relative seclusion an ascetic can find there for undisturbed *sādhanā*:

In India, the followers of this tradition have customarily lived in seclusion from society. Therefore, the places for their ascetic practices have been ruins, desolate or other lonely places eschewed by society. In fact, this is the reason behind making the cremation ground a place for ascetic practices, because ordinary people come here only occasionally, and that too, when it is absolutely necessary for them to do so, otherwise these places remain bereft of people. (Chaturvedi 1973:74, my translation).

The book *Aughar Bhagawān Rām* provides a whole list of Aughar ascetics who have lived in cremation grounds (Chaturvedi 1973:22-32), viz. Aughar Kharabdas who used to live at Manikarnika cremation ground on a raised platform (*macān*), Aghori Pritamram who lived at the Svargadvar cremation ground at Jagannathapuri, Ramnarayan Aghori who lived at Arrah cremation ground, and it also mentions the cremation ground at Gauhati, Assam, where several Aughar ascetics live and perform their *sādhanā*. In the book *Aghoreśvar Samvedanaśīl*, Sarkar Baba makes a statement of praise for his disciple, for wearing garments made from refuse-rags and shrouds, that resonates strikingly with the admonishing the Buddha had given to Nanda for the proper behavior of a monk of his order:

Tonsured ascetic!... This is saintliness. Despite being born in a wealthy family, the non-accepting attitude that you have adopted towards your relatives and friends, is commendable for tonsured ascetics. You do not now have any right in

their clothes either, whether it is made of velvet, whether of silk, whether of very nice wool, or whether it is ordinary cloth. This is like the arising of non-attachment with everything. One who is content with, satisfied with, garments made from torn and ripped pieces of cloth picked up from refuse heaps or cremation grounds, is a person of balanced vision, balanced knowledge, balanced intellect and balanced happiness. (SSS 1984:66, my translation).

In the same book, discussing the practical aspects of *sādhanā*, Baba asks his disciple Maitrayana Yogini what has she achieved by her cremation ground practices. Yogini replies:

I got its results instantly. The attachment I used to feel on seeing someone, that inclination was completely destroyed. I now did not lack for anything. All those things and materials which are necessary for human life, began to be available to me easily. Because of the increasing crowds (of devotees), after three years, I left Umanath mountain. I served many suffering and deprived people with my blessings...(SSS 1984:131, my translation).

Clearly, two things happened with the yogini due to her cremation ground practices. Not only did she lose attraction for bodies as beautiful objects of admiration, she also realized the nature of transience in life, thus killing her avarice and cultivating contentment. Now whatever came her way was deemed sufficient for her upkeep. Wilson has cited numerous examples from the Buddhist literature where the Buddha achieves the same result with his bhikkhus by either asking them to visit the charnel grounds, or, if they are still stricken by passion, to conjure up beautiful images which are then magically changed to portray death and decay, thus stemming desire at the root from which it gushes out (Wilson 1996:79ff).

The Body:

One of the most striking similarities between the Buddha's practices and Aghor practices is the focus on the body, contemplation on the body, and finally, realizing the transient nature of the body, relinquishing attachment to it. While delineating The Four

Foundations of Mindfulness in the Satipatthāna Sutta of *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha begins:

Bhikkhus, this is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the surmounting of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of pain and grief, for the attainment of the true way, for the realization of Nibbāna – namely, the four foundations of mindfulness.

“What are the four? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating feelings as feelings, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind as mind, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world.” (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:145).

The Buddha then expands his discourse and describes the mindfulness of breathing, the four postures, full awareness, foulness of the bodily parts, elements that constitute the body, the nine charnel ground contemplations, the contemplation of feeling, contemplation of mind, contemplation of mind objects, and the four noble truths. While describing the mindfulness of breathing he says:

In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of vanishing, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and vanishing. Or else mindfulness that ‘there is a body’ is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body. (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:146).

This focus on the body is reflected clearly also in Aghor literature. I illustrate with a few examples from the book *Aghor Vacan Śāstra*:

Seekers! Know that person to be Aghoreshwar who makes his body a repository of virtues, who worships virtues, who cultivates virtues, and who constantly finds virtues within himself.

Your own body is like a corpse and on your body many lowly desires have realized their fulfillment. You too can keep it very fulfilling by keeping nice thoughts. Everything can be achieved through this body.

Purification of the body is known as *tapa* (austere practice). These practices should be undertaken early in youth.

Prodded by the mind we heat our body and we cool our body, and we throw it in the fire of many indulgences which burns it, and burns it, and turns it to ashes. Then after a definite period, a time will come when even our breath -- the God-connection in us -- will also stop and from this point of view, the creation will disappear for us. In our sight this creation will remain no more. (Ram 1991:243f, my translation).

Sarkar Baba extols the importance of the body when he says to his disciple on being asked by him, “Gurudev! Am I God?” He says:

O tonsured ascetic! If this thought not be in your thoughts, then is God elsewhere outside of it? Absolutely not? This has been explained to you in the opposite manner. Understand correctly. You yourself are god. This body-form that you have, this body, and the many kinds of thought processes, desires-determinations, wishes that keep arising in it, it is because of those that it is known by the name of *Jīva*. The moment, the day, these improper actions cease, you yourself will become god. (SSS 1984:20, my translation).

This quote is important not only in that, like the Buddha, it focuses the seeker on the merits of the body, but also has a similar theme that the Buddha explained, that of dependent origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*). Simply stated, the world exists for us because we exist, and we exist because the world does. The world exists for us only as long as we live, as long as we are here. It ceases to exist for us when we are not here. Our existence and the existence of the world, for us, are co-dependent. This is illustrated by an experience Chhotay Babu had while wandering with Baba in the dead of the night on the ghat of the Ganges at Parao. The story was narrated to me by Chhotay Babu in Delhi, during fieldwork. I paraphrase it below.

At Parao, Sarkar Baba would take Chhotay Babu at two every morning and go for a dip in the Ganges. He would dive under water in front of Rajghat. Even at that time it was a cremation ground. In fact, it used to be packed full with dead bodies. So many dead bodies used to be littered there that these two would have to step over them to reach the river Ganga. And Sarkar Baba used to take his bath there! The process of his bath

was also unique. Since Chhotay Babu did not know how to swim, Sarkar Baba would ask him to stand in the water, and he would dive under water himself. Chhotay Babu would stand there for an hour, hour and a half, and sometimes two hours. It would be absolutely quiet and desolate all around. As far as the eye could see, stark desolation would be spread in every direction. But Sarkar Baba would remain submerged under water for one and a half hours. Sometimes Chhotay Babu would become worried about where Sarkar Baba had gone, or if some water animal had got hold of him. But after an hour or two, Sarkar Baba would come out of the water laughing.

One morning, at two, Sarkar Baba took him to the Ganges stepping over dead bodies. A woman's dead body was lying on the shore. She had no clothes on her body and both her legs were spread apart. The body was rotting, and still, she looked pretty. Sarkar Baba made Chhotay Babu stand between her legs and said, "Keep standing. Don't go anywhere."

Then Sarkar Baba dived and disappeared under water. Now Chhotay Babu, standing between the legs of the dead woman, began to become dizzy from the stench that was emanating from the corpse. He had no feeling of attraction towards the body of that beautiful woman. But it was his guru's order, so somehow he kept standing there. After about one and a half hours, Sarkar Baba appeared. As he was stepping out of the Ganges, he asked Chhotay Babu, "Do you see it? How beautiful her body is. Had she been alive, no one would have left her alone. And look at her now, not even an animal has come to sniff at her. That is why I say that the life force that is present in the body is the most important."

Focus on the body, and realizing the spiritual potential inherent in the body, is illustrated well in the book *Viveksār* as I discussed at some length in chapter two, when describing the tenet of *kāyā paricaya* (see P. 98 above). In a different context, explaining the merits of knowing one's own life force, Prāṇa- *sādhanā*, Aghoreshwar says to Malang, a *faqīr* visiting him from Afghanistan

Prāṇa is the cause of all greatness. Only an unfamiliarity with it makes one a blind traveler on a long path, making people wander for great distances. This wandering and searching and curiosity come to an end when one becomes a natural part of an all-aware consciousness. That consciousness arises from the perseverant quest of the Prāṇa, and the body is the source of the Prāṇa, Malang. Immersion in the Prāṇa is an achievement of great value. After achieving this state the awareness of when it became morning, when it became evening, when it became night, when it got to be day, what is the date, what is the day, fades away. Achieving that state gives the person great thrill. (SSS 192:34, my translation).

The idea in this quote, to concentrate on the body as it is alive, through the medium of focus and knowledge of the Prāṇa, the life-force, sounds similar to what the Buddha tells his disciples about the mindfulness of the body. The Buddha, while expounding on the four principles of mindfulness, says this to explain the elements in the body:

Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.' Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at the crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body ...as consisting of elements thus: 'In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element and the air element.' (Ñanamoli & Bodhi 1995: 148).

Sarkar Baba, explaining the transience of the body to his disciple Darshi, says:

Darshi! The tired body mingles back into the five elements when the Prāṇa leaves it. Regard the Prāṇa as the fountainhead of knowledge. Without the Prāṇa a person will not be able to know either the world or its master. Only through the Prāṇa residing in the body can one get to know the world and its creator. (SSS 1982:36, my translation).

Further, he says to Darshi:

Darshi! Do you see Sambhav seeker. He has another name also called Saugat seeker. Do you know the meaning of this name? Anyone who wishes to understand the meaning of this name should understand and recognize the “dead” and the “fate of the dead”. Who does not know this fact? Without the Prāṇa in the body “dead” is the only appropriate description for it. (SSS 1982:15, my translation).

Here, Aghoreshwar gives a non-Buddhist interpretation to the word “saugat”, interpreting it as śava+gati, that is to say, a body that has been cleansed of its elemental impurities and since no desires, determinations or distractions arise in it, it is like a corpse, a śava. It is for this reason that he says to his disciple Sambhav to focus on the body, and the good deeds that can be performed by it:

Oh Sambhav! Physical form is a representation of the Divine Mother herself. I do not want to have the vessel of your body which is empty of you. Within the body itself is that great creativity cultivated. (Shukla 1982:9, my translation).

Clearly, the focus on the body is portrayed as crucial amongst Aghoreshwar too, as the Buddha does for his bhikkhus. Within the body, the Buddha describes the mindfulness of breathing to his bhikkhus in this manner:

...Here a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, sets his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he understands: ‘I breathe in long’; or breathing out long, he understands: ‘I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, he understands: ‘I breathe in short’; or breathing out short, he understands: ‘I breathe out short.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in tranquillising the bodily formation’; he trains thus: ‘I shall breathe out tranquillising the bodily formation.’”(Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:145-6).

Similar to this is what Sarkar Baba advises to his disciples:

One who sits in solitude, or if he gets concentrated even in a crowd, then watching the length, force and forms of his breath he can determine his tasks for the day very well. If the length of the breath is short then it is very good. If it is long, then the result will be very sorrowful. It can pull towards material indulgence. The shorter the length of the breath the better it is. If the breath stops within, then it will be even

more joyful. If the breath is flowing regularly, then what kinds of forms are taking place in it? (Ram 1991:247, my translation).

This is particularly illustrative in the Aghor context with reference to what the Buddha said about the mindfulness of the body. When an Aughaṛ resides in the cremation ground, he or she sees the ultimate fate of the body all around, and realizes that the sādhak's own body is no different. This brings about the understanding of non-attachment towards the body, yet an awareness of the bodily processes, including the breathing in and out process is cultivated as well. Once the sādhak is able to focus on this process, he or she becomes mindful of all other processes that the body entertains.

There is yet another similarity between Aughaṛs' and the Buddha's practices, one that is unique to the Aughaṛs as far as we know. The Buddha has clearly mentioned above about his ascetic practices that he would partake even of his own urine and excrement as long as it lasted. Aughaṛs are known to imbibe, similarly, their own urine and excrement during their *sādhana*. A passage in the book *Aughaṛ Bhagawān Rām* states:

'Amarī' should be used constantly. 'Vajrī', if it is not possible to use it all the time, should be used at least once in twenty-four hours. (Chaturvedi 1973:51, my translation).

Here, "amarī" is the Aughaṛ word for urine, and "vajrī" refers to excrement. An Aughaṛ ascetic uses his own waste materials in this way. The logic behind such practices is:

...these lead to a direct experience of God and respect to his powers, and the practitioner himself becomes effective with this. The practitioner who uses them becomes brave and unconquerable. It is clear that even when not practiced in *sādhana* the animal-like human being uses it for increasing agricultural production and does welfare to the world. (Chaturvedi 1973:51, my translation).

At least one perceptible effect of this practice is that it breaks the distinction between that which is beautiful and alluring, and that which is not. It also reflects the

transformation of matter through the body. The same object, so cherished when ingested through one end of the body, is perceived as disgusting at the other end. This Aghor practice breaks down the distinction between the lovely and the ugly in the starkest form. Of course, besides its psychological effect of producing non-distinction of categories, there does exist a notion of the physical effects of ingesting such substances on the gross body, as well as the subtle body. On more than one occasion I have been informed by practitioners that one's own fresh urine, if healthy, cures diseases, and urine which is boiled to a high degree of concentration enhances spiritual practice.<sup>26</sup> There also exists an elaborate school of urine therapy called "svarodaya vīgyān", but that seems to be a more modern development.

Another similarity between the Buddha's and Sarkar Baba's ascetic practice, while not exact, pertains to the Buddha's practice of coping with extreme heat and cold in adverse seasons. Sarkar Baba's practices were similar while residing near the village of Manihara near Banaras city:

At about ten-eleven in the morning Baba would come down from the macān. He would carry a stick in his hand, walk very fast, go into the village and cry, "Ma, give me roṭī (bread)." Baba would speak this and pass in front of all the houses, but he would not stop in front of any house. If someone put either dāl (lentils), or roṭī or jaggery in the bowl that he used to carry in his hand he would eat it even as he walked. He would eat himself, and also feed the group of eight or ten dogs that would follow him through the village. He would go with his food to a bamboo grove outside the village, eat what he needed to, and would throw the rest in the grove. The dogs of the village used to clean it up. Right next to it was a dry pond, like a dried field. There was not a single tree in it. In the hot, grueling mid-day sun of the month of Jeṭh (May-June), Baba would, without the speck of a shade, lie down on the ground in that pond, and cover himself with a sheet. He would cover himself up around 10 or so in the morning sometimes, and lie there all day long. He would get up around six in the evening when the sun set. Then he would go back to the macān. (Ram 2003:31, my translation).

Philosophical Tenets:

Besides these similarities in cremation ground and body related practices, there are similarities in the Buddha's philosophy and Aghor philosophy too. Wilson writes about three principles of Buddhist philosophy as:

In the eye of one with insight, all phenomena are impermanent (Sanskrit, *anitya*; Pali, *anicca*), characterized by dis-ease or suffering (Sanskrit, *duhkha*; Pali, *dukkha*), and without any abiding essence (Sanskrit, *anatman*; Pali, *anatta*). (Wilson 1996:10).

It was with the aim of showing a path to deliverance from suffering, that the Buddha taught his Dhamma of the four noble truths, namely, the noble truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the noble truth of the origin of suffering (*dukkhasamudāya*), the noble truth of the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodha*), and the noble truth of the way leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodhagāminī patipāda*) (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:25). Sorrow, in this frame, arises out of clinging to things that are impermanent (*aniccata*), and refers to every kind of conditioned state divided into five categories, viz. material form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*sannā*), mental formations (*sankhāra*), and consciousness (*vinnāna*). (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:27) Those who cling to impermanence are condemned by such clinging to “wander on in the cycle of repeated existence, *samsāra*, in which each turn brings them the suffering of new birth, ageing, illness, and death.” (Ñānamoli & Bodhi 1995:25). Together with impermanence and suffering, the Buddha talked about the non-self (*anatta*). Simply stated, since everything in the body, mind, feeling, perception etc. is impermanent, and subject to the laws of dissolution of the elements (earth, water, fire and air), clinging to any element in terms of an everlasting element of personality is a folly, for everything changes, and nothing survives dissolution. The notion of an everlasting Self, then, is a result of ignorance.

Aghor philosophy, on the other hand, subscribes to the Shaiva-Shakta tradition.

However, the Aghor form of Shiva that is mentioned in the Vedas is regarded by Baba Kinaram as non-dependent, *nirālamb*, where the *jivātmā* and *paramātmā* become one without any duality (Chaturvedi 1973:35). Kinaram has also used the word *niranjan*, imperceptible, for the same non-dependent conception of Brahma. Here, the visible world is regarded as a fiction of understanding, generated by the forces of illusion, *māyā*, and form, *upādhi* (Chaturvedi 1973:36). There is also some evidence of the conception of incarnation of the Brahma, *avatār*, in Kinaram's writings. Chaturvedi writes:

Kinaram Ji has said aja (unknown, unborn, omnipotent), taintless, omnipresent, unperceivable by mind, intellect or word, non-dependent Brahma took the triguṇātmaka (imbued with three characters of sattva, rajas and tamas) form by its own desire and despite being one, became many. (Chaturvedi 1973:37 gloss added).

In this perceived world, therefore, *māyā* (illusion) is what colors all perception, giving it a semblance of solidity where none exists, because everything that exists is transient, dying, and ephemeral. All instruments of perception reside in the aggregate instrument of perception, the body, and the body itself is subject to dissolution. To borrow from Chaturvedi again:

In this body there are five senses of perception (eyes, ears, tongue, skin and nose), five senses of action (hands, feet, anus, genitive organ, and the mouth), and one antahkaraṇa (the place of origination of thought, emotion, and consciousness). This antahkaraṇa has four aspects, man (cognitive instrument), buddhi (intellect or thought instrument), citta (intuitive instrument) and ahaṃkāra (ego instrument). In the man resides the hṛdaya (mind) which inspires and illuminates all the senses. Kinaram, analysing objects of the senses, has said that man is based on Prāṇa (the life force), Prāṇa is based on śvās (breath), śvās is based on śabd-brahm (the world conceived as created by the word or sound-vibration), and the Brahma is based on its own natural form. Brahma is everlasting and indestructible, but the body is changing and destructible. The state of the body is as momentary as that of a drop of dew. (Chaturvedi 1973:40, gloss added).

Like the Buddhists, Aughaṛs also regard a fixation on the objects of the senses, therefore, to be a folly in that all form changes and ends, to cling to it, therefore, leads to a waste of time that life provides for investigating one's real nature. Desire for objects of the senses is what ties one to this world, and a freedom from objects of the senses, desire, is what frees one from the clutches of illusion, and leads to a perception of reality.

Anand, an Aughaṛ saint, is quoted by Chaturvedi to illustrate the nature of this bondage as depicted in a series of questions and answers:

Who is the one who is impoverished? One who is full of desire.  
 Who is the one who is wealthy? One who is content.  
 Who is the one who is blind? One who is blinded by lust.  
 What is ordure? Criminal behaviour and notoriety.  
 Who is an enemy? Our own senses. (Chaturvedi 1973:41, my translation).

However, since the entire creation is a result of the one Brahma willing that one to be many, what exists in the Brahmāṇḍa (the cosmic egg), also exists in the Piṇḍa (the body). While objects of desire lure one's senses out of the body to perceive the external world, thus continuing the bondage of the persons to objects of the senses, once an Aughaṛ yogi shuts the senses to external perception and turns them inside, within the body, that one, indivisible reality becomes evident as clearly as "a fruit in the palm of one's hand," *hastāmalak* (*Emblica officinalis* in the palm of one's hand). The scenario is quite reminiscent of the Buddha's own moment of enlightenment, and the four weeks he spent wandering from tree to tree, enjoying the discovery, within himself, of perception of the reality that is not perceivable by the senses.

The Social Realm:

These instances cited above, pertain only to general practices of Aughaṛ ascetics with reference to their dwelling in the cremation grounds, wearing clothes made from pieces

of shrouds or refuse rags, and to their performance of meditative practices in the cremation ground. There are other instances available in this literature, especially from the life of Sarkar Baba, which denote the emergence of a mental state very similar to what the Buddha had to say about his mental state during his period of *sādhanā*.

Referring back to the Buddha's statement that cowherd-boys used to bother him, poke him with sticks and urinate on him, yet he felt no anger towards them, we find similar instances in the life of Aghoreshwar Bhagawan Ram:

When Baba used to walk between Manihara and Hariharpur villages, he would stop for a day or two at Daulatpur village in between. There was a small fortress in Daulatpur. Village people had put a small thatch hut next to it for him. Sarkar would stop there... Some dogs would always follow him around. The village children who were into pranks would throw stones at Baba when he would walk by. Of those who threw stones at him, two or three are still alive such as Lalbahadur Singh, Lallan Sharma, Ramautar Singh. They told me that when we would throw stones at Baba, for a couple of days Baba did not say anything. But after that, he called us. And he gave laddoos (Indian Sweets) equal to the number of stones each of us had thrown at him, respectively. The boy who had thrown two stones, got two laddoos, the boy who had thrown three, got three. (Ram 2003:32, my translation).

Much has been written about the fact that the Buddha did not accept caste distinctions, and at least within the order of his sangha, all members were treated as equal. This is the foundation of the Aghor way of life too, who do not believe in the caste system, and in fact, eschew all thoughts of duality or category distinctions. They regard all human beings as equal, and what is more, instead of just paying lip service to this notion, they actually practice it in real life. Sarkar Baba also held the Buddha and Buddhist philosophy in great respect. Later in his life when he started a social service organization by the name of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, he not only practiced indifference to caste and gender categories, he spoke of collective activities of the institution on special occasions, as to be performed by a Sangha.

To exemplify the Buddha's view of the caste system, Chattopadhyaya quotes

Rhys Davids:

In the first place, as regards his own Order, over which alone he had complete control, he ignores completely and absolutely all advantages or disadvantages arising from birth, occupation, and social status, and sweeps away all barriers and disabilities arising from the arbitrary rules of ceremonial or social impurity. (Chattopadhyaya 1959:460).

Further, he cites Oldenberg quoting the Buddha as:

In the supreme perfection in wisdom and righteousness... there is no reference to the question either of birth, or of lineage or of the pride which says: 'You are held as worthy as I,' or 'You are not held as worthy as I.' It is where the talk is of marrying, or of giving in marriage, that reference is made to such things as that. For whosoever, Ambatha, are in bondage to the notions of birth or of lineage, or to the pride of social position, or of connection by marriage, they are far from the best wisdom and righteousness. It is only by having got rid of all such bondage that one can realise for himself that supreme perfection in wisdom and in conduct. (Chattopadhyaya 1959:460).

In the book *Viveksār*, Baba Kinaram explains to his disciple that a follower of this Avadhūt path does not observe the distinctions of varṇāśrama dharma, speaks truth, meditates on the seed mantra given by the guru, and remains aloof from the distinctions of caste, creed, family and actions (Singh 2001:63).<sup>27</sup> Sarkar Baba also says:

In the entire world one is a saint by one's actions, and one is a thief by one's actions. One is a priest and a scholar by action, one is a warrior and ruler by action, and one is a person who does service to others, by action. (Ram 1991:48, my translation).

And further:

Most of our ills are generated by (succumbing to belief in) the categories of caste and class. Because of this burden many people of the Hindu society are not able to achieve their full physical and mental potential. (Ram 1991:50, my translation).

Again:

The person who ends his sense of duality and distinction becomes God. As long as distinctions and differences, of pure and impure remain, he does not achieve divine energy. (Ram 1991:56, my translation).

I could compile more such statements but I think these examples suffice to illustrate the point. Parry does raise the question whether such a teaching is relevant only for the ascetic, or for all men. Personal observation however, confirms that for a true Aghori, to subscribe to the notion of caste distinctions is to remain tied down to an intellect of category distinctions, and for liberation, it is essential to practice what the Aghori preaches. To quote Parry:

If... Aghori doctrine poses questions about the ultimate legitimacy of the social order, there is a rather different way in which their practice reinforces this message of doubt. In orthodox caste society, polluting contacts between castes must be eliminated in order to preserve the boundaries of the group, for which... the boundaries of the body serve as a metaphor. The Aghori's inversion of the same symbols of body margins implies exactly the opposite message. With the destruction of boundaries entailed by the consumption of flesh, excrement and so on, goes an affirmation of the irrelevance of caste boundaries. (Parry 1982:99).

### Conclusion

The conclusion we have arrived at is that the similarities and overlaps in the *sādhanā* practices of the Buddhist and Aghor traditions might point to common origins, or they may indicate a history of interactions over the centuries. However, the understanding of meanings attributed to these practices of the 6<sup>th</sup> century Buddha and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Aghor ascetic, may have developed on different tracks despite arising from the same source.

Two objections can be made here. First, that the nature of the Buddha's use of the cremation ground and the use that Aghor ascetics make of the cremation ground are very different. While both of them go to the cremation ground, one simply looks at a corpse and meditates on that vision, the other can even manipulate the corpse for meditation.

From my point of view, the two sets of practices have the same root. In fact, one can say

that they lie on a continuum. The Buddhist ascetic may only look at the corpse, but the difference for an Auḡar ascetic is only of degree. As Wilson has pointed out, Buddhaghosa was careful to stress the choice of the appropriate kind of corpse for meditation by the Buddhist monk because, if, instead of generating disgust the corpse generated sensual ideas in the monk, the practice could backfire (Wilson 1996:16). Buddhaghosa, we presume, had to point this out because such an event must have occurred, perhaps regularly, with the Buddhist monks. For the Auḡar ascetic, disgust or attraction are not a matter for consideration at all. A corpse is, in their worldview, made from elements that create the rest of the universe, and so any strong feeling towards it is immaterial. Chhotay Babu's experience with the corpse of the dead woman narrated above (p. 91) illustrates this, because a corpse is a corpse, gender distinction becomes immaterial in this case.

Continuing with our discussion on the Pali Canon, the second objection can be raised that not all scholars believe the Pali Canon can be used to reconstruct an adequate biography of the Buddha. Certainly, there is enough evidence to point to the contrary. Schopen makes a strong case that the "canonical" material was used by a "small atypical part of the Buddhist community" to inculcate an ideal (Schopen 1991:3). The actual reality may have been quite different. Schopen lucidly makes a case for studying epigraphic and archaeological evidence to construct an actual history of Buddhism, rather than relying on canonical material, as colonial scholars seem to have done. Even Gombrich, who believes in the historical authenticity of the Pali Canon writes of the Mahāsihanāda Sutta:

I have the impression that later Buddhists have been chary of quoting this passage. Unlike the Padhana Sutta, the Mahā Sihanāda Sutta does not claim that

these practices led to Enlightenment; but on the other hand the Buddha does not say in the latter text that he was wrong to do them, only that they were ineffective... On the contrary, he seems to be boasting. The author of the text is saying, as it were: ‘Anything your guru can do, ours has done better.’ (Gombrich 1996:78-9).

In a sense, this represents a posturing by the Buddhists in debates with non-Buddhists. It may very well be, but as Collins has asserted, “to banish Pali texts from the civilizational history in Southern Asia would be in its own way unrealistic, and self-defeating.” (Collins 1998:76). This is important for two reasons. First, that we know Pali Canon was written down sometime in early first century B.C. (Collins 1998:54), and therefore, has a right to be examined as an historical artifact (Wynne 2003:11).<sup>28</sup> Second, Pali Canon is a collective work which was written down over many centuries, and what exists in these texts exists because a decision was made by those constructing the texts, to do so very consciously (Collins 1998:78). Therefore, what exists in the Pali Canon is there with conscious intent, whether it constitutes a true historical record or not, is another question.<sup>29</sup> My contention is that the Pali Canon portrays the Buddha as having gone through those practices, and hence, the existence of such practices before the time the Pali texts were written, and the use of such practices by the Buddhist monks, cannot be discounted. Whether the Buddha actually undertook such practices is a question that requires more elaborate consideration. Space limitations prevent me from dealing with this issue at length here.

And then again, there is the possibility of situations existing where one tradition or group, through their interactions with the other, borrows elements of ritual or philosophy, and either modifies it while accepting it, or accepts it wholesale without much modification at all. As Schaeffer (2002) shows in his article on the attainment of immortality, Tibetan Buddhist tradition has adopted what appears to be a Natha text

penned by Avadhutachandra, a text which delineates not the accomplishment of a perfect body through various yogic practices, but also the concept of *Jivanmukti*, the idea of being liberated while still in the physical body, an idea that is foreign to the Buddhist tradition. As he writes:

It was this faith, perhaps, that led to the embrace of the *Amritasiddhi* teachings in Tibet, to the birth of a Tibetan Buddhist Śiva, immortal and living liberated in the Himalayas.

... Where, when, and how this transformation occurred are not at all clear at the moment, and a continuing historical and literary investigation of this process will add to our developing picture of Indian and Tibetan religious interaction in the early part of the last millennium.

... In broad terms, perhaps the study of doctrinally slippery instances of Indian and Tibetan religious practice and thought such as this can contribute to the current shift away from talk of “Buddhism” as a reified and neatly definable object of study from which we can exclude certain ideas, practices, or people based on a rigid taxonomy of identifying features, and toward a focus upon specific instances of groups defining themselves as Buddhists – groups whose notions of religious identity were based upon regionally and temporally localized practices, literatures, and personal encounters – as well as their strategies of definition, delimitation, and inclusion. Thus for Pad ma ‘od zer and other readers of Avadhūtacandra’s work, to be a Buddhist was, among other things (and perhaps only in the context of this practice in particular), to strive to be Śiva, lord of yogins. (Schaeffer 2002:515-533).

If my point made earlier is correct, that *sāadhanā* influences the philosophical superstructure of the belief system, and that the belief system employs particular kinds of *sāadhanā* to reinforce its understanding, then there certainly are differences in the practices of the 6<sup>th</sup> century Buddha and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Aughaṛ ascetic. The Buddha was, perhaps, trying to understand himself and to explain to his Bhikkhus the transient, ephemeral and ultimately distasteful nature of the body, and to convey that an attachment or identification with such an eternally changing object was futile. The 21<sup>st</sup> century Aughaṛ uses the same elements of such a *sāadhanā* for similar purposes, that is to say, to realize the transient and ephemeral nature of the body which generates so much attachment. But after this the philosophical superstructure, and hence the understanding

of the nature of reality, changes. In Aghor practice, the form, the body, the *śava*, is inert unless it is embraced by Shakti, the energy, the principle that animates it. One's own body, then, becomes the focal point at which such energy can be cultivated. Once this energy is cultivated it leads to a state of being which transcends the normal fate of any body, that of birth, death and rebirth. The notion of birth, death and rebirth are present in Buddhism too, the Jātaka stories attest to that, and the Buddha, by using his body for meditation, reached a state of consciousness and enlightenment where he transcended the normal fate of the body, that is, of birth, death and rebirth. The *sāadhanā* and the ultimate goal of the two traditions are thus the same, although the beliefs which energize them are different.

<sup>1</sup> Śrī Parvata is renowned to have been a stronghold of Tantra, inhabited especially by the Shaiva sects of Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas.

<sup>2</sup> Charpentier thought Makkhali Gosāla's father was a mendicant bearing a picture board of Shiva (Basham 2002[1951]:36). *Bhagavatī Sūtra* (a Jain scripture) mentions the same about Gosāla, that he was a *maṅkha*, with a picture board in his hand (Basham 2002[1951]:37).

<sup>3</sup> Śarabhaṅga Ṛṣi's description in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, however, is not that of a shaved-head ascetic. The description of the moment when he enters the yogic fire of self-immolation portrays the fire as consuming his "down, hair, old skin, bones, flesh and blood" (Vālmīki 1998:V:40).

<sup>4</sup> After Śarabhaṅga Ṛṣi's self-immolation, a whole host of ascetics present there gather around Rama. These included, "Vaikhānasas, and Vālakhilyas, and Samprakṣālas (who wash their utensils after meals), Marīcipas (who live on the sun's or moon's rays), Aśmakuṭṭas (who powdered grains by stones),... Patrāhāras (ascetics living on leaves), Dantolūkhlas (who use their teeth as mortar and pestle), Unmajjakas (who perform penance in neck-deep water),... Gātraśaiyyās (those who use limbs of the body alone for bed),... Aśaiyyās (those without a bed),... Anavakāśikas (those enjoying no respite from their religious observances),... Salilāhāras (sages who live on water alone), Vāyubhakṣas (those who live on air alone),... Akāśanilayas (those having only the sky as their roof), Sthaṅḍilāśāyīs Urdhvavāsis (those sleeping on the altar),... Ārdrapaṭavāsas (those dwelling on high altitudes), given to Japa (those performing Japa)" (Vālmīki 1998:VI:2-6, emphasis and gloss added).

<sup>5</sup> Gombrich writes that in the beginning, on hearing this, the Buddha sounds extremely annoyed. He also writes "...the tone of the entire text is such that I wonder whether one can read it as the Buddha's own words. The text is devoted to stressing the Buddha's extraordinariness, so that it reads as part of a debate on whether the Buddha was basically a normal human being." (Gombrich 2002:28 fn 2).

<sup>6</sup> "...Charnel fields are all but nonexistent in today's Buddhist world, so contemporary Buddhist meditators in Thailand and Sri Lanka have turned to the autopsy room as an alternate place for apprehending the foulness of dead bodies." (Wilson 1996:195 n. 6)

<sup>7</sup> Yosadara tells Rahul not to become a monk or he will have to "...collect discarded rags of a slave-girl from the cemetery..." (Jones 1949, Vol. III: 252).

<sup>8</sup> See Chattopadhyaya, 1959, and Mittal, 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, J.J., 1949. *Mahavastu*, Vol. II, P. 114, footnote 8.

<sup>10</sup> Chattopadhyaya (1959:1) mentions ancient Indian materialism as "Lokayata," the philosophy of the people, as also the philosophy of this worldliness. Mittal (1974:2), presents it in opposition to spiritualism.

<sup>11</sup> *Brahmaṇiṣṭha Pādyā* was one of the first books published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, a social service society started by Baba Bhagwan Ram, delineating the philosophy of Aghor.

<sup>12</sup> See Pandey (1984) and Ram (2003).

<sup>13</sup> *Jaṭā* refers to the matted hair that Indian yogis have. It is usually very long, matted, and is worn as a bun on the head, though not necessarily. *Jaṭā* is a symbol of asceticism. In fact, it is the symbol of an ascetic par excellence. It reflects non-attachment to material life, a certain "roughness" in one's appearance that denotes spirituality. Clearly, child Bhagwan would not have had matted hair, but he had a long lock of hair, and thus his name, Jaṭulī, one who has a *jaṭā*.

<sup>14</sup> *Satsaṅg* refers to spending time in the company of saints and listening to religious discourses.

<sup>15</sup> *Kīrtan* refers to devotional songs.

<sup>16</sup> Meenakshi Hindi English Dictionary describes it as, "a mixture of turmeric and lime powder used for auspicious purposes." Rori, or Roli as it is sometimes known, is red in color, and is often used to put the red mark on the forehead after worship.

<sup>17</sup> Most *sadhus* consecrate food. It includes sprinkling water on the food, or around it as a purificatory rite, and speaking mantras. Consecrating in a Vaishnav tradition means sprinkling water on it with basil leaves and chanting *mantras* from texts devoted to God Vishnu.

<sup>18</sup> It is customary in Kashi to perform ablutions in the Ganges before going into the Vishwanath temple.

<sup>19</sup> Dhoti is a garment that is made of a plain white length of cloth, which can be worn in many different ways. Usually, it is tied around the waist as one would tie a bed-sheet, and then wrapped and tucked in intricate ways.

<sup>20</sup> Meenakshi Hindi Angrezi Kosh defines the word *acyut* as “1. Not fallen, not deviating. 2. Infallible,” Meenakshi Prakashan, India, 1990. In yogic terms, however, the word signifies the state when none of the worldly illusions affect the person. In essence, his seed does not fall.

<sup>21</sup> The words *ūrdhvaretā* and *ūrdhvaḡāmi*, again, in yogic terminology refer to the rise of energy from the base of one’s spine towards the crown of the head, rather than flowing down, as happens naturally.

<sup>22</sup> Fried bread, Indian style. Unleavened dough is rolled out in a circle, then deep fried till it puffs up. Exquisite!

<sup>23</sup> An Indian sweet that looks like a pancake, but is smaller, much harder, almost harder than a crisp cookie, but of a similar size.

<sup>24</sup> White, P. 94, “...the “Nine Nāths” of Konkana converted from Buddhism to Hinduism after the collapse of their monastery.”

<sup>25</sup> Briggs (1982[1938]:10) provides a legend for this: “Once two *siddhas* (perfect yogis) tried to split the ears of a candidate who had been at Hing Laj; but they found that the slits closed as fast as they were made. So they gave up the attempt. Since then Aghars have dispensed with the custom.

<sup>26</sup> *kācē amarī nāsē rog, pākē amarī bāṛhai jog.*

<sup>27</sup> *varaṇāśram ko bhēd na rākhai, bāni satya sahaj so bhākhē.*

*saham śabd samujhi so gahaī, jāti pānti kul karma ko dahaī.*

<sup>28</sup> Wynne notes Norman’s point that “the Pali canon contains no definite evidence for a substantial amount of Sinhalese Prakrit... it seems quite clear that after the Tipitaka was written down in the first century B.C., it was not substantially altered, at least in content, and as such, it must have been very similar to the extant Pali Canon. This means that the Suttapitaka in existence today can be taken as an accurate record of Buddhist thought from the time of the Buddha (c. 484-404 B.C.) until the first century B.C. at the latest” (Wynne 2003:11).

<sup>29</sup> Wynne, P. 22ff, demonstrates that at least some of the details of Buddha’s biography as found in the Pali Canon is an accurate historical record by showing Buddha’s interactions with his two gurus, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta (Wynne 2003:22ff).

## Chapter 4

### **Sarkar Baba's Language – Colloquialism, Universalism and Guru Particularism**

So far I have looked at the Aghor tradition from a historical and comparative point of view, treating it as a religious tradition at par with other such traditions in India. In this chapter I focus on Sarkar Baba's manner of communication, his language, his body language, the topics that he talked about either privately or publicly, and the skills his audience needed to understand him. The purpose of this exercise is to put into perspective the link between Sarkar Baba's words and his practice. Although each saint has a unique personality, this could be helpful in generalizing the anticipation of behavior from saints of this tradition.

There is another kind of association that can be made here. This one refers to the more recent history of India, and how colonial influences shaped the tenor of modern Hinduism. Some scholars believe that the historical reality of colonialism ushered in an era of modernity which gave rise to Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism is not the topic of this chapter, it will be covered in the next one, but what it gave rise to has relevance for the way people began to see and understand Hinduism. An outcome of Hindu modernism as a reaction to colonialism was the rise of what scholars call Hindu universalism. It is with this idea, the nature and practice of Hinduism in particular, and religion in general, in connection with social cohesiveness, that I look at in this chapter through Sarkar Baba's modes of communication, and how Sarkar Baba's life and philosophy stands in relation to that.

It is almost a truism that realized saints have a universal message. This universal message, though, is different from the creation of religion particular universalism, such as

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Hindu universalism or Christian universalism. For example, writing about Keshabchandra Sen (1836-1886), a Brahmo Samaj leader, van der Veer points out that Sen was a universalist who introduced Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa to the wider world through his publications, creating a Hindu universalism in the process:

It is crucial to realize, however, that Keshabchandra was also a universalist who wanted to bring all religions together and that Ramakrishna was an unorthodox ascetic with a desire to transcend and transgress narrow boundaries of Hinduism. What we also have in this meeting, then, is the creation of a Hindu universalism. (Veer 2001:46).

This universalism was a product of the constructed contrast between “Hindu spirituality” and “western materialism”, and the defense of Hindu spirituality against colonial modernity. This defense led Swami Dayananda to imagine a Veda-based history of India and Hinduism, and Swami Vivekananda to propagate a “practical Vedanta.” This propagation had another consequence, that of the caste-and-race-based conception of Hindu Aryanism (Veer 2001:48). Further, Peter van den Veer quotes Romila Thapar's writing on Hinduism:

...Romila Thapar has argued that in the India of the 1980s there is a political attempt to restructure the indigenous Hindu religions... to a “syndicated Hinduism” that is a monolithic, uniform religion, paralleling some of the features of Semitic religions like Christianity and Islam. She rightly connects the current of Hindutva movement in India to the nineteenth-century Hindu response to “missionary activity and Christian colonial power.” Revivalist movements, like the Arya Samaj, discovered in Hinduism a monotheistic God, a Book, and congregational worship. This is a substantial transformation of a set of polytheistic traditions with a great variety of scriptures, none of which is really dominant, and domestic and temple worship that is only seldom congregational. What these movements wanted to create is a modern Hinduism that is respectable in the eyes of the world (monotheistic and text-based) and that can be the basis for a morality of acting in the world (secular) as in Mohandas Gandhi's use of the Bhagavadgita as the foundational text for social work (*karma-yoga* and *seva*). (Veer 2001:27).

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Sarkar Baba's life and message could not be further from this model. He was not a proponent of Hindu Aryanism, or practical Vedantism, or "syndicated Hinduism." Unlike Swami Dayananda who, according to Veer (2001:50), regarded existing Hinduism as degenerate, for Sarkar Baba Hinduism existed in its rich variety at the very grassroots level where *grāmadevatās*, tree spirits, shrines of saints, local variations of pan-Indian deities, all existed in their own right, and with equal harmony, with the predominant deity worshipped in the regional temple. He did not practice monotheism in the sense that if he established a temple for Shiva or Kali, he would also establish a temple with equal facility for Krishna-Govinda. If he conducted a *Rudra-mahā-yajñya*, he could, and also did, conduct a *Viśṇu-yajñya* (Sinha 1988:47). While he did believe in, and talk about, the ultimate Brahma, he never talked about Brahma as the ultimate entity to be worshipped. Rather, he used the word *Īśvar*, or *Bhagavān*, or *Bhagavatī* in his speeches to refer to that which Hindus call divine, terms which are in everyday use in Hindu households. Neither was he ever the least bit concerned about presenting Hinduism only so that it could look "respectable in the eyes of the world."

In several of his speeches Baba actually criticized the caste-based "Brahmanism" which frequently passed as Hinduism, and he certainly did not adhere to any single text as the authority for Hinduism. While he was fond of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, he could cite instances from the *Gītā* or *Mahābhārata* to make his point with equal facility, he would talk about *Śiva Purāṇa* and the *Devī Bhāgavat* to elucidate his discourses. They all existed on par for him; none was any greater than the other. In fact, harking back to practical yogic traditions, he believed in knowledge gained from experience, not from

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just reading of the scriptures. This passage from *Aghor Guru Guh* illustrates this point where he talks about the knowledge gained from scriptures and various philosophies:

Oh, the pitcher that is full of water does not make noise. Sambhav, have you thought that way. And there is a reason for your thinking the way you are. You want to gather tatters and stitch them together into a cloak. Glaring patches will be visible everywhere! From outside these patches will be easily seen. From inside you will remain cold and miserable. By wearing a cloak stitched from tatters you can feel little warmth only. Sambhav! I know all the scriptures and sacred books are mere tatters. They are not whole cloth. Oh, you can see it clearly, every place shows a glaring patch. Such a stitching of patches will rip easily under pressure. You will find many seekers behave childishly in this way, and their thoughts crumbling under pressure. (SSS, 1982:9, my translation).

Sarkar Baba had this in common with the Radhasoami, he was always skeptical of pedantism in religion, for, while displaying the learned erudition of the protagonist, it did not, ultimately, shed light on the ultimate nature of the truth, which was more a matter of experience than anything else. To him, *prāṇa* (the life-force) was not something to read about; it was something to observe, and communicate with. But there was one thing which was common to his view and those of the evangelicals and Utilitarians of colonial times, that of “relocation of cultural value from belief and dogma to language, experience and history” (Veer 2001:42). Sarkar Baba did not want his devotees to accept anything on the basis of blind faith, but to actually examine it in the context of their own experience, and what history had shown to them. In that sense his was a very grounded and practical view of learning and practicing religion. This could lead to the fruition of potential for perfection in every human being so they could rise to godhood, but he did not resort to the example of a “perfect man” like Krishna, as argued for by nationalists like Bankimchandra.

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However, each saint also exhibits what can be called Guru Particularism. Most scholars would agree that to look at Hinduism and its various disparate traditions, we need to look at the guru traditions that have continued throughout Indian history and that have imparted to it the particular mantle it wears today. Whether it be the Tibetan Buddhist gurus practicing in the cremation grounds, or Gorakhnath or Dattatreya as proponents of Shaivism or Shaktism, or even Kabir, Raidas or Rahim, each having a certain following because of what they taught, and more importantly, *how* they taught it to their disciples. This is what constitutes guru particularism, because broadly, even different traditions like Buddhism and Shaktism have common strands owing to interactions over history. Guru particularism is especially influenced by the understanding of the guru as being able to mediate across boundaries in a dynamic way, including those between juxtaposed historical traditions, as I have discussed in the first chapter citing Turner's characterizations of liminality. Guru particularism is important to understand because it lends itself to variegated explanations of the same social truths differently in different times and places, as will be evident in the following pages of this chapter as I discuss Sarkar Baba's speech and practice.

These facets of Sarkar Baba's practice come out clearly in the language he used while talking with various kinds of people. It is for this reason that I am making his speech – whether published in books or in newsletters – as well as data gathered from field work and personal observation, the main fulcrum of this chapter. It is here that one can see the relationship of different traditions in his speech, as well as his thoughts about spiritual practice and social cohesiveness. Just like his lifestyle of absolute freedom, sometimes it seemed to me that Sarkar Baba's language, too, was a prime example of

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absolute freedom – unrestrained by the rules of grammar, unconstrained in what he could say, and always with his own stamp of communicative ability inherent within it. Sarkar Baba always exhorted those who would listen to him to break free of the shackles that bind human beings with notions of caste, class, region, language and religion. As he expresses his views on religious books and language in the book *Aghor Guru Guh*:

No scripture can be regarded as given by god. If a scripture is regarded as given by god, then its language should also be divine. Understandable language is not the same the world over, all the time and everywhere. Ancient Bible is in Ibrani language, new Bible is in Yunani language, Quran Sharif is in Arabic, Zend-Avesta in Pahalavi language, the Vedas in the vedic language, and Gita is in Sanskrit language. People of every religion consider their own language to be the language of god. A cause of strife amongst believers of different faiths has been language too. If religion is a heritage of language and country, then its god also belongs to only one country. If we burden others with something, how can we be free of the sins accrued by it? (SSS 1982:iv, my translation).

Further, as if anticipating the curiosity that people had about the language of Aghars, Sarkar Baba highlights the use of a special kind of language used by saints in India, calling it *sadhukarī* (the speech of saints):

The unmatched words and letters of Aghoreshwars and Aghars do not make a language. From Malabar till Kashmir, and in Assam, Orissa, even Madras, the words of Aghar-Aghoreshwars are known as the *sadhukarī* speech (SSS 1982:iv, my translation).

As I reflect back on my interactions with Sarkar Baba, as well as how I saw others communicating with him, I will have to parse his manner of communication into several different categories. This categorization is needed especially because of the kind of content Sarkar Baba's messages used to have while talking to different people. These categories can be delineated as i) the manner and language of his communication in the books published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, including the manner and language of the way he communicated with his disciples who were initiated into the Aghor path; ii) the

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manner and language of his communication at public gatherings where he was required to make formal speeches; iii) the manner and language of his communication while chatting informally with visitors; and iv) the manner and language of his communication with other saints, whether they belonged to the Aghor tradition or not.

Examples of the first and second manners of communication, those with his initiated disciples and those at public gatherings, can easily be referenced from a number of publications of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, the books referenced in this dissertation, and especially the Hindi newsletter titled *Sarveshwari Times*. Examples of the third manner of communication, that of informal conversation with visitors, are provided here from my fieldwork notes. The fourth manner of communication, that with other saints, I have seen with his own guru, as well as with a few visitors to the ashram when I was present there. I also heard stories about such conversations during my fieldwork, and those stories are what I will present as data. The first manner of communication is the easiest source to look at, as presented in his books.

##### **Talking with Initiated Disciples: The Books and what they say**

One of the tasks I performed (and still do) for the ashram, is to attempt a translation of books authored by Sarkar Baba, and published by Shri Sarveshwari Samooh. I qualify my effort in this field with the word “attempt” because while at the first glance the text of the book may appear quite straightforward, when one begins to translate it, there seem to appear, as it were, hidden meanings and images that, if looked at carefully, would amount to “reading into” the text and require considerable more research in the context and

history of the ideas presented than a mere translation of them. I provide here a series of examples to illustrate this point.

a). *Sahaja*:

There is an innocuous statement to his disciple Darshi in the book *Aghor Guru Guh* that Sarkar Baba makes, explaining to him the rise of equanimity in a seeker's mind:

Darshi! You know that the absence of virtue (*punya*) is sin (*pāp*) and the absence of sin is virtue. And where both sin and virtue are absent, that condition is described as a consciousness free of illusions (*prapañca rahit citta*). In such a consciousness does a wholesome mind (*samyak citta*) arise. Darshi! It is also known as knowledge of the *Prāṇa* [life-force] (*prāṇamaya bodh*). Make an effort and you will get to know it. Be very careful about time (*samaya*). The divine-nature (*parā prakṛti*) is not easy to reach (*sugam*), but it is entirely natural [innate or effortless] (*sahaja*). (SSS 1982:13-14, gloss added, my translation).

From a native Hindi speaker's point of view there are words in this statement that are commonplace, such as *punya* (virtue), *pāp* (sin), *samaya* (time), *sugam* (easy to reach), and *sahaja* (natural or innate). There are some words which are high register yet not difficult to understand, such as *prapañca rahit citta* (consciousness free of illusions) and *prāṇamaya bodh* (knowledge of the *Prāṇa* [life-force]). And then there are words whose meaning is not easily apparent, such as *samyak citta* (wholesome mind), and *parā prakṛti* (divine-nature). The meanings for the word *samyak* in the *Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (2008) range from entire, whole, complete, all together, correct, accurate, proper, true, uniform, same, identical to pleasant and agreeable. Similarly, the word *citta* has the range of meanings: attending, observing, thinking, reflecting, imagining, thought, intention, aim, wish, the heart, mind, memory, etc. From the context of the statement I have translated it as “a wholesome mind,” although it could equally be “a balanced mind” or “mind full of equanimity.” This will be especially so if

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we consider the Buddhist meaning of *samyak*, as in the expression *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, where the word means right, correct, true, accurate, complete or perfect (SGI 2010). The word *prakṛti* in *parā prakṛti* is easier to translate, being understood almost universally as nature, but the whole term *parā prakṛti* is difficult to translate because of its specific usage in different religious-philosophical contexts. For example, the seventh chapter of the *Bhagvadgītā* (7.4-5)<sup>1</sup> enunciates it as a superior energy (*Bhagvadgita* 1989), the spark of existence within everyone, as opposed to *aparā prakṛti*, which forms the physical matter of existence (*Bhagvadgita* 1908, 1907, 1893). *Parā prakṛti* is variously understood as the *jīva* (Janardana 2005), the spirit, the life-force, the shakti, or, according to Shri Aurobindo, the supreme spiritual nature of being (Aurobindo 1942:265). Goddess Kali, as the *nirguṇa* Devi or shakti, is also thought of as *parā prakṛti* (Chopra 2008:129). Within the corpus of Power Tantras (Shakti Tantras) or the cult of the Triad (Trika) exist three goddesses – *Parā*, *Parāparā* and *Aparā*, where *Parā* is the central goddess – white, beautiful and benevolent, worshipped in her higher aspect as Mātṛsadbhāva (Essence of the Mothers) (Sanderson 1988:672-4). One could rightfully wonder, is Sarkar Baba referring to the nature of the goddess *Parā*, or goddess Kali, in the statement above.

With such a plethora of meanings available for the translator to consider, the act of translation becomes more of interpretation than mere translation. Leaving aside the complexity of certain of the terms used, a simple statement like “*parā prakṛti sugam nahīn sahaja hai*” (*parā prakṛti* is not easy to attain, but it is innate) leaves one wondering if Sarkar Baba is using this word in its most common usage of natural or innate, or is he pointing to something more esoteric, something of a deeper innate value

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for his initiated disciple and its relevance for the course of his practices, by using the word *sahaja*. With reference to my discussion in chapter two of the exchanges between Aghaṛs and other religious practitioners, we may recall that the word *sahaja* can indicate the ritual practices and consequent psychological states reached by the Nath yogis, or Buddhist practitioners, or even Vaishnava adepts! (see chapter two). I dwell on this word here for a reason. It occurs at least seven times<sup>2</sup> in Baba Kinaram's *Vivēksār* (Kinaram 1973, 2001) I dealt with at length in chapter two. In some of those usages, the meaning is clearly that of “innate, natural, simple or easy” such as in verses 211 (*bānī satya sahaja sō bhākhai* [he speaks the truth naturally, or, he speaks the truth, and his speech is easy to understand]), 255 (*ātam rakṣā cāra vidhi hai śiṣ sahaja subodha* [disciple, self-protection through four means is easily understood]), 256 (*dayā darad jo sahajehi pāvō* [the compassion and pain that I easily/naturally receive]), and 260 (*dhīraja sahaja sañtoṣa amānī* [patience, natural contentment, ego-lessness]). But in the other verses, it could hint more at a tradition-generated philosophical meaning. Verse 171, for example, *brahm ko jīvana sahaja sarūpā* could be translated as “brahm's life is its natural form,” or it could also be “brahm's life is of the form of *sahaja*.” Similarly, verse 214 (*sahaja prakāśa nirāśa amānī*) which is very similar to verse 260 in the words it uses, can have an interpretation pointing to the tradition of *sahaja*. This is even more apparent in verse 254 where the expression is *sahajānanda subodhamaya ātama rūpa nihāri*, which could be read as “looking enchanted at the form of self in the easily understandable joy of *sahaja*.”

It is with such a background that I proceed further with this chapter. Continuing with the theme of understanding or translating words which can have multiple meanings,

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especially from the vocabulary of Buddhism, here is another citation from the book *Aghor Guru Guh*.

b). *Rahasya, anāgāmī phal*:

Sarkar Baba tells his disciple Sambhav about the initial preparedness for the worship of the *Prāṇa* (life-force), then comments to Darshi:

Darshi! Sambhav seeker understood this mystery (*rahasya*) as a mystery, as an awakening (*jāgarūk*), as a fruit of liberation (*anāgāmī phal*). (SSS 1982:7, gloss added, my translation).

I wondered for long about the meaning of this sentence. Why does Sarkar Baba use the word mystery twice, once, it seems to me, as the word “mystery,” and second, almost as a notion of “secret gnosis.” But more compelling is the expression *anāgāmī phal*, the meaning of which is not readily apparent, because it comes from Pali. The dictionary meaning of this term is: as a noun, “that which does not arrive or does not return,” and as an adjective, “that, which has no future.” (BSS 2010:3601). But this meaning simply leaves one scratching their head. There is, however, a more Buddhism-specific meaning of this word. The word *anāgāmī*, in Pali, means “non-returning” (Rhys Davids et al 2007). It denotes a man who has accomplished three stages out of four towards full Arhantship. More importantly, *anāgāmī* does not mean breaking of the bonds on the path to Arhantship, but, rather, cultivation of good mental habits. Now Sarkar Baba's statement begins to make more sense because just before this statement, he was telling Sambhav seeker that:

‘...one who has narrow attachments hidden within him, the *Prāṇa* is very far from him, it remains unknown to him. These weaknesses pose as his friends and turn his inner being into garbage.’ (SSS 1982:7, my translation).

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A noble person in whom the *anāgāmī* consciousness (*citta*) arises then experiences the fruit (*phal*) of it and is never reborn in the mundane world. This idea spoken in the context of inspiring Sambhav seeker in Sarkar Baba's statement is further corroborated by the story of the Buddha's father, Śuddhodana, who fed the Buddha and his retinue one time and after listening to the Buddha's discourses, became progressively *sotāpanna* (stream enterer), then *sakidāgamī* (to be born only one more time), then, on hearing the *Mahādhammapāla Jātaka*, he became *anāgāmī* (one who is never born in the mundane world again), and finally, he became an *arhat*, enlightened and never to be reborn. (Varma 2002).

c). *Śakragāmī phal*:

Related to the expression *anāgāmī phal* is another interesting term, *śakragāmī phal*.

Sarkar Baba continues to explain to Darshi:

*Guru* in the form of *Prāṇa* (*prāṇamaya guru*) can be seen and known anytime, anywhere, effortlessly, by practice, and one can achieve powerful fruits (*śakragāmī phal*) from him. *Guru* is not a body, he is the *Prāṇa*. (SSS 1982:7, gloss added, my translation).

Monier-Williams provides the meaning of *śakra* as strong, powerful, mighty (applied to many gods, but especially to Indra) (Monier-Williams 2008). Even in Buddhism Indra is one of the protective gods, the other one being Brahma. Buddhist texts adopted *Śakra* as Indra's primary name. In esoteric Buddhism he is one of the twelve gods who protect the world (SGI 2010). So then, the term *śakragāmī phal* would amount to a fruit of the way of Indra, a prominent Hindu deity, the god of thunder in Vedic mythology, but spoken of in a Buddhist way. I have dwelt on this expression,

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again, because *śakragāmī phal* is not a common expression in Hinduism and therefore, while translating, I had to pay special attention to the tradition from which its usage hails.

d). *Saugat*:

Another example from the stock of Buddhist vocabulary occurs in the context of the word *saugat* (Buddhism: a follower of the Buddha; Other: atheist, believer in nothingness).

Sarkar Baba asks Darshi:

Darshi! Do you see Sambhav seeker? His other name is also *Saugat* seeker. Do you know the meaning of this name? Anyone who wishes to understand the meaning of this name should understand and recognize the “dead” (*śava*) and the “fate of the dead” (*gati*). Who does not know this fact? Without the Prāṇa in the body “corpse” is the only appropriate description for it. Tārā is known as the rider of the corpses. Oh, this rider of the corpses Tārā, is very strange. She wears the garland of the skulls of her very dear children around her neck and roars with ecstatic laughter! Who else can liberate us besides the liberator of all, Tārā!! (SSS 1982:15, my translation, gloss and emphasis added).

Although to most people evocation of the word *saugat* would indicate a Buddhist tradition, Sarkar Baba gives a completely different meaning to it, equating it with *śava* (corpse) and its ultimate *gati* (fate), combining them into one word as *śavagati*, which, in colloquial pronunciation, becomes *saugat*. Sarkar Baba's intention in this teaching is, perhaps, to inspire Sambhav to become so detached from the world that his desires for the world become the same as that of a corpse, that is, non-existent. The Buddhist connotation is further evoked by the mention of Goddess Tārā, one of the prime goddesses in Tibetan Buddhism, although Tārā has an equally prominent role, if somewhat lesser known, in esoteric Hinduism, as the second of the *Daśa Mahāvīdyās* (the Ten Great Knowledge Goddesses). In the Indian context, Tārā is first mentioned in Vāgbhaṭṭa's sixth century *Aṣṭāṅga Saṃgraha* (White 1996:64) and Subandhu's seventh century *Vāsavadattā* (White 1996:64, Kinsley 1997:92), said to have been brought to

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India from Tibet by Nāgārjuna. Further proof of Tārā's association with Tibet can be found in the story of Vaśiṣṭha, who had to go to *mahācīna* (lit. great China, but it can also mean extended China) to worship Tārā (Kinsley 1997:96-7). In the Buddhist context Tārā is always benevolent and compassionate, although she can have benign as well as fearsome forms. In the Hindu context, Tārā has a fearsome form only, although Sarkar Baba describes her as a loving and compassionate goddess further in the passage. As a part of the Hindu *Daśa Mahāvidyās*, Tārā is regarded as identical with Kali, although her iconography does differ from that of Kali, and the maternal instinct is thought of as being even stronger in Tārā than in Kali. While some scholars believe there is a difference between the Tibetan Tārā and the Hindu Tārā, others opine that:

...there is little doubt that She is the same Devi. This is shown in a reference to Tara in the Hindu *Tantrarajatantra*, where Her mantra is given as *Om Tare Tuttare Ture Svaha* -- identical to the Tibetan version. Here Tara takes her form as Kurukulla. (Magee 2010).

Tārā Kurukullā is supposed to be a particularly fierce form of her in Tibetan Buddhism (Kinsley 1997:95). Magee's contention is supported by Beyer's description of an origin myth of the Tibetan Tārā, which comes close to Sarkar Baba's description of Tārā as a kind mother who liberates all:

...she entered into the meditation called Saving All Beings, and by the power of that meditation she rescued from their worldly minds a thousand billion beings every morning and fixed them in their attainment of acceptance; and she did not eat until she had done so. Every evening she fixed therein the same number of beings, and she thus became famed as Tārā, the Savioress. (Beyer 1973:65).

So although, again, Sarkar Baba uses vocabulary from what is commonly understood to be a Buddhist stock, his meanings are not necessarily Buddhist, although there may be a common history behind how those meanings got generated in the two traditions. There

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are other statements though which are clearly from a Hindu tradition, resonating in the Tantras. However, again, there are some whose meaning is difficult to ascertain.

e). *Kālakūṭa, vṛhattara rekhāō se āvṛtta*:

Take this statement from *Aghor Guru Guh*:

Darshi! The city of the one who is the Himalaya dwelling (*Kālakūṭa*) Parvati's husband Shiva (*Pārvatīpati*) is well defended (*digbandhit*) and guarded (*surakṣit*) by the master of ghosts and other ethereal beings (*bhūtagaṇādhipati*), Aghoreshwars, and Kapālī-aughars. It is very pleasant and cheerful (*saumya*). The fruits and flowers of that place do not resemble each other, neither are their color and form, taste, and measure similar to each other (*anurūpatā*). Darshi! Know that time-transcendent Shiva (*Kālakūṭa*), Kapaleshwar, Aghoreshwar, surrounded by ever expanding circuits (*vṛhattara rekhāō se āvṛtta*), lives in a place where you see this happen. You can find him there. (SSS 1982:13. My translation, gloss added).

This passage gave me pause for a long time. While the words for Parvati's husband Shiva (*Pārvatīpati*), well-defended (*digbandhit*) and guarded (*surakṣit*), master of ghosts and ethereal beings (*bhūtagaṇādhipati*), etc. are self-explanatory (although *bhūtagaṇādhipati* could refer either to Shiva or Ganesh), the others, such as *saumya*, *Kālakūṭa*, and especially the phrase *vṛhattara rekhāō se āvṛtta* (surrounded by ever expanding lines) can present multiple meanings. Take the word *saumya* for example. I have chosen to translate it as pleasant and cheerful, but Monier-Williams (2008) gives its meanings also as: "relating or belonging to *Soma* (the juice or the sacrifice or the moon god)." It can also mean cool and moist, placid, gentle, mild, etc. all of which meanings agree with my translation, but if it is related to the moon or the moon god, then the meaning is more sectarian, perhaps indicating Śaiva Siddhānta, but not secular. The same goes for the word *Kālakūṭa*. The most general meaning of this word is "poison." But Monier-Williams (2008) also gives an alternate meaning as a noun, that of "a country

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near the Himalaya and of the people dwelling in it.” I have chosen this meaning for the first occurrence of this word in the passage because it makes sense in the context of Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas. But for its second occurrence, I have chosen to translate it as “time-transcendent.” My logic is simple, but to explain it, I must deal first with the phrase *vrhattara rekhāō se āvr̥tta*. For long I pondered over the phrase, wondering if it referred to the lines of the earth's magnetic field, or cosmic fields like the “Buddha worlds,” or the four directions, or the earth's rivers and mountains. How could, I thought, a *rekhā* (line) cover or blanket (*āvr̥tta*) something? The answer came, quite simply, from a 1988 essay by Alexis Sanderson titled *Śaivism and the Tantric Traditions*. There, describing the cult of the Mantrapīṭha which belongs to Svachhandabhairava (‘Autonomous Bhairava’) also known as Aghora (‘the un-terrible’), he writes:

...he is worshipped with his identical consort Aghoreśvarī, surrounded by eight lesser Bhairavas *within a circular enclosure (or circuit) of cremation grounds*. (Sanderson 1988:669, emphasis added).

Sanderson further defines an enclosure or circuit to mean an *āvaraṇa* (Sanderson 1988:670). One piece of the puzzle had fallen into place. But there was more.

Describing the Cult of Yoginīs he writes that it represents the:

...more ancient cult of Rudra/Bhairava in association with female spirits (Yoginīs)... In the Mantramārga the series of cosmic levels (*bhuvanādhvan*) is governed by Rudras... *Radiating out from the heart of the Deity as an all-pervasive network of power (yoginījāla)*,... appropriated the cycle of time... and irradiated sacred space... *connected with cremation grounds*... (Sanderson 1988:671, emphasis added).

So now the circuit and enclosure is not merely a series of cremation grounds, but they are, in fact, associated with a radiating all-pervasive network of power. Now the term *vrhattara rekhāō se āvr̥tta* begins to make perfect sense, if that is what Sarkar Baba

meant. *Kālakūṭa*, the husband of Parvati, lives in the midst of a radiating network of power which is associated with a series of cremation grounds. So far so good. But the story goes further still. Sanderson describes the *Jayadrathayāmala* and the Cult of Kali:

... Kālī as the destroyer of time (Kālasaṃkarṣiṇī)... trampling the body of Kāla (Time) beneath her feet... in the center of a vast, many-circuited *maṇḍala* of goddesses enclosed by cordons of male servant-guards and an outer ring of cremation grounds... Here then is a Yāmala (Union) cult very similar to that of Kapālīśabhairava and Caṇḍā Kāpālīnī taught in the *Picumata-Brahmayāmala* but centered in Kālī rather than Bhairava. (Sanderson, 1988:674-5, emphasis added).

Now it becomes clear that when Sarkar Baba describes the place of residence of *Kālakūṭa* Shiva to Darshi, he describes it as a *maṇḍala* formed by radiating lines of power linked to cremation grounds, and it explains the meaning of the second occurrence of the word *Kālakūṭa* cited above. I think Sarkar Baba is using this word colloquially to describe Shiva because *kūṭanā* in Hindi means to crush, or to subdue, something. Because of his association with Parvati, often used interchangeably with Kali, Shiva is also time-transcendent and, therefore, this noun, *Kālakūṭa*, is an appropriate description of Shiva. This description is relevant because Sarkar Baba used to talk about Shiva, but he used to worship Devi or Kali.

f). *viśva*, *viśvās*, *viṣ*:

Here is another enigmatic statement from *Aghor Guru Guh*:

Darshi! Not with the world (*viśva*). But yes, with hope for the world (*viśva ās*). A person who acts this way has special faith (*viśvās*) in (/of) the lord of this world with him, he has within him affection for the world (*jagat kī mamatā*). His faith (*viśvās*) accompanies his hopes for the world (*ās*). Otherwise this hope (*ās*) turns into poison (*viṣatulya*) which slowly kills human beings. Poison (*viṣ*), faith (*viśvās*) and world (*viśva*) — these are three words that have three meanings, namely — morning (*subah*), afternoon (*dopahar*) and evening (*śām*). In the evening passion (*rāga*) burns women, in the morning it burns the men. (SSS, 1982:15, my translation, gloss added).

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Clearly, there is a play on homonymic words here, which certainly pulls the reader's attention to the thought expressed, but it does not clarify the meaning. While *viśvās* (faith) and *viśva ās* (hope for the world) are easily understandable, the relationship between *viṣ* (poison), *viśvās* (faith) and *viśva* (world) remains obscure, especially their equation with *subah* (morning), *dopahar* (afternoon) and *śām* (evening). How can, after all, *viṣ* mean morning, *viśvās* mean afternoon, and *viśva* mean evening? Again, I searched through various texts and finally, *Svacchandatantra* yielded something similar to what Sarkar Baba is trying to say. I will note here that according to Prof. Radheshyam Chaturvedi, the editor and commentator on the *Svacchandatantra*, it is one of the pillar texts of Kashmir Shaiva philosophy, the other two pillars being *Mālinīvijayatantra* and *Netratantra*. *Svacchandatantra* is also known as the *Aghoreshtantra*, where Svachhandabhairava himself is Aghoresh. He has this name because he presides over the Aghor mantra (ST I 2004:1).

To understand Sarkar Baba's statement, let me divide it into three parts: one, that deals with the spiritual quest -- *viṣ* (poison), *viśvās* (faith) and *viśva* (world); second, that deals with a time referent -- *subah* (morning), *dopahar* (afternoon) and *śām* (evening); and third, which deals with obstacles to the spiritual quest, namely, passion (*rāga*) which, apparently, burns men in the morning and women in the evening. Now let me look at how these could possibly relate to concepts in the *Svacchandatantra* as elaborated by Acharya Radheshyam Chaturvedi.

While describing the geography of the body and the passage of time within it in Tantra with referene to *prāṇa* (the breath which rises up) and *apāna* (the breath that comes down), Chaturvedi uses the term *ṣaḍadhvā* (ST I 2004:5), where *adhvā* implies the

path to be travelled for purification of the body. This *ṣaḍadhvā* refers to the space of the physical body from the foot till the crown of the head, which is known as *deśādhvā*, and vibrations in the *prāṇa*, which are known as *kālādhvā*. These two are further subdivided into three aspects each: *deśādhvā* into *kalā*, *tattva* and *bhuvan*, and *kālādhvā* into *varṇa*, *mantra* and *pada*. Thus they constitute the six elements of the *ṣaḍadhvā* (ST II 2005:990).

To understand fully what Sarkar Baba is trying to communicate here, I will have to translate a small part of the introductory matter of the *Svacchandatantra*. This pertains to *kālādhvā*, the movement of the *prāṇa*:

... *varṇa*, *mantra* and *pada* are the three categories of *kālādhvā*. According to *Svacchandatantra* they reside in the *prāṇa*. Movement of the *prāṇa* (*prāṇacār*) up from the heart till the *śaktitattva* (crown of the skull) prevails for thirty-six finger breadths. Within it is embodied the *kālaparimāṇa* (entire measure of time). *Varṇa* or *mantra* or *pada* are *śabdārūpa* (in the form of words). They arise from the *prāṇa* and disappear into the *prāṇa*. *Varṇa* is the most subtle of them, *pada* is the grossest. The subsumption of the gross into the subtle is their disappearance.

*Kāl* (Time) is also of two kinds – *bāhya* (external) and *ābhyantar* (internal). The external time is related to the *sūrya* (Sun) and the internal is related to *prāṇa*. The yogi conquers the *prāṇa* and brings external time under his control. *Akṣinimēṣ* (The eighth part of the blink of a human eye) is known as a *kṣaṇa* (moment). Two *kṣaṇas* make a *tuṭi*, two *tuṭis* a *lav*, two *lav* a *nimēṣ*, and fifteen *nimēṣ* constitute a *kāṣṭhā*. One external *kāṣṭhā* implies one *ādhyātmik ahorātra* (spiritual night).

*Prāṇa* is regarded as the Sun. The movement of the *prāṇa* from the heart till nine finger breadths above to the base of the throat is the *pratham prahar* (first quarter) of its *prāṇacār* (movement). From nine finger breadths above the throat till the base of the tongue is the *madhyāhn* (second quarter) of the *prāṇa*. From the base of the tongue till the *bhrūmadhya* (forehead between the eyes) is the third quarter, and above that till the *dvādaśānta* (top of the crown) is the fourth quarter. After that there is a half *tuṭi* (one *kṣaṇa*) of *sandhyā* (evening) there, and then when the *prāṇa* reverses its journey and comes back from the *śakti* or the *dvādaśānta* (the crown) it is known as *apāna*. This downward movement sequentially leads to the night, that is, midnight at the base of the tongue, and daybreak in the heart. In this night it is the *candramā* (moon) or the *apāna* (downward breath) which is active. This kind of upward and downward

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movement constitutes one *ahorātra* (spiritual night) of the yogi. (ST I 2004:5-6, gloss added, my translation).

So, to make things clear, when the *prāṇa* moves up from the *hrdayakamal* (lotus of the heart) to the *ūrdhva dvādaśānta* (top of the crown) where Shakti resides, it is regarded as the Sun, where the first quarter of its movement will be *subah* (morning). As it moves up through successive quarters, it passes through the time frames of *dopahar* (afternoon) and *śām* (evening), culminating finally in the *rātri* (night) at the top of the crown. There, it rests for a *kṣaṇa*, the time interlude of one eighth of the blink of a human eye, after which it *rises as the moon* and begins its descent back to the heart. During its downward course, this same *prāṇa* (now *apāna* or downward breath) is known as *candra* (moon) which spends the first quarter descending from the top of the crown till the center of the brows, and successively, culminates in the morning in the heart. During its upward course as the Sun, it has the potential to provide *mukti* (liberation), during its downward course as the Moon, it has the potential to provide all kinds of *siddhis* (supernatural powers, ST II, 2005:39). Here, clearly, we have at least an example of *subah*, *dopahar*, and *śām* that Sarkar Baba could have implied. But it goes further.

In chapter seven of the *Svacchandatantra*, Chaturvedi elaborates in detail how this upward or northward and downward or southward movement of the *prāṇa* takes place along three subtle *nāḍīs* (channels), namely *īḍā* (from the left nostril along the left side of the backbone), *pingalā* (from the right nostril along the right side of the backbone), and *suṣumnā* (along a channel in the center of the two, through the center of the backbone). The left channel of the *īḍā* is also known as the *pitṛmārga* (the path of the ancestors), the right channel of the *pingalā* is known as the *devamārga* (the path of the

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gods), and the center channel of the *suṣumnā* is known as the *Śivamārga* (the path of Shiva) (ST II, 2005:83). Each time the *prāṇa* as the Sun reaches the top of the crown at the culmination of its *uttarāyaṇa* (upward or northward journey) along any of these channels, before it turns into the Moon, there occurs a solar eclipse. Each time the *prāṇa* reaches the heart as the Moon during its *dakṣiṇāyaṇa* (downward or southward journey), there occurs a lunar eclipse before it turns into the Sun. This period of the eclipse is known as a *viṣuvat kāl* (encompassed or comingled time), as the term *viṣu* implies unity due to one-ness, sameness, or comingling (ST II 2005:67-8).

This term, *viṣu*, in colloquial pronunciation, can easily be rendered *viṣ* or poison, the word that Sarkar Baba uses in his related terms *viṣ*, *viśvās* and *viśva*. The characteristic of *viṣ* or poison, in common parlance is to destroy what it takes hold of because it overwhelms all other functions of the body in question. In India, the event of the eclipse is also regarded colloquially as the “eating” or destruction of one cosmic entity by the other as it overlays and overwhelms its existence. This characteristic, of *viṣ* or poison, however, becomes exactly the opposite when one is trying to treat poison with poison, that is to say, negate one kind of poison by the application of another, in which instance, it restores the functioning of the body in question to normal. So, now, the punchline. I don't think Sarkar Baba is using the word *viṣ* *only* as a poison here, but, playing on the similar pronunciation of *viṣ* and *viṣu*, *also* as the union of the Sun and the Moon phases of the *prāṇa* during their *viṣuvat kāl* or eclipse period, a period in which meditation is especially fruitful. That is why the other two terms, *viśvās* and *viśva* are necessary here. In the book *Aghor Guru Guh* where this text occurs in the beginning of chapter five, this expression opens the chapter without any preamble to it. Since Sarkar

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Baba is communicating here with his initiated ascetic disciples, they probably already have the frame of reference to the movement of the *prāṇa* and its phases, as is evident from the last few lines at the end of chapter four of this book, where Sarkar Baba talks about *prāṇamaya bodh* or the knowledge of the *prāṇa* (SSS 1982:14). They probably already know the *mukti*-giving liberating potential of the northward movement of the *prāṇa*, which is an act of destruction (poisonous) in wordly terms as is corroborated by the *Svacchandatantra*:

Those who desire *mukti* (liberation) should establish themselves in the day (of the *prāṇa*, in its Sun phase) and perform *japa* (recitation of the *mantra*) with the *prāṇa*. This should be understood as the *saṃhāra* (destruction) which bestows *Śivadhāma* (Shiva's world, to the practitioner). (ST II 2005:66, gloss added, my translation).

What Sarkar Baba seems to emphasize here is a twofold attention to elements of this practice. One, that this practice should be conducted with *viśvās* or full-faith for it to bear fruit. Two, in order to avoid ego-generated negativity, or *ās* as passion, it should be performed for the *viśva*, that is to say, with hope for the benefit of the world. If it is not performed in this manner, *then only* does it become *viṣatulya* (akin to poison), bringing the ascetic practitioner on the same plane as other human beings who burn day and night because of *rāga* (attachment to their passions). In the case of this example, men burn during the day, and women, by night. However, if the practice is conducted with *jagat ki mamatā* (compassion for the world), the Viśveśvar (lord of the world, or in the *Svacchandatantra* parlance, *Svacchandabhairava*) has his grace on the practitioner making them successful. Even the notion of gender-specified burning resonates with ideas in the *Svacchandatantra* because while meditation during the day of the *prāṇa* in quest for liberation destroys the existing world to bestow Shiva's world on the

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practitioner, ostensibly a male act of virility, meditation during the night of the *prāṇa* creates the world, unleashing the Moon-generated *rāsa* or juices, replenishing and recreating the world, ostensibly, a feminine act of creation: “Going down from the *Śaktigarbha* (womb of the Shakti) there is creation, and this leads to *vr̥ddhi* (prosperity)” (ST II 2005:49).<sup>3</sup> By making a gender-related statement, Sarkar Baba brings his teaching closer to the external, mundane world.

There is, however, the possibility of an alternative explanation to the word *viṣ* (poison), one that relates directly to the notion of *rāga* (passion). In *Tantrāloka* we get the idea that it is the erotic desire (*kāmatatva*) which is the poison element (*viṣtatva*) (*Śrītantrālokaḥ* I:419). However, this poison element is not portrayed negatively, rather, it is regarded as the all pervasive power (Shakti) of the *Paramēśvar* (supreme god) (*Śrītantrālokaḥ* I:421). If that is the case then my interpretive translation becomes: this all pervasive power ails women and men through the medium of passion (*rāga*) but the yogis who have hope and compassion for the world together with self-control and faith in their practice, retain the special grace of the lord of the world. As a teaching to his disciples, this statement of Sarkar Baba seems entirely appropriate.

g). *Bhāva, abhāva, pūrṇabhāva*:

Let me look at another puzzling statement from *Aghor Guru Guh*. Sarkar Baba says to Darshi:

Darshi! Sambhav seeker asked — ‘Dada! Is *abhāva* (scarcity of desired things) the driving element that animates the *prāṇa* of a human being?’ I laughed loudly and replied, ‘Oh no Sambhav. You will not find even a trace of *abhāva* (the feeling of scarcity) where that *bhāva* (feeling) has never even arisen. The absence of such a feeling of scarcity is actually the existence of *pūrṇabhāva* (a totally fulfilled feeling, a state of absolute being), exactly the same as the absence

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of day is “not day”, and the absence of night is “not night”. The absence of day is night and the absence of night is day.’ (SSS 1982:12-3, gloss added).

The relationship of *bhāva* (feeling), *abhāva* (the feeling of scarcity), and *pūrṇabhāva* (a state of absolute being) is again a little puzzling. Let me begin with the word *abhāva*. In normal parlance, this word implies scarcity, or lack of something. However, *Hindi Śabdāsāgara* (Dās 1965-75:270) presents some interesting interpretations of this word, such as the one found in the *Vaiśeṣika śāstra* where it is regarded as the seventh element, which implies the existence of something, such as the existence of nothing. *Śabdāsāgara* uses another term for a specific kind of *abhāva*, namely *anyonyābhāva*, which implies the nonexistence of one substance as another substance, such as a bull is not a horse and a horse is not a bull. Related to this is the next interpretation, *atyantyābhāva*, that which never was nor will ever be. Sarkar Baba's statement about *abhāva* comes close to the *anyonyābhāva* interpretation of the term.

The word *bhāva* has more than forty-one meanings listed for the term in the *Śabdāsāgara*, but for our purpose, the existence of something, as an opposite of the general understanding of non-existence of something, will suffice. This state of existence can further be elaborated upon specifically as “a thought or fault that arises in the mind.” This meaning comes close to the way Sarkar Baba is using it in his discourse. The dictionary does not list a meaning for the term *pūrṇabhāva*.

In the absence of a dictionary meaning, this term, *pūrṇabhāva*, presents a translation problem. We could think as Mirza Ghalib thought when he wrote the lines of his famous poetry, “had I not been, what would have I been?”<sup>4</sup> (Arshi 1992:187) and leave the term unstated because of its indefinability. Clearly, here, both *bhāva* and *abhāva*

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refer to sentiments which have arisen and taken shape and, therefore, by the simple fact of existing, they are in a grosser state than other, unstated and un-risen states. Had these two sentiments not arisen, it would probably have been a state of *pūrṇabhāva*. We do, however, have an exposition of a similar term in the *Svacchandatantra*. It is not exactly the same as what Sarkar Baba is saying, but it is close enough to shed further light on it.

Describing the progression of a yogi to deeper and deeper subtle realms of the mind, where he acquires a state of *śuddha ātmasvarūpa* (pure self-image), *Svacchandatantra* states, “giving up the six, then relinquishing the *unmanā* [state, the yogi] becomes absorbed in the seventh element.” (ST I 2004:408, gloss added). This absorption makes the yogi established in the *paramaśivasvarūpa* (transcendent form of Shiva). Its description as the “seventh element” also corroborates the *Śabdasāgara* interpretation of *abhāva* as a seventh element. This *paramaśivasvarūpa* or subtle and transcendent form of Shiva is also known as *parabhāva* (transcendent sentiment). “This *parabhāva* is extremely subtle. It is also known as *abhāva*” where the equation is:  $parabhāva = parā sattā$  (transcendent authority) =  $param Śiva$  (transcendent Shiva) (ST I 2004:409, gloss added). Here we have the exposition of *parabhāva* as a subtle sentiment akin to the state of being Shiva, where all other sentiments lose their existence. The *unmanā* state is described in the *Svacchandatantra* as an *apara bhāva*, an extremely subtle sentiment embodying the ultimate power, which also, therefore, is known as *abhāva* (ST I 2004:410). When we look at Sarkar Baba's statement in the light of this discussion, it becomes apparent that the *pūrṇabhāva* (complete or holistic sentiment) that Sarkar Baba refers to could be another term for the *parabhāva*, a state where all other states and sentiments meet their dissolution. Since it is the subtle states that give rise to

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the gross ones, it follows logically that before any other *bhāva* (sentiment) has risen, this *parabhāva* prevails in its subtle form and, therefore, it can also be described as a state where no other gross or non-transcendent *bhāva* exists, that is, the unblemished state of the *pūrṇabhāva*. My simplified interpretation of Sarkar Baba's statement would be: a feeling of scarcity is not the driving engine of life. A feeling of absolute fulfillment exists where not even a trace of wanting or lacking anything remains, for the absence of such desire itself is a state of absolute fulfillment.

h). *Ahiṃsā*:

Somewhat related to this exposition of *bhāva* is what Sarkar Baba says about *ahiṃsā* (non-violence). He states in *Aghor Guru Guh*:

What you call non-violence is actually the great art of violence. You may ask how? As long as your eyes are open, this creation exists before you. The day your eyes close, your *Prāṇa* separates from your body, the creation undergoes a catastrophe for you. A person with a compassionate heart is a person with a holistic vision. (SSS 1982:4-5).

This is, clearly, confusing. How can non-violence be the great art of violence?

Anyone who has read about Mahatma Gandhi's efforts to cultivate non-violence as passive resistance during India's struggle for freedom would wonder how a saint like Sarkar Baba can endorse violence as non-violence, and then end his statement with an eulogy for compassion as a key feature of holistic vision. Again, I feel this statement is given to Sarkar Baba's initiated disciples and relates more to a yogic state than a common social truth. Some light on this conundrum is shed by the *Svacchandatantra* in its description of the upward and downward movement of the life-breath (*prāṇacār*, ST I 2004:5), as discussed in relation to *viṣ* (poison), *viśvās* (faith) and *viśva* (world) above. According to the *Svacchandatantra*:

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The flow of the *prāṇa* from the heart to the top of the crown is known as its day. A seeker established in that is said to be established in the day. Without any particular effort, entering through the *apāna* process (downward flow of the *prāṇa*), keeping the mantra inside, resting at the *ūrdhva dvādaśānta* (top of the crown), one should perform *japa* (meditation on the *mantra*). It should be regarded as *saṃhāra* (destruction), because that *japa* destroys everything completely. Therefore, it bequeaths the fruit of accomplishing the *Śivadhāma* (abode of lord Shiva). (ST I 2004:118, gloss added).

Further, *Svacchandatantra* explains that the *saṃhāra* (destruction) that takes place is of the impurities that are obstacles to the path of liberation, and leads to the *creation* of pure elements (ST I 2004:119). In the light of this exposition, Sarkar Baba's statement begins to make sense. *Saṃhāra* (destruction) is regarded as an act of violence. This act is associated quintessentially with Rudra-Shiva. However, when the chanting of the mantra in the way prescribed destroys the impediments to liberation, it enables the seeker to create a new world which is the acquisition of the abode of lord Shiva. Acquisition of this abode is synonymous with attaining liberation, and therefore, free from all shackles of impurities, giving the seeker the holistic vision of compassion. Cultivating this creative process of destruction, however, is an art, because the seeker has to be mindful of his activities. This, I think, is what Sarkar Baba is trying to communicate, but since it is aimed at his initiated disciples, what one reads in the book appears too cryptic to be understood easily.

i). Truth:

Besides the somewhat esoteric kind of communication outlined above, there are other topics which relate more to the mundane and social. These appear to inculcate a sense of holistic vision in his disciples, as, for example, Sarkar Baba's thoughts on the most common of all spiritual tenets, the truth. He explains to his disciple Darshi:

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Darshi! What people usually regard as the truth is merely a minuscule fraction of the existing reality. *People know the truth, but do not understand it.* That is why, truth often feels very bitter. It can also create illusions which can lead astray even great masters and learned scholars from their path. For this to happen to common people, then, is quite normal. *At times partial understanding of the truth leads to a life that seems untrue.* This is not surprising. Darshi! Truth is not the same everywhere, at all times, in all the places. A mother hides away sweets in a box for her son, but fearing that her son will eat too many of them and get sick, she tells him an un-truth that there are no more sweets left instead of speaking the existent truth. If she tells him the truth her son will get sick. *That is why, the same truth is not true everywhere.* (SSS 1982:1, my translation, emphasis added.).

This statement of the nature of “Truth” is a very different explanation from the general descriptions of spiritual truth that religious books often provide us with. Since we have all been conditioned to think of “the Truth” as a single, unchanging, everlasting entity, such an exposition of the truth might appear strange to readers, although given the nature of social reality, anyone who pays attention to economic or political news knows well by virtue of points and counterpoints presented by various contenders to the issue, that “truth” is really something that is hammered out in social life. It is an entity that is negotiated and agreed upon. It is seldom a clear, unsullied, transparent entity. Sarkar Baba appears to communicate to his disciples to have a holistic and flexible vision when face-to-face with social truth as opposed to the general understanding of spiritual truth, because social truth can have as many dimensions to it as there are proponents of it. This also indicates his attention to the particular and personal history of each individual and their life-experiences, which mold their perceptions of the world in specific ways, and reflect their very personal strategies for dealing with everyday situations in their life. It could also well be argued that Sarkar Baba is borrowing stories like this from the genre of women's stories (see Gold 2009:97-8 for some delightful stories of this genre). That may

well be so. He was an astute observer who synthesized holistically all that he saw and heard.

This discussion of social truth provides me with an opportunity now, to transition to the second category of Sarkar Baba's communication: the manner and language of his communication at public gatherings where he was required to make formal speeches.

### **Talking At Gatherings: Language According to Need**

Earlier in his life Sarkar Baba did not address public gatherings except on special occasions like the Gurupurnima or Navaratri festivals. On those occasions, the ashram would fill up with thousands, and then hundreds of thousands of devotees. In the evening people would gather in the open air auditorium (*pandāl*) and a formal meeting would be conducted. On the stage would be several other devotees including a few prominent people from Banaras, visitors from other religious traditions, and office-holding members of the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh. As the proceedings would get under way, a number of people would present their views, and finally, Sarkar Baba would make his speech.

When Sarkar Baba added the "Mahila Sangh," (Women's Group) organization to the activities of such meetings, then women speakers representing the Mahila Sangh would also come to the stage and present their views. With the conclusion of Sarkar Baba's talk, the meeting would normally end. Other than these meetings, sometimes Sarkar Baba would be invited at different functions around the city to address public gatherings. Later in his life, however, when his health had begun to deteriorate, Sarkar Baba began to address a small gathering of devotees weekly, from the foyer of his own living quarters rather than from the open air auditorium.

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The topics of his addresses at these meetings, whether in the large open air auditorium, or from the smaller foyer of his quarters, could be anything. They ranged from topics of social relevance such as the way a person should behave in public and mold his life; the nature of politicians and officials in the country; social ills like dowry, mistreatment of women and inordinate expenses during rites of passage ceremonies; methods and processes of changing one's life for spiritual progress; nature of the guru and the disciple, etc. A quick look at the articles published in the *Sarveshwari Times* from 1972 to 1992, the year Baba relinquished his body, gives us about 40 talks or reports on women's issues, including the ills of dowry, more than a dozen on youth issues, about 100 on the state of the nation, and more than 300 on matters of the spiritual path.

The *Sarveshwari Times* newsletter, which was always published in Hindi, had a consistent pattern to the articles it published. In the beginning of the year, ranging from between January 15 (the first issue of the year) till January 30 (the second issue of the year), it would have a lead article and report on Sarkar Baba's *avataraṇa divas*, his birthday. The dates for this report varied depending upon the actual date of the *avataraṇa divas* according to the Hindu *panchang* (ritual calendar), which does not tally exactly with the Gregorian calendar. The normal tradition was to celebrate *avataraṇa divas* in Prayag (Allahabad), at the sacred confluence of the Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers, following the January Magh Mela at Prayag. In the March 15<sup>th</sup> or 30<sup>th</sup> issue there would be an article or Sarkar Baba's speech, on *Vasant Navarātri* (nine day spring festival of worshipping the goddess), either about the nature of the goddess, or about the method of conducting oneself during these nine days. Since Sarkar Baba would

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often speak on all of the nine days of this festival, articles on these talks would carry on for several later issues of the newsletter. Around June-July would fall the occasion of *Gurupūrṇimā* (full moon of the Guru). Lead stories in a few issues following this occasion would be based on Sarkar Baba's and other's talks delivered on that day. In September would be celebrated the *sthāpanā divas* (foundation day of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, September 21, 1961). Talks on that occasion would be published in the newsletter. In October-November would be celebrated the *Śarad Navarātri* (nine day winter festival of worshipping the goddess). Talks delivered during this festival would find a place in the subsequent issues, and then the whole annual cycle would repeat itself. In between these festivals would be published articles pertaining to spiritual and social upliftment of the individual and society, matters of fighting dowry, the power of the youth, educating children, etc.

Most of these talks, some of which I attended in the 1980s and some of which I transcribed while Sarkar Baba was in the US, were published regularly in the fortnightly newsletter *Sarveshwari Times*. Besides publishing Sarkar Baba's talks, the newsletter would have information about ashram activities and activities at various branch ashrams, a general list of the Samooh members who got married, or passed away, details about organizational activities of Gurupurnima and Navaratri, details on availability of medicines manufactured at the ashram etc. However, the most prominent part of the newsletter, usually on the first page, would be the talk that Sarkar Baba had delivered in the past week. Sometimes, though, the first page would be taken up by a topic of importance to the Aghor tradition, such as the birth celebrations of Baba Kinaram, called

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the “lolark shashthi” festival. In such instances, Sarkar Baba's talk would be on one of the inside pages.

Whatever the topic was, Sarkar Baba tried to present his thoughts and philosophy in the simplest possible terms. If one listened to or reads his talks during the weekly gatherings or during festivals like Gurupurnima or Navaratri, when hundreds of thousands would gather within the ashram boundary, mostly villagers from the areas around Banaras and from Bihar, his language would be most colloquial. He was always respectful to all present; his manner of speaking used to be unhurried and conversational; he usually had quite a few stories to tell to illustrate his point; and occasionally he would cite well known aphorisms that resonated with what the audience already knew. In each one of his talks, though, he would express his thoughts candidly, even if it meant scathing social criticism. Sarkar Baba was without fear in his life, and his expression of thoughts and ideas reflected this during his talks.

To discuss Sarkar Baba's communication at these gatherings, I am using the *Sarveshwari Times* as my primary resource. Since the topics of these talks were varied and numerous, I have selected a few such talks and topics to focus on.

### I. Spiritual Topics

#### a). Guru and disciple.

Sarkar Baba often talked about the nature of the guru-disciple relationship. He would describe the nature of this relationship, the nature of the process through which the disciple gains knowledge from the guru, and the various kinds of knowledge the disciple can learn from the guru. On the fourth day of Vasant Navaratri (Navaratri observation in

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spring) in 1989, while addressing a group of devotees in the USA, Sarkar Baba again talked about the nature of the guru-disciple relationship. I transcribed this talk. It was sent to Banaras and published later. I paraphrase selected parts of his talk below to highlight his message, as well as his style of delivering it:

This subject is harder than the hardest, and simpler than the simplest. It is *śāntipriya* (peace-loving), and it is a *paramārtha kī pagaḍanḍī* (pathway of spiritual attainment) for human beings where all those negative acts which happened knowingly or un-knowingly, which not even god forgives, are forgiven by the guru. The first thing here is that one should have *viśvās* (faith) in the guru. But that faith is very difficult to establish because guru is not a *putlā* (mannequin) made of flesh and blood. Gurus occur in all castes, all countries, and all times. When our own nature has become conducive and the goddess shows her grace, the guru can be found effortlessly. Otherwise, one can search for all of one's life, the guru cannot be found. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1992, October 30:2, my translation, gloss added).

Relating this quest to the social frame within India, Sarkar Baba then goes on to equate the search for a guru with the constant search a girl's father has to conduct in India to find a suitable groom for her:

Just as, to find a suitable *var* (groom), the *kanyā* (girl's) father *dar-dar bhaṭakatā hai* (wanders from place to place). He does not know where her girl's groom will be found. Who is he, when will he be found, how will he be found? In the same way a human being's life keeps wandering from one door to the next, from one place to another. When, where and how will that *mahāpuruṣ* (great soul) be found, in what situation, and even on finding, how will I have faith in him, because *binu viśvās na kauno siddhī* (without faith there is no success) (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1992, October 30:2, my translation, gloss added).

The use of this metaphor, that of the bride's father's search for a suitable groom, is especially efficacious in highlighting the difficulty in finding a suitable guru, as it conjures up images of sun-baked tiredness, dust-smearred feet, sweaty and soiled clothes, hunger, thirst, and worry. *Dar-dar bhaṭakanā* (wandering from place to place in search) is a very common idiomatic image in the Indian context, used often to illustrate very hard

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work with very little payback. It has one more purpose to it I think. It has the same element of trust involved in the search that a girl's father has to make on encountering the one who he thinks is a suitable groom, and project a peaceful and happy life for her in the face of daunting uncertainty. This is an even more forceful evocation when the groom, in this case a guru, does not look like what the seeker may have had in mind. Sarkar Baba illustrates this situation further with a story:

There was a woodcutter. He was chopping wood in a jungle, high up on a tree. There was a dak-bungalow nearby, where a high-ranking government officer was camping. He was a thoughtful man who had great faith in god, and he was always ready to learn any kind of knowledge. He was in search of a guru. He heard the sound of the wood being chopped and came out to investigate. When the woodcutter saw him he became nervous and the axe slipped from his hand, falling to the ground. The officer took pity on the woodcutter and went back in without paying much attention, leaving him in peace. The woodcutter knew an *ākarṣaṇa mantra* (mantra to attract objects to him). He stretched out his hand and the axe flew back into his hand. He started chopping the wood again. The officer heard the sound once more and he was intrigued. How could the woodcutter climb down from the tree, pick up his axe, climb back up to the top of the tree and start chopping wood again so fast? He came out to see what was going on. When the woodcutter saw him, again, the axe slipped from his hand and fell to the ground. The officer went back in again, wishing not to disturb the woodcutter. The woodcutter extended his hand once more, the axe flew back into his hand and he began chopping the wood. When the officer heard this sound the third time, his curiosity was peeked. He came out. Once again, the axe slipped from the woodcutter's hand. This time the officer called him. The woodcutter climbed down, shaking in fear. The officer said, "Do not be afraid brother, I respect you. Tell me, how do you get back your axe so fast?" The woodcutter replied, "I know a *vidyā* (knowledge), *ākarṣaṇa vidyā* (knowledge of attracting things), and this is how I get it so fast. The officer asked him, "Can you tell it to me?" The woodcutter said, "I can tell it to you, but you are not going to believe it because I am poor, I am a woodcutter, I am illiterate. I am absolutely rustic." The officer said, "No brother, I want to learn this knowledge from you." The woodcutter said, "You will not be able to learn it. Because you will not have faith in me, and without that faith, this knowledge will remain away from you." The officer said, "I have full faith in you, I respect you, I bow to you. From today, I will think of you as my guru." So the woodcutter told him. Such and such is the *vidyā*, perform an *anuṣṭhāna* (ritual observation) for seven days in this manner, and on the eighth day, you will be graced by the knowledge. When you will be graced,

these are the signs you will see. When such signs arise, know that this knowledge has become yours.

Saying this, the woodcutter tied his bundle of wood and went away. The officer began his practice. On reaching home the woodcutter narrated this story to his wife and said, "We need to leave this region as soon as possible. After seven or eight days, when the knowledge does not come to him, that officer is going to kill us. Start gathering all our stuff together." So they began to make preparations to leave. That took them seven days. On the eighth day the woodcutter went to the market to get some provisions before leaving. And there, the officer saw all the signs the woodcutter had predicted, signifying that his practice had been successful. So he gathered his entourage and came to the woodcutter's house bearing gifts. When he asked for the woodcutter, his wife told him he had gone out, and then asked the officer, "What have we done that you want to kill us?" The officer was surprised. He reassured her of his devotion to his guru and sent his vehicle to fetch the woodcutter from the market. When he arrived, the officer bowed to the fearful and shaking woodcutter in respect, and informed him of his success. The woodcutter felt happy, and the officer became successful in his endeavor. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1992, October 30:2, my translation, gloss added).

Sarkar Baba's aim in this story is quite transparent – to illustrate that even a poor and unlikely looking candidate can have the knowledge that a true seeker can gain, if he has the right mental attitude, right respect and ego-lessness towards the guru and his knowledge. In another speech of his, Sarkar Baba quotes the following popular aphorism: "*sant daras ko jāiye taj mamatā abhimān. jyō-jyō pag āge baṛhe, kotin jag ke samān*" (Go to a saint, leaving your pride and attachments behind. Each step that you take, then, is like achieving a million worlds (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1986, June 30:3, my translation, gloss added). Although one interpretation of the word "jag" in this verse can be "yajña," Sarkar Baba emphasizes the meaning I have translated above, as that of acquiring many worlds. However, it is important to have a "true" guru, not an impersonator passing off as a guru, for the knowledge to bear fruit. That is why Sarkar Baba emphasized the term "*sadguru*" – a true guru – as the right guru to choose, the right guru to search for.

And then, there are many kinds of disciples too. Some are so devoted to their guru that they can fulfill the guru's aim with ease, and some are too cunning for their own good. Two such stories narrated by Sarkar Baba illustrate the point. The first story narrates how the devotion of a disciple brought salvation to his own guru:

There was a guru ji. Every day he used to worship Thakur Ji (an idolized form of God Krishna) with great devotion, through the rituals of bathing and feeding him. It was his routine to offer food to Thakur Ji in the afternoon. His ashram was very small. Only two people lived in that ashram, one was the guru ji, the other was his disciple. The disciple was not very sharp, but he was completely devoted to his guru. He used to follow his guru's words meticulously.

One day guru ji had to go out of town on business. He called the disciple to him and instructed him to have his mid-day meal only after feeding Thakur Ji. The guru told the disciple he would be gone for four days and, therefore, took out the provisions for four days and handed them to the disciple. Then he handed the keys to the disciple and left on his trip early the next morning.

The disciple cooked the meal with great devotion. Then he gave Thakur Ji a thorough bath and at about 11:30, he served the food carefully in a plate and brought it to Thakur Ji. He opened the curtains behind which Thakur Ji's statue stood, put the plate in front of it, rang the bell as he had seen his guru ji do, and then, just as his guru used to do, he closed the curtain and went and sat outside. He had seen his guru ji open the curtain after fifteen minutes by which time, apparently, Thakur Ji would have finished his meal.

By about twelve in the afternoon the disciple got hungry. He thought, "Thakur Ji must have finished his meal by now so I will go and partake of his leavings." Very carefully he opened the curtains. And then he saw that the plate of food was lying there just as he had kept it, absolutely untouched. He thought, oh, Thakur Ji did not get a chance to come and have a meal. Then he thought, well, Thakur Ji, after all, is Thakur Ji, a very busy God. He must have become delayed at some devotee's place. I'm sure he will come in a little while and partake of his food. That's right. I will close the curtains again. When Thakur Ji comes and has had his meal, then I will have my food as *prasad*. Thinking this, the disciple closed the curtains again, sat down outside, and began to wait.

One hour went by. Two hours went by. The disciple got very worried. After every half hour he would open the curtains and check to see if Thakur Ji had had his meal. Why was Thakur Ji going to come and have his meal! And yet, again and again the disciple would open the curtain to check if Thakur Ji had eaten yet, worried about what must have caused Thakur Ji not to arrive for his meal? He thought, every day guru ji used to serve him and his meal would be finished within fifteen minutes. Today when I have served him, he is not eating at all. If he does not eat then guru ji will be upset with me. And if, per chance, Thakur Ji tells my guru ji that his disciple ate his meal without waiting for my

arrival, then guru ji will be really mad at me. Now what should I do? How should I feed Thakur Ji. The disciple could not see any way out of this predicament. Hours kept passing and the hour of six rolled around in the evening. The disciple had become ravenous, not having eaten anything all day. He also felt angry. Where did Thakur Ji go after all, he thought! I am dying of hunger here, and Thakur Ji has not arrived to eat yet!

Now, from behind the curtains, Thakur Ji was watching this play. He began to think, boy, this disciple has really put me in a fix today. If he dies of hunger now, then guru ji will lose faith in me. What should I do? It appears that I will have to go and eat after all.

So Thakur Ji arrived. The disciple saw him enter the room and stood up in agitation. He said, 'Man, you are really late today, I have been hungry all day today. Come-come. Eat soon so I can eat too or I will die of hunger today.' Thakur Ji replied, 'Don't worry friend. What to do! I got too involved with a devotee today. Come, bring whatever you have for me to eat.' Now the disciple thought that the food he had served in the afternoon must have become cold, so he went and heated it up, and served it to Thakur Ji again.

Thakur Ji began to eat, and he found the food so delectable that he ate up the whole plate! The disciple kept watching him with hungry eyes, even as he finished the last morsel. He couldn't even say to Thakur Ji to leave a little bit for him, since Thakur Ji was the guest. Thakur Ji finished his meal, blessed the disciple, and went away. Before leaving, Thakur Ji said to the disciple, 'Friend, you made great food. Don't worry, tomorrow I will be on time.' 'You are sure you will be on time?' The disciple asked. 'Don't worry, tomorrow I will arrive on the dot.' Thakur Ji reassured him, and left. Now the disciple was in a deeper quandary. He could not use the provisions for the next day for his own use, since guru ji had measured it so carefully. So he decided to sleep without eating that night.

Next day he got up early in the morning and made all arrangements. He was absolutely famished. He thought, 'who knows about Thakur Ji! If he eats everything today also, then I will have to go hungry for a second day. So let me do this. I will cook food for two people. Then, even if Thakur Ji eats his fill, I will still have something left for myself.'

So the disciple cooked for two people. By 11:30 he gave Thakur Ji a bath, worshipped him, and served him the food. When Thakur Ji started to arrive here, his elder brother, Baldau (Balram), came before him. Thakur Ji said to him, 'I have a devotee who cooks absolutely delicious food. Why don't you come and taste it too?' Baldau said yes.

Exactly at 12:00 Thakur Ji and Baldau entered the room. The disciple was dumbstruck! He asked, 'Who have you brought with you?' Thakur Ji replied that this was his brother, and that both of them were going to eat today. The disciple was beside himself with hunger. He said, 'Fine. Both of you can eat, but today I have only this much food. Don't finish up everything. Leave a little bit for me too!'

Thakur Ji smiled. He said fine, we won't eat your share. He knew that the disciple was hungry. If he died of hunger, then who would cook such delicious meals for them! After eating, Thakur Ji and Baldau blessed the disciple, promised to come back again the next day, and left. The disciple ate whatever was left and saved his life.

Now, in two days, he had already used up the ration for three days. On the third day the disciple cooked for three people – for Thakur Ji, for Baldau, and for himself. At 11:30 when he finished all the rituals Thakur Ji and Baldau arrived, but they also brought Radhika Ji (Krishna's consort) with them. Now the disciple was flabbergasted. 'Who is this woman you have brought with you?' He asked. 'This is my wife,' Thakur Ji replied. Your food has been so delicious that I brought her along to taste it. It will be sufficient, won't it?'

What was the disciple supposed to say! He said, 'Of course it will be sufficient, but I have food only for three people. Eat as much as you folks like, but leave some for me, or today again I will have to sleep hungry. 'Don't worry,' Thakur Ji assured him, it will be enough for you too.' Saying this, the three of them dined with great relish, blessed the disciple, and went away.

Now, here, all the ration was finished within three days. On the fourth day the disciple went into the village to beg for alms so he could serve the food to Thakur Ji. With the rations he got in charity, he cooked food for four people. That day too Thakur Ji, Baldau and Radhika Ji came and dined well.

On the fifth day when Guru Ji returned, he found out on the way that his disciple had been begging for alms. On returning to the ashram he asked his disciple what happened, since he had given him enough ration for four days. He said, 'Did you sell that ration that you had to go out and beg for alms?'

The disciple became upset. He said, guru ji, it is just as well that you have come back. You should serve the food now. Those three, together, have made my life very difficult here.

Guru Ji became suspicious. 'What are you blabbering about?' he asked. 'I had given you ration for four days, for yourself, who are these three people you have been feeding?' The disciple told him, 'One is Thakur Ji, with him comes another man, and a woman too.'

Guru Ji was convinced now that his disciple was high on grass. He scolded him, 'You are trying to pull a fast one on me, aren't you? You feed your friends, and you blame Thakur Ji. Why would Thakur Ji come here to have a meal?'

The disciple explained, 'No guru ji! I have served them food just as you had asked me to. The first day Thakur Ji did not even arrive during the day to have his meal. He came in the evening, and he did not leave anything for me. That night I slept hungry. The next day I cooked for two people, and two of them came here to eat. The third day I cooked for three people, and three people, two men and a woman, came to eat. Now you tell me, how would I have served them food if I had not gone out begging?'

Guru Ji was amazed to hear this story. He asked, 'You have seen with your own eyes that three people come here to eat?' 'Yes guru ji,' the disciple

said, 'I serve them myself every day. But it is good now that you are here. You serve them. They have created enough trouble for me already.'

Now guru ji was even more curious. He said, 'No. You will have to serve the food today. Then I will find out whether you are lying or telling me the truth.' The disciple agreed. He finished his worship and served the food on time. Guru Ji hid behind the door and watched everything. At the appointed time Thakur Ji, Baldau and Radhika Ji arrived and began to eat the meal served by the disciple. When Guru Ji saw this, tears of joy began to flow freely from his eyes. When the disciple saw this, he came running to his guru. He asked, 'Guru Ji, did I make a mistake? Did I do something wrong during the worship?'

Guru Ji replied with a choked throat, 'Hey, no. You have shown me today the one sight I have always yearned to see all my life.' The disciple said, 'Guru Ji, I have done only what you had asked me to do. It is your right to serve the food. Now, from today, you serve it again.' Guru Ji said, 'No, hey, from today, this right is yours.'

By then Thakur Ji, Baldau and Radhika Ji had finished their meal. They asked the Guru Ji and their disciple, 'You have served us very well. What should we give you?' Guru Ji prayed to them, 'Give us just one boon. Please come and eat at lunch time everyday just like this, as you have been doing for the past few days.' 'So it shall be,' they said, and disappeared. Guru Ji's joy knew no bounds. His own disciple had shown him God." (Ram 2003, 237-40, my translation, gloss added).

There are many interesting elements built into the structure of this story, such as the tacit understanding of the inevitability of penance and suffering on the path to god such as going hungry, test of the seeker's faith, the need for alms in an ascetic's life, the need for a small diet for a seeker, etc. Built within the structure of the story is a sense of inevitability arising from the respective duties of all parties concerned, if genuine faith is exercised. Take, for example, the simple-minded disciple's belief that Thakur Ji actually comes and eats what is offered to him, and his decision to forego his own meal till such time as Thakur Ji has eaten. Deriving from this is Thakur Ji's helplessness! He is duty-bound to come and have the meal if the disciple believes he will come and dine on his offerings. Deriving, further, from this is the inevitability of a true *darśan* (holy vision, glimpse) to the guru, who has to verify the sincerity of his disciple. This, further,

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develops into the inevitability of divine grace, as the guru achieves the goal of his life. Also built within the structure of the story is the importance of a simple, devoted nature, as opposed to high intellectualism. Clearly, if the disciple had been thinking right, he would not have waited for Thakur Ji.

But my primary concern here is with the simplicity of Sarkar Baba's delivery, and the humorous manner in which he relates the story, often putting in colloquial elements of low register language where one would normally expect high register. These are elements which do not come out easily in an English translation. An example of this is the way in which the simple-minded disciple treats Thakur Ji, the god, who, although worshipped, is talked to like a common man, in fact, even somewhat insultingly, as with a friend who has been lax in his behavior.<sup>5</sup> The other is the language that the disciple uses while talking to himself, or rather, in thinking out loud, as he grapples with the new obstacles he is presented with daily.<sup>6</sup> He is so simple minded that he does not even know about the family of the god he worships – Thakur Ji's brother Baldau, and his consort, Radhika – yet it does not matter, because his faith in following his guru's words remains unshaken against all odds. The point in the story where he comes running to his guru, mistaking his tears of joy for tears of sorrow, highlight his single-focused attention to the task at hand. The ultimate culmination of the story in Thakur Ji's granting the guru his desire underlines the merit of the faith of a devoted disciple.

Another story follows, this time, about a disciple who is less than conscientious in following what his guru asks him to do. I narrate the story in brief, paraphrased from what I remember of it. The structure of the story is very similar to the one above, but the results are diametrically opposite:

A guru ji had to go out of his ashram for a few days. He called his disciple and instructed him how to worship Thakur Ji – a dark piece of little stone that looked like a tiny pestle<sup>7</sup> – with ablutions and rituals every day. After guru ji left, the disciple tried to follow what his guru had asked him to do, but soon tired of it. He went out of the ashram for some fresh air and saw ripe mangoes hanging from a tree outside. He decided to bring some down by throwing stones at them. When he could find no stone, he picked up the little stone that was Thakur Ji, and chucked it at a ripe mango high up on the tree. That was the end of Thakur ji, for he could not find that stone again. Now the disciple got worried about what he would tell his guru on his return. Then an idea came to his mind. He went and picked a roseapple (Jamun) fruit, which looked exactly like the stone that was Thakur Ji. Satisfied with his handiwork, he waited for guru ji to return. Guru ji returned and found everything in place. When he went to worship Thakur ji, however, things turned out different. He picked up the stone (now the roseapple fruit) and began to wash it for Thakur ji's ablution. The ripe fruit burst into his hand with a *fitch* sound, leaving the Jamun seed staring him in the face. Guru Ji was livid at this wanton desecration of Thakur Ji. He called the disciple and asked what this was. The disciple replied, "*puni-puni candan, puni-puni pānī, Ṭhākur jī gal gailan, ham kā jānī!*" (repeated anointments of sandalwood, combined with repeated washing, Thakur ji has melted, what can I do!). Guru ji got up to thrash him, but he ran away never to be seen again. (personal communication, May 1990, New York).

This story is hilarious the way Sarkar Baba narrates it in colloquial Hindi mixed with the Bhojpuri dialect. People roll with laughter when Sarkar Baba impersonates the errant disciple's chagrin at having to perform the daily rituals, begin to drool when he sees the ripe mangoes, as well as his despair at losing Thakur Ji after a ripe mango.<sup>8</sup> Added to this is the sound effect when the roseapple fruit bursts leaving the guru ji astounded at the desecration of his object of faith. The culmination of the story, in the disciple running away, amply highlights the lack of faith and commitment required so earnestly on a seeker's path.

b). *Dīkṣā* and being *Gurumukh*

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In the previous section I talked about a few stories related to the guru and disciple relationship. In this section, I present some of Sarkar Baba's views on the necessity of a guru and cultivation of the knowledge that the guru imparts:

What should our behavior be towards our guru (*gurujan*), [towards] those we call our own (*svajan*), and [towards] ourselves. I put this topic before you so that it may be interesting to you, and so you may be able to understand it. If many people talk about it, you will understand it more. One understands less if only one person speaks about it. You can understand who is a person associated with a guru (*guru kā jan*)? His disciples. One who makes an effort to live his (guru's) teachings in life. Not that he just listens to him. Suppose you ask [your disciple] for a jug of water. He orders someone else to bring it. That person passes on the order to someone else. And so, the water never arrives. So you can understand, we heard that god (*devatā*), that guru, but it was not the right way of listening to him. What should be our proper behavior with him? It should not be that his requests are passed on to someone else. Either don't listen to him, or, if you listen to him, then make an effort for it.

Those who are associated with him (*jan*) are very dear to him. Being nice to his disciples is being nice to him. If you oppose his disciples, then think of it, those for him he has taken form, how much pain you can cause to his heart and mind. That is why it is said, more [important] than Rām, [is] Rām's server (*Rām sē adhik Rām kar dās*). Even greater than Rām is the one who serves Rām. As far as a nice person (*sajjan*) is concerned, no nice person waits for you to honor (*ādar*) him, [nor wishes] that you should honor and serve (*susrūṣā*) him. Before you bow to him he bows to you, greets (*praṇām*) you. He bows to you even before you do...

So you should treat what your teacher has given you with respect, act on it, make it your own... Our proclivities are such that we do not become deserving (*pātr*) of what that person [guru] gives us. If we become deserving, then that which he is giving you, of his own accord, will become naturally attainable. We need to become a vessel (*pātr*) with appropriate receptiveness.

What are our shortcomings? You can understand yourself what we lack. How much we cheat ourselves. How much we deceive ourselves, that knowingly, we take the wrong direction. So, being kind to yourself can only be kindness towards others. If you cannot be kind to yourself, you cannot be kind towards anyone else. How egotistic we become, create deceptions, act upset, when disciples come we have them touch our feet, we don't even answer when someone asks where is Babaji. Sometimes we start living on fruits. Sometimes when we see pilgrims on the bank of the Ganges, we close our eyes and pretend to be telling the rosary. Such egotistical behavior can only be fatal...

Senses have many portals, Suradas they inhabit every door  
(*indriya dvāra jharokhā nānā, jahā -tahā Sūra kīnha asthānā*)  
Seeing the breeze of sense delight, quickly they open the door

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*(āvata dekhahī viṣaya bayārī, so tehī deta kapāṭa ughārī).*

Each one of our senses is associated with a particular god (*devatā*). They are very greedy, avaricious, full of desires. Many desires reside in them. These desires are so many that they give rise to hundreds of diseases, which disappear within. Some are fulfilled, some are not. It creates an explosive situation. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, April 15:1, my translation, gloss added)

Sarkar Baba seems to be talking to two groups of listeners simultaneously in this passage. On the one hand are his lay disciples, to whom he emphasizes the necessity of being attentive to their guru. On the other hand are his initiated disciples, to whom he seems to be imparting the knowledge of “listening right,” that is to say, taking their guru's words not only seriously, but also promptly. A disciple's identification with his guru needs to be strong enough that he treats his guru's request as a matter of personal honor, not a request that can be taken lightly. This is because, as I have experienced during my time at the ashram, that a guru tests the sincerity of the disciple by making the smallest, and sometimes the oddest, request. If the disciple falters in following what the guru is asking him to do, the knowledge, or cultivation of inner personal expansion, becomes mitigated. Associated with that is the need for self-control and detachment from the pride of being a monk. It is easy to see on the ghats of Banaras many sadhus who delight in influencing lay passers-by by pretending to be meditating, or by pretending to be detached from the world even as they take deep puffs from a *chilam* (generally, a marijuana pipe), while at the same time eyeing the world with interest with one eye open. In Sarkar Baba's opinion, that is a fatal condition for a true monk.

In this passage Sarkar Baba makes word play on the word “*gurujan*” which, in normal parlance, denotes “the elders” or “teachers.” Sarkar Baba turns it into the phrase “*guru kā jan*,” implying those who consider themselves avowed to their guru, or those

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whom the guru thinks of as deserving candidates or appropriate vessels (*pātr*) for his teachings. One becomes deserving by paying attention to the guru's words, but that focus does not arrive unless the doors of the senses have been appropriately closed. The poetic lines that Sarkar Baba uses are quoted quite commonly in India, and most of his audience, whether initiated or lay followers, are likely to be familiar with it. Thus, it connects with their already existing frame of reference.

Another topic that Sarkar Baba dealt with in his talks used to be the importance of *dīkṣā*, generally translated as initiation. He says:

... initiation, and finding a guru [taking mantra from a guru] (*gurumukh*) is most important amongst Indians. Those who are birds, who are animals, simply moving in the shape of human beings, do not have a need for it. But their character, thought and behavior is even worse than animals. But those human beings who are of a higher nature, who have faith in themselves and in god, have a great need for it.

With the guru's mantra, with *dīkṣā*, first, the body becomes purified. You may take a hundred dips in the Ganges, go wandering to a thousand pilgrimage sites, or take mantra from a guru, turn towards his thoughts, and then you will benefit more. It leads to sanctification (*pavitratā*). You must have heard about *Nārada* in the *Bhāgavat* story. He used to sit where the story would be narrated. He had not taken initiation. When he would get up and leave, the soil from that place would be dug up and thrown away because that ground used to become impure (*aśuddh*). The bodies of uninitiated folks are like this. Because they are not fit for that community (*samāj*). A different kind of society exists for them. They can roam in the community of animals (*paśu*). Those who are tyrannical, those who are cruel, those who are conjurors (*māyāvī*), [as] you must have heard in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in the *Purāṇa-śāstras* (the *Purāṇas*) that the demons (*asuras*, non *suras*) are conjurors. It was also found that they could take the form of *Rām*, they could take the form of *sādhus* and *mahātmās* (great souls). You must have heard that in *Lankā* they produced thousands upon thousands of *Rāmas* and *Lakṣmaṇas*. So, you cannot immediately recognize the mentality of those who are conjurors, alienated from their guru (*guru vimukhī*), demons, usurers (*sūdkhor*), profiteers (*munāfākhor*), because they are quite nondescript. [This is] because they are in the form of humans, but they are not human. Only their face resembles that of a human. If you study their acts and behaviors, they will be demonish (*āsuri*). To look at, they would be reclining on a bolster, sitting on their cushion. They act as reputed and prestigious folks (*sāhu*), but they are not. They are demons. Even *their* mentality can improve if they become initiated by a guru

(*gurumukh*)... They keep pictures(s) of god(s) hanging around, and addressing it, they promise to do such and such a thing. They can even swear on them (god), they can even make a vow on them (god).

But those who are nice folks, initiated by their guru, they will never swear in this way, even if they lose their life. They will never deceive anyone. They practice only that which is proper, that which is just, they live their life out in a just manner, and fight against injustice. So, soil would be dug up and thrown away after *Nārad* would leave. Someone mentioned it to him that you are so impure, they throw away the soil where you sit after you leave. He (*Nārad*) asked *Vyās*<sup>9</sup>, why do you folks behave towards me in this way? [He replied], you are not initiated. You have not taken *dīkṣā*. [*Nārad*] felt very bad. He met with lord Viṣṇu and said give me *dīkṣā* and make me initiated. [Viṣṇu] said, take initiation from whoever you meet [first thing] in the morning.

In the morning he saw a fisherman going along with his fishing nets. [*Nārad*] saw him in the form of Viṣṇu and took initiation from him. So, establishing your faith in the guru (*gurupīṭh*) even in an undertaker, a Brahman, even birds and animals, you can achieve the substance and knowledge that comes from the guru. [You] can establish your guru-faith anywhere - from an undertaker, to a Brahman, to an unfortunate person. You will need only faith and devotion for that. It is not necessary that you take initiation only from a *mahātmā*. You don't have to take initiation from only a big pandit. That is not so. According to your resolve, when you listen to the guru's words, meditate upon it and have good feelings towards it, then you will receive the same fruit that you will receive on taking initiation from a wise person. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, April 30:1, my translation, gloss added)

Sarkar Baba touched upon many different aspects of social life in this talk of his, as is evident from the passage quoted above. On the one hand, he highlights the historical-social-spiritual importance of finding a guru and having sincere faith in the guru and the guru's words. This impinges on the purity of the body as well as of the mind, as a key factor for progress on the spiritual path. On the other, he relates it to social equality, giving the example of *Nārad* muni, a quintessential Brahmanical figure, who took initiation from a fisherman, emphasizing that the faith in the guru is not a monopoly of the learned and the affluent. His social critique of those who dress nicely and behave affluent, but keep an inimical or unjust mentality, is an unguarded portrayal of social hypocrisy. By itself, this story, while highlighting the element of faith in the

guru, is also in keeping with the Aghor practice of going beyond caste distinctions, as well as the Tantrik practice of bringing opposites together. But most importantly, from a social standpoint, what is new in this passage is that Sarkar Baba relates it not only to a just life, but in fact, fighting for justice. This fact, of being just and fighting for justice, he explains further in his talk:

So I hope you understood what I said. Our revered guru, Guru Dattareya had twenty-four gurus. So when we become prominent, we become affluent, we have a big community, then how humble (*namratā*) should we be? We should be as humble as those trees in whose shade hundreds of people can find a place to sit. We should not become willful (*uddanḍa*) like the palm tree in whose shade even a bird cannot sit. How will this humility come into us? How will this simplicity (*saraltā*) come into us? How will this compassion (*karuṇā*) come into us? How will kindness (*dayā*) come into us? All this is achieved only by becoming initiated (*gurumukh*). Being initiated does not imply only listening to a mantra in your ears [from the guru]... You should be inspired (*preraṇā*) towards him. You should be ready to, and also walk, on the path indicated by him. Just this much inspiration (*preraṇā*) [is needed]. It does not mean that you sit in front of him day and night and obstruct his work. If you keep sitting in front of him without getting up, he too will begin to postpone what he had planned to do today. This is not so. Just let his memory come into your heart, mind and consciousness, let his thought come to you, once in twenty-four hours. [You should] look at the path indicated by him...

So, initiation will make you perceive better who is a true human being, in whose hands should we trust ours. Whose company should we keep. Who is a miscreant (*kukarmī*) whose company will make us liable for one-sixth of his misdeeds just by sitting with him. You may not keep the company of a thief, but if he visits your place only occasionally, the police will begin to suspect you of being his accomplice... So if you don't remain tyrannical, never let your temperament become that way, then how good it will be for your progeny, how much faith they will keep towards you, how nice will their deeds be. It is for this that one needs initiation and becoming *gurumukh* in life. When we become initiated we follow all the customs, rules, laws and the constitution... What will this do for us? We will live well. Even god will be pleased with us. The angel residing within us will be pleased with us. Those human beings who visit us and keep our company will be pleased with us. Our own heart will remain so happy...

When you harbor ill feelings towards someone, you think of killing him, at that moment you become like a murderer (*kātil*). [You become] like an executioner (*jallād*). When you produce compassion in you towards someone, to be kind to him, to cooperate with him, to help him, at that moment you become like a god (*Īśvara-tulya*). Your body, your mind, and your senses become like

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that of god. It bequeaths untold riches to anyone who sees you at that moment and bows to you. Your own condition becomes divine, but anyone who sees you or meets with you, feels delighted. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, April 30:3-4, my translation, gloss added)

Sarkar Baba's attempt in this passage appears to be to warn against the inimical effects of keeping negative company. Keeping such company not only makes the person's own mind susceptible to nether thoughts and actions, but it also makes that person a suspect in society's eyes. Being just, and fighting for justice then, implies avoiding the company of those who are unjust, and cultivating the kind of feelings within us – those of compassion and cooperation – which qualifies a person to be called human. In effect, when Sarkar Baba talks about fighting for injustice, he implies the fight for justice as a corollary of molding a just behavior individually, internally, and then projecting it in actual behavior externally for social benefit. One more curious idea that he mentions is that keeping long company of someone makes a person share in one-sixth of the negative elements associated with it, besides making the person susceptible to negative thought patterns. In some ways this idea is tangentially related to the Pāśupat idea of exchange of negative karma. But while in the Pāśupat case the monk actively seeks dishonor to impart his own bad karma to the one who criticizes him, thus lightening his own load of bad karma, in this case Sarkar Baba implies that such sharing of negative karma can happen just by association, even without an active or conscious effort to do so. I will discuss this Pāśupat philosophy briefly in a later section.

#### c). The Mother - Shakti.

Sarkar Baba talked quite a bit about the goddess, and how to bring her into the seeker's own life. Sometimes it was in terms of faith and devotion, sometimes in terms

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of anthropomorphic descriptions. Some examples of how he talked about god or goddess, follow.

Brothers! We see darkness at every step of our life, at every step we wonder now what will happen, how will it go on now, what will happen after this, now what is going to happen? O Brother! We have entrusted all that is ours in the hands of that who knows and owns all. That entity – that unknown god – will definitely do something for us – always does something for us, we will have to have full faith in that. *It is that full faith, our complete devotion, that is the goddess, god, Bhagavān or Bhagavatī.* When we begin to help ourselves, then that entity begins to help us too. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1987, November 15:4, my translation, gloss added).

Here, Sarkar Baba emphasizes personal initiative in cultivating faith in the goddess, and equates that faith with the goddess's presence. What Sarkar Baba says here, in light of his thoughts about the importance of initiation and taking mantra from a guru, is corroborated by White in his discussion of the *Rasārṇava*, where he writes:

...mantra, ... those “tools for thought” by which the tantric practitioner, like the Vedic ritualist before him, empowers himself to manipulate the divinities whose acoustic being is nothing other than the aggregate of the phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. In a universe that is vibratory in nature, it is through these primal vibrations that one may most efficiently return to the absolute source of all vibration. (White 1996:179).

Faith in the goddess, coupled with the faith in the mantra given by the guru, thus makes the seeker doubly predisposed to attune the self in consonance with the goddess, as discussed below. On the occasion of *Vasant Navarātri* in 1988, Sarkar Baba described the goddess in this manner:

This Mahākālī, Mahālakṣmī, Mahāsarasvatī whom we worship – is a three-fold energy (*triguṇātmaka śakti*). That energy, which in our lives, that is to say the lives of the human beings, does not always descend in the same way, in all places, at all times. And this is the reason why we have to meditate on her, think about her, study her and repeat this process again and again. We have to speak to her, we have to have our message conveyed to her. We have to listen to her, we have to have our sentiment delivered to her. She is tri-fold day and night (*triyā din-rātri*) Mahākālī, then Mahālakṣmī, after that Mahāsarasvatī... [we pray to

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Mahākālī] O Goddess, you are very benign. You are peace-loving (*saumya*, *śāntipriya*). You protect me from all kinds of infamy (*kalaṅka*). Who knows what kind of blames human beings will cast on others, please protect me from that. Mahālakṣmī comes in the fourth stage, the Mahālakṣmī who fulfills all my wishes, all my desires... Mahāsarasvatī, she is charming (*lalitā*). She gives efficacy (*oj*) to speech. She makes you charming. She makes your speech very sweet. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, August 15:2, my translation, gloss added).

In this passage above, Sarkar Baba seems to advocate intense personal communication with the goddess, a process of communication which is not one sided. It depends, according to the import of the passage, on the “vesselness” (*pātratā*) of the individual concerned, a word that we came across while discussing how the guru imparts his knowledge to disciples. The same process seems to apply here too. For the goddess to descend into, or into the life of a seeker, the seeker needs to be in tune with the goddess. Once that harmony is established, the characteristics of the goddess should flow into the seeker. During the same *Navarātri*, which was observed in the USA, Sarkar Baba first related the goddess to the tradition of the Hindus, and then brought her existence to very human forms within the family:

Today is the sixth day of *Navarātri*. Sitting together in the evening, the one we are thinking about, meditating on, singing *bhajans* of and praying to, that progenitor (*jananī*) of great majesty (*aiśvarya*), the mother, Bhagavatī's, worship is a wealth bequeathed to us traditionally from our ancestors. If we accept it all through our lives, keep it with us, then we will never lack for anything. As it is, in one form or another, that great power, mother of the world (Mahāmāyā Jagadambā) fulfills everything in the future of each living being... So friends, what don't we derive from that Mother-power (*māṭrya-śakti*)? How much joy do we get from it, how much affection, how much love. In many forms and with many names the Mother-power helps us, such as wife, daughter-in-law, mother, aunt. With many names and forms she encourages us. With many names and forms she circulates the best energy in us... If, while conducting the business of our life, in the span of twenty-four hours we remember her only for a second, it gives us immense power, immense foresight. It is that power which makes us meet with nice people at every place, in every which way... The day this mother in the form of the life force (*prāṇamayī-mātā*) leaves us, people burn this body as sticks. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, October 30:2, my translation, gloss added).

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Some could argue that in this passage Sarkar Baba is simply trying to inculcate respect within the men-folk of the family towards the women in the house. That could be so. But I think his vision is much more holistic in the sense that he does see the mother-element present in all women-folk of the house, because, if we refer back to the earlier passages about cultivating being “in-tune” with the goddess, cultivating nice behavior patterns with women-folk of the house could be one such method. Within the same issue of the *Sarveshwari Times*, but from another talk, Sarkar Baba throws more light on the body of the Mother:

The goal that we have in our life, when we have to face storms, troubles and difficulties, at that time, to protect ourselves, we need those traits and characters. The substances of that trait are found only at the feet of the mother (*mātr̥ya-carana*), it is made up of the Mother's traits, characters and substances (*mātr̥ya guṇa-dharma-dhātu*). It is in the nature of the Mother. In the same way as the nature of fire (*agni*) is to burn, the nature of water (*jal*) is to cool, the nature of air (*vāyu*) is to give life with touch, the nature of the earth (*pṛthvī*) is to provide smell, and the sky (*ākāś*) has its own nature. In the same way – *kṣiti* (earth), *jal* (water), *pāvaka* (fire), *gagana* (sky or ether), *samīrā* (air) | *pañca* (the five) *racita* (have made) *yah* (this) *adhama* (non-virtuous) *śarīrā* (body) || (earth, water, fire, space and air are the five elements that create this ignoble body).

As we have, our bodies made of these five elements. In the same way, if she has a body, then it is a body made of those divine substances (*mahān tattva*), those divine traits (*mahān guṇa*), and it cannot be destroyed. It shines like lightning (*vidyut kī tarah prajvalit*), and it is cool and calm like the moon (*candramā kī tarah śītal aur śānt*). (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, October 30:1-3, my translation, gloss added).

Sarkar Baba seems to create a homology here, between the elements that create the human body, and the elements that create the Mother's divine body. The difference, it appears, is that there is potential for each element of the human body to be saturated with the elements of the Mother's body, thus opening the possibility of transmitting the Mother's traits (*mātr̥ya guṇa-dharma-dhātu*) into the physical human body. Having

stated his take on the nature of the Mother's body, he then relates it to the relationship that we have with the mother:

... if we receive but an iota of her grace, even if we may not be her best children, let us say we are absolutely unsuitable to be her children, even then that mother is never bitter from her own side. She still provides cool and calm joy. That goes for whether it is the this-worldly mother (*laukik mātā*), or the other-worldly mother (*parlaukik mātā*). The nature of both the mothers is the same towards her children. But if we spend time just in wondering whether we are her children or not, whether we are a part of her or not, if we keep ourselves occupied with this kind of divisive thought, then it becomes very late. We are not able to achieve anything. We are [definitely] a part of that primal (*Ādyā*), Mother of the world (Bhuvaneśvarī), Mother of all (Sarveśvarī), Mother. It is her nature and character (*guṇa-dharma*) which is in our bodies and in our lives. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, October 30:3, my translation, gloss added).

The homology that Sarkar Baba had initiated in the passage quoted earlier, about the similarity of body elements between the human body and the Mother's body, becomes complete in this passage with an unequivocal assertion that it is the Mother's nature and character which is in human bodies too. Then Sarkar Baba talks about how to cultivate those traits of the mother in our own lives:

It is the eighth day [of *Navarātri* worship] (*aṣṭamī*) tomorrow. [It is called] *niśā-rātri*, meaning the night of a special worship where the goddess alights (*āvirbhāva*) [into the seeker]. What is this *āvirbhāva*? Entry into the seeker's body in the form of air (*vāyu*), in the form of a thrill (*tarang*), in the form of a vibration (*kampan*)... It cannot be said in what land, in what country, at which place, suddenly her electrical impulses will fill us with infinite energy. Then the courage and enthusiasm which it fills us with, makes us look at the world as if like a myrobalan fruit (*āmlavat*) in the palm of our hands... So that which is the gracious power – *Ramā*, *Umā*, *Śivā* (various names of the goddess) – when this great power resides within us, and her grace remains upon us, then everyone will look kindly upon us. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, October 30:3, my translation, gloss added).

The nature of the goddess, as Sarkar Baba has described, is subtle, and all fulfilling. Only the one who experiences it can vouch for a feeling of thrill, or vibration. In terms of psychoanalysis, these experiences can certainly be explained (away), but if

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the residual impact of such an experience is such that the seeker's abilities and talents become magnified, then the seeker can certainly claim it to be the Mother's grace. But acquiring her grace is not easy. There is, of course, the self-control and internal cleanliness and harmony that the seeker has to cultivate, but more than that, it is also a complete surrender to her power that is cultivated. This is as much a matter of inner attitudes, in my opinion, as also a reference to traditions that seek her grace. As Sarkar Baba elaborates in the next passage:

It is not as if when a train is coming we go and stand directly in front of it, because then we will be cut and die. *One stands to the left, or to the right of it, to ride it.* The tendency that we have, to tackle everything directly, will destroy us. So I will not advise you to face that power directly for us to become agreeable to her, and for her to become benign towards us. When I was little my mother would have me hold her finger and take me places, she would help me in taking support of the wall. When I became even a little conscious of running and jumping, she took her finger away. I remember this very well. And when I began to walk a lot, and began to behave willfully, she let go of me and let me be. Now [she knew] she did not need to be there. She knew I had found my impertinence, I could be on my own. But I will implore to all of you, my friends, that if we want to be imbued with those divine characters, we will need to maintain ourselves like children who seek the support of their mother's finger. Without her support, we cannot walk even one step. We cannot walk even one step. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1988, October 30:3-4, my translation, emphasis added).

Here again, we have an emphasis on faith and devotion on the goddess, but this time, with the acknowledgement that her body elements and vibrations are within the seeker, it is those that animate the seeker, and if such faith and devotion were to go away, so will the harmony achieved with the mother. In many of his talks Sarkar Baba has spoken about the form of the goddess. His views are somewhat different from how the general populace understands it:

Gods and goddesses are not the way that you see them in *cartoons*. They do not hold arrows and swords and other weapons, but in fact, they are very much like us, and they even reside amongst us. They are the gods of this earth (*prthvī par*

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*kē devatā*). It is pure imagination to talk about the gods of heaven and the sky (*svarga tathā ākāś kē devatā*). You will die thinking about them all your life, but you will not achieve anything. All that you do every day, and all that happens with you, is dependent on your will power and determination (*sankalp*). What determination you get up with in the morning, with whom, for how long, and what do you converse, what kind of human beings you see, and how long you stay with them. All these things have a favorable or unfavorable effect on us. That is why, when it comes to these things, you will have to keep your sentiments in check. If you don't control yourselves thus, and indulge in excesses, then it will bring hindrances to your worship and penance, and because of that hindrance, you can lose yourself. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1990, October 15:1, my translation, emphasis and gloss added).

In this passage, although Sarkar Baba does not specify the particular god or goddess he is referring to: when he refers to those pictures as cartoons, he is probably referring to the myriad different pictures of gods and goddesses that we see in India and elsewhere every day. In particular, however, two goddesses stand out: one is Durga, sitting astride a lion and holding bow, arrow, sword and various other weapons, and Kali, holding a scimitar. Scholars have documented these pictures well in their descriptions (for Kali, see Kinsley, 1997:67; for Durga, see Pal, 2009). Sarkar Baba dissuaded people from getting hung up on the image of the god or goddess as displayed in these pictures. His effort was to have them experience the goddess through their own meditations and practices.

My attempt in citing these passages about the goddess and the seeker's process of harmonizing with her is to portray how Sarkar Baba used a very practical, down to earth method of communicating his idea. His speech is usually always colloquial and conversational, even though it may have a few high register words. But the sentiment and intensity with which he spoke about it never failed to influence the listener, at least till such time that they got engrossed in their mundane activities again.

d) Devotion with prudence (*bhakti* with *yukti*):

One of Sarkar Baba's constant efforts was to wean people away from the generally accepted notions of devotion, and bring them to a state where they realize the importance of self-control and inner investigations of the Self. In this context, excerpts from one of his talks that illustrate the idea of *yukti* in *bhakti*, the application of right strategy in exercising one's devotion, is quite illustrative. The passage is necessarily long because of the plethora of thoughts included within it:

Friends! The kind of winds that blow in our country these days, in various seasons, did not use to be so earlier. In duty (*dharma*), action (*karma*), ethics (*nīti*), justice (*nyāya*), daily deeds and behaviors, we all know that if we receive only praise, then we can take an entirely wrong path too, and we may not be able to stop ourselves from the deeds of the worst kind.

Therefore, the existence of criticism and denunciation is also very important. It is even better if it happens right in front of us. At that time our unruliness, anger, or a surge of any kind can push us back a lot. ... it was an ancestor of ours who did not hesitate even in working at a cremation ground. He had to sell his wife and son, and breaking his self-respect, he used to work barely two to four hundred miles from his city. Everyone knows him. Even today, he is well known in history as a truthful (*satyavādī*) person. If we are his progeny, then we should not hesitate in doing whatever small or large opportunities for action come before us. Our purpose will be fulfilled. It will certainly be fulfilled. This is predetermined. A person who bears the strength to cope with the all-round attacks of regret, remorse, sorrow and troubles, is a true human being. He is the one who remains ageless. He lives forever and also achieves that supreme truth, that supreme peace.

...even above the many kinds of 'isms' (*vād*) that we have such as incarnationism (*avatāravād*), idol-worship (*mūrtipūjā*), 'god-ism' (*īśvaravād*), there is another 'transcendent-ism' (*paramvād*) which is beyond all arguments (*vivād*). You, I and everyone is that. But if we all accept the subordination of someone else then we also find the same despicable fate as we see amongst the Bengalis and Assamese in our country.

...perhaps you are not able to hear what I say, or if you hear you are not able to understand it. If you are able to understand it, you are not able to act on it, and even if you are able to act on it, you are, perhaps, not able to mold it in the way it should be done. This is the reason you remain deprived of everything. What I say is "devotion won't bear fruit without prudence" (*binā yukti kī bhakti*

*na hoī*). You will need prudence in everything you do, only then will it be fulfilled smoothly. If you don't have prudence (*yukti*), only straight devotion (*bhakti*), then it can turn out to be even violent (*laṭṭhamār*). It can even lead you astray. Your worship and devotion can turn into invectives... What importance does the imagination of gods and goddesses of the sky (*ākāś ke devī-devatā, bhagavān-bhagavatī*) have for us human beings who live on the earth? I fail to understand it. It provides the livelihood of some people who follow absurd reins (*lagām*) and ruts (*līk*), by which we have been made fearful (*bhayabhīt*) or suspicious (*saśaṅkit*), and rendered confused and frustrated (*kunṭhita*). They take advantage of our frustration... Because of the many faults associated with imaginary gods and goddesses we find ourselves as if groping in the dark, and our education and initiation also strengthens that. That is why our whole life's effort to know the reality goes to waste... then, what will we do even if we get the kingdom of those greedy (*lolup aur lobhī*) gods and goddesses? I have heard many a times in our histories that demons (*asur*) had made them weak by snatching away their kingdom a number of times. Many a times the gods had appropriated the wealth of the demons and declared themselves very rich. They never gave any importance to sages and seers (*ṛṣi-muni*), saints and great souls (*sant-mahātmā*), or human beings (*manuṣya*) of the earth. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1990, September 15:1, my translation, emphasis and gloss added).

Although Sarkar Baba continues to elaborate his ideas, let me pause here to take a look at some of the ideas presented in this passage. First is the observation of “new winds blowing in our country,” which I think is an allusion to the natural human proclivity to assign blame for unsavory events in our lives to others, may they be human beings, or gods and goddesses. It is easy to ascribe our plight to the gods and goddesses because in India we have ready pictures to think of a god or goddess in a particular way. Sarkar Baba appears not only to be negatively disposed towards worshipping such imaginary gods and goddesses, but also seems to not recognize any validity in their pictorial depictions. Sarkar Baba was more inclined to taking ownership of one's own life, including one's spiritual life, and to investigate the nature of reality within ourselves, not in the pictures and stories that exist outside of us. The second interesting idea is to welcome criticism, to use it to further one's growth, and not to be swayed by it

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negatively. The third interesting idea is the characterization of gods of heaven – as greedy beings – who wage wars and are prone to the same base proclivities as human beings. His contention is, why worship them if they are so weak?

This is further corroborated when he mentions heaven-dwelling gods and goddesses, and their proclivities towards human beings further in his talk:

Therefore, if we want to do something, let us turn away from worshipping heavenly gods. The heavenly god does not provide for the necessities of our life, such as flour, rice, water, salt, vegetables etc., nothing. If someone weighed down by fleeting thoughts, or a teacher, or a monk tells you about worshipping heavenly god or goddess, then we should take a decision on this matter only after thinking long and hard about it. Then only does your visit to this Aghor-place (*aghorācal*) have any value. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1990, September 15:1, my translation, gloss added).

Sarkar Baba takes a very practical view of worship in this quote, bringing the spiritual quest of the seekers down to earth with the quest to fulfill their physical needs by taking responsibility for their own lives in their hands. This idea is extended further in his mention of the pitfalls of accepting the authority of someone else, especially with reference to Bengal and Assam, which appears to be a social commentary on India's westernization, where all things western are prized, and things which have been accepted as traditional are ignored. He illustrates this by mentioning the popular trend of schoolchildren being encouraged to wear western clothes in the place of traditional Indian, or South Asian ones. His emphasis, it appears to me, is that by dressing in the western way, our thought processes are conditioned away from the traditional ways of dressing and thinking, which then becomes a hindrance in spiritual progress.

His mention of the truthful ancestor indicates the story of king Hariścandra, who is said to have ruled over Kashi (modern day Varanasi or Banaras), and later, through a

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series of adverse circumstances, ended up working as an undertaker's assistant at a cremation ground not too far from the city. His life story is full of valor as well as pathos as befits a man who was committed to speaking the truth and keeping his word. Even today, his life-story holds inspiration to many. What is interesting is that Sarkar Baba cites the Hariścandra story as an example of prudence, or, in a different context we may say, strategy, to achieve spiritual goals. This is not to say that king Hariścandra is thought to have consciously and deliberately sought censure to gain spiritual merit, but the overall effect of his actions seems to have been that. However, this idea reminds us of the Pāśupat practice of acting deliberately crazy either like a child or like a ghoulish (*bālonmattapiśācavat*),<sup>10</sup> where more the ordinary folks chided a person who acted crazy in this way, the more spiritual merit came to him. This idea is illustrated further in Sarkar Baba's talk, as he narrates the story of a king who had always been praised, and that of a prostitute:

...in the heavens, hellish arrangements were being made for that much praised king, but considerably better arrangements were being made for the prostitute. When the reason for this was enquired about, angels (*devadūt*) informed that he (the king) used to be engaged in constant criticism of the prostitute, while she used to engage in constant praise of the king. Everyone used to only praise the king. That is why such arrangements were being made. When a solution to this problem was asked about the angels said something would have to be done so that people criticize the king severely. Then arrangements were made so that everyone began to criticize the king. After that, the hellish arrangements of the other world turned into a beautiful arrangement... one who listens to the sins of others becomes a sharer of one sixth of that sin, and one who narrates it, shares five sixths of it. So this is one kind of strategy, friends! (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1990, September 15:3, my translation, gloss added).

This idea, of the narrator and listener of someone else's sins as sharers in the negative effects of the sin itself, and thus a mechanism for the sinner to cleanse himself, is a curious one, but it is in keeping with the Pāśupat concept mentioned above. As

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McEvilley writes, “The theory of Seeking of Dishonor, as formulated in the *Pāśupata Sūtra*, is that through courting the scorn of others, the Seeker “gives his bad *karma* to them,” and “takes their good *karma* from them” (McEvilley 2002:228). This practice can be traced back to the Ajivikas, including Makkhali Gosala, and has connections to Shaivism, Jainism, as well as Buddhism. In that sense, it is not a new idea, but is in fact one that has been known and practiced for centuries. Ingalls mentions that this same mechanism, perhaps drawing from the same source, was practiced by the Greek Cynics also, where “the Cynic exposed himself regularly to scorn; he actively sought dishonor even at the cost of blows” (Ingalls 1962:282).

McEvilley, however, brings an interesting idea to the discussion. In so far as the idea of gaining merit by others having criticize someone is concerned, it is based on the theory of *karma* where:

One may gain good *karma* by patiently enduring hardship or gain bad *karma* by mistreating another person; the Seeker of Dishonor tries to manipulate these two processes. But the underlying theory goes beyond conventional ideas of karmic process, which would give one bad *karma* for coercing another into acts karmically unfavorable to himself; it posits a magical breach of the usual working of the process. (McEvilley 2002:228).

The argument, with merit, is that saints transfer their own good *karma* to others and take on their bad *karma* on themselves as a saintly act of piety or self-sacrifice. This is an idea formulated by the Mahayana Buddhist author Śāntideva in *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. This would amount to an act of grace. Lakulīṣa, the proponent of the Seeking of Dishonor idea, however, appears to teach black magic, causing the downfall of others while seeking one's own salvation (McEvilley 2002:228). While the idea that McEvilley expresses is a sound one, I think there is more to it than simply that. On the one hand,

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this idea seems to be in keeping with the genre of Tantrik antinomian behavior, which requires valor (*vīrabhāva*) to be self-effacing, and successful. Once a seeker has attained the merit required and become a *siddha* (successful or realized one), one has the power and knowledge to bestow grace on another, but not before. On the other hand, it also acts as a mechanism of social control – implicitly indicating one to be nice to others, or it can have negative consequences unbeknownst to the individual.

What Sarkar seems to be saying by citing the two stories in his talk, one, that of king Hariścandra, and second, that of the king and the prostitute, is to warn against the pitfalls of criticizing others, while at the same time, advocating the cultivation of a certain kind of stoic nature which remains indifferent to praise or criticism. If one becomes addicted to praise, as in the case of the king and the prostitute story, the quest for praise itself becomes the downfall of the individual. That is why king Hariścandra's story is so important in Sarkar Baba's narrative. Although Hariścandra is said to have faced abject hardships and criticism, it was not as if he was actively seeking them. It was his steadfast valor and adherence to the truth in the face of all hardships that ultimately led to his own, as well as those of his wife and son's, salvation. That, I think, is the idea Sarkar Baba wants to impart to his listeners.

#### e). Sorrow (*dukkha*) –

On many occasions, Sarkar Baba spoke about the nature of sorrow (*dukkha*), and the way to be free from it. To illustrate how and what he spoke about it, I cite here passages from a 1972 issue of *Sarveshwari Times*:

The topic today was – how to mitigate physical (*daihik*), divine (*daivik*) and material (*bhautik*) sorrow (*dukkha*). Many people explained it in different ways. As long as our eyes are open (ie. as long as we are alive), this sorrow will be perceivable in this creation (*sr̥ṣṭi*). The day our eyes close (ie. we die) that day our individuality will go away. It may still remain in someone else's eyes, because that person's eye has many creations in it. There are many things. Sorrow, there are many trillions (*koṭi*) of sorrows. There are thousands of trillions of sorrows. There are millions upon millions of sorrows which torment us. Getting up (*uṭhanā*), sitting (*baiṭhanā*), sleeping (*sonā*), talking (*bāt karanā*), all this is sorrow. Eulogy (*stuti*), prayer (*prārthanā*), reflection (*ciñtan*), contemplation (*manan*) all are a part of sorrow. How will all these be destroyed completely (*samūl nāś*), how will we become like roasted seeds (*bhunē bīj*)?...

When you feel sorrow, you feel tormented (*sañtapt*), then you scream and run. Sorrow is a dark spirit (*ḍākinī*<sup>11</sup>) which has thousands upon thousands of arms, thousands of eyes, thousands of feet, and she dances with them in this cosmos. Dancing in this way when she becomes tired and whenever she goes to the *kadalī van* (banana or plantain forest) of the saints, for *kadalī van* is a forest of the saints, then she experiences some peace (*śānti*) and rest (*viśrām*). She is so unruly that despite getting peace and rest there, she is not able to stay there for long, and she comes back towards sorrow again. You know a story. There was a *brahma-maṇḍala*, a colony of Brahmans. It caught on fire. When it caught on fire the Brahmans yelled out and said it is on fire and we are burning, and ran out to the road. When they came out on the road they began to speak like you people do, Oh, everything is burning, ours is burning. So they came back. Our suitcase is burning, our trunk is burning, our brother is burning. When they returned, the heat from the flames surged towards them and they cried out, we are burning, Oh, we are burning. So they ran out again. In the same way each one of our lives are burning. We burn and run and say ours is burning and return. After saying everything you come back to square one.

This is what I was watching in you. You were screaming about your pain. But after all that crying, you turn back and return to the state of “ours is burning.” You run when you burn, and you return when you think something of yours is burning. This is our condition. How, then, can sorrow be eradicated from its roots? We are not even able to try for it. When we are tormented, our condition becomes like that of that *ḍākinī* with thousands upon thousands of arms. She dances like a *ḍākinī* in the cosmos. You become perturbed by your worries and troubles. You become so perturbed that you cannot sleep, the bed does not attract you, your dear ones do not look appealing to you. You don't like it when someone says something to you. The nice *haluā* (the sweet *halwā* dish) that we had asked to be prepared does not even taste like *sattū* (mix of barley and chick-pea flour). The *roṭī* (unleavened bread) on which we had liberally applied clarified butter (*ghee*) does not even taste like dry bread (*sūkhī roṭī*). It is as if its taste has changed... it just isn't tasteful (*rucikar*). Such is sorrow.

How can these sorrows be eliminated from root?... We have personally arrived at that *kadalī van* (banana or plantain forest). We have reached its

shadow, so we should certainly resolve in our mind to mitigate this sorrow and these kinds of complications at least a little bit in our lives. Let us sit somewhere worry free and attain that state of *samādhi* (deep meditation). Let us examine our senses and think about these things. We don't even have to try very hard for it. There is very little effort, and there is a lot of effort too...

How will all this happen. Think of it. Suppose you have a horse worth five hundred rupees. If you sell it today, and it dies, you will not be miserable. If it had died while still with you, you would have been miserable. So till such time you have the sense of belongingness (*apanāpan*), as far as you have the sense of ownership, till that extent you will have sorrow. Sorrow will torment you. Where you don't have that sense of ownership or belongingness, there is no sorrow. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, April 15:3, my translation, gloss added)

Sorrow is a topic that finds ample space in Buddhist literature. However, being that it is a universal condition, Sarkar Baba's treatment of it for his devotees is quite natural. His analogies in the passage are of special interest – those of the *ḍākinī* and her sojourn into the *kadalī van*, the colony of Brahmans and their repeated return to things they think belong to them, and the horse that one sells to someone else, which then dies – hail from three different social and spiritual realms. These social and spiritual realms, however, are not mutually exclusive, they have a certain degree of overlap. The first analogy, that of the *ḍākinī*, appears to belong to the Buddhist realm, but her journey to the *kadalī van* has a semantic resonance to a popular motif in folk epics like the *Ḍholā* where the forest is called *kajarīban*, or black forest (see Wadley 2004: 12, 52-4), and relates the analogy to the genre of Gorakhnath and Jalandharnath stories. In the *kajarīban* queen Manjha, one of the main female characters in the epic who is beset by adversities, finds help from goddess Durga. The *Ḍholā* also mentions Hingalaj (now in Pakistan) as an abode of goddess Durga, which is a place associated with Aghaṛs and Gorakhnathis. There exists an actual place called *kadalī van*, which is a part of the Srisailam complex in the Kurnool district of Andhra Pradesh state in India. Srisailam

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complex is known as an abode of god Shiva as Mallikarjuna, and goddess Parvati as Bhramarambika. White seems to think it was, perhaps, the same site as the Śripārvata which was a Buddhist center which, seventh century onwards, became a prominent Shaiva center (White 1996:110-11).

Without going into details of where the actually *kadalī van* may be located geographically, for it could as well be in Assam (White 1996:236), let me just relate it to the Matsyendranath story, where he was enraptured to the point of losing his yogic powers, in a land ruled by women. White interprets *kadalī van* or Kadalī Rājya as the kingdom of the plaintain forest, equating the plantain part of this nomenclature with the thighs of beautiful women since it was Matsyendranath's sexual indulgence that led to his downfall (White 1996:237). I think the analogy Sarkar Baba makes refers to the weakness within human beings, who, when tired and dejected by the sorrows they face, hanker for a place of some peace and respite, here mentioned as the *kadalī van*, the forest of the saints. Saints may teach their devotees the lesson of "non-attachment," as exemplified by the analogy of the colony of Brahmans, but the difficulty inherent within human nature to let go of things they think belongs to them, pulls them back into the realm of sorrow. Their sojourn into the *kadalī van*, therefore, is short lived. However, if one could realize the transience of belongingness, as exemplified by the analogy of the horse which is sold to someone else, an analogy which belongs to the realm of Indian folk-life, one can begin to understand the true nature of sorrow as a mental construct. Once understood, and practiced in daily life to cultivate a sense of detachment, sorrow begins to fade away, gradually losing control over the individual, ultimately setting him free of its clutches.

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II. Social Topics

a) Women and Dowry

Sarkar Baba created his organization for social service. One of the important items on the agenda of the organization was working to eliminate the scourge of dowry, while at the same time inculcating a viewpoint of holistic respect towards women. It was, I think, with this goal in mind that Sarkar Baba created a special women's organization within the Samooh, called Mahila Sangh (women's organization), so they could find a space, and voice in a public setting which was dominated by males. He spoke about the ills of dowry in many of his talks, and I am basing this section on those talks, as they were published in the *Sarveshwari Times*. This is what Sarkar Baba had to say on this topic in the January thirtieth issue of the newsletter in 1972, as he addressed those assembled in the ashram, but especially women:

Today, it is the celebration of your society... I have great happiness, hope and faith that you can express your views before others, you can explain your thoughts to them. Women can thunder (*simhanād*) and roar (*garjanā*) like Durga (the goddess of valor on the battlefield) which can make the earth shake and the directions palpitate. Many women are acrimonious. When they get angry at their children, they take on a very fierce (*ugra*) form. If women use their fierce form to negotiate their genuine concerns, then they can be successful. In your sweet voice also resides Sarasvati (the goddess of knowledge and learning). Your sweet voice and sentences are like mantras. You naturally have the supernatural power (*siddhi*) of putting your words into reality. If you use them for holy deeds (*pavitra kārya*) instead of their opposite, you will go very far...

The second matter concerns dowry (*tilak-dahej*) and death rituals (*barahī-terahī*) [of the twelfth-thirteenth day]. All this was a business of the Brahmans. They did not have an agricultural livelihood. This was their only source of support, but now even enlightened folks of the Brahman lineage have started opposing this. Your Prime Minister belongs to that lineage which opposes it. If not even a jug of water was served to parents while still alive, what can be done after they are dead? If the soul is eternal and everlasting, then what meaning do these actions have? It will lead to your unnecessary [financial] harm (*kṣati*).

As far as dowry (*tilak-dahej*) is concerned, who has ever become rich solely on the basis of dowry? Your Prime Minister was married in Gandhi Ji's

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ashram in those very clothes that were made from the thread spun by Nehru Ji. Indira Ji is not very well-read either. But she had learnt how to administer by being with her father. You too can use your experience to initiate a better system (*vyavasthā*) in your home and neighborhood, and gain respect (*sammān*). Muhammad Sahab married his daughter Fātimā to a water-carrier (*maśak*). Today, Fātimā is worshipped not only amongst the Muslims, but also amongst the Hindus.

If you helped in the marriage of a girl in your neighborhood, if you helped a poor child to study, then you did a noble task (*dharm*). If you do not have the resources to do so, then too you can help with your words, you can help by sharing your utensils (*bartan-bāsan*). You can go to their house to help (*sahyog*)....

Today the times (*yug*) have changed. There are resources (*suvidhāyē*) for your holistic development (*sārvabhaum vikās*). You can express your views before everyone. You should staunchly oppose [the system of] dowry. Don't let unbearable thoughts (*dusah vicār*) and sentiments (*dusah bhāvanāyē*) even come near you. Your good thoughts (*acchē vicār*) will spread like a storm (*pracaṇḍa vāyu*). (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, January 30:1, my translation, gloss added).

I will note here that this excerpt from 1972 exhibits Sarkar Baba's early lead on the fight against dowry. Stronger awareness about this issue as a social problem did not percolate into civil society consciousness till the 1980s. As far as Sarkar Baba's talks are concerned, he had been speaking on this issue from even before 1972, the year from which I have chosen the passage.

It seems as if Sarkar Baba is treading gently in the passage quoted above. His tone is conversational, and he talks about dowry in consonance with other social issues that merit attention, so as not to appear as if he is forcing his anti-dowry message on people who may not yet be receptive to it. This will especially be true of the male folks present in the gathering. I think Sarkar Baba is trying to generate a social consciousness amongst women too used to being content with their domestic chores, while at the same time not antagonizing their men-folk, or those men -- husbands and family members of the women being addressed -- who may be present in the audience. But that does not

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prevent him from speaking his mind. His message is quite clear – times have changed and women have a responsibility to grow in their thinking as well as in public life. This fact would have to be digested by the men folk in the audience. It could also be that women, perhaps, are more influential within the domestic sphere rituals, and dowry forms a strong part of it. Generating a consciousness against dowry in women could go a long way in influencing their men-folk who look at it as a method of economic prosperity. His use of the particular examples, when he gave this talk in 1972, of Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, as well as reference to Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, bring the perspective to a largely secular and cross cultural frame of reference. I think using metaphors and examples like the thunder made by goddess Durga, holistic development, thoughts spreading like a storm, or helping folks within the neighborhood with whatever is at one's disposal, is his way of empowering and inspiring women to begin to act within their particular spheres of influence while avoiding negative thoughts and influences.

As the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh organization grew, he instituted a system of marriage within the ashram which was dowry free, and included minimal token gift exchange. Following this system was expected from members of the organization, although such restrictions did not apply to the kin of those members who were not members of the organization. In another talk, cited below, Sarkar Baba's tone was not as neutral as in the first passage above, when talking about dowry:

When wealth is harmed (*kṣati*) in our life, it gives great sorrow (*dukh*), so let us not give this sorrow to others. How can nice people even think of snatching (*apaharaṇa*) the wealth (*arth*) of those who are going to become our relatives (*sambandhī*), those with whom we are going to have a life-long relationship. So, dowry is for those people who do not have any faith towards either their society,

or their relatives. I want to stay away from cooperation by such people. This [Sarveshwari Samooh's marriage system] is for those people who think about the society, who hold an ideal for their future society. It is not for those who live only for themselves and their relatives. ... The coming future will not side with them. You know, even Buddha has said, produced religion [is], finished religion (*utpanna dharma, vināśa dharma*). Those behaviors (*ācār*), rules (*niyam*) and systems (*vyavasthā*) which have become shackles (*bandhan*), which are neither natural (*svābhāvīk*) nor timely (*sāmayīk*), cannot bring happy tidings (*sukhkar*).

So, this [Sarveshwari Samooh's marriage system] is not for those who are destitute of principles (*ādarśahīn*), not holistic (*sārvabhaum*), those who go through life within themselves like a frog in a well (*kūpamaṇḍūk*), those who have no faith towards mending a broken society. This is for those who keep faith towards a bright future (*ujjala bhaviṣya*) for the society. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, May 30:1, my translation, gloss added).

Not only is the tone of this passage a lot more strict than the previous one, Sarkar Baba also seems to be making a serious attempt towards building socially conscious citizens. He tackles this at two levels, personal, as well as social. At the personal level, his use of the metaphor of stealing someone else's wealth, especially of those with whom one wants a life-long relationship, amounts to a transactional approach to relationship where all the emotion and sweetness is missing. His use of the word *arth*, a very common Hindi word derived from Sanskrit to denote wealth, also seems to have two meanings. One is the depletion of someone's wealth by stealing it. The second is more socio-psychological. The word *arth* is also used sometimes to represent a person's being, or Self. Depleting someone's Self, or self-respect, the value of their "being" by demanding money from them, clearly, amounts to an anti-social act that can generate further degeneration of the society. Sarkar Baba was very conscious of this fact, which is why he uses adjective like deprived of principles, non-holistic and frog in a well to describe people who adhere, either because of greed, or because of lack of social consciousness, in continuing systems and traditions which, in his view, have outlived

their utility, and have become unnatural, untimely, and limiting. On another occasion, when he had to bless the bride and groom wedded at the ashram according to the Samooh's system, this is how he elaborated upon it:

...you saw these auspicious acts and heard about them... Our middle class (*madhyam varg*) is in great confusion (*uljhan*) and sorrow (*dukh*). They are afflicted (*prakop*) by conservatism (*rūḍhitā*). They are very hesitant to break it. They are not able to break it. Uncertainty (*aniścitatā*) has become their companion. Their mind and heart cannot find certainty.

So this marriage system (*vivāha paddhati*) is not for those rich folks who put a monetary value (*bhāv-tāv*) to their sons. Instead, it is for us middle class folks who go through many traditions, but remain free of pretensions (*chhala-chhidra*). [We] look at other people's wealth as dirt (*dhūl aur miṭṭī*). [We] do not wish to behave with our relatives in such a petty manner.

For those wealthy (*dhanī-mānī*) and conceited (*dambhī*) people this task is very difficult (*duṣkar*) and agitating (*dusah*) because their desires (*kāmanāyē*) and acts (*kriyā-kalāp*) remain encompassed by conceit. But even they cannot live happily by creating sorrow for the girls (*kanyā*) and their families. Because they [*kanyā*] are going to come to everyone's house, they will be born in every home and create difficulties.

If we are simple folk (*sādhāraṇa*), if we think (*vicāravān*), we can understand ourselves what kind of wisdom (*buddhimatā*) we display by snatching the wealth of those we create a relationship with? During marriage ceremonies we receive [false] adulation (*vāh-vāhī*) for two hours by getting the wealth of our relative snatched, and then later, those very same people revile (*dhikkārate*) us. You must have seen this yourself amongst your friends and relatives.

So, slowly but steadfastly oppose (*daṭ kar virodh*) those who have spread such anarchy in your country and in your caste, and keep a shunning (*tyājya*) and despicable (*ghṛṇit*) sentiment towards them. Because their acts are like a human ghost (*nar-piśāca*). They are the Satan (*śaitān*) with a human face. The work of those who snatch [other's wealth], put pressure [on them], and connive in these abuses is satanic. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, June 15:1, my translation, gloss added).

This time, especially in the last paragraph, Sarkar Baba's language is even stronger. His observation about the nature of stress caused by the dowry system is interesting. He thinks the poor people are not hurt much by it because they are so poor they are able to get by without having to bother too much with it. The dowry system is encouraged by the rich, for to them it is a method of wealth transfer and making powerful

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family connections, even if it amounts to auctioning their sons. The middle class, on the other hand, is neither blasé about it, nor unaffected. Caught in a double bind of proving themselves worthy in society, and marrying their daughter at a very heavy economic cost, they end up continuing a system which has long turned into a social evil. Perhaps there was a time when dowry used to be a gift given of his own accord by the bride's father. The groom's father would accept it graciously as a token of a strong marital relationship. But today it has turned into some sort of a mandatory marriage tax which burdens the middle-class bride's father into debt. The cruelty exercised in exacting this tax is well evident in the reports of bride-burning and bride abuse cases by the in-laws across India. The newspaper reports on this issue are too numerous to cite here, but according to the National Crime Records Bureau of India, in 2009, there were 8,383 reported cases of dowry deaths, and 89,546 cases of cruelty by husband and relatives against women. In the year 2008, Delhi alone had 491 reported cases of dowry deaths (National Crime Records Bureau of India data, downloaded 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2011).<sup>12</sup> It is to this middle class that Sarkar Baba exhorts steadfast opposition to this decrepit system because in more ways than one, it demeans the girl child and, consequently, the entire women-folk in a society.

This is exhibited in an excerpt from his speech at a different gathering:

Samooch has declared a revolution against dowry. Now, members of our Samooch feel pride in conducting marriages without dowry. The validity of feeling pride on taking dowry has decreased. But this is just the beginning. Our goal will be fulfilled when no one will even utter the name of dowry, and when the same kind of celebration will be held at the birth of either a boy or a girl. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1973, February 28:4, my translation).

b). Death Ritual Expenses

Another topic that Sarkar Baba discussed in the meetings of the Mahila Sangh was the scourge of expenses during death rituals. In the Magh Mela camp at Prayag (Allahabad, U.P.), in February 1973, this is what he had to say to the women present at the meeting on this topic:

Whatever faith and devotion (*bhakti-bhāv*), religious duty (*dharm-karm*) we have, it is a greater duty (*dharm*) first to look at our social evils, it is the supreme devotion (*bhakti*). Evil customs (*kurītiyāñ*) have surrounded us on all sides, they overwhelm our life, because of which our life ends writhing in agony and misery (*kalap-kalap kē, taḍap-taḍap kē*).

You can see, even dying (*marnī*) has become a great evil custom. What is the condition that befalls on a family where someone dies? But even in this bad condition, some folks of demonish temperament (*āsurī pravṛtti kē log*), get after them, and making them perform many different rituals (*karm-kāṇḍa*) waste their wealth. When someone dies we get together many kinds of things like a cot, bed, bedroll, utensils etc. with the belief that these things will be of use to the one who died. But the one who has died, whose body is no more, how will that person use these things? A dead cow does not eat grass (*marī gāya ghās nahīñ khātī*). Nor does a dead person come back to ask you to buy a ticket to heaven (*svarg*) by performing many kinds of rituals in their name.

Knowing all this fully well, you still end up doing all these useless deeds (*nirarthak karm*). Even if you have nothing, you become ready to take a loan (*karz*) to give it away. You should think about this. Heaven (*svarg*) and hell (*nark*) mean nothing to the soul (*ātmā*). It is indestructible (*anaśvar*), it is unborn (*ajanmā*). It does not either live or die. Indulging in ostentation (*āḍambar*) behind it leads to great reparation (*prāyaścīt*). Other religions do not display so much ostentation. This was the occupation of a certain class in our Hindu religion. You all know that class (*varg*), that caste (*jāti*). On all the occasions of birth and death (*janma-maraṇa*) and marriage (*śādī-vivāha*), this caste keeps after you. And you, fixed in superstitions (*andhaviśvās*), remain ensnared by them.

The person who dies never says that after me you should squander (*luṭānā*) the wealth I have amassed (*upārjan*) with such hard work (*pariśram*), and squander it so much that you reach a condition (*avasthā*) where nothing remains with you. But fearful of social criticism (*ālocanā*) and caught in the twists (*cakkar*) of those selfish people, you squander everything away. Then those same people who looted you in so many ways, would not even want to look (*āñkh uṭhākar dekhanā*) at you. So, you should stay away from them. You should do only that which is proper (*ucit*). It is possible that your neighbors will first laugh at you, make fun of you. But later on, they will be the ones who will follow (*anusaraṇa*) you. If you act keeping the right (*ucit*) and wrong (*anucit*) in

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mind then they will get only one chance to laugh at you. However, if you act according to their opinions then your economy will be in shambles (*chinna-bhinna*) and they will get a chance to laugh at you again and again, which will lead to chagrin (*kudhan*) in you. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1973, February 28:3, my translation, gloss added).

Sarkar Baba's tone, although not particularly strong except when he is describing the priestly class, is quite straightforward in this passage. His message here could apply to the men present at the gathering as well as the women. His topic appears relevant for the setting of the Magh Mela at Prayag, where people of all castes and regions come to perform various kinds of rituals, including death rituals. Although a quick reading of the passage could imply he was talking mostly to rural women, I think he was talking to his devotees and visitors from Delhi, Kolkata, Patna, and many other urban areas of the country. His message is quite simple – don't get ensnared by priests into rituals which are unnecessary, for not only are they detrimental to one's economic well-being, they are also not helpful to the person who has passed away. This message of Sarkar Baba is corroborated in real life from Ann Gold's study of Ghatiyali village in Rajasthan. When interviewed about the ritual of "sinking flowers" respondents were firm in their understanding that it does nothing for the departed soul, but they do it anyway because of fear of social scorn (Gold 2000:241-3). Gold stresses the negative consequences of such rituals while writing about Madhu Nath, a renowned performer of the Gopichand epic, as "...Madhu had incurred the great economic stress of sponsoring two funeral feasts. I saw others driven to or beyond the brink of nervous collapse by just such accumulated pressures" (Gold 1992:5). What Sarkar Baba was alluding to, clearly, was a pan-India issue and its

pressures remain unmitigated despite government efforts even in the present day Rajasthan (Gold, email communication, July 2011).

There are some high-register words in his talk, such as when he describes the soul (*ātmā*) as indestructible (*anaśvar*) and unborn (*ajanmā*), or when he relates the expenses incurred for the soul to ostentation (*āḍambar*) and reparation (*prāyaścīt*), or even when he talks about amassing (*upārjan*) money with hard work (*pariśram*) and squandering it away to reach a pitiful condition (*avasthā*), all these words are very common in the daily lexicon of Hindi users. They can, and frequently are, used in other contexts of life too, such as using *āḍambar* to denote political corruption, or *avasthā* to relate to a person, region or country's state. The word *upārjan* for earning money is somewhat specialized and less frequently used, but in this context it is not only appropriate but especially pithy because the implied sense of the statement is “generation of wealth over time with hard work.” It is definitely much more forceful than just “earning money,” which could be stated with a word like *kamānā* (to earn), and therefore, makes the import of his message even more serious.

Simultaneously with his high register but commonly used words, Sarkar Baba uses a lot of colloquial words and idioms. For example, to explain the non-usage of material things by the departed soul, he says “a dead cow does not eat grass (*marī gāya ghās nahīn khātī*).” Here, the tenor of the statement is definitely rural, but it is because of this mental image which contrasts with the holiness of a departed human soul, that the message gets across in a more memorable manner. Other words that he uses, like superstitions (*andhaviśvās*), right (*ucit*) and wrong

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(*anucit*), criticism (*ālocanā*) and caught in the twists (*cakkar*) are at once of the common lexicon, and even verge on colloquial at times. As the Samooh grew, just as he instituted a dowry-free system of marriage for the Samooh members, Sarkar Baba also simplified the rituals of death ceremony, which were short, inexpensive, but equally full of meaning. Once again, while the Samooh members were expected to abide by this system, their family members were under no pressure to do so.

Dalmia makes an interesting point while talking about the Hindu groups' posture vis a vis the colonial authorities, where:

It is hereby that popular religious practice—which continues to be considered a part of Hinduism, since it is not to be allowed an autonomous existence—is increasingly branded as 'superstition' and downgraded. Traditionalists as well as reformists are alike in their condemnation of this 'superstitious' practice. (Dalmia 1997:8).

At the first glance it appears that Sarkar Baba's branding of expensive death rituals as superstitious fits the description that Dalmia provides of the erstwhile traditionalists and reformists. If looked at only within the context of the cited passage, it certainly appears so. But I think, again, Sarkar Baba's take on these issues was not in terms of a nationalist agenda, but a social one, because, on the one hand where he disagrees with expensive death rituals which bankrupt the affected party, there are other contexts in the published materials of the Samooh where he highlights the rural practices of worship of the seven mothers, or those of the village deities (*grāmadevatās*), because they provide cultural continuation and psychological solace to the practitioners.

I will point out, further, that Sarkar Baba never displayed anti-Brahmanical tendencies, or for that matter, anti-tendencies towards any caste. He looked at human beings as just that – human beings. However, he did talk about caste as a category when it came to issues of marriage, commensality, dowry, etc. At those times, he was definitely against the occupational manipulations inherent in the caste system, and the predatory profit motives of the practitioners, taken together as a caste. Under normal circumstances, even when he knew that a person was not the most morally high person, he would give them respect and welcome, even though he would limit his interactions with them to the bare minimum.

c). Caste –

Caste, and caste based social discrimination was a topic that Sarkar Baba often spoke about. He may not have always used the word caste in his talks, but those who were familiar with his manner of speaking knew very well what he was trying to imply. In what is a very short passage from the *Sarveshwari Times*, the December 15 issue of 1977, he summed up the Aghor philosophy vis a vis the caste system succinctly to his followers:

... make a firm decision (*niścaya*) and determination (*saṅkalp*) within yourself. Do what you need to make your task a success. Don't look at religion (*dharm*) separately. Jati-caste do not have any importance with us. This is not a superficial statement (*banāvaṭī bāt*) nor is it a statement of sermon (*upadeś*). We all sit together. Everyone gets an opportunity to join the *bhairavī cakra* (a mystical practice without caste distinctions). Our left-handed path (*vāma mārg*) is the path of our dear one (*priya mārg*). It is the path of our dear divinity (*iṣṭ*). We do not have an affinity for divine idols (*deva-mūrti*). We have an affinity with the folks who are neglected (*upekṣit jana*). If we help someone, the left hand should

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not know what the right hand did. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1977, December 15:1, my translation, gloss added).

This short statement, almost cryptic, nonetheless encapsulates the philosophy of the Aghor tradition. Sarkar Baba not only highlights the Aghor tradition's practice of not observing caste distinctions, he also equates it with one's religious foundation, as nothing separate from *dharm*. In this kind of religious practice, it is not the idols of gods and goddesses that are truly worshipped, it is the neglected people who are worshipped, for they too have the divine element present within them. Yet, lest the seeker begin to suffer from pride about doing something important by interacting with the neglected people, Sarkar Baba cautions against that, advising to keep one's charitable deeds so secret that even the right hand does not get to know what the left hand did.

With reference to the caste system, on the state of the Shudras<sup>13</sup> in India, and the dire need for giving them a better position and respect, this is what he said to his disciple Darshi:

The country where people watch their feet, look at their feet, do not ever stumble on their path. They have great facility in managing the rest of their body, Darshi! The reason for the thousands year slavery (*paratantratā*) of this country has been nothing other than we have neglected (*upekṣā*) our duty to keep a watch on our feet, to keep our attention fixed on them. We used to walk with our head held high, we looked only at the head of others, and even from saints we heard only about how to meditate between the eyebrows (*bhṛkuṭī*). In such a situation why wouldn't our feet stagger, why wouldn't we lose control over our body?

Scriptures (*śāstra*) and folklore (*janaśruti*) have divided the body into four categories. You have heard about this categorization (*vargīkaraṇa*) in the scriptures, you have heard it from ascetics and seekers also. Darshi! Feet (*carana*) are to be accorded even more importance than the head. You have seen it is the feet of our gurus and seniors that are greeted. Even then, Darshi! According to categorization the feet are still considered *Śūdra* only, but how great is the importance of this *Śūdra*! The day you know and understand this and establish yourself in the feet, you will get to know the life-force in the real sense, which is to be found in every creature. (SSS 1982:58. My translation, gloss added).

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In these two paragraphs, Sarkar Baba does not hold back in criticizing the Indian self definition in transcendental and renunciation terms, and using the metaphor of feet, critiques the popular ideology of people keeping their sights and nose in the air, talking about lofty ideas, while neglecting the feet, the Shudras. The language here is somewhat high register since it was spoken to one of his initiated disciples, but the words are still of common use. Of course, in this analogy Sarkar Baba is taking the frame of the commonly known Vedic *Puruṣasūkta* hymn which categorizes the society into four divisions based on their mythical place of origin from the primordial divine being. He further critiques the attitudes of former rulers, and jokes about a popular custom of “touching feet” of elders, but not taking care of what exists beneath the feet, in the following passage:

Darshi! We will realize (*bodhagamya*) the appropriateness (*aucitya*) of the sayings (*sūktis*) of the Ṛṣis only when we interpret from them an exactly opposite meaning than what we have thought them to be till today. Blind faith (*aṅdhaviśvās*) and hypocrisy (*ḍhakosalā*) have thrown us very far away. They turn a wise man (*samajhdār*) into an ignoramus (*nāsamajh*), and an idiot into a wise man. Oh brother! You have heard it said everywhere — “Take refuge at his feet. (*caraṇa śaraṇa jāo*)” You would never have heard anyone say, “Go climb on his head. (*mastak par savār ho jāo*)” This is said and done only by wicked (*duṣpragya*) people. They are riding on the head even today. This is the reason why all happiness and prosperity is slipping away from beneath their feet. You have seen and heard about former kings, have you not? Their present condition is a result of this very misdeed. They deserve it. Happiness and prosperity have slipped away from under their feet because they always rode only on their head. Those who are our leaders today are also riding on the head. Even about them you have heard and seen, that the chair of political power has slipped away from beneath their feet. (SSS 1982:59. My translation, gloss added.)

Having taken the analogy of the *Puruṣasūkta* hymn to describe the place of Shudras in society, and joking about the opposite practice of going to someone's refuge, Sarkar Baba finishes with another analogy, a popular picture amongst the Hindus – of

Baby Krishna lying on a leaf, sucking on his toes – and interprets that as a Puranic

indication to respect those whose social status is less than one's own:

The same life-force is reflected (*pratibimbit*) equally in the *Brāhmaṇa*, the *Kṣatriya*, the *Vaiśya* and the *Śūdra*. This is an evident truth (*pratyakṣa satya*). Disrespecting this truth we are burying our heads in sand (*bālū mein sir gāḍ kar*) and are trying in vain to escape from the storm in the desert (*marubhūmi mein āye tūfān se*). By disregarding the life-force (*prāṇa*) residing in the feet in the form of *Śūdras*, by insulting them, by punishing them, we are bent upon destroying ourselves. The paradox (*viḍambanā*) is, we quote from the scriptures, *Purāṇas* and other religious texts in support of these unbearable (*dussaha*), ill-thought (*durbuddhipūrṇa*), illogical (*tarkahīna*), impractical (*avyāvahārik*) behavior, thoughts, and way of living, and impute one-sided and willful meaning to them. Our scriptures have shown *Bālamukunda*<sup>14</sup> holding his feet in his hands and putting his feet in his mouth, sucking and kissing them. This is clearly evident from the following prayer-lines of *Bālamukunda*—

*“karāravindena pādaravindam, Mukhāravinde viniveśayantam.  
baṭasya patrasya puṭe śayānam bālam Mukundam manasā smarāmi.”*

(With the lotus of the hands (symbolic of *Kṣatriya*, the protector), the lotus of the feet (symbolic of *Śūdra*, the service-person), putting in the lotus of the mouth (symbolic of *Brāhmaṇa*), *Bālamukunda* sleeping on the leaf of Vat-tree, I remember within myself.)

It is clear that our scriptures have given an equal place to all the four social categories, infact in a way they have given the *Śūdra* a higher place than the *Brāhmaṇa* or the *Kṣatriya*. Therefore, always respect the *Śūdra*, the feet. (SSS 1982:60. My translation, gloss added.)

This passage presents a fascinating juxtaposition of colloquial Hindi, as in the colloquialisms about burying one's head in the sand in a desert storm, to Sanskrit words, as in the choice of words used to describe willful interpretation of scriptures, ending with a Sanskrit couplet. To most of Sarkar Baba's educated disciples, these passages are lucid, for the rural devotees, the Sanskrit couplet may have been difficult, but it should be noted that this passage was not spoken at an assembly, it was published in a book where Sarkar Baba is talking with his initiated disciple. More than the language, however, it is the content of the passage which is of special interest, at once critical of the popular

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social conceptions, and with reinterpretation of popular Vedic and Puranic symbols in an egalitarian context.

Not only this. A decade ago, Sarkar Baba had highlighted this very same practice in the context of stages of life, living in an ashram and the caste system (*varṇa vyavasthā*). Speaking to thousands of devotees who had arrived in the ashram on the occasion of Navaratri, he said:

As long as you live in the *āśram*, do not even think about the caste system (*varṇa vyavasthā*). If you harbor the thoughts such as I am a Brāhmaṇ (high caste priest), I am a Kṣatriya (high caste warrior), I am a Ḍom (low caste sweeper), I am a Camār (low caste leather worker), then you are not living in the *āśram*. You do not have a life conducive to the *āśram*. You do not have affection for the *āśram* in your heart. You can never mold the *āśram* in your life, whether it be your householder stage (*grhastha āśram*) or your forest dweller (*vānaprastha āśram*) stage of life.

You acquiesce to the householder *āśram* and the forest dweller *āśram*, you say you are better than sadhus because you do a lot during your householder stage of life, you even give to the sadhus. That is right, you give a lot. It is good because I understand their (sadhu's) condition, who say they are the worshippers of the omnipotent God (*sarvaśaktimān paramātmā*), yet move from door to door as a beggar (*bhikhārī*). This is the reason they move from door to door. Many women, despite being rich, go to beg for alms to conduct their worship of the goddess. So that, O Goddess, I may not have the pride (*abhimān*) of this wealth and this power.

So that is why this subject has been brought up. As long as you follow the way of life of the *āśram* (*āśram dharm*), whether you do it after coming to this *āśram*, or you follow it in your householder *āśram* or forest dweller *āśram*, as long as you follow the *āśram dharm* but keep thinking about caste and the caste system and keep acting on it, you will not be able to do anything. Look at our own Prime Minister (then, Mrs. Indira Gandhi). She is a Brāhmaṇ. [But] she does not think about the caste system. She eats even with a Harijan (low caste, untouchable). If she discriminated even for a day, would any Harijan give her his vote? So you should understand this, and benefit from this.

Please do not keep a low attitude (*durāv*) if your helpers (*naukar-cākar*) or associates (*bhāi-bandhu*) are of a low caste. If you keep a low attitude, if you harbor hatred [towards them], then the future will not agree with you. In a way, many kinds of faults (*truṭiyāñ*), many kinds of weaknesses (*kamjoriyāñ*) will arise within. No one will help you. If your own caste people will not help you, why should someone else help you? From this point of view, the solid conclusion is that as long as you live within the *āśram* do not harbor suspicion about any caste

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that such and such a person is a sweeper or a leather worker. Or that, you are a Brāhmaṇ or a Kṣatriya. An *āśram* can be only that place where the caste system (*varṇa vyavasthā*) does not exist. Where there exists the caste system, the *āśram* does not exist there. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1972, March 30:3, my translation, gloss added).

In this passage, Sarkar Baba has turned the interpretation of the caste system (*varṇa vyavasthā*) on its head. Talking about neo-Hinduism and traditional Hinduism in the context of nationalism, Dalmia points out that they “constantly reinterpret and modify inherited practice, they are fiercely nationalist as well...” (1997:7). Sarkar Baba's take on the ashram system and caste system certainly looks like a reinterpretation of the popular conception of the terms, but I do not see fierce nationalism associated with it. The normal, traditional interpretation of the *varṇāśram dharma* or the caste system is definitely the observation of caste-specific strictures on conducting one's life, especially those related to interaction with other castes. But Sarkar Baba plays on the word *āśram*, and *āśram dharm* (way of life while living in an *ashram*) which normally means a place of refuge, extends its meaning to non-discriminatory behavior, and then relates it to the stages of one's life, also thought of as an ashram in the traditional vocabulary, but implying a stage of life, thus transforming the whole of one's life as guided by the principles existing within an ashram, namely, holistic, non-discriminatory, self-less behavior. He gives his interpretation a practical color by citing the example of the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, who could interact as easily with untouchables, as with high caste folks, bringing in the very crucial “vote” or “support” element into his discussion. Nor is his talk directed only towards the high caste folks of the audience, or just the males therein. By bringing the names of lower castes in his discussion he, I think, is trying to empower the lower caste devotees also to think outside of the caste

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system box. By bringing in the example of women going ritually begging from door to door, he also brings them within the purview of his discussion. His ultimate message is strong and clear – there is no place of caste-centered thought and behavior – in a holistic way of life, equated with the life within an *āśram* setup. Rather than being a nationalist comment, I think this passage reflects his social concerns.

The passage cited above does not imply, then, Sarkar Baba thought about the ills of inter-caste discriminatory interaction towards the lower caste only. To him, consideration of the caste was injurious to all parties concerned. He thought about the effect of such a system on the high castes too, especially their younger generation. This is what he had to say:

There are some people in our country who are now saying that only Harijans should be brought up, but no one talks about the helpless children of Brāhmaṇs and Kṣatriyas and the kind of life they are leading. Forced [by circumstances], they are now taking to stealing and looting. A situation is being created where they are being coerced into doing all sorts of deeds. Who is responsible for this condition? (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1977, November 15:1, my translation, gloss added).

Or consider another passage from his February 1978 talk about the nature of religion (*dharm*) and social composition:

In reality, human religion (*mānav dharm*) is the true religion.... There are not many religions, there is but one religion. Religion is not tied to any book. True religion is outside the circumference of any book (*pustak kī paridhi*). There is only one religion for the entire humanity (*samast mānavamātra*). By enclosing religion within books we have created a condition of separateness (*alagāva*), and created negative sentiments in every human being about caste (*jāti-pānti*), untouchability (*chuā-chūt*), category distinctions (*varg-vibhēd*) etc. We don't need a religion which makes us impotent (*napuṅsak*). It is sad that some religious incumbents (*dhārmik matāvalambī*) are propagating and affirming such restrictions on practices of diet (*khān-pān*) and strictures on behavior (*vidhi-niṣēdh*) that the tendency towards impotence is taking root. (*Sarveshwari Times*, 1978, February 28:3, my translation, gloss added).

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I can call the message in these passages, Sarkar Baba's universal message. In both of these passages, Sarkar Baba's concern appears to be with the society as a whole, his statements are not geared mainly towards one particular class category. In the first passage, he mentions the upliftment of Harijans, a name given to the untouchables by Mahatma Gandhi, but not exclusively of the Harijans, and not at the cost of the younger generations of other castes. Either one of these situations creates a social imbalance which, ultimately, can prove to be detrimental for social well-being. In the second passage, he holds responsible those proponents of religious views who imply that religious fervor is confined to particularities of diet and special kinds of behaviors. Such a myopic view of religion, too, breeds a social imbalance which is ultimately detrimental to society. When Sarkar Baba talks of human religion (*mānav dharm*) I think he truly means a code of religious ethics which encompasses all human beings, not just the castes of India, where there exists a true respect and concerns for all individuals, not just for particular privileged social categories.

With reference to the practice of Hindu universalism, Swami Dayananda was against the caste system as it existed in India at that time:

... which he saw as a degeneration of the original, natural ordering of Vedic society in four functional groups: priests, warriors, traders, and servants. This natural order was entirely rational and functional, if only it was based on achievement rather than ascription. (Veer 2001:51).

Like Dayananda, Sarkar Baba also did not agree with the caste system, as well as the truth of Aryan history in India, except, unlike Dayananda he did not think of it as a "natural" order of things at all. Dayanada's idea that the caste system was a degeneration of an ideal natural order meant that people of every caste could officiate as priests in the

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Arya Samaj's ceremonies. Similarly, during one of his *yajñas*, when Brahmans objected to a low caste person being the “*hotā*,” the patron of the *yajña*, Sarkar Baba initiated him into the Aghor tradition, thus making him “casteless,” and able to officiate as the patron of the ceremony, as Guard Sahab, one of my informants, told me. But, Sarkar Baba was always very conscious of things that were created by human agency, including the caste system, and even the concept of “God.” While he believed in the possibility of the existence of “God,” the concept of god that human beings have, he knew, was quite man made. I have discussed the idea expressed in the following passages in earlier chapters.

Sarkar Baba says:

You should use your hands for virtuous deeds so that your hands symbolic of valor may be able to achieve their objective. Darshi! God is nothing different from this. Your virtuous deeds are known as God. The aspiring of your hands towards your *Prāṇa* is known as virtuous deed. (SSS 1982:56. My translation.)

And again:

I said — ‘Oh Sambhav! Physical form is a representation of the Divine Mother herself. I do not want to have the vessel of your body which is empty of you. Within the body itself is that great creativity cultivated. Sambhav! Do you understand what is creative form. Action is known as creativity. Action is the fountain-head of the *Prāṇa*. Even a super-conscious (*caitanya*), absolutely aware person is seen as a normal, usual character in the body of consciousness. You do not need Rama, you need Rama's virtue and character. The presence of his virtues is the presence of Rama. ‘*Atmaram*’ (the everlasting soul within every body) is that *Prāṇa* only, Baba.’ (SSS 1982:9-10. My translation, gloss added).

So despite there being some elements of commonality between the nationalist creators of Hindu universalism, Sarkar Baba's idea of a universalism based on the common life element, the *Prāṇa*, present in all living beings, leading to a somewhat immutable universal morality, is that which distinguishes his life from those of the nationalist leaders.

### **Talking Informally: The Colloquial Baba**

What we find in the books published by the Samooh, or the newsletter *Sarveshwari Times*, are but a miniscule part of the total communicative cornucopia of what Sarkar Baba used daily to get his point across. While the published material gives us a glimpse of his more formal, or semi-formal expressions, more often than not he was just talking with people in their own language, with an air of absolute informality. Humor often formed an essential part of all such communication, and humor, I think, was a tool which Sarkar Baba used most effectively in teaching. This informal talk, verging on idle banter, could verge on a communication of the guru's prescient knowledge of the acts of his disciples, or it could be a new lesson to open the thinking parameters of his devotees. It could also be a subtle statement of what a realized guru is, and what he can do. In the passages below I present some examples of such interactive episodes where what Sarkar Baba said formed only a part of what he was trying to say, because his demeanor, and body language or overt physical acts, played an equal part in strengthening the import of his lesson. I collected these stories during my stays with Sarkar Baba, and during my fieldwork.

Mr. Singh (name modified) has been with Sarkar Baba for a very long time, since the time when he was in school in 1969 at Allahabad. Now he is at a senior position with a leading English newspaper in Delhi. Mr. Singh himself possesses a jovial personality, and a somewhat heavy body to go along with it. Overtime, Mr. Singh became so friendly with Sarkar Baba that their interaction took a whole different mantle. Mr. Singh would respect Sarkar Baba's teachings, but being susceptible to natural human foibles, when he

would have to participate in a social activity that he knew Sarkar Baba might have a different view on, sometimes he would try to hide it. Deep down, somewhere, though, Mr. Singh always knew his was a role play – an attempt to hide something from Sarkar Baba – and Sarkar Baba played along, sometimes letting him know, that he knew. Here is an example from an episode in New Delhi.

1. Today You Have Applied Perfume

Whenever Baba visited Delhi, Mr. Singh would come to visit him. By then, somehow, Sarkar Baba had begun to call him “Fatso (*Motē*).” Mr. Singh had then begun to work at a leading English newspaper in Delhi. One evening the editor of his newspaper had thrown a party that went late into the evening. At that time Sarkar Baba was in Delhi. Mr. Singh, consequently, did not want to go to this party but people advised him that it would be politically suicidal not to attend. So he went. The party went on till about eleven at night. Alcohol flowed like water, and although Mr. Singh had reservations about drinking, he drank a little to maintain social decorum. However, now the smell of alcohol began to permeate his breath. He wanted to come and be at hand should Sarkar Baba want something, but what to do now? First he thought he would not visit Sarkar Baba that evening. But then he couldn't resist the thought of seeing him so he went to Bengali market, chewed on a well-scented betel leaf with anise seeds in it and then, at eleven at night, reached the Mathura Road residence where Sarkar Baba was staying. It was very quiet at that hour of the night. He crept in, on cat feet, and lay down in a room without making the slightest noise. Sarkar Baba, however, was up, as he always was. He began to play.

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As soon as Mr. Singh lay down, a boy who was in Sarkar Baba's service came out of his room and told Mr. Singh, "Come, Sarkar Baba is calling you."

Mr. Singh was nonplussed. Not a leaf stirred as he came in, how did Sarkar Baba get to know he had arrived! He asked the boy, "Did you tell him I have arrived?"

The boy said, "No. Sarkar Baba has been asking about you since 10 tonight, asking us, 'Say, Fatso hasn't arrived today?'" (in Sarkar Baba's Bhojpuri: *āj Moṭē nā ailan?*).

"No Baba."

"What time does he get off work?" (*kau bajē kām sē chhūṭat hauvē?*)

"At eight Baba."

"So it takes him two hours to get here?" (*hiyān āvē mē unkē dū ghanṭā lag jā lā?*)

"No Baba."

The boy continued, "In this way he has been asking us about you all evening. Come quickly, he wants to see you."

Mr. Singh, with trepidation, went to Sarkar Baba's room. The room was dark inside. Mr. Singh stood at the door instead of going in. Sarkar Baba was sitting on the bed in his lotus posture. He asked Mr. Singh, "Say Fatso, how are you?" (*kā Moṭē, kaisan hāl-cāl bā?*).

Peering into the darkness inside the room, Mr. Singh replied shortly, "I am fine Baba." (*ṭhīk bānī Bābā*).

Sarkar Baba said, "Hey, put on the light. Let me see Sir's face." (*tanī batiyā jalāvā ho, Sir kē cēharā dēkhē da!*).

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The light was turned on. With a deliberate theatrical style Sarkar Baba closed one eye with his hand, and with the other, checked out Mr. Singh from top to bottom two times. Then without any preamble, he said to Mr. Singh, “Okay, support me.” (*achhā, tanī dhara*).

This was a game Sarkar Baba used to play some nights. He would sit on the bed in his lotus position and lean backwards. Someone would have to hold him in position by supporting his back with his hands by placing his palms against Sarkar Baba's back. Now Mr. Singh was in a fix. He tried to do this while at the same time holding his breath (for it was still reeking of alcohol) and staying as far away from Sarkar Baba as he could. But Sarkar Baba was not relenting tonight. He kept leaning back with his full weight. Mr. Singh was turning blue holding his breath when suddenly, Sarkar Baba put both his hands behind his head and leaned back completely. This made Mr. Singh's hands slip and Sarkar Baba landed backwards on his body, forcing him to expel his breath with a loud gasp! As he gasped, Sarkar Baba got the full whiff of alcohol. The boys in the room were laughing at these antics (they did not know about Mr. Singh's alcohol problem that night) but amazingly, Sarkar Baba used great subtlety in communicating to Mr. Singh, without the others present in the room realizing what was being talked about.

Sarkar Baba smiled and said, “HmMMMM, Fatso, today you have applied perfume.” (*HmMMMM, Moṭē, āj ta tū scent lagaula ha!*).

What could Mr. Singh say! He said, “Yes Baba.” (*jī Bābā*).

“It smells a lot.” (*bahut mahakē lā*).

Mr. Singh kept quiet.

“Which one is it, domestic or imported?” (*kaunē bā, dēsī ki bidēsī?*).

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“Baba, it is imported.” (*Bābā, bidēsī bā*).

“I see. Where did you apply it?” (*achhā. kahāñ lagaula?*).

“Baba, there was a party at my editor's place. There.” (*Bābā, hamār editor kē hiyāñ ēk thē party rahē. ohī mē.*).

“Oh. Why?” (*achhā. kāhē?*)

“Baba, it would have been politically incorrect not to do so.” (*Bābā, nā lagāvē sē thīk nā rahē*).

“Oh! Okay, okay, okay. That's okay.” (*achhā. thīk, thīk, thīk. thīk bā.*).

Then Baba made Mr. Singh massage his feet till three at night. Then he sent him off with the words, “Go. Sleep.” (*jā, sutta*).

Sarkar Baba didn't mention another word about Mr. Singh's adventure. And yet, he clearly communicated to him that he knew what he had been up to, and that Mr. Singh did not need to hide anything. But in doing so, he protected Mr. Singh's good name by not letting anyone else know what all this was about.

2. It is not nice to overstay anyone's hospitality.

Another story of Sarkar Baba's sense of humor and resourcefulness comes from the Apollo hospital in Madras (now Chennai). Sarkar Baba was there for treatment; he had already spent a few days there, and now he wanted to get out of there. However, the doctors had declared in no uncertain terms that he would not be allowed to leave. When Sarkar Baba's associates informed him of this and expressed their helplessness in getting him a release, he remained quiet. After some time he asked those present around him to go and have tea and freshen up, for he wanted to be alone for some time.

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The people left Sarkar Baba alone and went out to have tea. As soon as they left, the doctor on duty entered Sarkar Baba's room on his daily rounds. Sarkar Baba began to play. He began to cry like a child in front of the doctor. He bawled so loud that even the doctor got worried and asked him, "What is the matter Swami ji? Why are you crying?"

Baba said, "Look Doctor Sahab, I have fallen into great trouble. My mother has died. I am her only son. My mother's cremation is waiting for my presence. If I don't reach there soon, she will not be cremated. I am her only son, and this is the condition her mortal body has to face. That is why I am crying. Please let me go, otherwise who will take care of her dead body? Please help me."

The doctor was moved. He replied, "Don't worry Swami Ji, I will help you." He prepared Sarkar Baba's discharge papers immediately, handed them to him, and went away. When Sarkar Baba's associates returned after having their tea they found him wearing his lungi and sunglasses, all ready to leave. They went to him and asked, "Baba?"

Baba said, "Let's go."

"Where?"

"Let's go home."

They told him, Baba, we have talked to the doctor. He is not willing to let you go under any condition.

Sarkar Baba said, "Why? Do you people think you are the wisest of them all? He has actually handed me the discharge papers and has asked me to go home."

These folks ran to the doctor. The doctor, with full sympathy, assured them that Swami ji was in a very difficult situation, therefore, it was okay for him to leave. Now

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Sarkar Baba's associates realized that under the guise of sending them out to tea, he had played his own tricks. When they returned to Sarkar Baba he said, "Come, lets go. It is not good to overstay at someone else's place for too long."

And then he walked out of the hospital.

Let us pause to look at these two stories briefly. In the first story, with Mr. Singh, Sarkar Baba speaks in the Bhojpuri dialect of Bihar, because Mr. Singh speaks the language. To read the words of what Sarkar Baba is saying, it does not amount to much except for idle chit-chat. However, when one reads between the lines, with the right context, and what Sarkar Baba is doing physically, it becomes apparent that there is a whole lot more of communication going on that the mere words would let us know. Somehow, Sarkar Baba was fully aware of what Mr. Singh had been up to that evening, and he was not even displeased about it. The only thing he wanted to communicate to Mr. Singh was that nothing is hidden from an enlightened guru, and his attempts to hide his actions can only end in comical failure. His use of the word "scent," which is commonly used to mean "perfume" in India, as a substitute for the smell of alcohol, lends both levity and intimacy to the whole interaction. His statement, "you have applied perfume today" for the reeking smell of alcohol, further makes the interaction humorous, while at the same time showing clearly how careful Sarkar Baba was in conducting his communication without hurting the privacy of the concerned individual.

The second story appears funny to me not only because it goes against the grain of all the "holy" behavior that saints are supposed to observe, but also because of the last lesson he imparts in a quip. Again, this whole episode needs to be looked in totality, as opposed to looking only at the words which are spoken, because they are but mere

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dialogues in a play which has a different script. I think Sarkar Baba is trying to communicate here the resourcefulness that human beings have, including, yes, saints, and that every human has foibles and weaknesses which can lead them to do what they think is right, but yet, ultimately, could be considered wrong. What the doctor did to help Sarkar Baba was the right humane thing to do, but in terms of the purpose for which Sarkar Baba was in the hospital, it was not. This is what comes out of what he said to the doctor, an absolute lie, but he acted so well that, perhaps, it throws some light on the acting talents of saints. I am not sure if this acting proclivity can be regarded as a Pāsūpat trait of appearing other than what one really is, but Sarkar Baba always had his own reasons for doing things, reasons which may not be apparent to a casual observer. I cannot even attempt to deal with them here. In my opinion, the lesson here is about resourcefulness in getting out of tight situations, as also, that the guru is capable of doing anything, and that his disciples should not doubt his words. Also, perhaps, that Aughar saints have a different outlook on life than what is generally believed about saints. Guru particularism?

### 3. Who is greater – God – or the devotee?

During my fieldwork, Mr. Singh narrated a very interesting story that happened at the ashram. There is a grave on the land behind the Banaras ashram. The ashram wanted to acquire that land for social service. That land belonged to a nearby villager, who did not want to sell it. A case had been filed in the court on this issue. Mr. Ratnakar Advocate and Professor Vedpathi (names changed), two old time stalwarts of the Samooh, were

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working very hard on this case for the ashram. One day that villager came into the ashram. He came to Sarkar Baba, greeted him, and sat down to one side.

Sarkar Baba asked him in Bhojpuri, "How are you?"

He snapped, "You and I have a case going."

Sarkar Baba laughed and said affectionately, "No hey! You and the ashram have a case going (*nā rē! tahār aur ashram kē case calat bā*)."

He said, "I want to ask you a question."

"Sure." Sarkar Baba said.

He asked, "You tell me, is God greater, or is God's devotee greater?"

Sarkar Baba stayed quiet for a minute and then said, "The devotee is greater, because God has to fulfill the wishes of the devotee."

That villager replied, "Very well then. You have said this. Now, it is I who should win this case."

Sarkar Baba replied simply, "Okay. You will (*thīk bā. jīt jaiba*)."

On the day the judgment was declared, he did actually win! Mr. Ratnakar and Professor Vedpathi returned back to the ashram rather disheartened. They could not get over the fact that the ashram had lost the case despite their best efforts. That same evening the villager came into the ashram with a whole basketful of sweets. Other people in the ashram thought he had come to rub salt on their wounds, and wanted to shoo him away, but Sarkar Baba said, "Come friend, come."

He presented his basketful of sweets to Sarkar Baba and said, "Baba, I won a case today. I have brought you the sweets for it."

Sarkar Baba said, "Yes. Please distribute it among the ashram residents."

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He distributed the sweets in the ashram. As one can imagine, there was great consternation in the ashram at this. Before leaving, however, the villager wrote down the land he had won the court case for, as a gift to the ashram.

Mr. Singh concluded, it was Sarkar Baba's friendship that the ashram won the case even after losing it, and Baba's devotee also won what he wanted.

Again, the language here is the simplest possible, but what is being said, or practiced, between the words, is of paramount importance. A number of people learnt lessons that day, but the lessons they learnt were very different depending upon which party they belonged to. The villager, obviously, won the "devotee card." I have no idea how Sarkar Baba knew he would win, or if he made it happen since he had given his word to him. What the villager gained, however, appears to be an affirmation of faith and a belief in something larger than a court case, something amorphous but powerful that he had access to in a difficult situation. That assurance made his magnanimity even grander: he was giving a gift to a saint who helped him keep his pride intact. Pride, I presume, was the lesson on the other side too – the ashram's side. Mr. Ratnakar and Prof. Vedpathi may have had an inflated sense of importance that they were using their special skills to "benefit" the ashram, and perhaps, that they were putting the ashram in debt by doing this favor. Their pride was shattered, and yet, their hard work did not go in vain, or it would probably not have made the villager so super-conscious of his own pride. That, of course, is my opinion on the episode.

4. Even now I did not find God

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When Sarkar Baba used to visit Delhi in the beginning years of the Samooh in the 60s and the 70s, he would always stay at our home at Jangpura Extension. As indicated in the opening comments of this thesis, I was still a young boy then. Even in those days, Sarkar Baba's activities used to be quite unconventional. In the blistering heat of Delhi, Sarkar Baba would sit on the bed and cover himself with a blanket. He would sit for an hour in this way. One day I mentioned to him that everyone was most uncomfortable with the heat, how could he cover himself with a blanket in such weather?

Sarkar Baba laughed and replied in Bhojpuri, "Oho, I too am bothered by the heat. That is why I cover myself with the blanket!"

"How's that?" I enquired.

"Because when it becomes very hot inside the blanket, I open it just a little bit. Then cool air sucks out all the heat from inside."

I wasn't going to believe it without trying it for myself. So I did. I sat on the bed and covered myself with a blanket. Within moments I was completely soaked with sweat. When the heat became almost unbearable I removed the blanket. Aha! It was a relief to experience the letting off of heat and it really felt very cool. It may be that Sarkar Baba had said it just to give me a satisfactory answer, but I am sure this act can be tested by others, and it is completely safe to try it at home. My conclusion: If you heat up the heat, then the process of letting off heat cools you down.

That night too, Sarkar Baba was in a humorous mood. He began to tell me, in Bhojpuri, the story of a person wandering in search of God, and the futility of external seeking –

There was a boy. He had become quite tired of his life. He just couldn't figure out what to do with his life. So he thought, fine, I will go and search for God. But where to search for God? He asked someone, "Brother, how will I find God?" That person informed him to go and bathe in the Ganges every day and he would be sure to find God. The boy began to take a dip in the Ganges every day. He bathed in this way for many days but he did not find God. He asked a different person this time. He said, "Sir, it has been many days since I have been bathing in the Ganges, but I have not found God. Can you tell me how to find God?" That person told him to go get his head tonsured, and to retain a little pony-tail at the top of his head. He would be assured to find God in this way. So the boy went and had his head tonsured, and retained a little pony tail at the top of his head. He began to wander in this way. His parents thought that their son had gone crazy. And still, he did not find God. He was really perplexed about what to do now! "Do you understand it?" He asked yet another person, "Sir, how can one find God?" That person told him that he would have to have his penis circumcised to find God. He said, "If you get yourself circumcised, you will find God very soon." Now the boy was really scared. He did not want to get himself circumcised, but to achieve the object of his quest, he decided to go through with it anyway. He went and had himself circumcised. He began to wander in this way. Yet, he did not find God. Disappointed and dejected, he sat down at the base of a tree and began to cry, "I bathed in the Ganges, I had my head tonsured, I had myself circumcised, but I have still not found God. Oh, what should I do?" (personal communication, Summer 1972, New Delhi).

Sarkar Baba told this story and began to laugh. I began to laugh too. Then he asked me, "Do you know of a way to help him?"

I smiled even more at Sarkar Baba's statement. If I had known the solution to this problem, wouldn't I have acted upon it myself? I told him I did not know the answer.

Sarkar Baba said, "Yes, it is very difficult." And dismissed the matter.

I have thought about this story many times over the years. Why did Sarkar Baba tell me this story, without giving me the expected ultimate conclusion. Was he trying to tell me something? Was he trying to mold my thinking in a particular way? Was he trying to sow the seeds of a future path in life? To this day I don't have a certain answer for it. Sure, the way he narrated this story, it was hugely humorous, so I never forgot it. Having perused through many narratives of seeking god from different cultures and

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religions, what he narrated in a small story becomes a life-sized truth. It has certainly exposed for me the superficiality of external symbolism of religiosity. It has also inculcated a healthy respect for the eternal spiritual effort in all religions. What the story has done for me is to have a non-discriminatory, non-denigrating attitude for practices of people from all religions, as well as a healthy skepticism for ostentatious religiosity. This thinking was not a result only of his words. Those words were very simple, almost childish. Inherent within those words, however, was a power that still makes me see things with lenses of a different color.

### 5. Country liquor and the pestle

One day during my fieldwork I was sitting in the ashram, exchanging stories with Mishra Ji. He began to tell me humorous stories that had happened in the ashram and I was beside myself with laughter. One such story, in his own words:

At the Parao ashram in Banaras, there are 10-15 toddy (*tāḍī*) trees behind the rear boundary wall. On hot summer days, people extract toddy from them. Occasionally, Baba would also drink some of it. Sometimes, elders in the ashram would partake of it. One year Baba gave those trees to the barber who used to shave him. He told him to sell the toddy and supplement his family's income. The barber was devoted to Baba. But what happened is that when he would extract toddy, a few people in the ashram would drink out of it. If few began to drink, many more joined in. Slowly, a time came when he would have no toddy left to sell in the market for his family. One day Baba was sitting on his chair. Just then the barber passed by with his toddy containers (*labanī*). Baba stopped him and checked his clay toddy pots. He found that some pots were maybe a quarter full, and some were entirely empty. Baba asked him, how was he going to support his family with this? The barber replied that it was okay, that he was happy if it was consumed in the ashram. Baba asked him to name the people who drank his toddy. Amongst the people he listed came the name of Ramsingh (name changed), a very prosperous gentleman of the city of Banaras. Baba was quite appalled. He said, it is okay if a poor person drinks from your labors, but this gentleman is prosperous enough to pay for it. Why does he not pay you for it? When the barber did not reply, Baba said, fine, he will pay dearly for it.

A few days later Ramsingh came to the ashram. As soon as he sat down next to Baba's chair, I don't know what came over him, his temperament began to change. He felt completely detached (*virakt*) from the world. He took hold of Baba's feet and said, Baba, please give me initiation (*dīkṣā*). I am not going to go back home now. I will leave my wife and children. Baba said, hey, you are married. You have a wife. Now, if you, of your own volition, marry your wife to someone else, then only can you be free of this responsibility. Ramsingh became confused. He asked Baba how could he be free of this responsibility, for who would be willing to marry his wife? Baba told him that he knew of a man who would be willing to do so. All that Ramsingh needed to do was to be ready for it, and to go and tell his wife about it. Ramsingh agreed and went home to talk to his wife.

Mr. Vishvakarma (name changed) was made the go between in this whole episode. He went to Ramsingh's house and told his wife about what Ramsingh had agreed to do. Ramsingh's wife thought Baba was playing a joke and so she played along in jest. Here, in the ashram, Baba called Mr. Buddha (name changed) and got him ready for his wedding with Ramsingh's wife. He began to be anointed with turmeric, as is customary for the groom during weddings. Mr. Buddha's wife was also informed of what was going on. A day before the wedding she too arrived in the ashram, all feisty for a fight. As soon as she saw Mr. Buddha, she began to berate him for agreeing to marry Ramsingh's wife. She accused him of having an affair behind her back. Mr. Buddha felt rather ashamed. He was doing all this just because Baba had asked him to, and so, in shame, he could not even argue back with her. He asked her to watch what was happening, because Baba was doing all this for a reason.

The ashram was now agog with curiosity with all these goings on. The next day, the day of the wedding, Baba telephoned Ramsingh's house. By now, Ramsingh's feeling of detachment had waned and he really did not know what to do about all this. Baba asked him to bring his wife to the ashram so she could be married that day. Ramsingh did not reply. So Baba sent Mr. Vishvakarma with the ashram jeep to get the bride to be. When Ramsingh went to his wife to ask her to get ready to go to the ashram for her wedding, she was grinding spices with a pestle. She was appalled that her husband would even ask her to do so, and so, in anger, she lifted the pestle and brought it down none too gently on his head. He began to bleed from his head and had to be rushed to the hospital. It took 14 stitches to close the wound.

Mr. Vishvakarma telephoned Baba and told him of all this. Baba remained quiet. Ramsingh had paid dearly. In the ashram, Mr. Buddha was remarried to his own wife, vows were renewed, sweets were distributed, and everything ended on a happy note! (personal communication during fieldwork, July 1997, Banora Village, Chhatisgarh).

I wondered about what Sarkar Baba was trying to do, and say, in this story. Some could argue that Sarkar Baba caused unnecessary domestic strife and aggravation for the

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sake of amusement. To me, it is a method of teaching necessary lessons. All the literature on Aghor tradition points to the “raw” nature of Aghor, and if there is one thing I have understood from all of it, it is that being associated with an Aghor saint is like being in contact with a live wire. If one conducts the power carried by it properly, one benefits from it. If not, it can give one the shock of their life.

From one point of view this whole episode looks like the “marriage game” little children play, getting dressed up, putting on lipstick, performing pretend marriage rituals, fighting as well as laughing, all the time knowing that all this is in play. From another point of view, it appears to me to be a guru's very strong communication to his devotees and disciples. Sarkar Baba was ever-mindful of proper behavior, and injustice was one thing he never could stand. While Ramsingh was an old devotee of his, Ramsingh's behavior did not reflect what Sarkar Baba was trying to teach in the ashram through his own behavior. Sarkar Baba did not want to verbally chastise him, being that he was such an old devotee, where chastisement would have certainly hurt his pride and ego. So he played. He concocted a game which tested the faiths of the devotees he asked to participate in the game. This included Ramsingh, Mr. Buddhu as well as Mr. Vishvakarma. Mr. Buddhu and Mr. Vishvakarma joined in, not knowing that this was a game, out of full faith for what their guru had asked them to do. I have no clue as to how Ramsingh felt all detached from the world on sitting near Sarkar Baba, nor do I have any way of investigating that. However, once his feeling of detachment kicked in, the game was on. For the lesson to be fully completed, however, it was also necessary that he snap out of his state of detachment, which happened shortly before the story concluded. I wonder if Ramsingh ever realized he had paid the price for free country-liquor by going

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to the hospital to have his head sewn up. I have a feeling, even if he did not put two and two together himself, that he would have found it out, since everyone else in the ashram had pieced the events together. Mr. Buddhu, ashram people conjectured, may have had karmic effects to expiate, so he had to become the brunt of jokes, since everyone laughed when they heard what he was going to do. If that was the case, it would appear he was an unsuspecting participant in something similar to the Pāṣupat practice of courting dishonor. Of course, Mr. Buddhu thoroughly enjoyed the attention, although his wife was less than enthusiastic about it. However, she too, ultimately benefited by letting out whatever bottled emotions she may have had, being remarried in the ashram, renewing her vows, and having a grand story to tell in the rural countryside for many years to come.

For old-timers at the ashram, although noteworthy, this was not too exceptional an episode. According to them, Sarkar Baba used to do such *līlās* (divine play) from time to time, each time with a different set of results for the concerned individuals. Since the nature of these events are so bizarre and unconventional, it is easy to describe them as *līlā*. To me, these are powerful acts of communication – either of faith, or of identification with the guru, or of the right kind of behavior in a practical world – communication which loses its potency if delivered merely through words.

#### 6. Cooking at the Cremation ground

Now I cite a story where not a lot is said verbally, yet a lot is said by physical action. At the end of the story, I hope, readers would realize two things – one, the particular lifestyle of an Aughar saint, and two, the communication of an adventurous, if not spiritual

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experience – for the lay devotees. In this case, Guru particularism takes the form of Sarkar Baba's peculiar lifestyle, because, for him, living with the cremation ground and what it offered, was a simple and natural life. This story is excerpted from the book *Avadhūt Pādya*, published in 1963. It narrates Sarkar Baba's visit to his devotees at Prayag, near Allahabad, and the consequent happenings. This story was written in Hindi by the then member of Prayag branch of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, Shri Surendra Sahay, and as readers will notice, it is full of statements that depict his joy and devotion at being with Sarkar Baba.

It was the evening time on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 1963. It was very cold and the icy wind seemed to be striking like arrows, when, suddenly, we heard the horn of a car... It was a strange sight. On one side of the car was Shri Gurudev, and next to him was His Highness Maharaj of Jashpur, and behind them were seated Ramdhari Singh, whom Baba had named 'Guard Sahab', Pathak Ji, Shri Amarnath Singh, and two servants of His Highness Maharaj of Jashpur etc. ...

While still sitting in the car Sarkar said ... 'we are in a hurry, we have to reach the Trivenī<sup>15</sup> right now, let us go.' ... When we were about to sit in the car, a devotee of Sarkar, Shri Rampyare asked him to allow him to go too. ... He said yes. Shri Rampyare also got in with us.

As we were driving, Sarkar said to us – '... take the car in the direction of shops so we may buy some vegetables and groceries. ... The car stopped and we began to shop, but waves of devotion began to rise in Shri Rampyare's heart. He thought in his heart that Baba was the lord of the world to him, therefore, he, as a guard, should maintain his status. So he picked up His Highness' gun lying in the car to put it on his shoulder and patrol around the car, but Baba saw him.

Sarkar asked him to put the gun down and go home, not because Baba was upset with him, but just as a precaution so that Rampyare's wave of pure devotion did not make him do something unwanted. ... Now the question was, where should we go? ... Dear Gurudev said, 'It will be very crowded in the Mela.<sup>16</sup> It would not suit us to go there. Let us go to the cremation ground, we will have some solitude there.'

... I want to draw your attention to the scene of the cremation ground at that time. The night was very dark. For light, there were just the tiny shimmering lamps from the Public works Department. It was the bank of the Ganges, and on that bank were furiously burning pyres of the dead. ... Sarkar walked towards the bank where the woods of the pyre had just devoured the five-element body of a fortunate person, and were now dying down. Sarkar stood there for five minutes then walked back to the car and asked us to start preparing the food.

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... Sarkar ... went back to grace the pyre where smoldering logs were indicating that this is the same place where a few hours ago a puppet of flesh and bones had been cremated. ...Sarkar said, 'Master, bring it, put the lentils on these coals.' You are great, guru, for this is how you bestow your grace on those you want to.

...After I had finished cooking the vegetables I went and sat in the sand where Sarkar's cot was lying, lentils were cooking on the now fiercely bright pyre logs, ... [others] were having a religious discourse. I had sat only for a few minutes when Sarkar said, 'Uma Babu, please bring some alcohol.' ...Uma Babu left.

...The food was ready. Maharaja Sahab also arrived. He sat for a few minutes when Baba had us prepare a plateful of food for him, and asked him to go eat it. He went away with his plate and we began to partake of the offerings made to Mother Sarveshwari at the place where only a few hours ago people had observed mourning.

What a glorious moment that was. We devotees were so blessed that we were sitting in the lap of mother Ganges with our dear Gurudev, partaking of the food offered to the graceful Mother Sarveshwari by our Guru, in her own holy place, the cremation ground. The *prasad* that great R̥ṣis and munis pine to receive, we devotees were receiving so easily.

After eating, we prepared to sleep. ...Sarkar said, 'Brother, now I am going to sleep in the holy lap of the Mother.'

Everyone became quiet. A little while later, everyone's snoring indicated that they were all fast asleep. I was still awake and I heard Sarkar groaning in pain. That voice had deep anguish in it. I could not stay put any longer. I got up and began to tend to him... (In the morning) after tea, everyone sang *bhajan-kirtan* and when we all asked Sarkar to have lunch. He declined... and left for Vindhyaachal. (SSS 1963:44-52. My translation, gloss added).

This story is quite illustrative of the kind of guru particularism reflected in Sarkar Baba's life which allowed him to take his devotees to the cremation ground, cook the food on a pyre, sleep in the cremation ground at the confluence of Trivenī, and provide the feeling of a divine experience amongst those who were in his company. It also reflects Sarkar Baba's awareness of the danger that excessive devotion entails, once the devotee gets carried away. The incidence of Rampyare picking up Maharaja Jashpur's gun to guard Sarkar Baba is reflective of this, and he had no option, at that point, but to

send Mr. Rampyare home. Sarkar Baba did not say much at all, and yet, he said a lot to those around him.

#### 7. Night Duty

Starting in the year 1986 when Sarkar Baba was diagnosed with nephrological problems, he would visit the US each year for consultations and treatment at the hospital. On those occasions, when I would be present in New York, I would become the de-facto translator, storyteller, and night attendant at the hospital. Those would be long hours, long days and long nights, when Sarkar Baba would apparently be sleeping in the hospital bed, punctuated by visits from doctors and nurses, when I would be called upon to translate. Those quiet hours gave me a lot of time to think. I had numerous questions for Sarkar Baba which I hesitated in asking. One of them was about his ever-wakeful state. My experiences with him in Banaras had made it clear that he never slept, at least not in the normal sense of the word. Yet, at the hospital, if he did not want to give blood to a visiting nurse, or did not want to talk to a doctor doing his rounds, he could snore so loud the whole floor would begin to shake. At the ashram in Banaras, many people had the good fortune of spending time with Sarkar Baba at night, and this was true here in America too. Every person in Sarkar Baba's "night attendance" knew that it meant absolute, all-night wakefulness. Personally, I remember spending many nights with Sarkar Baba either laughing uncontrollably all night long, or groaning in pain. Several nights were spent in telling stories, sometimes of history, sometimes of geography, sometimes about Haldī-Ghāṭī (the famous battle fought by Maharana Pratap), or Vaiśālī (the famed city destroyed by emperor Aśoka), or Somnāth (the famous temple in

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Gujarat). I narrated *Vayam Rakṣāmah* (see Caturseñ 2002, a novel about Ravana's history), recited *Vaiśālī kī Nagarvadhū* (see Caturseñ 2003), even the complete Hindi novel *Somnāth* (see Caturseñ 1987). As I would narrate the story it would appear as if Sarkar Baba had fallen asleep, the sound of his snoring would infuse the darkness of the room. But as soon as I would finish the story and become quiet he would get up and ask, "Is the story finished?"

"Yes Baba."

"Then tell me another one."

My somnolent mind would groan in protest. Now which story should I tell him? Am I some sort of a story specialist? All the stories I had read since childhood that I remembered I had already told him. Now what should I do? Even as I would be mulling over the memory bank of my stories Sarkar Baba's voice would break the silence of the night, "Hey, start the story."

And I would begin to narrate the soaps seen on television. First, *Cosmos* (the 1980 TV series written by Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan and Steven Soter), then *Vikram aur Vētāl* (The 1988 Hindi TV series), then "Stories of Indian Women". As I would narrate the stories in the dark the scene before my sleep laden eyes would become liquid, then it would disappear, and I would begin to nod in sleep. It seemed as if Sarkar Baba's voice would come to me from a very far off place, "Look at him! I have asked him to tell me a story and this dude is sleeping!"

It was then I realized that in such a somnolent state the heaviest things to lift are one's eyelids. Hard as I would try, they would not open. But Sarkar Baba would spend the whole night in a state of complete wakefulness. Why doesn't Sarkar Baba sleep? My

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sleep laden mind would groan in frustration. If he goes to sleep for a few hours, I, too, would get a chance to straighten my body. But it was to no avail. It appeared as if Sarkar Baba was giving me an untiring lesson about “laziness, sleep and yawning being the three friends of death” (*ālasya, nidrā aur jamhāi, yē tīnō haiṅ kāl kē bhāī* – a common expression in Banaras). Or perhaps he was trying to show me that in serving your guru, there is no place for sleep or laziness. Or perhaps that if one gets a chance to learn something, one should learn it with complete awareness, not lose the chance in enjoying sleep.

Sometimes Sarkar Baba would amaze me. I had started the novel *Bāṇabhaṭṭa kī Ātmakathā* (see Dwivedi 1992) that day. As soon as I started this story, Sarkar Baba became seated on the bed in his lotus position in a state of deep meditation. He began to listen to the story quietly, with absolute focus. He liked the story so much that he asked me to read it straight from the book. I began to read it. I kept reading for a long time. I don't know if it was sleep fatigue, or I had become very attuned to the atmosphere in the book, but suddenly I felt that the atmosphere in the room had turned inexplicably mysterious. The passage in the story was narrating the scene where Aghorabhairavācārya, seated on a corpse at night on the banks of the river Śoṇabhadra, had asked the Buddhist seeker Virativajra to describe the beautiful body of the goddess (Dwivedi 1992:116). I was reading –

The Avadhūt said, ‘Unfortunate one, you were being sacrificed to the goddess, divine angels had propitiated you, Śiva's consorts had played the sacred music, but your fate was unhappy with you. You did not satisfy the goddess' thirst, at least try to assuage her discontent now. Look, describe to me the beauty of the goddess' body.’

‘There was no other way out. I thought a little and began to read –

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*bāhūtkṣepasamullasatkuctaṭaṃ prāntasfuṭatkañcukam  
gambhīrodaranābhimanḍalagatkāñcīdhṛtārdhāṃśukam  
Pārvatyaṃmaḥiṣāsuraṃvyatikare vyāyāmaramyaṃ vapuh  
paryastāvadhibandhabandhuralasaskeśoccāyaṃ pātu vah. '*

*(As she raises her arms up, her nipples show and her bodice rips at the edges  
Her girdle shakes at the region of her deep belly, with her half cloth tied to it  
This, beautiful body of Pārvatī, exerting at the time of killing Maḥiṣāsura  
May he [Śhiva] detached from all relations, lazing and with high hair, protect  
you).*

‘The Avadhūt scolded me – (Dwivedi 1992:116, gloss and emphasis added. The verse above translated with help from Dr. Patrick Olivelle).

I was about to read that scolding when Sarkar Baba spoke out. “You are an animal, unfortunate one! Is this what is known as a beautiful body! Tell me more.”

I was snapped out of my reading reverie and looked to find Sarkar Baba sitting on the bed in his lotus position, smiling with his eyes closed. I looked down at the book.

The next line was–

*You are an animal, unfortunate one! Is this what is known as a beautiful body!  
Tell me more. (Dwivedi 1992:116, emphasis added).*

“Oh Baba!” I said, “You seem to know this story already.”

He replied in a very sweet, emotion laced soft voice, “Yes, it is a good story.

Read further.”

I recalled that Sarkar Baba's penance region had also been the banks of the river Śoṇabhadra at one time. Is that why the atmosphere in this room seemed so mysterious?

I began to read further –

I narrated another one –

*caḥsuradikṣu kṣipantyāścalitaskalinīcārukoṣābhitāmram  
bhadraṃ dhyāyānuṃyātāṃ jhaṭiti valayino muktabāṇasyapāṇeh  
Candyāḥ savyāpasavyaṃ suraripuṣu śarān prerayantyā jayanti  
truṭyantah pīnabhāge stanavalanabharāt sandhayah kañcukasya.*

*(Even as her beautiful and very red eyes like a blossom, glance fleetingly  
in all directions in tandem with her thoughts*

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*Her braceleted hand lets loose the arrow swiftly  
Candi shoots arrows left and right at the enemies of the gods  
And her bodice, tearing at the edges due to the weight of her full breasts  
still holds [and wins]).*

The Avadhūt laughed. He said – (Dwivedi 1992:116, gloss added. The verse above translated with help from Dr. Patrick Olivelle).

By then Baba spoke out again, “You won't be able to do it. Get up, go away.”

I read, the next line was,

*You won't be able to do it. Get up, go away.* (Dwivedi 1992:116, emphasis added).

As I read the story it felt as if like a Buddhist Jataka story, this too was a story of some past life of Sarkar Baba's. At two or three other different places he spoke out the words spoken by the Aghor Baba before I could read it. I couldn't understand whether the whole story was resident in his memory, or whether he was reading the book himself through my eyes.

So I knew, he was fully awake, even though I was not. This continued day after day, night after night, without Sarkar Baba ever falling asleep. But in the hospital, whenever one looked at Baba, he always appeared to be sleeping. A nurse even joked about him, “He sleeps for twenty hours out of twenty-four, doesn't he do anything else?” How was I to tell her that my abilities were quite incapable of describing what Sarkar Baba did.

One day I asked him, “Baba, everyone in the hospital says you keep sleeping for twenty-four hours a day. But I see that when you open your eyes they are never laden with sleep. Tell me, do you really sleep or not?”

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He did not reply in the positive, but he did not negate it either, leaving the mystery of his twenty-four hour sleep up to me. His reply was, “You have been with me for so long, you tell me, do I sleep or not?”

Despite the agony of keeping awake all night long, I used to enjoy this “night duty” immensely. The reason was that during this time of the night it seemed as if Sarkar Baba used to be in a supernatural world. It was as if his knowledge, affection, exuberant humor spilled from his very being at those moments. Sometimes he would laugh uncontrollably describing some event that had happened during the day, or sometimes he would narrate a story to reveal some difficult to understand concept to us. I think Sarkar Baba used to do this to play with us, in the same way that a mother plays with her children. It seemed as if he was making us practice getting beyond our physical limits. To drive home the point to us that we were not a slave to our senses, and that our faith in him would take us through the most difficult situations -- beyond the limits of sleep, beyond the limits of tiredness, beyond the limits of fear -- even beyond the limits of formalities. This was the reason why, despite doing such hard labor all night long when every pore of our body would scream for rest, our eyes would burn with the lack of sleep, our mind would wander in somnolence, Sarkar Baba would still keep laughing, still keep playing, seemingly engrossed in his mysterious activities all night long. In the morning, surprisingly, our tired body would still have a light heart and happy mind.

People said Sarkar Baba helped his devotees by taking their ills upon himself. If so, this time of the night also used to be his time for digesting all the ills that he had taken upon himself. Sometimes, all night long, he would scream in pain, “Oh mother, oh God” as his body would jump and writhe on the bed in pain as if an unseen tormentor was

raining blows on his body. Sometimes his body would jump up from the bed, sometimes the soles of his feet would begin to burn. It was difficult to watch him in pain in this manner, and it was impossible to analyze what was happening and why it was happening.

Also, through the medium of these stories and their narration Sarkar Baba would gauge our interests, our expression, our knowledge. And then he would supplement our abilities through the medium of his own stories. And all this in such a manner that we never felt he was giving sermons to us. All in a night's play, he would communicate to us what he was trying to without ever letting us feel that he was sitting us down to teach something.

### **Talking With Saints: The Enigmatic Language**

A few times, I saw Sarkar Baba talking with other monks and saints. Often, on the occasion of Gurupūrṇimā, monks and sadhus from different parts of the country would come visit him. These included Buddhist monks from around Banaras and Sarnath, and Hindu monks who knew about him. Baba was always very courteous with them. He always offered them food and drink, and he would encourage those around him, to talk with them. During Gurupūrṇimā, he would even have them sit alongside him on the stage from where talks were delivered, so they will be in full view of the audience.

Sometimes, however, his conversations were silent. That is an odd thing to write in an anthropological dissertation, but I have seen him sit with another monk, just quietly looking at each other for 10-15 minutes, and then suddenly get up and leave, or bid farewell to the monk who was visiting him. In those few minutes I could tell something was going on, but if it was verbal, it was communicated telepathically. I saw two

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instances of this first hand, once, when an Aghar saint who lived at Majanu ka Tila in Delhi came to visit Sarkar Baba. Sarkar Baba welcomed him, offered him water and sweets, and then they both sat facing each other, looking at each other without blinking. After some time had passed, the saint took his leave and the visit was over.

The second instance was when Sarkar Baba's own guru, Burhau Baba would visit the ashram at Parao. In those instances also, they would come face to face with each other, but no words would be exchanged. Sarkar Baba often just kept his head bowed respectfully, while Burhau Baba would stare at him. After some time, this would end and Burhau Baba would be on his way. One instance of such a meeting comes from the narration of Bindeshwari Bhaiya, one of my informants during fieldwork. At that time Sarkar Baba had prohibited the drinking of liquor in the ashram and Burhau Baba was quite upset about it. He came to the Parao ashram, barged into Sarkar Baba's room where he found him standing in a corner with his head bowed. There was a short interlude of staring by Burhau Baba, after which he came out, kicked a few flowerpots to pieces, and went on his way. However, in another instance, this time narrated by Mr. Vivekananda Sahay, no conversation even took place among the guru and disciple, and yet, a lot was communicated. Mr. Sahay's story pertains to an important political personality of India, about whom I will have more to say in the next chapter. So here, the story, though long in Mr. Sahay's detailed description, is quite interesting:

I remember, Hanumathaiya Ji had visited the ashram in 1968. At that time, on the occasion of Gurupurnima, Baba would entrust specific functions to various people, who, as office bearers, would have to wear their designated "function" on a patch of cloth tied around their arm. Since 1968, I was always deputed as the liaison officer, and I fulfilled this function till the year 1977. The job of a liaison officer used to be to contact prominent visitors wishing to visit the ashram, meet them at the train station or at the airport, and after they had met Baba, to take

them back to the place where they were staying, etc. That morning in 1968, I was informed that Mr. K. Hanumathaiya was going to visit the ashram. He was staying at the Banaras Circuit House. I was to welcome him at the ashram gate, and then to escort him to Baba. After he had met Baba, I had to take him to the Krin Kund Sthal for a *darśan*, and then see him off at the Circuit House where he was staying. It happened so. When he visited the ashram, Baba and he spent time alone for about an hour. Then I escorted him to Krin Kund. But my heart was trembling with fear on taking him to Krin Kund. Because at that time Baba's Guru, Baba Rajeshwar Ram was alive, he was the abbot there, and in his free and unfettered mode of behavior he would not hesitate in using a stick or invectives on whoever happened to be in front of him. No one was either big or small, prestigious or low class, for him. I had experienced this myself in the ashram in 1966. Let me make you aware of that incident first, to explain the trepidation in my heart.

The old abbot came to the ashram during Gurupurnima. People roared "*Har-Har-Mahadev*" [Glory to Mahadev (a name for Shiva)] on seeing him. He went straight to the meeting hall and sat on the easy chair lying there. All the old people of the ashram ran to touch his feet. He welcomed some with the whack of a stick, some others with a slap from his wooden sandals. He kept scolding everyone. I did not know him, but because of curiosity I went to see what was happening. At that time my good friends and guru-brothers Parmanand Mishra and Ramashankar Pandey used to live in the ashram. I asked the two of them, "Who is this gentleman who has created such a commotion here?"

They said, hey, you don't know? This is Baba's Guru Maharaj. Go quickly and have a *darśan* of him, it will make fortune smile upon you. I said, "But he seems to be beating everyone who goes to him!"

They both said, hey, just go and have a look. Keep praying to him in your mind that Baba, I am a new person here, I won't be able to cope with your beating. Please give me *darśan* in your quiet and serene form. As I walked towards the old abbot I began to pray in my mind, "Hey Baba, I have got this opportunity to have your *darśan* for the first time today. I am very afraid of coming up to you. Your formidable behavior has made me very frightened. Please give me *darśan* in your serene form."

It was a great surprise to me when the old abbot hit the person before me with a stick,<sup>17</sup> but when I bowed to touch his feet praying in this manner, he caressed my head with affection and said, "Get up, get up."

I got up, but still had my hands folded. He said, "I was also a deputy collector."

My surprise knew no bounds! I had met the old abbot for the first time just now, but he seemed to know me. That is why he was telling me that he, too, had been a deputy collector in his past life, same as I had been not too long ago. That meant that I did not need to fear him. Then I said to him, "Baba, I should also receive something from you."

He felt in the waistband of his *lungi* and then threw a one paisa coin at me. I picked it up, touched it to my forehead, and then argued with him just as a son

argues with his father, "What is this you are giving me? What can I get with this?"

He said, "Keep it carefully. When its work is finished, then I will give you more."

The old abbot had given me his *darśan* in a most serene and affectionate manner. Now he beckoned to me with his finger. When I went near him he said, "Go, bring it."

I could not understand what he was asking me to bring. Parmanand Mishra explained with his hand gestures that the old abbot was asking for alcohol, and that I now needed to go to my own Guru Maharaj and get some liquor for the old abbot. I ran to Baba with a very happy, fulfilled heart. Baba's room was locked from inside. I called out gently, "Sarkar, Sarkar," and Baba opened the door. He asked, "What is it?"

I said, "Sarkar, the old abbot is asking for liquor."

Baba became very angry with me, "Hey! Have you lost your mind? Can't you see how drunk he already is! This is a public place and he is creating such a disturbance here. Now you want to go and give him some more. Do you want him to commit bloodshed here?"

I said, "Baba, he has asked me to bring some. Now, here I am, falling at your feet. Please allow me to fulfill his request."

When I prayed so, Baba picked me up. In a small tea cup, he measured out two or three teaspoonfuls of alcohol and said, "Go, give this to him."

I acted stubborn, "I won't take this. He will throw this right back at me. What Baba, this is not even covering the bottom of the cup.:"

Baba said, "Hey, you are bent upon making trouble here today."

But then he poured a little bit more. When the cup was half full he gave it to me and said, "Now go. Beware, you can't ask for any more!"

But it was sufficient enough to bring to the old abbot, and I did so. The old abbot accepted it with great happiness. Then he gave me such an affectionate look, and his face displayed such a slight but sweet smile, that I began to feel soaked with his affection. He emptied the cup in one gulp. Perhaps he understood my difficulty. Without saying anything more he got up from the chair and said, "We will meet again."

Then he started brandishing his stick again and walked out of the *ashram*, naked, to the *ricksha* waiting there for him. The *ricksha* took him back.

I narrated this story to explain to you my mental state on having to take Mr. Hanumathaiya to the old abbot's place. This time too, I prayed while walking, "On the order of my Guru Maharaj, I am bringing a gentleman to see you. He is from South India. He does not even understand our language well. So old abbot, please give me and him, a *darśan* in your serene form. This will also be in the interest of our organization. O old abbot, please do not let anything happen for which I will have to feel ashamed in front of him."

Meanwhile, Hanumathaiya Ji kept asking me questions and I kept replying to them even as I prayed. My mind was full of all sorts of uncertainties. When we reached Krin Kund I took Hanumathaiya Ji to the *samādhi* of Baba Kinaram

and then took him to the old abbot who was sitting on his cot. A bottle of liquor and a glass were lying next to him. The bottle was three fourth empty. The old abbot was drinking and he had a stick about two feet long in his hand. A thick, fat one, like a baton. He would smack that baton on his cot, bang, bang, intermittently. That was his mental state. In the midst of all this, I arrived up to him with Mr. Hanumathaiya. Perhaps Hanumathaiya Ji was also feeling frightened inside, for he asked me, "Is it proper to go to him now? He seems to be drinking."

I said, "Why don't you bow to him from right here, I will go close and ask him."

Hanumathaiya Ji agreed readily. I went to the old abbot, who was still smacking his baton on the cot. I put my head at his feet and said, "Baba, forgive my insolence, I am disturbing you at this moment."

The old abbot caressed my head with the same old affection and said, "Get up. Get up."

I indicated towards Mr. Hanumathaiya and said, "Baba, he has been a minister in the Government of India. Earlier, he used to be the Chief Minister of Karnataka state. His name is K. Hanumathaiya. He was eager to have your *darśan* and so my guru has entrusted this task to me. Baba, please give him your *darśan* and blessing in your serene form."

"Call him," said the old abbot.

Hanumathaiya Ji went to him. He bowed to the old abbot with devotion and touched his feet.

"Bless you," the old abbot said, then asked me to take him upstairs, to the *samādhi* of Baba Kinaram. I knew how to do that. I had incense sticks with me. I told Hanumathaiya Ji that the old abbot had asked him to go and have a *darśan* at the *samādhi* of Baba Kinaram. He lighted incense sticks there as an offering. When we returned, the old abbot raised his hand and blessed us, and then we came back. In this way I became acquainted with Mr. Hanumathaiya. (personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, New Delhi).

This story is interesting in that it highlights the very different modes of behavior and communication between Sarkar Baba and his guru, diametrically opposed in how they interacted with common folk. Buṛhau Baba dispensed his blessings with a stick or baton, Sarkar Baba did not. Buṛhau Baba could create public scene without any hesitation, Sarkar Baba tried to avoid it. Buṛhau Baba was usually gruff, Sarkar Baba's words could melt hardened hearts. Here we have two gurus of the same tradition, but with very different particularisms on display.

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However, within the same tradition, in another context, we also see the same kind of apparently eccentric behavior between the guru – Burhau Baba, and the disciple – Sarkar Baba. This communicative episode took place many years earlier, and has been published in the book *Aughar kī Gaṭharī* (Pandey 1984). What appear in the story to be instances of childish behavior, to me, appear to be amusing evidence of non-verbal, symbolic *sadhukkarī* communication between the guru and the disciple. The passage is lengthy because the descriptions here are more illustrative than my paraphrasing, of the long story. The context of this story in the book is that after Sarkar Baba gained fame in Banaras and its hinterland, his guru asked him to visit the Sthal. Phokabir (Kedar Singh) tells this story to Dayanarayan Pandey about how the abbot, Baba Rajeshwar Ram sent a messenger, Chhedi Sav, to Sarkar Baba. The way young Sarkar Baba goes to the Sthal, and what transpires between the two, is of particular interest:

Chhedi Sav touched Baba's feet and standing to his side, began to look at my face. So, I had to tell my Baba – 'Chhedi Sav has come here as old abbot's messenger. The Baba of the Sthal wants to meet you. His [Baba's] eyes looked up and after seeing Chhedi Sav, became still at their own place. He did not say either yes or no. I took his silence to be an affirmative, and that is exactly what happened. Before the arrival of evening that day a boat came to his place. He got into it. Instead of coming to Varanasi by boat, I put my bicycle on a bus and got down at Maidagin.

... In the morning around eight or nine after breakfast, thinking that his boat would have reached Manikarnika [ghat] by now, I came out from my house and went straight to the ghat. There I saw the ever constant view of Manikarnika cremation ground – in front of me was the smoke emanating from about a dozen pyres, as if making the way for people journeying back from earth. ... At that time Manikarnika ghat was under the administration of Lakshminarayan Dom. He saw from his seat that Baba's boat was docking at the bank. Seeing him get down from the boat, he ran to him. Baba accepted the Dom's hospitality. He stayed there for about two hours. Lakshminarayan did all that he could to be hospitable. I whispered in Lakshminarayan's ear, "He has to go to Krin-Kund."

... Now listen about Baba's playfulness. ... [Baba said] 'I will not go there. I will not lift my feet to go there (to Krin Kund). I have sworn so.' Lakshminarayan began to look at my face on hearing this. I winked at him. ...

He said to Baba – ‘Sarkar, if you have sworn something about going there, then its sanctity must be observed. ... My horse-drawn carriage is ready. I will pick you up and set you on it. There, you will be able to go without lifting your feet.’

Lakshminarayan went with him on his grand carriage till Gyanvapi. I followed the carriage on my bike. About hundred meters before the gate of Krin-Kund Baba indicated to me to take the horse's rein and stop it. I dropped my bike on the road. I took the reins of the horse in my hand and stood by the side of the road. The carriage stopped.

Here again Baba began his tantrum like he had done at Manikarnika Ghat. While sitting on the carriage he said – ‘Neither will I go on the carriage, nor on foot.’ Again, Lakshminarayan's quick thinking came to our aid. First, he too began to wonder what to do, but instantly, a solution came to his mind – he picked up my playful Baba on his back. Then, trotting like a horse, he went inside the Krin-Kund monastery. At that time his holiness Baba Rajeshwar Ram lay on his cot. His eyes were closed. ... The young avadhūt's respectful hands touched the old abbot's feet. His heavy eyes began to blink. Suddenly, clouds of love began to swim in his affectionate eyes. Finally, waterfalls of tears began to pour out. The old abbot's love began a sarcastic monologue – ‘I had made you my disciple to prepare my tobacco, and you have begun to wander freely so far away from my control.’

The young Aughar did not say anything. ... The abbot said to the young avadhūt – ‘I am thinking I should get you married. You will do it, right.’

The young avadhūt, with bowed head, said slowly – ‘okay.’

... Now listen to the next proposition of the old abbot. He said to the young Aughar – ‘But the bride is from far away, from Orissa border. Will you be able to take care of her?’

The young avadhūt's answer came in a hushed tone, but it was said with all seriousness – ‘Why won't I take care of her?’

After saying this Kedar Singh told me about his mental state at that time – ‘When Baba said “Why won't I take care of her?” about the bride from Orissa, my hackles rose. In my understanding he became ready to marry some girl from Orissa. My mind thought it to be some everyday wedding and I became livid.’ ... The guru and the disciple remained together with affection and devotion for about two hours. Their symbolic *sadhukkarī* language remained beyond our comprehension. In the end, disciple avadhūt Bhagawan Ram touched the feet of his guru and started out. Lakshminarayan Dom's carriage was waiting for him outside. (Pandey 1984:55-60, my translation).

Some days later Kedar Singh went to Sarkar Baba again. At that time he understood the mystery about Sarkar Baba's wedding:

... When he [Baba] saw me at Bakuliya Bag, he began to laugh like a child. My hands began to massage his feet. He smiled at me and said – ‘Phokabir, your *kharāun* (wooden sandals) were taken away by Ganga. But yes,

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it helped us cross into the river Son. Then he began to mumble something – ‘Hinguli from Hingalaj, flew to Orissa, went to Kamaksha, met me ....’ I do not remember [all of] it. But yes, his mumbling in this way indicated to me that the ‘bride from Orissa’ was nothing but a transformation of the loving divine mother. I became ashamed at myself and came home to bring food for him. (Pandey 1984:68, my translation).

The story quoted above from “Aughar Ki Gathari” is quite amusing. But it also has two very important implications. One is the recognition by Sarkar Baba's own guru that Sarkar Baba had become spiritually accomplished and, therefore, worthy of not only being invited back to the Sthal but, virtually, also of being “married” to Goddess Hingalaj. The second is Sarkar Baba's return to the Sthal, but not as a meek disciple anymore, but in fact, as a hero, on a rich Dom's swanky carriage, and ultimately, on the back of the Dom himself, as powerful or popular personalities are sometimes carried by jubilant crowds in India. In a symbolic manner, one could interpret Sarkar Baba's symbolic gesture as a communication of “mastery” over men, carried by them in their hearts and minds. This metaphor seems appropriate in the light of the term his devotees began to use to address him later – *Sarkar*. In colloquial Hindi *Sarkar* simply means government, such as Bharat-Sarkar (Government of India), Rajasthan-Sarkar (Government of Rajasthan) etc. But Sarkar is also a common mode of address in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and parts of Madhya Pradesh where it implies “lord” or “master,” someone who maintains his grace on those in his shelter. In a tangential way it is similar to the Rajasthani term of address – *Hukum* – which is used to address chiefs and kings or people in unquestioned authority. In the larger context of Hinduism, it is similar to the more common Sanskrit term “Swami” which also means lord or master. Although it is equal in

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meaning to “Swami,” *Sarkar* has a colloquial and regional ethos to it which Swami somehow lacks.

This is relevant because Phokabir had once said to Sarkar Baba he would get the seat of Kinaram, to which Sarkar Baba had replied, “Why wash an old sheet and make me sit on that? Make a new sheet” (Pandey 1984:21). This, in fact, indicates Sarkar Baba's communication of a premonition about the path his life was going to take. He had become established as an Aghar-master and yet he had no interest in taking the seat of the holy place where he had been initiated. He had become a *yogic* master, but he had no desire to be crowned with swami-hood, although His accomplishments now made him at par with his guru, who was not only impressed by his success, but also lamented, “I had made you a disciple to prepare my tobacco, and you have begun to wander freely so far away from my control.” This passage also displays the use of symbolic language, termed *sadhukkarī* above, and known more popularly as *Sāndhya-bhāṣā* in literature, but of course Phokabir did not understand or remember most of it, and so I do not have a better handle on it.

It is important to examine Sarkar Baba's denial of the seat of the Kinaram Sthal, and his decision to establish a whole new seat that would, in some senses, rival the Sthal. This denial signifies not only the return of Baba to modern public life, and I stress the word modern here, but in fact, it depicts his return with such power, potential and vision that it could not be contained within the older structures. Once enlightened, we can presume with some certainty that Sarkar Baba had a good idea of what he wanted to do with the rest of his life. Just as in his childhood situation Sarkar Baba needed to avoid adults who would interrupt or interfere in his activities all the time, in this situation too, he did not want to be

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encumbered by carrying the weight of the seat of a tradition that was so old and established it could not be changed easily. Also, it would have been disrespectful to the history and traditions of the Sthal, as well as to his own guru who was alive at that time, to begin altering the age-old practices that Aghars had become synonymous with. But for Sarkar Baba to come back to society and take up active social service, it was essential that the outer manifestations of an Aghar's life be brought in closer conformity with the structures of “normal” social behavior, not transgressive ones. In addition, he always had a great respect for what Kinaram Sthal stood for, a hoary tradition of ascetics who can, and have, achieved enlightenment, while at the same time accepting all sections of society in their fold. However, being so old and established, it was more concretized in form, tradition, and in people's minds. In effect, then, when Sarkar Baba stood his ground and started a new seat of Aghor, one which had links with the old tradition, yet was new in its form and spirit, it was the beginning of a new form of Aghor culture, rooted in hard ascetic practices, but blossoming within society.

Interesting as this story is, other forms of saintly communication are even more fascinating. Bindeshwari Bhaiya narrated a story the likes of which I had never heard before. Just like I used to, there were others who would attend on Sarkar Baba during his all-night wakeful hours. In Bindeshwari Bhaiya's own words:

One night at the Parao ashram, we were massaging Baba's body. It was about one or one-thirty at night. I saw, a mahatma with big matted locks piled up on his head in a bun, I do not know how or when, he came inside the ashram. Before he came, Baba said to me, “Please bring a chair here.”

He had the chair brought and placed next to his cot. Even as I was putting the chair there, I saw this mahatma, wearing wooden sandals, walk in. He was absolutely naked. Baba asked him to sit down in the designated chair and said to me, “Please bring some water.”

By the time I brought the water in a glass, I found them talking, I don't know what, in their *sadhukkarī* language. I stood there with the glass of water in my hand listening to them. Baba was speaking, and so was the visiting mahatma, I could hear them clearly, but I could not understand a word of what they were saying. I could not even fathom what language they were speaking. Their conversation was quite unique. I was still standing here with water and sweets, when that mahatma asked Baba to give him leave. Baba asked me to give him water. Mahatma Ji said, "Let it be, child."

I was still standing, and the mahatma started walking out. A few moments later Baba said to me, "Go look, where has he gone?"

I went in the direction where I had seen him go, but there was no one around. I ran up to the ashram gate and asked the person on duty there, "Has anyone come here?"

That person said to me, no one has either come in here, or gone out of here. The gate has just not been opened. I came back and said to Baba, "Sarkar, I do not know where he went! No one has seen him either come in, or go out."

Baba said, "Hey, silly! He was an airborne mahatma. He was traveling on the airwaves. He saw me and alighted. That is why I had asked you to put the chair here."

Baba had extended courtesy to him, given him a seat, and when the conversation was over that mahatma had gone out of Baba's foyer towards the well, and then simply disappeared into thin air. I had seen that clearly that night.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown the link between the words of an Aughar saint and the actual practice that they follow. Continuing from chapter two and three, the imagination of "helix in time" interaction and exchange between different traditions such as the Buddhists, the Naths, the Pāśupatas, the Tantriks, etc., I have looked at Sarkar Baba's manner of communication under several different categories, highlighting the links with other traditions where they are obvious. For communication with his initiated disciples I have tried to analyze some of the Buddhist words and concepts that formed part of Sarkar Baba's vocabulary such as *sahaja*, *anāgāmī phal*, *śakragāmī phal*, *saugat*, etc., making a note that it is not as if Sarkar Baba is using these words with a political

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purpose, rather, because they form a part of the wider Buddhist-Nath-Aghor history and conception of things. Because this link exists between them, it is easy for Sarkar Baba to interpret concepts from an Aghor perspective. The same can be said about the goddess Tārā, whom Sarkar Baba describes as a benign and loving deity, a conception that exists in Buddhism, although in Hinduism she is thought of more at par with Kali.

I have also looked at some of the Tantrik elements in Sarkar Baba's statements such as *kālakūṭa*, *vṛhattara rekhāō se āvṛtta*, etc., which can be understood only by a broad reference to the Tantrik texts as exemplified by Sanderson, and by specific reference to the *Svacchandatantra*, especially when it comes to describing internal time frames of a yogi. Related to it is the discussion of the yogic conception of *bhāva*, *abhāva*, *pūrṇabhāva*, as well as the cultivation of *ahiṃsā* as an art of destruction, sentiments which refer to gross or subtle states of being, leading to a compassionate vision when all residual impurities are destroyed. These discussions also throw light on the "mysterious language" of Aughaṛs, as evident in Sarkar Baba's exposition of social truth to his disciple Darshi. I get the sense from these communications that the mysterious language of the saints purports to hide esoteric elements of a tradition's teachings in plain sight. Everyone can read them, but only a few initiated ones get to understand what it really means.

For communication with his lay devotees I have looked at the topics Sarkar Baba used to touch upon: guru-disciple relationship; the importance of being initiated; the goddess as faith and devotion or in an anthropomorphic form, and the ways that Sarkar Baba thought a seeker could harmonize with her; the importance of practical devotion (*bhakti* with *yukti*) and cultivation of a stoic attitude towards both praise as well as

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criticism, the nature and causes of sorrow and how to be rid of them by mitigating the sense of ownership or belongingness; the evil of dowry and how Sarkar Baba exhorts his followers to oppose it; the evil of bankrupting death rituals; and the discriminations that are practiced on the basis of caste. As I hope to have shown, his ideas about caste were based on his notion of social cohesiveness and social healing. In this he differed from stalwarts like Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda, because to him a caste-based society, or the evils it had given rise to, were not an immutable human state. For him, it was the life-force which was immutable, and that is where his guru particularistic universalism shows.

Guru particularism is reflected best, of course, in the daily life of the individual gurus, but especially, we need to look at the concept of spirituality as expounded by Veer to discern the finer strands of this concept. It is in here that one can see how a particular guru drives home the lessons of a spiritual quest that, sometimes, can only be learnt from experience. Discussing Madame Blavatsky and the Theosophists, Veer distinguishes between two kinds of “spiritualism,” the Blavatskian “communicating with the spirits” kind of spirituality which includes talking with *bhuta*, *preta*, *jinn* etc., and the “unbounded tradition of mysticism” based on practices of *yoga* and meditation etc. which existed in India, and attracted many western theorists. It was the Blavatskian spirituality that led Dayananda to dissociate himself from the Theosophists because, says Veer, the intermediaries of such communication are regarded as “impure and inauspicious, tainted by their contact with the dead, and often, they are of low caste.” (Veer 2001:57). In the Aghor sense, however, this aspect of spiritualism reflects an ability to mediate

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dynamically across boundaries, and it becomes a part of larger spiritual persona of the guru. This is where his “Guru particularism” shows, and is reflected in his practice.

These ideas which Sarkar Baba talked about, he also practiced in his own life. In all his communication of this kind he used colloquial, conversational language, and in his speeches he tried to include everyone, high caste or low, men or women, urban or rural, so they would think about his message and feel empowered to act upon it. Clearly, Sarkar Baba's message was not only about spiritual salvation, it was equally about social upliftment and coherent social policy.

For communication outside of the formal realm, I have narrated stories which depict Sarkar Baba's spoken language, as well as what he was trying to communicate between the lines. Such communication, though hilarious at times, comprised not just of advice or knowledge, it was also a reinforcement of the all-knowing nature of a realized guru, who could make things happen if he wished to do so. Sarkar Baba's communication with other saints, however, is the most enigmatic one. Being either silent (and perhaps telepathic), or, if spoken in a language not understandable to others, this is a mode of communication which is the hardest to explain and analyze. So I desist from doing so.

A discussion of all these forms of communication – the content therein and the choice of language used – exhibits clearly Sarkar Baba's understanding of his devotees and disciples. He always knew exactly what to say to the right person at the right time, and if he deemed it necessary, he would communicate it by creating either a story or a long practical play. It is in looking at the nature of his “plays” that we begin to understand the unconventional ways that Aghaṛ saints behave, and why it is easy for the

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casual observer to misunderstand these acts, an idea which seems to have been repeated time and again in colonial reports and even older texts.

This chapter also puts into perspective the link between Sarkar Baba's talk and his practice. If he talked about treating a human being as a true human being without caste distinctions, he practiced it. If he talked about being just and virtuous, he practiced it. If he talked about being totally free of all socially encultured conceptions, he practiced it. Sarkar Baba was a very socially conscious person, and he used every device at his disposal to communicate a socially relevant message to his devotees. Some called it a miracle, others thought of it as peculiarities of an Aughar saint. Whatever the case, it kept the ashram alive and lively, for in the company of Sarkar Baba there certainly was not even a single dull moment.

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<sup>1</sup> *bhūmir āpo 'nalo vāyuh kham mano buddhir eva ca  
ahaṅkāra itīyaṃ me bhinnā prakṛtir aṣṭadhā (Bhagavadgītā 7.4)  
apareyam itas tvanyāṃ prakṛtiṃ viddhi me parāṃ  
jīva-bhūtāṃ mahā-bāho yayedam dhāryate jagat (Bhagavadgītā 7.5)*

<sup>2</sup> *brahm ko jīvana sahaja sarūpā  
nāma kahō tasa haṅsa anūpā. (Vivēksār, verse 171)  
baranāśrama kō bhēd na rākhai.  
bānī satya sahaja sō bhākhai. (Vivēksār, verse 211)  
sahaja prakāśa nirāśa amānī  
rahanī kahaū yah ajapā jānī. (Vivēksār, verse 214)  
sahajānanda subodhamaya ātama rūpa nihāri  
kahat bhaye guru śiṣya san rakṣā yatna vicāri. (Vivēksār, verse 254)  
ātam rakṣā cāra vidhi hai śiṣ sahaja subodha  
dayā viveka vicāri lahi saṅta saṅga ārodha. (Vivēksār, verse 255)  
dayā darad jo sahajehi pāvō  
para pīṛā ko saṅtata pāvō. (Vivēksār, verse 256)  
dhīraja sahaja saṅtoṣa amānī  
kṣobha rahita dīṛha ātamajñānī. (Vivēksār, verse 260)*

<sup>3</sup> *Śaktigarbhādadhah sṛstistasmād vṛddhi prajāyate. (ST II 2005:49, verse 76)*

<sup>4</sup> *... na hotā main to kyā hotā.*

<sup>5</sup> Consider, for example, the way the disciple addresses Thakur Ji on his arrival the first time: "Man, you are really late today, I have been hungry all day today. Come-come. Eat soon so I can eat too or I will die of hunger today." This translation does not do justice to Sarkar Baba's Bhojpuri expression of it: "arē āvā mardavā āvā, baṛā dēr kar dēhala tūn, din bhar hamār upāsē kaṭ gayēl. Cala-cala khāva jaldi sē ta hamahūn khān na ta prān jāī āj hamār." (Ram 2003:238). Or the second time, when Thakur Ji arrives with his elder brother Baldau. My English translation reads, "Who have you brought with you?" In Sarkar

Baba's Bhojpuri, it is more colorful: “*Ī kēh kē lē aula tūn mardavā?*” (Ram 2003:238). Here, the term “*mardavā*” can mean both “man” or even “dude,” to use an American expression. In the exchange that follows, the disciple admonishes the divine duo, “Fine. Both of you can eat, but today I have only this much food. Don't finish up everything. Leave a little bit for me too.” This translation of mine is too sedate. Sarkar Baba is more vocal: “*Thīk bā. Khaiba ta khā dūno jan, bāki āj etanē bhojan bā. Kul mat khā jaiha dūno log. Tani hamaro khātir chhoṛ diha.*” (Ram 2003:238). If I were to expand the translation, it will read something like, “Fine. Both of you can eat if you want to, but this is all the food I have today. Make sure you don't finish all of it. Leave some for me too.” Similarly, when Thakur Ji arrives on the third day with Baldau as well as Radhika Ji, the disciple is incredulous. I have translated it as: “Who is this woman you have brought with you?” For “woman” Sarkar Baba uses the Bhojpuri word “*mēharārū*” (Ram 2003:239). This word can mean woman, or even female, but it is a neutral term to denote the feminine gender, not a respectful one, and certainly not a high register one.

<sup>6</sup> When Thakur Ji is late in coming to lunch on the first day, the disciple complains to himself about the delay. I have translated it as, “...everyday guru ji used to serve him and his meal would be finished within fifteen minutes. Today when I have served him, he is not eating at all. If he does not eat then guru ji will be upset with me. And if, per chance, Thakur Ji tells my guru ji that his disciple ate his meal without waiting for my arrival, then guru ji will be really mad at me. Now what should I do?” Sarkar Baba's original Bhojpuri expression is: “*guru jī bhog lagāvat rahē ta Thakur Jī turattē ā kē khā lēt rahalan. āj ham bhog lagaulī hā ta ī khaibē nā karat haiñ. Nā khaihēñ ta guru jī dhēr bigarīhēñ ham par. Aur Thakur Jī kahīñ guru jī sē kah dēhalan ki tohār cēlvā hamar āvē kē pratīkṣā nā kailas, khuddē khā kē sut rahalas, tab ta barā gaṛabaṛī ho jāī. Ab kaun upāya kariñ ham?*” In this expression, the use of third person singular Bhojpuri pronoun “*ī*” to denote Thakur Ji, instead of high register words like lord or *prabhu* (god) appears comical because it amounts to treating the god as any ordinary person. Also, his chagrin at the thought that Thakur Ji might complain to guru Ji as an ordinary tell-tale person, is quite comical. Further, while preparing the food for the second day, the disciple thinks, “who knows about Thakur Ji! If he eats everything today also, then I will have to go hungry for a second day.” Sarkar Baba says in Bhojpuri: “*...kaun bharosā bā ī Thakur Jī kē. ājo kul bhojan caṭ kar jaihēñ ta hamarā phēñ āj upās karē kē paṛī.*” This will translate literally into, “how can this Thakur Ji be trusted. If he gulps down all the food then I will have to fast again today.” Here, besides the lack of faith in Thakur Ji, the expression “*caṭ kar jaihēñ*” implies “to scarf up everything greedily without leaving even a morel behind!” That of course, is very funny to those who are used to thinking of Thakur Ji respectfully.

<sup>7</sup> Just as Shiva is often worshipped in the form of a Linga – a stone established in the stone image of a yoni – so also Vishnu is often worshipped in the form of a “Shaligram,” a piece of stone that looks like a pestle, but sits (or stands) by itself, not within a yoni symbol.

<sup>8</sup> When the disciple begins to tire of performing the daily ablutions, he thinks to himself, “*ī barā phērā bā! Bhorē-bhorē uḥ kē roj inkē kē nihāī -dhoāī?*” This will translate into: “This is a major problem! Who is going to get up early every morning to wash and bathe him?” When he sees the mangoes, the Bhojpuri expression is: “*barhiyān-barhiyān, lāl-lāl pakal ām dēkh kē okar lār ṭapakē lāgal.*” The literal translation of this expression will be: “On seeing the nice, red, ripe mangoes, he began to salivate.” When he chucks Thakur Ji and loses him, he thinks: “*arē bāp rē. barā gaṛabaṛ ho gayēl. Thakur Ji ta bilā gailan. Ab guru jī kē kā kahab. barā phēraa bhayē!*” I will translate this as, “Oh my God! It went horribly wrong. Thakur Ji is lost. Now what will I say to guru ji. This is a not good.”

<sup>9</sup> According to *Hindi Śabdasāgar* he is the son of *Parāśar*, *Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyan*, who collected and edited the *Vedas*.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on this term, a common referent in the city of Banaras, see *Nāradaparivrājaka Upaniṣad*.

<sup>11</sup> This is a curious word that Sarkar Baba uses here, for the word *dākinī* has many and variegated meanings. According to *Hindi Śabdasāgar* it is a feminine noun which means a female ghost (*piśācī*, *dāin*) or a goddess of a lower category who is considered a part of goddess Kālī's entourage (Dās 1965-1975:1945). According to the dictionary at the Bhāratīya Sāhitya Saṅgraha website (<http://pustak.org/bs/home.php?mean=104531>), it refers to a category of female spirits or goddesses worshipped by Tantrik Buddhists of the Mahayana branch under which are included eight *dākinīs*, namely Lāsyā, Mālā, Gītā, Nṛtyā, Puṣpā, Dhūpā, Dīpā and Gandhā. Of the last four names mentioned here, Puṣpā,

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Dhūpā, Dīpā and Gandhā, Aghor practitioner's will know that in esoteric parlance these are names of elements of nature which are often offered to the goddess as substitutes for material offerings such as flower, light, food and aroma or incense. Of the first four names, Lāsyā, Mālā, Gītā, and Nṛtyā, Lāsyā can refer to the element of erotica, Mālā to an instrument of meditation or a garland, and Gītā and Nṛtyā can refer to the skills of music and dance. Sarkar Baba's reference to the *ḍākinī*'s dance with thousands of feet in this cosmos, perhaps, is an allusion to the Buddhist conception of this spirit.

<sup>12</sup> National Crime Records Bureau of India, reported dowry death statistics from *Crime in India 2009*: 1999 – 6699; 2004 - 7026; 2005 - 6787; 2006 - 7618; 2007 - 8093; 2008 - 8172.

<sup>13</sup> The lowest category in the four-fold social categorization of Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.

<sup>14</sup> A vision of God Krishna as a baby, lying on a leaf of the banyan tree, happily sucking on his toe.

<sup>15</sup> Triveni is the place at Prayag where the three sacred rivers, Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati actually meet.

<sup>16</sup> Mela, by itself, means a fair. Here, the reference is specifically to Kumbh-Mela.

<sup>17</sup> When the old abbot would hit someone, they actually used to become happy with the thought that he had given them a blessing in his typical Aughar fashion. They would actually become sad if he did not hit them!

## Chapter 5

### Mysticism, Nationalism, and Civil Society

In the last chapter I looked at Sarkar Baba's language and manner of communication and how it reflected on topics of interest to him, his philosophy, and the way he interacted with people. I also discussed how all of these communicative modes reflected Sarkar Baba's own style of Guru Particularism, when compared with other gurus who had their own particular styles of interaction. In this chapter I discuss three major themes which impact upon the nature of Sarkar Baba's mysticism, namely, his interactions with the modern notions of the nationalist and political arena; building a civil society institution -- Shri Sarveshwari Samooh -- devoted to social work; and his individual interactions and transactions in the social world. To throw light on aspects of Sarkar Baba's mystical life, throughout this chapter I provide examples from stories that are either published or narrated amongst his devotees, with three stories which shed light on mysticism in personal transactions towards the end of the chapter.

Mysticism is not an easy concept to come to terms with. Insofar as it deals with ideas and concepts related to that which is beyond normal human sensory perception, it lends itself to a multitude of ideas about what constitutes mystical behavior, and by extension, a mystical life. Related to this is the "interpretation" of mystical behavior as well as mystics themselves, an interpretation which is socially generated, and in most circumstances, varies according to time and place. So I will begin with the terminology associated with the English word "mysticism" and what I think is its counterpart in Hindi, "*adhyātm*." First, the dictionary meanings: The *Oxford English Dictionary* has two definitions for this word, one as "Religious belief that is characterized by vague, obscure,

or confused spirituality; a belief system based on the assumption of occult forces, mysterious supernatural agencies, etc.,” and the second as “Mystical theology; belief in the possibility of union with or absorption into God by means of contemplation and self-surrender; belief in or devotion to the spiritual apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect.” The related Hindi term “*adhyātm*” is defined by the *Hindī Śabdāsāgar* as “*brahmavicār* (contemplation on the divine), *jñāna tatva* (the element of knowledge), *ātmajñāna* (self-knowledge, or the knowledge of the *ātmā* [the soul]), *paramātmā* (the supreme soul or God) (my translation)” (Dās 1965-75:176). Unlike the first definition provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* for mysticism, “Religious belief that is characterized by vague, obscure, or confused spirituality,” a definition which can be understood as derogatory, the Hindi term *adhyātm* does not have this derogatory connotation, and it comes close to the second meaning provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* “belief in the possibility of union with or absorption into God by means of contemplation and self-surrender.” Most English-speaking non-academic laymen in India, though, will more likely use the word “spiritual” or “enlightened” and not “mystic” for a person who pursues the path of *adhyātm* or an attempt at union with god. Most will also agree that:

...mysticism, is immediate contact with the divine... Transcendent in the here-and-now. Instead of waiting until after death, it is an express elevator to the top (Collins 2008:6).

Or, as Bharati writes in his no holds barred style:

The mystic merges, his ecstatic, often eroticized report is much more than an analogy to him; *he does it*—he actually transgresses the rules of his society, he elicits within himself the keenest pleasure, and if successful, he creates what no husband, lover, or lecher succeeds in doing... (Bharati 1976:199-200).

Hindi speakers will call a holy person with ascetic inclinations an *ādhyātmik* person, and an *ādhyātmik* person who appears to be so in tune with the divine as to cause miracles naturally as a *caitanya* person. Both categories of persons, however, are more likely to be subsumed under one single term – *sant* – a saint. Both these terms and their definition, however, appear passive in my estimation. They describe a possibility (in English) and a state (of self-knowledge, etc. in Hindi), but they do not make us privy to what an *ādhyātmik* or mystical (spiritual) person does. Does a mystical person remain absorbed in the divine and therefore, by inductive logic, remain inert to society? Weber writes about this attitude – flight from the world contemplative mysticism – as a pursuit of salvation which can make the practitioner withdraw from the world (Weber 1993[1922]:169). Or does a mystical person perform social acts – what Weber attributes to a mystagogue – to achieve salvation (Weber 1993[1922]:175)? If a mystical person is indeed in constant communication with the divine then the question arises, can such a person in fact act socially like a normal human individual at all, since by being in constant communication with the divine such a person’s state and mode of thinking and perceiving the world are permanently altered?

Weber actually makes a distinction between asceticism and mysticism and further qualifies them as “world-rejecting asceticism” and “inner-worldly asceticism” (Weber 1993[1922]:166). He contrasts these two terms with “flight from the world” mysticism (Weber 1993[1922]:169) and “mystic as a magician... [or] a mystagogue” (Weber 1993[1922]:175). This fourfold conceptualization highlights the degree of active involvement of the ascetic or the mystic in the world. The world-rejecting ascetic withdraws from “all creaturely interests” while the inner-worldly ascetic “participates in

the world...as the elect instrument of god” (Weber 1993[1922]:166). In both cases, the ascetic exhibits an active struggle against the ethical inconsistencies of the world. The flight-from-the-world mystic pursues “mystic illumination... [to] the extrusion of all everyday mundane interests” (Weber 1993[1922]:168), while the mystic who feels called upon to bring salvation to the world does so as soon as men have prepared their souls to receive god, and thus, such a person emerges as a magician “who causes his power to be felt among gods and demons” (Weber 1993[1922]:175).

While useful as a conceptualization of the ascetic and mystic practices and states, these categories can be seen to be ideal types. In real life such a strict distinction may not exist amongst various kinds of religious practitioners. I feel the same person can occupy all of these categories at different points of their life, depending upon the nature of their *sādhanā*. Which is to say, not only can an ascetic be a mystic and a mystic an ascetic, but also a world-rejecting ascetic can be a magic or miracle performing mystic, and an inner-worldly ascetic can also be a flight-from-the-world mystic. To exemplify from Sarkar Baba’s life, I can say that when Sarkar Baba renounced his home and took to the ascetic path, he became a world-rejecting ascetic. While pursuing those ascetic practices when he sought seclusion in caves and river-banks he acted as a flight from-the-world-mystic. When he came back to society and established Shri Sarveshwari Samooh organization for social service he became an inner-worldly ascetic, and when he played tricks on his disciples and devotees to teach them lessons by conjuring inexplicable conditions, he acted as a miracle working mystic. Nor is there a necessity of temporal succession through these various categories of asceticism or mysticism. More than one category can possibly apply to the same person at any given time. Weber himself is aware of this

overlapping of categories for he acknowledges "...the distinction between world-rejecting asceticism and world-fleeing contemplation is fluid" (Weber 1993[1922]:170).

It is because of this inherent ambiguity in the state as well as the performed actions of a mystical person that, I think, we get the next set of terminology associated with mystical behavior. In English, these can be listed as "transcendent," "miraculous," and "magical." In Hindi the related terminology will be "*caitanya* (enlightened or conscious/super-conscious)," "*camatkārik* (miraculous)," and "*jāduī/karāmāī* (magical)." Of these terms, while causing or performing miracles is understood as an accepted way of behavior for mystics, performing magic is not understood as an example of spiritual/mystical accomplishment. This is because magic can include a slight of hand, or even manipulation of spirits (Mauss 2001[1902]:100). Magical acts are marked by an individualistic "patron-client relationship" for benefit in the world (Durkheim 1964[1915]:44), as well as classified as being secretive and isolated (Mauss 2001[1902]:29). In contrast, miracles are considered as belonging to a loftier realm and often, though not exclusively, fall in the realm of religious practitioners or mystics. Yet, frequently, there can be a blurring of lines between magic and religious practice, as in the case of divination or faith healing. Often "Collective religious practice – membership ceremonial as core of the church – keeps alive the frame of reference of spiritual power that can then be siphoned off for private use as magic, or...mysticism" (Collins 2008:6). I will have more to say about miracle and mysticism in the following pages.

For the sake of simplicity in my discussion I will subsume the notion of ascetic within the commonly used English term mystic for the *ādhyātmik* (spiritual) actions of a mystically illuminated person. This usage, then, will depart from the Weberian notion of

the contrast between a mystic and an ascetic and conform more to the general, dictionary usage of what a mystic is. This will facilitate an easier and, perhaps, more interesting discussion of what I think of as the variegated dimensions of social behavior, an in-worldly life, of a mystical person privy to, for want of a better expression, constant communication with the divine. This will also help me look at instances and circumstances of what are generally understood as miracles, the purpose for which they are performed or caused to happen, and the social effect it has on the individual as well as the group associated with the mystic. This will have implications for understanding in the Aghor context how unbounded mysticism is perceived by the common people, how these are made to work in the arena of civil society as well as political life, and how mystical behavior can be used as a mode of communication for building faith through individual transactions. It is also a truism that mystics do not arise out of a vacuum. They are as much a product of their society, culture, nation, and processes of history as any other social individual, although tenets of religion, and by extension mysticism, may exhort them to rise beyond national boundaries and social limits.

To discuss these matters in relation to history, modernity, and nationalism, once again, I use the framework provided by Peter van der Veer. In *Imperial Encounters* (2001) Van der Veer has elegantly outlined the dialectical nature of change, with reference to religion, nationalism, and modernity that took place in India and Britain with the advent of the colonial process. To sum up, while in the beginning the East India Company saw itself as “secular” and assisted Hindu groups within India in pursuit of their religions, there was an evangelical backlash in Britain where missionaries wanted to get into the action in India. They accused the company of not being secular because it

aided Indians, saying that if the Company aided Hindus, it should also aid the missionaries. As a result, the Company adopted a hands-off policy which went in favor of the missionaries and they were able to take up their activities aggressively. Such aggressive missionizing put the Hindu groups on a defensive, and, in fact, led to the Hindu reform movements whereby Ram Mohan Roy and the Brahma Samaj, Dayananda Saraswati and the Arya Samaj, and Vivekananda and his tenets of universal Hinduism became the mainstay of Hindu bastions as a defense against the onslaughts of Christianity. Further, this led to processes that can be variously classified as revivalist, or reformist, or traditionalist, as these groups looked back at old scriptures to validate practices in the present (Dalmia 1997:5-8). Contrary to the popular notion that “modernity” would lead to less emphasis on the role of religion, in the Indian and British case it was the opposite, because religion began to define nationalism, as well as policy-making related to it.

The identities of Hindu and universal nationalism that were created in this process still influence both countries and define the way Hindus look at their religion and themselves today. With reference specifically to Sarkar Baba, and the Aghor tradition in general, I argue here that while Sarkar Baba’s view may have been influenced to an extent by the historical processes that led to the formation of Hindu nationality, he did not buy into it totally. There are marked differences in his practice of Hinduism when compared to what the reformist movements espoused. His was a very personal and interactive view of Hinduism; he did not succumb to the nationalist rhetoric as presented by the erstwhile formulators of Hindu nationalism. Given the Aghor spiritual worldview based ultimately on non-duality, it sees human interactions in a field of boundary-

lessness, where spiritual accomplishment leads to transcendence of national, regional, ethnic and linguistic boundaries, a state of being where there exists an identification with humanity at large at the most subtle level, and where even processual outcomes of history such as the categories of modern, non-modern, or trans-modern do not have any particular meaning. Again, since aughars do not subscribe to the caste-based view of Hinduism, even distinctions of caste which are so intrinsic to rest of Hinduism do not matter here.

Nationalism, on the other hand, presumes an identity based on cohesion and unity that derives from an imagined collectivity that has shared boundaries – geopolitical, ideational, or otherwise – and necessarily involves precepts of inclusion and exclusion based on those imagined and shared criteria. The social markers of identity for inclusion or exclusion in this instance can be language, or class, or caste, or even political parties. A nation here is conceptualized on the 1648 Westphalian system, where the characteristics of the state, typically, are a rule of the law, perceived in the state's monopoly of violence, and a certain social compact between people of the region and the state that presides over them. This is a system based on rationality and a realist interpretation of politics in society, an activity of the public sphere. As van der Veer writes about the colonial times in India, “The Spirit of the Age was nationalism, and the battle fought by the spiritualists concerned who was allowed to participate in the public sphere” (van der Veer 2001:12).

When we juxtapose this system of the states and the founding philosophy of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, a tiny organization as compared to a large or small political entity like a state, we find that there is an inherent difference in the worldview such a

philosophy presents. This organization was imagined as a mechanism for social action in the material world, and to work for spiritual transcendence from all binary categories that limit human potential, as well as to serve others in the physical world to improve their human condition. It was certainly created to participate in the public sphere, but it was not created to administer people but to act as a civil society organization. There does exist an acknowledgement of the nation-state where the organization was founded, as reflected in a publication about the Samooh titled, “A Flag in the Indian Courtyard” (*Bhāratīya Āṅgan Mein ek Dhvaj*, SSS, 1965), but the founding philosophy of its creation does not depend on the nation-state, nor is it critical for its origin. In a geo-political state, identity labels of various kinds are applied to show equality amongst different groups. In Sarkar Baba’s worldview, the notion of equality appears very different. While the State based idea of equality hinges on equal rights which are treated as inalienable political rights, Baba’s notion of equality was not based on western enlightenment equality ideology where individual freedom and rights are treated as crucial, but on a notion of equality which is more organic to the human condition, an equality where life form at its very origins has a fundamental right to exist and develop. It refers to a perennial human condition that transcends history and time, politics and human institutions, and remains a constant.

Together with this exists the “unbounded tradition of mysticism” (van der Veer 2001:57). In the concluding section of the preceding chapter I had alluded to this tradition while discussing Guru Particularism, in this case drawing from the persona of Sarkar Baba, which made *all* his acts in the social world, not just political, a part of his mystical life. This mysticism extended from the tiniest details of daily life to the loftiest

practices of a humanist exercise. As van der Veer has demonstrated, one of the reasons why Swami Dayananda distanced himself from the Blavatskian Theosophist version of mysticism was because he thought its practitioners were impure, insofar as they communicated with ethereal spirits and were tainted by their association with the dead. For Sarkar Baba, who was an Aghaṛ ascetic, there was no difference between the two. I cite a story here as an illustration of this attitude. This story about talking to spirits was narrated to me by Harinarayan Chaturvedi whom I had met in Banaras. A long-time resident of the city, he worked as a school-master and even wrote one of the first books on Sarkar Baba in the late fifties. He knew Sarkar Baba all his life and observed his life in its multitudinous aspects. This is the story he told:

I have known him (Sarkar Baba) for more than 40 years. In my early days, when I was a B.A. student at Harishchandra College, I used to go to Dhannu's shop at Maidagin where Baba also used to come during Janmashtami festival, when *bhajan-kīrtan* were organized there. So, I have been acquainted with him for a very long time. But I really got to know him, and began dialogues with him, from about 1956-57. Because at that time one Lakshminarayan Rastogi used to live at Chaukhambha in Banaras, and Baba had come to visit his place. People told me that the *sadhu* I frequently talked about, and was so eager to meet with, had come to visit Lakshminarayan's house. At that time, Maharaja Jashpur, Maharaja Sahab Sonpur Nagendra Shahi and the priest of the Vishwanath temple, Anjani Nandan Mishra were also visiting with Baba. His form was uniquely strange, and he was nearly naked. He had just come back from visiting the Vishwanath temple. On his way back, whatever poor person he met, he gave someone his shawl, someone else his *lungī*, and yet someone else his robe, and had arrived almost naked to Rastogi Ji's house. He did not even have his loincloth on.

I reached his place. Rastogi Ji used to live only about two houses away from mine. He is no longer alive. When I went there, I heard "Come, Master" from Baba. I felt strange because I had never formally met Baba, so I thought he must be a spiritually enlightened person. Baba was about five or six years younger than me. I thought someone must have whispered in his ear that I am a teacher. I went and sat there. This was a name given to me by Baba. He used to call my uncle Chaturvedi Ji, but I was always Master Ji for him. There is a picture of mine in the book about Baba's travel to Afghanistan, and the subtitle of the picture is, "Useful discussion with Master."

I was interested in parapsychology. Pandit Shivkumar Shatri Vaidya Ji told this to Baba. Baba called me.

He asked, “Say, do you invite ghosts, do you talk to the souls of the dead?”

I said, “Yes.”

Baba said, “Okay, today I will call, you talk to him.”

Shiv Ji’s (Pandit Shivkumar Shastri Vaidya) brother-in-law’s name was Hari Ji. He is not alive anymore. He used to go to Baba’s place during worship ceremonies. Baba asked him to sit on his haunches, turn his back this way, do this, do that. He sat that way. In a few minutes, Hari Ji’s body began to jump violently. A sound came from his body, “Why have you called me, why have you called me?”

Baba was sitting quietly on the chair. He said to me, “Talk to him.”

I said, “What should I talk? I have not invited him, what should I say?”

Baba said, “No, he has been invited because of you. Now talk to him.”

I asked, “Who are you?”

The answer was, “Kāla-Bhairava.<sup>1</sup> Why have you called me?”

I became very nervous. I did not know how to handle a scorpion, here I found my hand inside a cobra’s den! Where did Kāla-Bhairava come from!

Baba said, “Hey, when a God is invited, one gives some gifts to him. Offer some fennel or cloves to him.”

We made that offering. After sometime Hari Ji’s body became calm and quiet. But for three days after that he felt as if he had no life left in his body. So to communicate with ghosts and other matters of parapsychology, was like a child’s play for Baba....

Baba had so much pain in his heart for humanity, so much love for all living beings, such a feel for right behavior, such an aptitude for organization, such a talent for understanding people, that it is very rare to see them all so refined in one person. Baba had an uncanny ability to understand what kind of a person one is, what are his talents, what kind of work can be entrusted to him, how to divide his time so he does not waste his time, and how can he be assisted by other people. He used to enjoy having lots of people dine with him. It used to be absolutely joyous.

Baba has practiced very hard *sāadhanā*. What is known as Aghor is really not aghor (simple) at all. It is a very hard ascetic practice. It is a very harsh practice. It is the kind of practice where someone just watching would be forced to bite their fingers in disbelief. Go to Mahraura and look at the scene of the cremation ground. It is so terrifying! And at that time Baba used to be in such a terrifying form himself that even during the day people would be wary of venturing to him. For *yogis* in that stage of Aghor practices it is said they are like “*bālonmattapiśācavat*” (children and ghosts.) Because in this state they sometimes behave like children, sometimes like an intoxicated person, and sometimes, like a ghost. But Baba always used to participate in the joys and sorrows of those who were close to him. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi).

So here we have an instance of Kāla-Bhairava, the *Kotwāl* of Kashi, being invited into Lakshminarayan's living room through the medium of Hari Ji's body, and a simple, practical application of hospitality to the divine.

Thus, Sarkar Baba's was an all-encompassing mysticism where, to him, communicating with what are considered as spirits was as easy as saving someone's life or prognosticating the near or distant future. I will present below data in the form of stories and excerpts which demonstrate how Sarkar Baba's unbounded mysticism extended to every field of daily life, not just the political.

Let me begin with looking at the founding philosophy of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh as a social service organization, and what human equality as an organic human condition meant to Sarkar Baba.

### **Worship of the *Prāṇa***

I recall a conversation one night with Baba in July 1986, just before I came to the United States. Normally, after he had had his dinner, while the rest of the ashram had eaten and gone to bed, he would either sit on his bed in the lotus position, or lie down, but he would be completely awake, either listening to stories, or telling stories. During one of those nights he said this to me:

*Ātmā* (the soul) and *Prāṇa* (the life force) are two different things. There are ten kinds of life-force. Of those, nine forces end at the time of death. The tenth, however, remains in the skull, it does not die. It is known as *Dhanañjaya Prāṇa*. It is to release this life force that people perform the ritual of *kapāl-kriyā* (breaking of the skull of the cremated person), but amongst Aghaṛs, *kapāl-kriyā* is not performed. The life-force, in essence, is air... This air in the form of life-force is not associated only with death. If someone meditates a lot, performs a lot of *japa*, then the person or deity that he meditates upon becomes etched inside his skull. I have a friend in Lucknow. His name is Lankesh. He has a friend who is a Buddhist monk. That monk has a skull wrapped in velvet cloth which has the

picture of a goddess, a *bhairavī*, etched on the inside. The person that skull belonged to, when alive, meditated so much on the goddess that her picture became etched on the inside of his skull. This tradition has continued from ancient times. (Personal communication, July 1986, Varanasi).

The two terms that Sarkar Baba uses here for the human spirit – *ātmā* and *prāṇa* – are crucial to understand his notion of human equality. The *Ātmā* can be regarded as the ethereal Self, it has been understood in the various schools of Hinduism as that part of the human being which is indestructible and therefore everlasting, and hence, it has been regarded as the ultimate divine element resident within the body of living beings. *Ātmā*, as such, has no form, color, shape, size or any other definable attribute. Since it does not have a form or definable attribute, it also does not have any human needs. By itself, in its pure state, the *ātmā* is regarded as impervious to all waves of pleasure, happiness or sorrow. The notion of the *prāṇa*, on the other hand, is different. It is the *prāṇa* which animates the living being, and it is the presence of the *prāṇa* which holds the *Ātmā* within the body. If *prāṇa* is not maintained, then *ātmā* becomes free to wander ethereally. *Prāṇa*, in essence, creates and maintains life, and in doing so, it generates needs. Every being living in a body has needs. Those needs, and sensory experience of the world remain only as long as *prāṇa* animates the body. Once *prāṇa* leaves the body, the body becomes inert, it loses its sensory experience of the world, and it certainly does not have any needs after that.

I have discussed the idea of *prāṇa* in the second chapter with reference to Baba Kinaram's *Viveksār*, and in the third chapter, with Sarkar Baba's views on the topic. This idea of *prāṇa* as the fundamental basis of life, as its "life-force" is a recognition of the very essence of what constitutes life, what determines the difference between that which is alive, and that which is dead. With it comes also the recognition that everything

positive we do in social life with living human beings is to maintain their life-force in such a manner that their life becomes not just liveable, but also meaningful. This idea is further corroborated in Sarkar Baba's book *Aghor Guru Guh*, where seeker Sambhav asks Sarkar Baba about whom to worship:

Darshi! A few moments ago a traveler on the path of Tantra, a devoted disciple by the name of Sambhav met me after a long time. He asked me — 'What is our worship? Whom do we worship?' Darshi! I told him that the *Prāṇa* is what we worship. Our own worship is our worship. Surprised, Sambhav asked me again. I did not want to reply to him in great detail. ... So I told him, 'The fire in our belly that keeps the *prāṇa* alive and active in all creatures, has to burn continuously. To make offerings in that fire amounts to worshipping your *prāṇa* by giving it affection, humility, and stability. To make offerings in that fire is to worship the cosmic creative principle<sup>2</sup>. One who has not offered such a gift of faith to his *prāṇa* has been neglecting his *prāṇa*. He then becomes afflicted by diseases like stomach ailments, and becomes inactive. He becomes unable to make offerings to the fire in his belly. People then call him a sick person and say: 'He has an aversion to eating now. Oh dear! He is not able to digest anything. Oh dear! He feels nauseous.' The actual cause for such sickness is not very important. The only important thing is that the person did not connect with his *prāṇa*. In the physical body *prāṇa* is the animating principle for all creatures. In the cosmos it is known as air. How painful it is to us when the air becomes dry, how unbearably uncomfortable? Oh Baba! A person who has connected with his *prāṇa* realizes a holistic, everlasting life. He recognizes the principle of existence of all creatures. Only he has complete knowledge of both the inside as well as the outside of the body and the cosmos. (SSS 1982:6, my translation).

So the common principle amongst all living beings, including human beings, is the presence of a life-force in their bodies. And this common element can be worshipped by giving the "oblations" of food to the life-force of beings.<sup>3</sup> But food is only one kind of offering that can be offered to worship the *prāṇa*. Affection as well as stability in life are also enumerated in the passage above as a result of food offering, and by extension, an offering in themselves. But going back to the issue of hunger in living beings, Shivaji, a long time devotee of Sarkar Baba, told me this in Banaras when I asked him about Sarkar Baba. He elaborated Sarkar Baba's view on hunger:

One time Baba had told me about hunger. He said, “All the deeds and misdeeds of this world happen because of this ever-hungry belly. Many people come to my ashram, but I never feel nervous about helping them. But, if a hungry person comes in here, I instantly become nervous. I begin to think how to satisfy that person, what should I feed that person, what should I give that person to drink. I want to satisfy that person, Shivaji, because I know what hunger means. For days, I never used to get anything to eat. I would beg for it, and even then I would not get it. Darkness would float in front of my eyes. I used to scream out to god, goddess, guiding spirit. My voice used to reverberate but I don’t know where it used to go. I would not get food. I would feel there was no one in this world. I have seen that day too. And not just for a day, or two days, for many years this continued. Sometimes I would get something to eat, sometimes not. That is why I understand hunger is the greatest need of human beings, and this need is with everyone. No one can, or should, ignore that need.” (Personal communication during fieldwork, July 1996, Varanasi).

Hence hunger is the great equalizer amongst human beings, not identity based on labels of religion, or language, or ethnic group, or state, but one of a common need, a need based on hunger. Clearly, the fact of hunger applies to peoples across geo-political boundaries and, one could surmise, when a spiritually realized person of this tradition looks at humanity it is on the basis of the *prāṇa*, and the hunger it generates, that he interacts with it. To use Weberian terminology, here lies at least one aspect of “...the essential meaning of the world as a unity...” (Weber 1993[1922]:173) It was because of this that whosoever arrived at Sarkar Baba’s ashram, he or she would get fed without any questions being asked, and without any conditions being laid on them for that food. As I saw many times, whatever simple food that was cooked in the ashram kitchen would be distributed to all. Sarkar Baba would ask even high officers and politicians not to leave without eating, and they would sit in the same row, on the floor as other ashram workers and guests, without regard to rank and caste, and eat without hesitation.

But hunger is just one equalizer when thinking about human beings. The existence of *prāṇa* creates numerous other instances where issues of boundaries between human beings can arise. I quote a passage below, again from *Aghor Guru Guh*, which

illustrates the treatment the body receives in the Hindu milieu, once the life-force has left the body:

When the life-god leaves the body the very same parents, friends and relatives beat the dead body lying on the pyre so it may burn rapidly<sup>4</sup>. At that time nobody calls this gruesome act a crime. Everyone says only that they have returned after cremating the body, having performed the death-rituals for their relative. These same people will abuse you with the choicest invectives if you were to perform these same actions while the body was still alive. (SSS 1982:10, my translation).

Clearly, for Sarkar Baba, an Aghaṛ saint for whom differences or variations in human life were not of much consequence except for the lowest common denominator, that of being alive, and having needs, it was through the practice of a spiritual life, and a discipline of a spiritual pursuit, that human beings with life be treated with the dignity and affection that their life force demands. This lowest common denominator concept was far removed from the issues of nation or state or caste and class, not that he did not have to deal with these issues on a regular basis. But his attempt, through Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, was to build an atmosphere, and a practical mode of behavior, where human beings would treat each other as human beings, and care for each other with the dignity their life deserves. He, in a sense, thought of the Samooh as a *Saṅgha*, a Buddhist term which denotes a collectivity which acts together for social or spiritual action. Within the collectivity, there is equality amongst all except the respect that people accord each other. As Collins writes:

A mystic-in-the-world, however, sees God everywhere; that means to see society everywhere, community everywhere. The universalism of humanitarian social movements is born at that moment (Collins 2008:13).

This, I think, was Sarkar Baba's idea of a civil society, with emphasis on civility. It was because of this that he exhorted his disciples investigating the nature of their own *prāṇa* to move towards a life full of friendship and compassion for all, an idea reflected also in

tenets of Buddhism, for a lack of such a lifeview can create a society that is more un-civil than civil:

In this country saints have always existed, and they will always be here. If society does not respect them appropriately, then effects of undue perversity, acrimony, and unfriendliness will become prevalent. The place from where virtues of the great souls disappear, those homes, cities, villages and countries give birth to lustful, oppressive, indecent people. Oh Darshi devotee! Only in the absence of friendship and compassion does a nation give birth to people missing virtue and vitality. Paying respect, to the *Prāṇa* is the worship of a knowable god. (SSS 1982:36, my translation.)

But a mere feeling of friendship and compassion remains in the realm of theory.

Sarkar Baba's was a practical view of life and he asked his disciples to put their

knowledge into practice thus:

Young ascetic Sambhav devotee! Despite being body-less (*aśarīrī*) these *Aghoreshwars* go through the medium of air wherever they want to. The absence of a gross body is not an impediment in their way in this kind of free movement. The pure vision that has arisen in you will be beneficial to all. You should become the angel of mercy (*kalyāṇa kā devatā*) for all living beings (*jīvātmā*). You should become water, air, earth, sky, light, and fire as needed by them. Whenever, wherever you see living beings in want of something, present yourself there as that element at that time. By becoming an edible substance, you can worship the life-force in living beings. You can quench their thirst as water, as air, you can provide both coolness and warmth to them as needed. As fire you can destroy their chill, as earth you can be a place of refuge for them, as light you can give them the joy of free movement, as sky you can provide freedom to them. Young ascetic! *Aughar-Aghoreshwars* do this mysteriously all the time. It is nothing to wonder at! Now even you will have to do it. You will understand. (SSS 1982:24, my translation, gloss added).

The passage above is imbued with a certain kind of mysticism I find difficult to explain, namely, how does a person become an edible substance, or water or light, etc., unless, of course, this is spoken of in a metaphorical sense. Durkheim certainly postulates that the soul can divide and duplicate at will “while remaining entire in each of its parts” (Durkheim 1964[1915]:265). Whatever the case, in this way, the skills and accomplishments acquired by Sarkar Baba's disciples could be put to practical use. The

instrument through which Sarkar Baba expressed his ideas about the nation and society, the instrument that is the most vocal piece of his humanism as well his thoughts reflecting nationalism, was the press run by the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, as discussed in the preceding chapter. The many books published by this press present Sarkar Baba's views on how he viewed the nation, the society, its history, and its existing stage. I present some excerpts below to highlight these viewpoints.

On nationalism and statesmanship, this is what Sarkar Baba says to his disciple

Darshi:

Darshi! There was a time once when great souls disinterested (*udāsīn*) in the world had defined in mutually distinct terms social duty (*kartavya*) and non-duty (*akartavya*). It could have been to protect our country from western influences that were trying to find a foothold here. However, they might not have paid attention to the production and availability of many things essential to life such as water and food grains. In today's situation our entire country is like a family. Each person among us is a member of this family; they are a part of the cosmic creative principle. It is our duty to make sure in everyday life and behavior we actively stop the waste of every life-essential commodity, and inspire others to produce more of it so that no member of the society and country should want for anything. If all of us offer together essential commodities as a gift to the fire of the *Prāṇa* residing in the altar of the physical body of human beings of various castes, categories, and religions, then our whole society and country can live a life of peace and prosperity. It can achieve a cool respite from their scorching needs. Because of partial-truths (*adhūrī saccāī*) we are facing these conditions. Darshi devotee! This is what is really needed now. This only is the worship of the cosmic creative principle. Great souls and saints also now have the duty to present their ideal behavior as an example for the common people. Darshi! In real terms there can be no other worship or duty greater than this. Adapt this in your behavior and inspire others. To verbally sermonize about it without practicing it in your life will be mere superficial erudition that will keep you ignorant, and will make others ignorant too. (SSS 1982:37, my translation, gloss added).

In this passage Sarkar Baba relates even saintly activity not to a-social renunciate meditation, but to active participation in the life of the nation and community, to fulfill the needs of common people, all of whom form a national family. He redefines worship as the performance of oblations of food to the hungry bellies of the people of this nation,

and calls it the worship of the *Vaiśvānar*. His notion of activity in the public sphere is based not on the dry notion of mere political realism; rather it is based on empathy.

He also had a critique of the national leaders and their behavior:

Many people want to be known as the father or the head (*mukhiyā*) of the family but they totally lack the virtues (*guṇa-dharma*) needed to be a father or head of the family. Hence, just being known by that name is inconsequential. The common people are like a ruler's own children. Can an exploiter (*śoṣak*) of the subject or children ever be a father? Only the person who looks after the family can be known as the head of the family. Therefore, a head of the family who neglects his duty of looking after the family cannot be the head of the family. Such people do not deserve to be known as father or head of the household, or the ruler of the people. Because of this paradox many rulers, leaders and chiefs who lack the virtues, and who do not have the actions and dignity associated with their position, are being criticized. This is clearly visible. The respect they had enjoyed yesterday is no longer with them today. Those who are praising them today will criticize them tomorrow. This is a strange situation, Baba! (SSS 1982:49-50. My translation, gloss added).

Sarkar Baba was quite clear that he did not see the present-day political leaders acting as a just “father” or ruler of the nation because they had lost the dignity of their position and lacked the virtues that make a good leader and because they had begun to neglect their social duties. In fact he was quite categorical in his critique of the capital of Bihar, Patna, which erstwhile, has had the reputation of being the capital of the most lawless state in present-day India, the capital where Lallu Prasad Yadav ruled till not too long ago:

This Pāṭalīputra city has always been uncouth. The Aryans had neglected it. It is full of double-faced (*dumukh*) people and idiots (*mūrkh*) who find pleasure in criticizing others without any reason. Let it be... This city is packed with people who mislead, bribe takers, idiots, sycophants, and jesters. Here, virtues are respected later, the virtuous insulted first. Since it has long been the capital city, it has possibly had an impact of its rulers too. The influence of backbiters (*cugalkhor*) and critics of virtue (*paranindak*) can be seen in this city, for they are bred under the auspices of the rulers. (SSS 1982:56. My translation, gloss added).

I discussed Sarkar Baba's views on social cohesiveness and the caste system in the last chapter, which has relevance to the kind of humanist worldview he was trying to inculcate. These passages show that Sarkar Baba was not completely aloof and untouched by the existing political reality of India in which he lived. He met with many political leaders of his time, and tried to influence them according to what he thought was in the interest of the nation. Similarly, national tragedies did have an effect on him too. To cite two examples, although Sarkar Baba never participated actively in political action, political events or their fallout did have an effect on him. I recall distinctly that when the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's bodyguards assassinated her, Sarkar Baba was distraught the whole night long asking us who was going to protect and lead India now. Similarly, when crowds incited by the Bharatiya Janata Party demolished the Babari Masjid at Ayodhya, Sarkar Baba said in his speech published in the Shri Sarveshwari Times, simply this, "Today human beings have been herded in a group and asked to go to a particular place of pilgrimage and throw stones at it. In many temples dogs cry and jackals howl. If you have true devotion why don't you set those places right?" (Ram 1992:143). Moreover while it was not Sarkar Baba's intent to do so, Maharaja Vijaya Bhushan Singh Ju Dev's donation of land to him in Madhya Pradesh, and the subsequent building of ashrams there, attracted very large numbers of the local population to Sarkar Baba, and thus, indirectly, imposed an obstacle to the aggressive missionizing activity of the various Christian missions that operate in these tribal regions. This effect of Sarkar Baba's presence in Madhya Pradesh's tribal regions seems like an extension of the resistance and reformist movements that began in the 1800s against the

Christianizing of the population by the missions, but there are significant differences here when compared to the “resistance” and revivalist mode of Hindu nationalists.

Sarkar Baba differed from the Hindu nationalism evident in Dayananda and Vivekananda’s systematization of Hinduism on the basis of Vedanta, because for him nationalism existed in realizing the potential of the youth of India, not in presenting pedantic arguments to a western audience to make Hinduism respectable in their eyes. In fact, I remember a funny incident which provides humor to the idea of Vedantism as it is practiced by scripture-carrying ritual specialists of India. It was the June of 1991 and Sarkar Baba had suddenly developed a severe toothache. Since he was living in Manhattan at that time, right next to the United Nations building, we took him to a dentist nearby. On returning from his trip, Sarkar Baba described his trip as follows: “Ah! He (the dentist) hit my teeth bang-bang with a hammer. He broke my tooth. Now even I have become a *Bedāntī!*” The pun, of course, lies in pronouncing the word *Vedāntī* (one who follows or expounds on the Vedanta) in a colloquial manner, with a “B” instead of a “V,” which changes the meaning of Vedanta from being a distillation of the Vedas, to being toothless, because *dant* in Hindi and Sanskrit is a tooth.

If anything, Sarkar Baba spoke against the Brahman theory and outlook of the world, while at the same time treating Brahmans who visited his ashram with respect. Unlike the “internal missionization” of Arya Samaj (Veer 2001:52), Sarkar Baba had no interest in missionizing of any kind, internal, or external. He never advertised the ashram or the hospital, he never went out to seek support for it, he never tried to pull people into the organization. Unlike Dayananda who gave up his ascetic attire to activism, Sarkar Baba never relinquished his ascetic attire or life, and his outlook remained equally

inclusive for all castes. To him, the organization existed in the vast milieu of Hinduism with a positive role to play, but he had no desire to become so big as to be unwieldy and bureaucratized. In his ashrams not even formal *yoga* was practiced, *hathayoga* or otherwise, and all spiritual activity of this kind was expected to be internal and organic.

But does that mean Sarkar Baba was completely dissociated from the nationalist political milieu of his time? I would have to say no. Clearly, Sarkar Baba's society emerged as a notable institution in Varanasi, and also nationally, judging by the number of politicians, officers, and other devotees who began to come to him from urban as well as rural areas, for various kinds of consultation. As a result, together with the hospital operations, Sarkar Baba's contact with the political leadership of India also kept expanding. Although he did go to visit Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru after the founding of the society of his own initiative, he came in contact with other leaders mostly through word of mouth when they visited him in the ashram. I present here some stories which reflect his role in the political world of India at that time.

### **Association with Political Leaders**

Given the political climate in India where political leaders often seek religion for support in their careers, it was but a matter of time before politicians would begin to flock to him. In fact, some of Sarkar Baba's more politically minded devotees had even floated the idea that the Samooh should form a new political party by the name of "Brahmaniṣṭha Majalis" ("party" of the Brahma devoted). My own personal experience was that Sarkar Baba was least interested in politics for personal gain. He met with political leaders because they had influence on the lives of common people, and perhaps, in his own way,

he tried to guide them towards policies and activities which would benefit the largest numbers. Other than that, he had no interest in politics or politicians. So when this group of politically conscious devotees went to Sarkar Baba with their proposals, he very astutely asked them to deliberate upon the constitution, policies and programs of such a party, and to consider what it would really stand for. If they could reach consensus on these issues, they could come back to him to discuss the matter further. The group began its deliberations but could never come to a consensus! When I spoke with Ishwarchandra Sinha Ji, a prominent journalist in the city of Varanasi, and a devotee of Sarkar Baba, he told me about the nature of Sarkar Baba's interactions with politicians:

Baba came in contact with politicians first when he went to Delhi in connection with ashram work, probably in 1961. Baba had met the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He met him at Nehru Ji's residence in Delhi. But I saw that Nehru Ji did not come very close to Baba. It was more of a formal meeting. They had also taken a group photograph. Shyamnarayan Pandey was also in that picture. At that time, he was the publicity officer for our society. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1996, Varanasi).

Shyamnarayan Pandey Ji confirmed this fact. He said:

One time, after the society had been established, we got an appointment to meet with Jawaharlal Nehru Ji. Our little delegation comprised of Baba, one Janwai Baccha from Nagar Untari, the secretary of Bidhiya Naresh, Choubey Ji, Maharaja Vijaybhushan Singh Ju Dev, and I. Before going to meet with him, Baba had had a letter drafted for him in which he asked the Prime Minister what had he thought about the coming generation? What was the Indian Government's policy towards reformation of the temples and monasteries in India that were not being used well?

The Prime Minister had replied to those questions. He had said, you people know more about the coming generation. We make programs, and work according to that. And the Government of India has its own policy towards temples and monasteries. We are following that policy. Very soon we will be making further announcements on this topic. On meeting him, we had informed him about Shri Sarveshwari Samooh. We had given him our literature. We asked him to visit us if he came to Banaras. When we came out of his residence, Baba said immediately, "He is not going to come to our place."

A few days later, the Prime Minister passed away. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1996, Varanasi).

Ishwarchandra Sinha had more to add:

After that, some politicians came in contact with Baba. Amongst them, those who came close to Baba were Murar Ji Desai,<sup>5</sup> Jagjiwan Ram<sup>6</sup> and Sarojini Mahishi.<sup>7</sup> Murar Ji Desai was a person of very pure thoughts. He became close to Baba very soon. Jagjiwan Babu was from Bihar state. He heard Baba's reputation and came to him. Most of the politicians of that time had come to Baba between 1960-62. Hanumathaiya Ji became the Railway Minister at that time. In 1963, when we were inaugurating the women's ward at our leprosy hospital, Baba had invited Jagjiwan Babu. Hanumathaiya Ji also came at that time and became a devotee of Baba. After that, he began to visit the ashram on every Gurupurnima.

After coming in contact with Maharaja Jashpur, when he became a Member of Parliament (M.P.) Baba would stay at his flat at Vinay Nagar locality of Delhi, when he would visit that city. Slowly, more people got to know him in Delhi. ...Some devotees of Baba from Bihar and Madhya Pradesh states wanted that our society should also have a political wing, and that it should be called "Brahmaniṣṭha Majalis." Sarkar said to me, "Sinha Sahab, please come to Delhi for a week."

... At that time, I used to work for the "Aaj" newspaper. I took an advance payment from them. Baba was staying at Maharaja Jashpur's place. We all had a meeting there... I asked those present in the meeting to finalize what should be the goal of the "Brhamaniṣṭha Majalis." But they all could not come to a conclusion about it. The matter died there in the meeting.

One time I went to Delhi, possibly in 1963. The national meeting of the All India Congress Committee was going to be held. Kamraj Plan was to be presented; a no-confidence motion against the government was to be forwarded. I was sent by my newspaper. ...One day Baba took me to Sushila Nayyar's place. She was the Health Minister of India then. We sat there for a little while. She was ready to go out somewhere. We talked with her about our leprosy hospital, but she spoke with us in a very listless way. We came back. Then we went to the residence of Murar Ji Bhai. He welcomed us very warmly. We had some formal talks there. From there, we went to the residence of Jagjiwan Ram. He and his wife met us very warmly. After that, the number of people who came in contact with Baba in Delhi kept on growing,

But there is one thing. When Baba had become ill in Delhi for the first time, he had spent quite some time at the Ram Manohar Lohiya hospital there. On getting out, he had gone straight to Banaras. After that, for a long time, he did not go to Delhi. One day, Baba was alone in Banaras, so I asked him, "Baba, Delhi?"

Baba had said, "Hey no. Now I do not feel like going to Delhi."

I had asked, "What is the matter?"

He had said, "They bother me a lot there. There is Indira Ji.<sup>8</sup> Her messenger came at night that Indira Ji has invited you. She wants to have your *darśan*. Now, Baba is not going to say to the Prime Minister that she should come here to see me. That messenger used to take me to her residence from the back door. I will not go there now."

In the year 1978-79 Banaras experienced terrible floods. The city was inundated with water up to Machhodari, even beyond Vishveshwarganj. Indira Ji had come to check on the flood situation. Since Machhodari was full of water, she went around on Malaviya Bridge, and reached the Grand Trunk Road. After a while, even that road was flooded. As I was with her as a press person, and since the ashram lay on her way, I was paying special attention. Since the ashram had become flooded too, all the patients had been temporarily placed on the sidewalk right above the steps which go down to the ashram from the G.T. road. Indira Ji stopped there and talked to those patients for a few minutes. Since the ashram was waterlogged, she could not go in. She bowed her head once towards the ashram, and then turned back. After a few days she came to Banaras again. She had to visit Chandauli<sup>9</sup> on that trip. This time too, I was observing very closely because the ashram lay on her way... The ashram had been informed that Indira Ji was going to visit. The ashram looked very clean, and quiet. Sarkar was sitting alone. I went and sat with him, and asked, "Baba, Indira Ji is going to visit?"

Baba said, "Hey yes."

By then I saw Indira Ji walking in, alone, without any security guards. It was the time when she was about to depart for Chikmangaloor to fight the election. There were many other politicians with her, but they had all been stopped outside on the road according to her wishes. She came straight in. When she entered the gate of the inner courtyard, Baba got up from his chair and stood up. Indira Ji greeted him from below the steps. Baba went near her. I do not know for how long he had been holding a hibiscus flower in his hand. He gave it to her in her hands. Then Baba returned to his room and Indira Ji went in with him. They both talked for about five minutes inside. Then Baba came out on the foyer with her and Indira Ji took leave. I have seen many such scenes. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1996, Varanasi).

Later in the history of the ashram, while Sarkar Baba was still alive, it became a common scene to see prominent politicians seek his audience. Sarkar Baba met nicely with everyone, but only for a short while, and he kept himself absolutely aloof from their politics. This last statement, however, needs to be qualified. While Sarkar Baba kept himself aloof from the bickerings and machinations of politicians, if he thought that there was a person who was a good human being, he could intercede on their behalf in a mystical manner. The following two stories illustrate this point.

I Want Him To Become The Railway Minister

Vivekanand Sahay Ji had narrated his experiences of Sarkar Baba with politicians in Delhi. Mr. Sahay used to be the Joint Manager for Vigilance and Security at the Food Corporation of India when he had first come to Delhi on deputation from the government of Bihar state. He ended his career many decades later, as the Chief Commercial Manager of the same corporation. I was able to interview him extensively at his residence in Delhi. The story has specific reference to Hanumathaiya Ji, a prominent political leader of India, whom I have mentioned in the preceding chapter while discussing Guru Particularism within the same tradition, and above in the passage quoted from Ishwarchandra Sinha. Mr. Sahay had said:

As far as... politicians are concerned, one name sticks out prominently in my memory, that of Mr. K. Hanumathaiya. He had been the Chief Minister of the State of Karnataka. He had also run the parliament in that state... Baba appointed Mr. Hanumathaiya as a guardian of the society. Hanumathaiya Ji accepted it gladly. Because of this I used to visit him in Delhi too, sometimes just to see him, sometimes, with some work for the ashram. Now I will tell you about the year 1971 when Indira Gandhi's government was in power, and the year in which Bangladesh had fought for its independence. At that time Mr. Hanumathaiya was the chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission. This is a post equivalent to that of a cabinet minister, but he was not a cabinet minister. The tenure of his present chairmanship was about to end. When I went to see him, he asked me if Baba was going to visit Delhi soon. I conveyed this request to Baba. Baba said yes, he might come by Delhi. I conveyed this to Hanumathaiya Ji. He said, I have something very important to discuss with Baba. I entrust to you the responsibility of informing me as soon as Baba comes to Delhi. Please request Baba that I want to have his *darśan* as soon as possible.

In reality, the cabinet was being reshuffled in those days, and Mr. Hanumathaiya wanted to get a cabinet post. Baba reached Delhi a day before the cabinet was to be reshuffled. It was decided that on the day of the reshuffle, Baba would meet with Mr. Hanumathaiya at his residence at eight in the morning. The next day we went to his residence. I saw Mr. Hanumathaiya, dressed in a pure white Mysore silk *dhotī*, white silk shawl and a white silk turban, with a three point vermilion mark on his head, carrying a metal plate in his hand to perform Baba's *ārati* when he arrived. Coconut, leaves and flowers filled the plate. When I opened the car door for Baba, Mr. Hanumathaiya performed his *ārati* right there. Then he took Baba with him inside the house. I stayed outside with other people. Hardly ten minutes had passed when a gentleman came out and said that I was being called inside. I went. Apparently, Hanumathaiya Ji thought that he was not

able to convey to Baba what he wanted to, or perhaps he was unable to understand what Baba was trying to say to him. So I had been called in as a translator.

Hanumathaiya Ji asked me to inform Baba that the cabinet was to be reshuffled very shortly. "According to seniority, I should get the post of a minister. But there are some opponents who do not want to see this happen. Even the Prime Minister wants that I should become a minister, but these opponents are creating obstacles. I want Baba to bless me so that I may become a minister."

I conveyed this to Baba. "Hmmm," Baba said, "choice of a minister is in the hands of the Prime Minister, no?"

I said, "Yes Sarkar."

"Well, then how am I supposed to influence the Prime Minister about this?"

Hanumathaiya Ji asked me about what Baba was saying. I translated it for him. He prayed saying Baba, you are omnipotent. You are an incarnation of the Goddess herself. I have full faith that if you want, it will happen.

Baba said, "Okay, I will pray to the Goddess."

Hanumathaiya Ji took it to mean that Baba had blessed him. Just then, the telephone rang. His Personal Assistant came in and told him something in Kannada language. He said, "Baba, Umashankar Dixit Ji (then president of the congress party) has called me, let me talk to him. I will be right back."

We could hear him talking on the phone, but we could not make out what was being said. Baba remained absolutely quiet. He did not speak a word. I remained quiet too. They talked for about ten minutes on the phone. Then, looking very disheartened, almost in tears, he came back into the room. He said, "Baba, it was the Congress President's phone. My name was being considered to become the Law Minister. The Prime Minister also wanted this. But my opponents did not let it happen. Now it has become final that I will not be taken into the Cabinet."

Baba remained quiet. Hanumathaiya Ji became quiet too. Baba got up. Hanumathaiya Ji, too, did not ask him to stay any longer. He was trying to hold back his tears, he could not speak. Perhaps he had full faith that if Baba visited his place and blessed him, his work would be done. But when he got this message on the phone, he had become totally disheartened and emotionally devastated.

Baba said, "Well then, please give me permission to leave."

Hanumathaiya Ji folded his hands in goodbye. I was feeling very sad myself, thinking that he had given us so much respect, he had invited us with so much faith, he had become a guardian of our society, if Baba had shown his grace, it would have been so nice. This is what I was thinking. Baba did not say anything. After getting into the car I asked Baba, "Where should we go?"

Baba asked, "What time is it?"

I said, "Baba, it is about quarter to nine."

Baba said, "Yes, it is very early right now. Since the cabinet is being expanded Jagjiwan Babu will also be very busy with that."

I said, "Yes, all those people will be very busy with that."

"Come, let us go for a stroll at India Gate," Baba said.

Baba came to India Gate and began to stroll. I was so sad I could not bring myself to say anything. But I did not want to be impolite either. Baba said, “Why? Why are *you* so sad?”

I said, “Baba, this very strange thing has happened. I really wanted that if you had accepted his prayers, we would have been able to say that the guardian of our society is a minister. He has always been so devoted to you, he should have received your grace. Because he got the news that he will not be made a minister even while you were still sitting there, I am feeling very sad.”

“Oh yes, brother! I, too, was thinking that if this man becomes a minister then it would be good for our society... He is a good man. He would have done something good for the society. I want him to become the Railway Minister so we have some convenience in traveling.”

I was listening to Baba half-heartedly, thinking, Baba is joking. Poor Hanumathaiya Ji, he almost cried. Now how am I going to visit him with *ashram* work? We kept strolling in this way and it became nine o'clock. Baba had a transistor radio in his hand. He switched it on. The first item on the news was that the cabinet had been expanded. Now, the names of the ministers were being read. The sixth or seventh name in this list was that of Mr. K. Hanumathaiya, as Railway Minister!

Hanumathaiya Ji had not even asked for this post.<sup>10</sup> When Baba had asked him which ministry he was interested in, he had mentioned the Ministry of Regulation Administration. This is what the Prime Minister was also interested in making him. This news suddenly brought it clearly to me that even Hanumathaiya Ji had no idea about it. And five minutes ago, Baba had said to me at India Gate, “If he becomes Rail Minister then we will have some convenience in traveling.” Within a span of five minutes, the decision of the whole Government of India was changed! The person who had been discarded and put aside, had become the Railway Minister. This is a miracle I have experienced myself with Baba. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, New Delhi).

Several things stand out in this long narrative. Politically, Sarkar Baba was very concerned that he should not be identified with any one political leader. That is why, besides the fact that Mr. Sahay's family was devoted to Sarkar Baba, I think, he used to stay at his place when he would visit Delhi, rather than at the bungalow of a minister. It allowed him to maintain his neutrality, as also freedom of movement, for he was always interested in meeting with common folks who would come for his *darśan*. It also prevented the leaders from visiting Sarkar Baba at their whim, because it was beneath their dignity to visit the house of a common officer of a semi-government corporation. It

also allowed Sarkar Baba to stay aloof from the political machinations of the parties, yet be able to intercede if he so wished.

Another point that stands starkly is Sarkar Baba's nonchalance in the face of the most difficult adversities. Mr. Hanumathaiya, or even his own guru, could put as much pressure on him as they wanted, but he remained unmoved from his resolve to do what he thought was the best course of action. We can understand Mr. Hanumathaiya's eagerness for the cabinet post, for that was a matter of his career, but even Mr. Sahay felt under tremendous emotional pressure to do something in the circumstances that would please the prominent leader. Sarkar Baba could have said something to that effect, but he chose not to. This illustrates to us a quintessential characteristic of Sarkar Baba, to remain unaffected by circumstances.

By now readers would have become well adjusted to the fact that miracles did play a role in the lives of those who came to Sarkar Baba. Miracles have played a role in the lives of other saints too, notably, Sathya Sai Baba. But, for the sake of comparison, while Sathya Sai Baba's miracles have been overt, unequivocal miracles of which he is the undisputed agent (see <http://www.saibaba.ws/miracles.htm>), Sarkar Baba's was a much more discreet, and anonymous way of acting. It is very difficult to ascribe agency to Sarkar Baba for his miracles. In seeking his blessings Hanumathaiya Ji wanted Sarkar Baba to pray to the Goddess to get him a cabinet post. Sarkar Baba said he would. But no more. And when the miracle happened, around nine o' clock in the morning, while he was strolling on the lawns at India Gate, Sarkar Baba behaved as if he had nothing to do with it, except to express his desire that he wanted Hanumathaiya Ji to become a railway minister. He had not disclosed a word of his intentions when Hanumathaiya Ji was

feeling so emotionally devastated. Sarkar Baba could have, if he had wanted credit. But he did not. I think that as a renunciate ascetic of the Aghor tradition, that credit meant nothing to him. From personal observation I have seen such events take place quite regularly in the lives of those who came in contact with Sarkar Baba, but it was this “personal transaction” which made the devotee aware of the miracle and increased his awareness of oneness with his guru. Sarkar Baba, however, always shied away from displaying his abilities overtly, usually leaving no trace whereby agency could be ascribed to him. If Sarkar Baba saw something worthwhile for national good in a person or politician, he would assist him. Otherwise, he shied away from politicians.

If, however, Sarkar Baba’s agency was needed in a crucial circumstance, he could easily intercede, as is apparent in the story that follows. This story involves another political leader of India at that time, Babu Morarji Desai. To devotees it is clear that in this instance, Sarkar Baba acted overtly, without regard to whether his powers were discovered or not, to save the life of Morarji Desai. This is how I came across this story during my fieldwork:

Can’t This Journey To Assam Be Postponed?

One day, while wandering through the streets of Banaras, I went to the Krin Kund Sthal and met Paramanand Mishra Ji. Old memories began to resurface. From the stories narrated by Mr. Sahay, readers already know his name. He was an old time devotee of Sarkar Baba’s. When I told him about my project, Sarkar Baba’s stories were bound to be told. He began to speak:

Listen to the story of Morarji. When Morarji was the Prime Minister of India, Baba rang up his place from Banaras, saying that he wanted to meet with him.

His P.A. (personal assistant) told Baba that his calendar was full. Baba could meet with him only when he came back from his journey to Assam. Baba scolded him, “Do I have to meet with you? I have to meet with Morarji Bhai. Go tell him the Baba from Banaras has called him. Go, ask him!”

The P.A. became flustered because he was used to everyone speaking politely with him, who was this Baba on the phone who was yelling at him! When he asked Morarji Bhai, he told the P.A. that Baba could meet with him whenever he wanted to. Baba took Pandit Yagyanarayan Chaturvedi Ji from Banaras with him and reached Delhi. In the morning he got onto the Jeep and went to see Morarji Bhai. He said to Morarji Bhai, “Can’t you postpone this trip to Assam?”

Morarji said, “No Maharaj, the government has to pay all this expense in preparing for my trip. I will not be able to postpone it.”

Baba stood up. Morarji Bhai said, “Please be seated Maharaj.”

Baba said, “Please send for a glass of water.”

A glassful of water was brought to him. Baba took the glass in his own hands, then handed it to Morarji Bhai and said, “Please drink it.”

Morarji Bhai drank it. By then Baba asked Chaturvedi Ji to go pick up two flowers from outside. Chaturvedi Ji brought them in. Baba gave those flowers to Morarji and left his residence. Then he caught the plane from Delhi and went back to Banaras. Morarji Bhai went to Assam. There, his airplane crashed. His pilot fell in the mud, but Morarji Bhai did not get even a scratch.<sup>11</sup> The rear door of the plane was cut open to extricate him. He escaped without any injury. When he returned from Assam, Morarji went to Madhya Pradesh’s Gamhariya ashram to meet with Baba. All the media-persons were gathered there to find out who is this Baba for whose *darśan* the Prime Minister himself was paying a visit. But it is true, amongst the politicians, Baba was very fond of Morarji Bhai. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, Varanasi).

Paramanand Mishra Ji’s story is not made up: this event really happened as is evident from the resolution passed at the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, as well as news reports (see *Times of India* 2009: September 3). However, he probably was not aware of all the facts where all five of the pilot team of this Tu-124 jet named “Pushpak Rath” (flower chariot) were killed in this crash.

These examples suffice to illustrate Sarkar Baba’s perceived role in the modern political world, and how he influenced the course of Indian history in his own quiet way. It is not that Sarkar Baba did not love his country. He certainly did. His nationalism lay, however, not in accusing other religions or cultures, but in thinking constructively about

the youth of India. I narrate here what Ishwarchandra Sinha, who spent practically his whole working life with Sarkar Baba, said:

One beautiful evening when the cool breeze had mitigated the oppressive heat and humidity of the day Baba began to hum something under his breath, after his evening bath. It seemed he was soaked in a devotional mood. I was a journalist, I began to note it down in my little pad. It turned out to be a poem. All that I did was break the sentences at a few places to make the flow of words smooth. The poem was about our nation, our society, our culture, and our youth who have to create a new history for our nation:

Mother energy, fill with light,  
 The young men and women of India.  
 O powerful one, from your blessed seat  
 Wean away from negative deeds  
 The downtrodden youth.  
 With waves of your energy  
 Give them strength to conserve their strength.  
 O compassionate one,  
 Fill me with the ability to  
 Give birth to a new history  
 And to think about the welfare of all humanity.  
 After gaining independence  
 Our great souls  
 Leaving behind the paths trodden by them  
 Have gone,  
 And are leaving still.  
 It's the youth that is now responsible for the nation.  
 In this age of science  
 Please bestow on them  
 the power to be active, peaceful, compassionate  
 With kind words for everyone  
 And mould them for an exemplary way of life.  
 Goddess Mother,  
 The youth of ancient India  
 In this new age  
 Are lost, wandering in the forest of the mind.  
 O Mother, give me the strength  
 To do that which should be done.  
 In the human garb deceit and conceit  
 Have taken such a form  
 Which tries to prevent me  
 From doing good  
 For the nation and society.  
 O glorious land of India  
 In your lap

I want to play and live,  
with the cool respite of peace.  
Acrimony and restlessness  
Want to push me in a tangle of  
Various religions and various negative paths.  
O waves of electrical light, O Mother,  
Protect me, protect me, protect me.  
Provide me with the ability  
To think about the  
Glory of our nation  
And its new history  
Which is in creation.  
All the young men and women of India  
May become pure  
Like the pure, lustrous rising sun.  
Dissipating darkness, may they  
Take the nation towards light.  
Our R̥sis and munis have told us  
About the everlasting glory that we have.  
They have made us walk those paths.  
But today we are  
Being forced  
to act otherwise  
Through greed for money  
And other transient illusions.  
O fresh breeze of the morning time,  
O cool rays,  
O Goddess, keep us away from these.  
May every morning of ours  
with the company of divine beings  
be spent in virtuous deeds.  
That will be the meaningfulness of my life.  
Otherwise, lost in meaningless deeds  
In the name of religion,  
I will be trapped by negative acts.  
O provider of solace to the seekers, shelter me.  
O Mother, chop away these nets and bonds.  
Inspire all young men and women  
To progress on the path of  
Creating a new history  
In building a new India.  
Provide them with a new vision  
For a new glory.  
For their hearing,  
Give them cool, peaceful words.  
Give them auspicious thoughts.

Fill their hearts with  
Vibrations of joy.  
Give them compassion.  
Give them friendship.  
O waves,  
with this life of mine  
May I be able to make this county  
Prosperous, happy and content.  
May I be able to fill all beings  
With affection and compassion.  
O Goddess, with your pure smiles  
And open hearted laughter  
Give us joy.  
So that I may  
Relinquishing hatred, jealousy and contempt  
Learn to live  
Like a nice human being.  
I have heard, I have seen  
Youth is spent away  
In caring for the family,  
And for friends and relatives,  
And for caste and category.  
But when one needs something  
When they have nothing left  
They receive neglect from all directions.  
Protect us from such a situation.  
I am in the shelter of your feet.  
I am calling out to you with my compassion.  
If I turn away  
On becoming adult  
From the responsibility  
Towards my nation and society  
Then what else would it be  
But to be a progenitor of ignominy.  
Fill me with that vibration  
With that electrical charge  
With the help of which  
I may fulfill the responsibility  
Towards my nation and society  
And make them glorious.  
Fill me with the rays of your light  
So I may be able to understand  
The path which Time is indicating to me  
And be able to act on it.  
Our nation has now come of age.  
Let not our coming days go to waste.

With great eagerness  
 I search for the unfathomable treasures  
 Hidden in our youth, which  
 Cruel people  
 Want to snatch away and destroy.  
 They try to keep them divided  
 To make them weak.  
 O Mother-vibration, protect the youth  
 From such cruel people.  
 May your rays protect them.  
 May you bless the nation  
 With your grace.  
 Salutations to you  
 Salutations to you, salutations to you.

People of every class and category used to come to Sarkar Baba. And for each person who came to him, he had just one thing to say, “May goodness come to you.” Sarkar Baba was always very careful to accord appropriate respect to every person according to his position and ability. But with that respect, he never used to get ensnared into politicking. He would certainly talk with everybody, but he would never recommend a talisman, or an amulet or assure someone of victory or defeat in a poll. He would behave normally with leaders of every political party. He even knew the deep personalities of every leader, but I never found him to be partial to anyone. He had a very high opinion about Indira Ji. In a speech he had said that she was the only capable leader then who could do something for the country, could even give her life for the country. When she was assassinated, I was the one who told Sarkar Baba the news. He had seemed a little shocked at the news. He had asked us to write a small sympathy letter, and then, had gone into his room. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1996, Varanasi. My translation).

Such a concern for the youth of India, as well as a desire to see India prosperous and strong, resonates through Sarkar Baba’s books. In keeping with what Ishwarchandra Sinha narrated as a poem from him, I cite a text from *Aghor Guru Guh* where Sarkar Baba recalls his conversations with old grandmother, who talks with the river Madheshwar:

I recalled the following things old grandmother had told me —  
 ‘Mother Madheshwar! When will you, with your sisters, flowing in numerous waves, come to irrigate our infertile, desolate fields, and make them lush and green? On that day we the residents of India will not only become self-sufficient in food, but we will also achieve the glory of making it available to other countries. Mother Madheshwar! Please join each village in a series of

banks, with your sisters. Mother! We are at the mercy of you and your sisters. Our distressed cry for help should not go in vain. O, the glory of India! I, an old woman, know that the knives of the invaders covered with the blood of saints and great souls, have been washed in you, and the blood covered cudgels of cruel abhirs have also been thrown into you. On your banks have the children of this old woman been cremated. Glory to mother Madheshwar! Glory to the mother of streams! Please also give victory to us now. (SSS, 1982:53. My translation).

I will take a moment now to compare the statements of Ishwarchandra Sinha, including the poem he recited, as well as the passage cited above, with what Dalmia writes about the formation of the “nationalist discourse as represented by Hariśchandra and his contemporaries.” (1997:13). This period specific nationalist tradition can be described as having:

1. direct access to pre-colonial tradition, literary as well as social-religious... 2. Ancient ‘Hindu’ texts and institutions as mediated also by British and western orientalis... 3. British colonial administrative, legislative and educational measures... and missionary activity. (Dalmia 1997:13).

Sarkar Baba’s poem, as recited by Ishwarchandra Sinha, certainly has expressions pertaining directly to nation and society, the youth, the path that Ṛṣis and munis have shown Indian culture which are similar to the prominent literateur, Hindi promoter and freedom fighter Bharatendu Hariśchandra’s access to pre-colonial tradition. I also know from personal experience that Sarkar Baba knew about the various ancient Hindu texts, though he did not necessarily believe in them. But here, in my view, the similarity diverges. The reason is that Hariśchandra was writing in a time of colonial contestation where there was a need to formulate a nationalistic identity, as well as a nationalist space in the political contestation. Sarkar Baba’s work begins in the post-independence years when the need for contestation with the colonialists for a nationalist identity and space was no longer there. This was a time of nation building, where the contestation is within the parameters of already established notions of nation and society, and the way Sarkar

Baba sees it, the need for social reform begins with the individual and family. In itself, this idea is similar to the idea expressed in Hariśchandra's Ballia speech where people themselves were responsible for social change (Dalmia 1997:22-3), but the context of the political arena is changed where free India has to contend not with external forces, but with those from within. Here, his ideas were guided by the Aghor principles, not the ancient sacred scriptures. Nor were these formulated in contestation with the colonial administrative or legislative measures.

### **Civil Society: in Practice**

In his daily life and in his personal behavior, Sarkar Baba always used to strive to bring India and its numerous castes and classes together. His was a nationalism, thus, which was very practical, and which existed not on the basis of an abstract political rhetoric, but in actual personal interactions with his devotees and visitors. These included ideas of friendship, equal treatment, as well as justice for all, depending upon their station in life. I have already cited in the previous chapter stories about the devotee who won the court case against the ashram in a land dispute, and then gifted the land so won to the ashram, as well as the story of how a prominent citizen of Banaras had to go to the hospital to have fourteen stitches on his head after he drank country liquor tapped from the hard labor of a poor person, without giving him appropriate remuneration.

Now I cite a story which reflects Sarkar Baba's notion of humanism in a civil society. This story relates to a shoe thief. It depicts clearly Sarkar Baba's take on certain kinds of social transgression, and how a little empathy could find a harmonious solution to it. The story is long, so I paraphrase it below.

## The Shoe Thief:

During the time when Sarkar Baba would stay for some time in the Rai Panarudas' garden in Varanasi, his popularity began to grow by leaps and bounds. Every evening there would be scores of devotees visiting for his *darśan*. As is the Indian custom, they would leave their shoes outside the garden gate before entering his enclosure. Every evening there would be a pile of shoes just outside the gate from all the devotees who were inside. After a few days shoes began to disappear from that pile. No one paid much attention to it in the beginning, thinking, someone must have slipped them on by mistake. But one time a prominent and affluent jeweler of Banaras found his shoes missing. He created a big furor. So the devotees went on a shoe thief watch, and caught the thief the next day. Venting their anger on him they brought him in front of Sarkar Baba with the expectation that he, too, would have harsh words for him to teach him a lesson. They also recommended in unison that he should not show his face in this sacred precinct anymore. To everyone's surprise, Sarkar Baba not only did not speak to him harshly, but in fact said to them, "everyone comes here with their own motivation. He, too, comes with his motivation." To the thief he said, "You should come here every day!" The devotees were aghast. The jeweler whose shoe had been stolen a day earlier was the most vociferous in his protest claiming, "But Baba, he is a thief. How can he be allowed to come here?" Sarkar Baba looked calmly at him and asked with a smile, "Doesn't the business of jewelry use sleight of hand? Isn't that theft too?" Then he asked the thief if he could run a small business. The thief said yes. Baba had one of the devotees give him ten rupees, with which the thief set up a hawking cart. This began to provide enough for his family and he gave up stealing. (Pandey 1984:12-16; Ram 1997:44). Not only was

the thief thus turned away from a life of stealing, the jeweler and other devotees also, perhaps, learnt a lesson about social responsibility.

Peter van der Veer points out that the Brahma Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission converge at the discursive level in the appropriation of scientific rationality and social activism (van der Veer 2001:68). Sarkar Baba never took recourse to scientific rationality although he did acknowledge the importance of science, and his social activism was very ascetic and personal, as is evident from the stories just referenced. This viewpoint is further strengthened by the story of Rambhajan Singh, who came to Sarkar Baba out of devotion, had a miraculous experience, and was pointed out the lesson of being an ideal Kshatriya. This story is a good example of the unbounded tradition of mysticism that Veer talks about. Rambhajan used to be a guard in the Indian Railways, and he narrated the story to me at Godauliya Chauk in Banaras, where I met with him during fieldwork in 1998.

Say, Mr. Soldier, You Did Not Catch The Thief In The Morning!

In the year 1961, Rambhajan Singh had met Baba at Maruadih. He narrated the story of his experience:

Now let me tell you why I consider the Aghoreshwar to be complete *Brahm*.<sup>12</sup> In 1961, I was in Munger district in Bihar. Sarveshwari Samooh was being established at that time. I suppose I can say Baba called me here through his vibrations. What happened was that I was transferred to Mau, and within two months, to Maruadih. On 21<sup>st</sup> September 1961, I was on duty at Maruadih railway station. At that time I had heard that an aughar sadhu lives in the garden there. But since I had been raised with Brahman-Vaishnav traditions, I was very hesitant to go to an aughar. But on the day of the inauguration of the Samooh when I found out what the goals of this society were, I felt this sadhu is a great saint, he is not any ordinary aughar. So I went to see Baba, but my uncouth nature went with me. For example, when people would come and bow to Baba, I would wonder if sycophancy rules the roost at Baba's place too! Because, people

could have greeted him from even a distance, but everyone insisted on touching Baba's feet. These kinds of negative thoughts used to arise in my mind.

On the third day after inauguration I was on duty at Maruadih station. The railway yard there was very big. It was around two or three at night. I was sitting in the guard's compartment of a goods train. Suddenly I spotted a very healthy man, wearing an undershirt and *lungī* coming my way, checking the seals on all the wagons. I decided in my mind that this was a wanted thief, and he had come here to loot the wagons. That is why he was checking the seals to find out what was inside the wagons. I became very careful, because I had decided to catch him. I could already see the headlines tomorrow, "Rambhajan catches a wanted robber!" I got down from the guard's compartment and hid myself, ready to pounce on that thief when he reached me. When he was barely two steps away, I lunged to grab him.

I lunged, and he slipped away. He began to run and I began to chase him. He would run the length of two wagons, then cross over between them, run back two wagons, and then cross over again. I chased him in this way for about one and a half hours. I fell down many times in chasing him, and my knees and elbows began to bleed. I was panting heavily and my condition was worsening every moment. I was barely twenty one years old, but I was losing ground to this much older robber. When I could not run any longer he stood in front of me, and then disappeared. When he disappeared I began to wonder about what had happened. I went back to the guard's compartment and sat down. I was so tired now that I fell asleep. And then I had a dream.

I dreamt that Aghoreshwar was sitting at Maruadih garden smoking his *hukkā*, and we were all sitting around him. Then suddenly I saw Aghoreshwar standing there in the form of omniscient Shiva! I woke up with a start and began to wonder what was happening? Could it be that Baba had played some *mantra* on me? Dawn was breaking. When I got off duty at eight in the morning I went home, took my bath, and went to Maruadih. When I reached the garden I saw Baba sitting just as he was in my dream, smoking his *hukkā*. As soon as I reached him, Baba began to laugh and asked me, "Say Mr. Soldier, you did not catch the thief in the morning? Hey, look, you are bruised! How did you get so injured?"

I began to cry when Baba said this. I thought, such grace of Baba that he came to the railway yard to give me a *darśan*! I fell down at his feet and sought shelter. When I sought shelter at his feet Baba said, "This won't do. Go, and bring a book from the shelf inside the room."

I asked, "Sarkar, which book should I bring?" At Maruadih there was a very small bookshelf on which Baba used to keep all kinds of Aghor literature.

Baba said, "Bring whichever you like."

Doctor Dharmendra Brahmachari has written a book on Aghor philosophy. It is a very big book. I brought that book out and put it in front of Baba.

Baba said, "Sit down. Read it."

I said, "Sarkar, from where should I read it? I will read it from wherever you want me to."

Baba said, "Start reading from wherever you feel like."

I began to read that book. And events from my own life began to unfold in its pages! I remember, in 1955 when I was married, I went to gift a sari to my father's sister. She used to live in Mokampur village in Gorakhpur district. I went to see some other relatives for which I had to cross the alluvial land made by the river. I had to cross a bridge on the stream with my bicycle. It had rained a lot that day. But I was so young I never thought how I would cross a flooded stream. At that time I was only fifteen years old, and I was rather immature. Even the wedding decorations on my feet had not faded, and I took my bike and began to cross the stream. The current was so strong that it swept me away with my bike. Further ahead, the water was very deep. There was a grass-cutter cutting grass on the stream bank. When he saw me he yelled out, "Hey idiot! Let go of your bike right now or you will lose your life today."

I was so attached to my bike that I was not letting it go. But when the grass-cutter yelled at me, I let go of the bike and somehow floundered to the shore. The grass-cutter then enquired about me. When I told him my aunt's husband's name, he became careful. He said, "Okay, sit down, I will fish out your bike."

The poor man went to his house, brought a stick and a rope, and pulled my bike out of the stream. He said, "You got away with your life today. Many people have died at this spot."

I read the word-by-word description of this incidence of my life in that book. I was stunned! Before I could even wonder what this was, I read the next line. It said, "Rambhajan, It was I who had saved you there."

I read further. Another one of my life-stories unfolded. When I was in the Railway Police Force (R.P.F.), I had got on to a military train at night by mistake. The guard who was standing there with his bayonet was a *gorkhā*. He put the point of his bayonet on my chest. By then the train had gathered full speed. He put the bayonet to my chest and said, jump down or I will kill you. I began to think about jumping down. It meant that every limb of my body would be torn to shreds. Just then I saw his superior officer run to him and take hold of his bayonet. He took the bayonet away from the guard and seeing me in my uniform, asked me who I was. When I told him, he said okay soldier, get down at the next station where the train stops. I saw this incident printed in that book. The description was absolutely the same. And the next line was, "Who had saved you that night Rambhajan? It was I who had saved you."

With these, there were many other good and bad stories of my life written in that book, about where I went and what I did. When I had read all this, my inner soul began to cry. I said to myself, Oh Aghoreshwar, I now recognize you as the deity of my soul, you are the complete *Brahm*. I seek shelter at your feet. Do with me as you please. When I prayed silently in this way, Baba became serious.

He said, "Okay, close that book. Tell me, what do you want from me. Go, sit alone for a few minutes, then come back and tell me."

I went away and thought. Then I came back and said to him, "Oh Narayan (Vishnu), now that you have asked me, I want that my warrior lineage should be able to serve my country well."

Baba heard this and he got up from his chair. He said, “Don’t you know? After the warrior lineage had produced Harishchandra, then only was it worthy enough to produce Ram in the *tretā yuga*<sup>13</sup> and Krishna in the *dvāpar yuga*. This is a very difficult penance.” Then Baba raised his hand in blessing and said, “Go. Perform penance. Do not become bewildered. Time will give you victory, but for this, you will have to live a life full of strife.”

So, even today, I am living a life full of strife. But I have full faith in the words of the Aghoreshwar that one day, the vow I had made in front of him, will come true. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1998, Varanasi).

Thus, for Sarkar Baba, being civil or dutiful in a civil society, or concepts like nationalism, were not something one talked about, they were something that one practiced in behavior, with reference to history -- personal, national as well as mythical -- and it brought people together in a constructive way, not in opposition to another ethnic or religious group, or another state. This is further supported in the narrative Bindeshwari Bhaiya provided to me of his own initial visit to Sarkar Baba’s ashram.

Around the year 1954, Baba had conducted three *rudra-yajñas*. On one such occasion Baba went to Calcutta with his disciples carrying the pamphlets and invitation for the *yajña*, in Raja Sonpura’s jeep. His route went through our village, so he stopped the jeep on the village bridge and gave some of that material to Babu Sarada Singh to deliver it to my father, Babu Krishna Singh, who used to be the village school headmaster at that time. The village school was right next to the village *panchayat* (local self-government) building, and my father had taught Baba in that school when he was little. Now that school building is in ruins. Amongst the teachers who taught Baba at that time, was Master Bhagwan Pandey. Baba’s name was also Bhagawan. Master Bhagawan Pandey would catch Baba’s neck in the crook of his walking stick, pull at him, and ask him, “Did you write anything?”

Whenever he would ask Baba that question, Baba would draw a map of India and give it to him.

Bhagawan Pandey would say, “You always draw the map of the world and India, but when I ask you to study, you do not! Why?”

Baba never used to study. His grandparents, after a lot of effort may have taught him a little, but not much. But when he came to my village in 1954, he came with all this literature. Of the many things that were given to my father were some of the earliest books of Baba, namely, *Brahmaniṣṭha Pādya*, *Avadhūta Bhajanāvalī*, *Citrāvalī*, and a few pictures of Baba. My father put all that literature on top of a cabinet. When I saw those books, for some reason I remembered the scenes of my childhood. I began to read those books one by one.

As I was reading, I memorized Baba’s address in Banaras. Now I had become even more curious. As I read those books, I forgot my house, my family,

everything. I felt sleepy, and I slept. When I suddenly woke up in the middle of the night, for some reason, I got up, walked out of the house, locked the door from outside, and started walking on the road. The railway station was a mile away from my house. I reached the station at eleven at night. The last train from the station used to leave at ten o'clock from Arrah (my village) for Sasaram, on a narrow gauge track. As I was entering the station I saw the train sound its whistle and begin to leave the station. That day, the train was late. I ran towards it and was able to jump and hang on to the hand rail of the last car. When I entered, I heard the passengers talking about how the train had been whistling and acting as if it would leave for the past one hour, thank God, it had finally left. When I heard this I began to think. The train was delayed for an hour, and it left as soon as I came to the station. Had it been waiting for me?

... When I came to Parao I saw several leprosy patients sitting outside the ashram under a *Neem* (*Azadirachta indica*) tree. I asked someone if Baba was there. He told me, yes, Baba was inside, having lunch. I should go right in to see him. At that time, the ashram had only a small gate. I stood undecidedly, near that gate.

When one goes to a new, unknown place, one does not really have the courage to just barge in. So I stood there, looking left and right to spot someone, with whom I could enter the ashram. By then I saw Baba walk out onto his foyer. He looked huge, naked except for a red *langoṭī* (loincloth) tied around his waist, washing his hand with water from a tumbler. Baba's eyes lifted towards the gate, and then our eyes met. Suddenly Baba broke out into a loud, openhearted laugh that I cannot forget even to this day. I have never seen him laugh so loudly after that. I can't say what he saw that made him laugh. When I did not see anyone else around, hesitantly, I went inside. I walked in and stopped by an iron gate that was covered with the thorny vines of *Satāwar* (*Asparagus racemosus*). The boundary to Baba's residence was guarded by a wire fence. I entered the boundary. By then I saw a devotee give *hukkā* to Baba and come out of his room. I told him, I wanted to meet Baba, how was I going to do that. He said Baba was smoking *hukkā*, and that he would take me to him. He took me to the inside hall. Inside was Baba's cot, the same cot that exists even today. Baba was lying on that cot. When I went inside Baba sat up in bed. While smoking *hukkā*, he began to observe me closely.

He asked, "Where have you come from?"

I told him I had come from Bagawan.

"From Bagawan in Arrah district?" He asked.

I said, "Yes."

"Whose son are you?"

I said, "Of Shri Krishna Singh."

"Of Master Sahab, hey, he never ever beat me in school. Even if I made some mistake while he was teaching, he never beat me. All the rest of them have beaten me. Come sit down, sit down," Baba said.

In the evening, at dinner time, Baba told the people, "Bring the food for that boy here too."

The courtyard where we have the seat of Lord Ganesh under the *Bel* (wood-apple) tree today did not have that tree there before. It used to be a *Bahera* (*Terminalia bellerica*) tree. Our dinner was served under that tree. We, of Bihar, are fond of eating more rice than bread. I put the *roṭī* aside even as Baba watched, and started eating the rice. But I had been given more *roṭī* than rice, so I finished quickly. After a short while, Baba called out to one of the servers, “Hey, are you watching? This boy hasn’t eaten anything...Did he eat this way during lunch too?”

I said, “Yes Baba, I did not eat the *roṭī*.”

Baba asked the server, “He is from the rice country. Give him more rice from now. He does not eat *roṭī*. You can see yourself, he has set the *roṭī* aside.”

When Baba said this, I began to get as much rice as I needed. I began to eat rice with green chilis, or pickles, or with fruits and vegetables.

... In 1966, I had come to the ashram to visit Baba. Dr. R.S. Chaudhary was the ashram doctor at that time. Two assistants used to work with him in the ashram hospital. Baba said to me, “Hey, Doctor Sahab is alone today. There was a person who used to help, but he has gone away. He is working by himself today. Why don’t you go and help him out.”

I went to the hospital and said, “Doctor Sahab, if there is anything I can do to help, please tell me. Baba has sent me to help you.”

He said, “Sit down, sit down.”

He opened his register and explained to me how to write down the details of all the prescriptions he used to dispense. At that time, one prescription used to cost only 10 paise (approximately \$0.002), and people used to put it in the donation box. So he asked me to enter 10 paise as the cost of the prescription. I began to do that work. On 13<sup>th</sup> of May, 1966, I worked in the hospital for the first time at Baba’s request. In the evening Dr. Chaudhary went to Baba and said that he liked me, and whether Baba would mind making me a permanent worker in the hospital. Baba agreed. But he did formally ask me. He called me and asked, “Say Bindeshwari, will you work at the hospital?”

I said, “Yes Baba. You can make me work anywhere in the ashram. I want to live here now. You can keep me after turning me into a monk, or you can keep me by employing here, but I do not want to go anywhere else.” Baba said yes, and I became a hospital worker. ...[the] hospital inaugurated Leprosy Patient Training Center and we all had our names written for that Center... Every evening many doctors would come to teach us various aspects of medicine. Pandit Shivkumar Shastri and Dattatreya Purohit used to teach us *Ayurveda*, while Dr. Gaur, M.B.B.S., taught us pathology. To teach us physiology, Baba invited another doctor. This Center of ours began to run well.

One day in 1969, at about eight in the evening, Baba came to the hospital where we were studying. He said he would teach us that day. Baba went and sat on the primary physician’s chair. We stood around the table. Baba asked, “Did you guys study standing up in this way in your schools. All of you, please sit down on your respective chairs.”

We sat down. Baba began to teach us fundamentals of Aghor medicine. Every evening, at eight, he would come to us and instruct us in the art as well the

science of how to diagnose diseases, what medications to use for treatment of various diseases etc. He taught us about many herbs and natural ways of healing patients. Baba has given us so much information that I cannot even begin to describe it to you. One day Baba said to us, “Do not think that since you treat leprosy patients, you spend so much of your time with them, that you will become affected with their disease. A doctor works as a representative of God. Even God keeps a watch over them. He won’t let any harm come to you all.”

And you can see, even to this day, we are all hale and hearty. We used to look after the leprosy patients so closely that other people, who wouldn’t even go near them, used to be amazed. While visiting them, even the relatives of the patients would cover their face because of the smell from their wounds. We used to work without a mask. Our bare hands were our main instruments with which to apply medication and wash and treat the wounds. But to this day, we do not have any physical ailment. (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, Varanasi).

Establishment of the leprosy hospital was the main focus of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh at its inception. But ideas of inclusion, and concomitant care with that inclusion, of all those who volunteered to participate in that endeavor, reflect Sarkar Baba’s practice of nationalism as well as civil society. He was particularly interested in the care of leprosy patients because they were most looked down upon by society, and hardly any facility existed at that time to take good care of them. It did not matter where the patient was from, the patient always found care at the ashram. But along with it, Sarkar Baba was very aware of the regions all the volunteers hailed from, and he personally looked after their smallest needs. Bindeshwari Bhaiya’s proclivity for eating rice instead of wheat was not lost on Sarkar Baba, nor were the needs of anyone else neglected at the ashram. I have personally seen Sikhs and south Indians, as well as Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, contributing together to the various ashram activities.

Sarkar Baba’s initiative in teaching his hospital volunteers about Aghor medicine reflects his initiative as a civil society leader – practicing what he preached, but in a setting of relative informality, by making everyone sit down as if in a classroom. Normally, people would not sit down on a chair in front of Sarkar Baba out of respect for

him. But he did not have any qualms about this. He conducted the class without the guru-disciple consideration, and did not hold back in imparting the knowledge he had learnt from experience.

Sarkar Baba, who had travelled a lot even before he ever set up the leprosy ashram, began to participate in the Kumbh Mela formally after the ashram was running well. This allowed the ashram residents and devotees not only to experience the religious fervor this Mela is seeped with, it also allowed them to experience the dizzying variety as well as unity in the numerous sects, *sādhus* and denominations who attended the Mela. It further made Sarkar Baba's ashram a recognized part of the Hindu milieu within the Mela context. Lallu Singh Advocate told me his experience of how Baba had sent him out to do "fieldwork" to observe the *sādhus* in the Mela grounds.

#### The Kumbh, a National Confluence of Religious Practitioners

It was the year 1965. Baba said that a festival was organized at the *saṅgam* (the confluence of sacred rivers). Our camp should also be held there on this occasion. I said, if we have your grace then it will happen. I started correspondence with the festival officer immediately. After a lot of official work, land was allotted for our camp. We were allotted the land that is about 100 feet west of the pontoon bridge at Prayag. Whenever I go to Allahabad, I bow to that place first, because the first camp of Sarveshwari Samooh was held at that place. We did not know what activities should be held at that place. Baba had just asked all of us to come to that place. We all went. We left on Saturday, and festivities were organized on Sunday.

I went to see Baba at night. Baba said, look *zamindārī* is now finished, isn't it? I said yes, *zamindārī* is over. Baba said, then let it be, what will you do working at the courthouse? I could not understand that language of Baba's. I had several cases pending at the court in Banaras. On Monday, while I was sitting with him, Baba asked me to take a round of the whole festival area, and to report to him about what I saw. I said, very well. But by about 9-10 in the morning, my mind began to pull me back to Banaras with the thoughts of the various cases pending in the court. I began to think, such and such a case must have been called in by now and they all would be looking for the missing advocate, I. When they won't find me, and when they will get to know that I have gone to Allahabad,

they will definitely hurl a few choice invectives towards me! I was thinking so, when Baba said, hurry up, go, take a round of the festival and report to me what kind of saints and *mahatamās* have arrived at this place. I said fine, I have been entrusted with a good job.

I began to walk. First I walked up to Jhusi near Ganges, and took a bath there. After that I began to wander in the fair area. At one place I saw a woman dressed up as Shiva. I found that most unusual. I began to obsess about whether a woman has a right to dress up as Shiva in this festival or not. Since Baba had asked me to take a round of the whole fair, I kept wandering all day, and came back only at about four in the evening.

When I went and greeted Baba, he said, “You kept wandering all day. Have you eaten anything?”

I said, “No. When my work is finished then I will eat.”

Baba said, “Go, go. Look in the kitchen. If something is leftover, go eat it.”

I had been wandering all over the fair on foot, I had been observing everything, noting everything in my mind, but Baba never asked me anything about it. I said, “I have gone around the whole fair, aren’t you going to hear my report?”

Baba said, “Come now, I know your report.”

I said, “One woman was dressed....”

Baba said in a dismissive tone, “No, she should not have done so.”

I knew then that my work was finished.

Baba said, “Go eat, and then sleep. You have worked very hard all day.”

So, we started celebrating our guru’s incarnation day in the year 1965, and it has continued to this day every year. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1998, Varanasi).

Clearly, what Sarkar Baba was trying to bring home to Lallu Singh Advocate was the immense diversity and complexity of the Indian religious scene, which, perhaps, Lallu Singh had understood, but Sarkar Baba did not need to repeat it. Even more important, however, is the fact that Sarkar Baba wanted to take Lallu Singh’s attention from his daily court activities, as well as the notion of being exclusive by being a *zamindār* (estate holder), something we all are apt to do, being wrapped up in our daily routines, and thus miss the bigger picture of cultural unity as well as diversity. By taking his attention from his work, and by asking him just to wander in the Mela, Sarkar Baba brought home to him the point about India’s religious unity in its vast diversity. Lallu Singh Advocate’s story provides just one representative example of how Sarkar Baba

tried to instill the notion of unity in diversity amongst his disciples. There are far too many examples to list here.

As a last example of Sarkar Baba's practice of civility in society I now cite a story which crosses national boundaries. It relates to the homeless folks in New York City and displays how a mystic teaches important lessons in the simplest of ways:

*Vaśīkaraṇa* – The Art of Mind Control:

It was the January of 1989. Sarkar Baba was convalescing in New York during the period of his visits to the Mount Sinai hospital in uptown Manhattan. We lived in the apartment of a devotee on 46<sup>th</sup> street and 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, one block from the United Nations building. I, too, was present there as one of Sarkar Baba's care givers. As was normal, many people would come to visit him every evening. One day a gentleman asked Sarkar Baba about *vaśīkaraṇa* – the magical power that allows one person to completely control another person's mind – and asked if Sarkar Baba could teach it to him. Those who are familiar with traditions of Tantra would know that there are a set of common *siddhis* (magical powers) such as *māraṇa* (causing subjugation), *mohana* (causing enchantment), *uccāṭana* (causing disenchantment), *vaśīkaraṇa* (mind control), etc. which are, perhaps, responsible for giving a bad name to Tantra for the ease with which they can be used and misused. Sarkar Baba did not say anything to him, but we all heard that question and smiled at each other with unstated curiosity.

It was Sarkar Baba's habit to go out for a walk every morning and evening. His sharp eye did not miss anything that went on in the streets. Usually one or two of the caretakers would accompany him to make sure he did not feel weak and fall during the

walk. That morning as we rounded the corner around Daag Hammerskjold Plaza, Sarkar Baba spotted a homeless person sitting on a bench. He stopped and looked at him from a distance of ten feet then asked me in Hindi, “Who is that person?”

I told him in Hindi, “Baba it is a homeless person.”

“Why is he sitting here this way in the cold?” Sarkar Baba asked next.

I did not have a suitable reply so I tried to fudge. Sarkar Baba did not look at me. Staring blankly ahead he asked, “What is his name?”

I had a reply to this one, “I don’t know Baba.”

“Go ask him.” Sarkar Baba said.

“Darn,” I thought to myself as I looked at the homeless person’s bloodshot eyes, assessing his dirty, smelly clothes, unkempt hair and matted beard, “what is Baba making me do now. What if this is a violent person?”

Sarkar Baba saw me hesitate so he prompted me, “Go! Go ask him his name.”

So I went to him and from a distance of about five feet spoke to him, “Hi. Good morning. My father who is visiting here from India is very curious about you. He wants to know your name.” I pointed towards Sarkar Baba as I said this.

The homeless person looked at Sarkar Baba standing there in his thin, white cotton *lungī*, an oversized black coat, thin, black cotton slip-on karate shoes (not being used to wearing shoes, that is all Sarkar Baba would agree to wear in the cold), leaning against his walking stick. Then he replied gruffly, “Why?”

I realized Sarkar Baba was as much of a curiosity to him as he was to Sarkar Baba. So I made up some explanation about foreign visitors, glitzy New York, life in America, etc. He replied in one word, “John.”

That was sufficient for me. I came back with a sense of mission accomplished and told Sarkar Baba in Hindi, “Baba, his name is John.”

“Hmmmmm,” Sarkar Baba said, “Go ask him how he came to be in this situation?”

I began to sweat in the cold. John’s eloquence had not impressed me much, and clearly, he wasn’t happy at our intrusion on his repose. I tried to deflect Sarkar Baba’s request, “Baba, he is sitting peacefully. He does not want to talk.”

“Why will he talk if you don’t want to talk to him?” Sarkar Baba replied sharply. “Go, ask him.”

So I went again. Readers can probably fathom that this was not an easy conversation. But it happened. I came back happily and translated what I had gathered about John’s life story. In short, he had lost his job and fallen on bad times. Sarkar Baba nodded a good bye to John and we moved forward. As we were walking on 47<sup>th</sup> street between First and Second Avenues, Sarkar Baba spotted a middle-aged woman sitting on the green bench with her shopping cart full of homeless belongings. He stopped and looked at her. Then he asked me, “Who is that person?” Once again I went through the whole process of asking her name and finally, her life story. Her name was Mary. She had fallen on hard times after her husband had passed away. Around the next corner, and another homeless person. The same process repeated again. While I had overcome the hesitation in approaching New York’s homeless by now, I still did not want to bother them. That day we made acquaintance with about six homeless folks in our neighborhood.

This became Sarkar Baba's daily routine on every walk. On the second day John showed his curiosity and asked a little bit about Sarkar Baba. Smiles were exchanged, and after a little conversation we moved on. Same thing with Mary. And with Dave. And with Robert. And with Edward. Whenever he would pass them by, Sarkar Baba would wave and say, "*Namastē Dādā* (elder brother, from Bengali)" to the male homeless folks. To Mary, he would say "*Namastē Mātājī*." After about a week of this routine we had become friends. We talked easily and our conversations, though still superficial, began to broaden in scope. On the tenth day after he had started this routine, Sarkar Baba did not feel well one morning so he did not go for his walk. I had to go out to get milk from the nearby grocery store, so I went out. John's seat lay on my way. As I was passing by he hailed me and asked, "Hey, where is your dad today?"

I told him Sarkar Baba wasn't feeling well. "Oh, I hope he gets well soon," said John with genuine concern in his voice. Mary saw me walk by and she asked me the same question, "Where is your father today?" I told her the same thing I had told John. She was concerned too and wished Sarkar Baba well. I went on my merry way, bought the milk, and came back quickly. Sarkar Baba looked at me when I entered his room. I said, "Your friends missed you today."

"Which friends?" He asked.

"Your homeless friends you say hello to every day." I replied, and added, "They have all sent you their wishes that you get well soon."

"Ah!" Sarkar Baba said and smiled, looking quizzically at me, "what else is *vaśīkaraṇa* hey? It is not *jantar-mantar* (magical rites and rituals)." (Personal experience, January 1989, New York City).

I remember I had stood there at that moment, absolutely stunned by the revelation of what had been going on for the past ten days. Sarkar Baba had not replied to the gentleman who had asked about *vaśīkaraṇa*, but he was well aware all of us who acted as his caretakers were deathly curious about the power. He had acted perfectly normal, with not even a hint of what he was about to teach us. What he taught was compassion towards fellow human beings, transcendence in perception beyond mere physical appearance, genuine interest in the trials and tribulations of other folks, pitfalls of excessive introversion or political correctness, dismissal of dependence on futile rites and rituals, but most of all, simply, how to be civil in a civil society. In making total strangers care about total foreign strangers, he performed a miracle of sorts. I qualify this last statement because it really wasn't a miracle. It was more of an exercise at what Dale Carnegie would call making friends and influencing people (see Carnegie 1990). Of course, he had also made friends. But his compassion and friendship were genuine, his attempts to get us out of our shells, persistent. I am sure John and Mary and all the other folks Sarkar Baba made friends with remember him so many years after this incident, as I remember them.

As discussed in the last chapter, through the publications of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, as well as in his personal dealings with devotees, Sarkar Baba also worked against the evil of dowry. He had instituted a dowryless marriage system in his ashram and termed it "Aghor Vivah Paddhati" (the Aghor System of Wedding) where only a few guests, mostly close family and friends were invited to the ceremony, no dowry was exchanged, and the whole ceremony would be completed within an hour or so.

Dowry was just one of the evils that he fought against. His books have comments on an appropriate food stocking policy, hygiene, commitment to national leadership, education, against alcoholism, drugs and gambling, as well as for personal development of all who form the nation and society. While these issues might be India-specific, he tried to broaden it for all those who came in contact with him, including foreign visitors.

### **Perceptions of Unbounded Mysticism: Grace in Individual Transaction Miracles**

Having considered Sarkar Baba's views and practices of nationalism and civil society, I will now turn to a discussion of the unbounded tradition of mysticism referred to above, which includes various aspects of mysticism, ranging from special grace to devotees to other kinds of mystical actions that are not easily explainable from a logical point of view. Stories have a powerful effect upon the depth of faith, strength of belief, and feeling of being in association with the divine. In a different context, writing about narration of sacred spaces in Rajasthan, Gold writes:

...sacred places have this "accretive quality"; accumulated layers of stories produce a kind of narrative density. The more miraculous events associated with a place, the more power it evidently possesses. This accumulation of miracle tales as collective memories operates as a magnetic field, drawing needy mortals afflicted by all kinds of troubles. (Gold 2009:88).

I suggest transposing this notion of "accretive quality" leading to more power as applied to a space, to that of a person, namely, Sarkar Baba. Except, in this case, the more the stories associated with a person, the more people have faith in his mystical abilities, and the more friends, relatives and acquaintances they bring to him.

I have presented some such stories in the preceding chapter, as well as in this chapter related to political personalities. Now it is the turn of the common devotees. As far as I know, each person I talked to or heard about who had come in contact with Sarkar

Baba had their own stories to narrate about their mystical experience with him. Looked at in totality, these stories become a formidable and continuing testimony of his mystical life. Of course I do not have either the space or the need to reproduce all of them here. However, as people came together on various occasions and shared their personal miracle stories with each other, it led not only to a deeper feeling of grace, of being special to Sarkar Baba, but also to a stronger bond within the community. It also piqued the interest of lay devotees towards the tradition from which he hailed. Therefore, these stories about mystical aspects of Sarkar Baba's behavior are presented as data of how people perceived him and what emotional-transactional associations such perceptions led to.

The presentation of these stories brings us face-to-face with the issue, as well as the importance of micro-history and hagiography in ethnography, as discussed in the first chapter. If we contrast hagiographical writing with what is generally known in the academia as objective social science writing, what stands out is the almost incontrovertible dichotomy of faith and devotion on the one hand and critical analysis and intellectualization of the subject matter at hand as the underlying base on which the narrative is constructed. The one, hagiography, accepts as a given the divine nature of the person in question because of their seeming superhuman actions, access to realms of knowledge less commonly understood by the common people, and an inexplicable draw, an attraction, a charisma inherent in the personality of the individual that defies explanation. The other, academic writing, does not readily accept the "divinity" of the person without critical analysis, and when accepted, resorts to more rational explanations to account for the charisma, knowledge and miraculous evident in the life of such a

person. Gold puts forth this contrast nicely in talking about miracles and miraculous as being “foundational” in South Asian religions (Gold 2009:98):

Yet when we compare these topics with ritual, myth, or mysticism, miracles have received relatively scant attention from scholars. Is this neglect due to an inescapable contradiction between academic analyses and popular faith? This could seem like a double bind: we ignore a vital and pervasive phenomenon if we ignore miracles. At the same time, if we try to talk about miracles we inevitably engage in reductive or demystifying practices and fail to do them justice. And if we attempt to avoid such practices, we risk sounding gullible or, worse crime still, unscholarly. (Gold 2009:98-9).

It is this contrast between the mortal and the mystical, human as well as divine, as well as its pervasive quality in the South Asian religious context, which forms the crux of my present section. How does one write about a person, when everything about him, for the common people, is mystical (spiritual) and therefore to be accepted at face value, while the academic tries to reason rationally about him sans the emotional or psychological significance of his persona. Thankfully, I am not the first one to grapple with this issue. I quote here a popular passage from the writings of a well-known historian whose ideas, with the passage of time may have received more than a fair share of critical appraisal at least in the context in which they were generated, but they hold theoretical value to frame my arguments in this section. Ernst H. Kantorowicz writes in the introduction to his *The King's Two Bodies*:

Mysticism, when transposed from the warm twilight of myth and fiction to the cold searchlight of fact and reason, has usually little left to recommend itself. Its language, unless resounding within its own magic or mystic circle, will often appear poor and even slightly foolish, and its most baffling metaphors and highflown images, when deprived of their iridescent wings, may easily resemble the pathetic and pitiful sight of Baudelaire's Albatross. (Kantorowicz 1957:3)

In the context of political mysticism, Kantorowicz makes the argument that in pre-modern, or medieval times, the king was understood to inhabit two bodies, albeit not so literally. One was the physical and mortal body of the king which was visible to the

populace, which could bleed and die, and the other was the metaphorical body of the “kingship” which was at once transcendent and divine, which gave the king the authority to rule, and which outlasted the mortality of his physical body. A similar understanding about kingship is to be found in the Indian milieu also, where the king was regarded as god’s representative on earth, and it is from that fact that his authority to rule derived (Derrett 1959:114). As Stietencron writes:

Both in Iranian and Indian tradition, charisma was conceived of as a kind of subtle, luminous substance that could be conferred on a deserving person by a God or by ritual action. This concept goes back to the second millennium BC, when the Indian and Iranian Aryans had not separated... (the corresponding Sanskrit word is *svarṇa* or *suvarṇa*, with *śrī* or *tejas* as alternative designations)... (Stietencron 2001:18-9).

This charisma was intrinsically linked to the king, and that may, in some measure, explain why Sarkar Baba’s devotees called him “Sarkar” – as lord or master. Nor is the notion of a single person, even though not a king, having multiple bodies alien in the Indian context. In a different context Sarkar Baba himself instructs Darshi about the guru not being a body, but a *prāṇa*, and available to disciples in all places at all times (see quote on p. 267). Yogic, Vedantic and Tantric literature certainly has ample text on the various sheaths,<sup>14</sup> or *śarīra/kośa*, that a single physical body can contain, namely *annamaya kośa* (body made of food), *prāṇamaya kośa* (body made of life-force), *manomaya kośa* (body made of mind), *vijñānamaya kośa* (body made of consciousness), *ānandamaya kośa* (body made of bliss) (ST II:5 fn; Rea 2007). In this body of literature the one individual has the ability to exist at various “planes” simultaneously. This, a psycho-soteriological notion, is taken as a given by the faithful in hagiographical literature, while for the academic, the socio-rational explanations matter the most. For our purposes, this concept does have a bearing on the oral narratives of saints as

discussed amongst the common folk and sheds a light on how a human being can be mundane, yet divine at the same time. And yet, even the mundane aspects of that person are not “really” mundane, because the divinity element make his persona liminal and thus beyond categorization.

I would like to illustrate this point by a story I heard about Sarkar Baba in Varanasi from Mr. Sao, a longtime devotee. The story goes that one morning when Sarkar Baba was sitting on his chair in the foyer of the Varanasi ashram, going over ashram business, a devotee of his Mr. SK (name modified), called from Calcutta with agitation in his voice asking about the particulars of the kind of tobacco Sarkar Baba used to smoke in his *hukkā*. When the person who picked up the phone asked about the nature of the enquiry, Mr. SK replied, “Sarkar Baba arrived here last night and he is sitting in front of me, asking me to prepare his *hukkā*.” The person on the phone was baffled because Sarkar Baba was sitting right in front of him taking care of business! This is but one story of Sarkar Baba being present in two places at the same time, but certainly not the only one. There are others, but for illustrative purposes one will suffice. What is important is the recognition by those who experienced this, is that Sarkar Baba’s presence was not limited by the existence of a physical body; his presence was transcendent to the gross body, space and time.

Another important aspect of unbounded mysticism is that saints and gurus are often characterized with a “divine birth.”<sup>15</sup> This is certainly true of the Buddha’s birth story, Jesus Christ is said to have had an “immaculate birth,” the first Sikh Guru Nanakdev’s story as recounted in the *Janamsākhīs* corroborates this about him, but it also holds true for numerous others such as Sahajananda Swami (Swaminarayan

movement),<sup>16</sup> Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh, Haidakhan Baba (mentioned in Paramhansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*)<sup>17</sup> and Meher Baba (Solibakke 2007).<sup>18</sup> Which is to say, not only do major prophets of world religions have a divine birth story associated with them, even leaders of sects, or sub-traditions are exalted with such a birth. I can think of at least two reasons for this in the Indian tradition. One is the impromptu deification of a guru in this tradition, which is the natural result of a deep faith and belief in the guru as a revered entity, expressed even in the most common of Hindi-Sanskrit modes of address as "*pūjanīya*" (revered). Second, intrinsically attached with this term, and the cultural notion of who is *pūjanīya*, is deep emotion not only in the position or seat (*pad/pīṭh*) of the guru, but also in his persona as an individual, and his persona as expressed in his daily behavior. While the guru's "persona" can be viewed somewhat objectively as a mode of social behavior, his individual traits as a "person" come out only in his interactions with individuals and families who form a part of society. Those interactions have a psycho-cultural structure which exalts the *sadguru* (the enlightened guru), as transcendent to normal human limitations. This interaction then creates and recreates, and gives support and strength to the already perceived "persona," and further, it builds the halo of charisma around the guru. I think Lawrence Babb's term, "South Asian construction of personhood, especially in relation to patterns of interpersonal transactions..." (Babb 1986:7) appears apt here. As subjects of such interpersonal transactions further interact amongst themselves in telling and retelling stories of their interactions and encounters with the guru, the perception of charisma implicit in the person of the guru is successively intensified. In a paradigmatic way it then extends to the whole life, including back to the

birth, of such an exceptional individual, for how else could it be? How can a guru who is, because of his charisma perceived as endowed with superhuman or “divine” powers, not have had a divine birth to corroborate his divine status right from the inception?

I am not arguing here for a rationalist refutation of a divine or miraculous birth, or of divine or miraculous events occurring in the life of the believers. Both of these categories belong to the realm of faith and belief, and if the medical idea of the placebo-effect is true, then it is possible the devotee’s faith and devotion in the guru can lead them to experience events in their own life *vis à vis* the guru which can be understood as divine or miraculous. What I am advocating here is that the notion of a miraculous or divine birth is but a natural extension of the devotee’s belief in the divine and miraculous persona of the guru.

In Sarkar Baba’s case too, there are a number of stories. I will not narrate them here but simply mention that his birth is said to be the boon from a yogi who performed a sacred ceremony in the house of his parents and gave them the *prasād* of a mango which resulted in Sakrar Baba’s mother becoming pregnant (Ram 2003:3-5). This miraculous nature of his birth is comparable to birth stories in the narratives of other contemporary saints too. The tradition of Sathya Sai Baba of Puttuparthi has it that when he was born in 1926, “The strings of a *tambūrā* (musical instrument) that was hanging in the house were plucked by a magical force just prior to his birth, and a cobra mysteriously appeared under the newborn infant’s bedding (suggesting Vishnu’s serpent-bed.)” (Babb 1986:162). It is interesting to note that Babb interprets the motif of cobra under the bed as “Vishnu’s serpent-bed” while others can interpret it as a symbol of Shiva. Babb’s understanding is based on Sathya Sai Baba’s hagiographical literature, for Ganapathi

(1981:23) interprets it this way also. Sathya Sai Baba himself has said that he is an incarnation of Shiva (Srinivas 2010:54), so the snake can be interpreted as a Shaiva symbol too. What is important here is that the symbol places him in a divine status, whether it be Vaishnava or Shaiva.

Writing about the patterns of development of Indian oral epics, Stuart Blackburn analyzes how a “hero” becomes worshipped as a God (Blackburn 1989:20). Essentially, in stories where the death motif is not built into the story-structure the deified hero is attributed with a supernatural birth. Then, over time, the hero’s birth assumes full or partial identity with a god. This happens in the epic of Pābūjī where he is regarded as a reincarnation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* figure Lakshmana, and in the Devanārāyaṇ story, Devanārāyaṇ is regarded as a reincarnation of Vishnu (Blackburn 1989:25). In the Gūgājī epic, he is identified with Shiva through the medium of the figure of Guru Gorakhnath, and is further attributed with the power to control snakes (Blackburn 1989:26-27). Devanārāyaṇ and Pābūjī are also attributed with miraculous births. These patterns of divine birth, identification with gods, and power to control elements of nature, in this case snakes, runs through the hagiographical stories of current saints, not just the figures in epic traditions. These associations find further embellishment as the life of the saint develops.

As little Sarkar Baba began to grow, more stories accumulate, such as stories of his healing abilities like curing the village policeman’s buffalo (Sinha 1988:14), absorption in devotional activities, and unusual activities like appearance of cobras in his presence (Personal communication from Bindeshwari Bhaiya during fieldwork, June 1996, Varanasi). Once Sarkar Baba left his home and came in larger association with lay

devotees, the trickle of such stories turned into a deluge, confirming the “accretive quality” and power of such stories.

Despite such charismatic recognition, stories of Sarkar Baba’s life as a seeker, a *sādhak*, of the Aghor tradition is equally important for this process of his life defines his later life philosophy, and how he treated those who came to him. What is important to note here is that these stories are a part of the folklore associated with Sarkar Baba. His devotees in Varanasi city certainly know them, but more importantly, they are a part of the folk-culture in the rural hinterland of Varanasi and Chandauli district. Illiterate men and women, farmers and landowners, housewives and grandmothers narrate and retell these stories for their own entertainment or peace, as the case may be, and in so doing, continue the folk tradition of Sarkar Baba’s stories. Most of the stories about snakes and scorpions as told to me during fieldwork remain in the realm of the *satsang* narrative. This is because of their faith and belief in the fact that Sarkar Baba is capable of doing anything he wants to. Like the king’s two bodies I alluded to above, Sarkar Baba’s body and being were perceived as limitless. These stories derive flesh and blood not only from telling and re-telling amongst their select group, but also from interacting with Sarkar Baba and having their own feeling of self, and closeness to Sarkar Baba, reinforced by each interaction.

I will present three such stories. The choice of these stories is not arbitrary. They have been selected from a wide selection of “miracle stories” to throw light on how stories create and embellish the persona of a mystical person in each successive individual transaction, leading to a belief that such a person is capable of doing anything, in effect, a belief in the unbounded mysticism of the person. They also include elements

of teaching lessons subtly, creation of faith and community in retelling of these stories, and creation of an understanding of a life-in-miracles. By this last phrase “life-in-miracles” I imply the reception of the idea that everything that a mystically illuminated person does is out of the ordinary. Since these stories are personal and narrated with emotion, I am going to present this data in the words of those who narrated them to me, as far as possible. Of course, all these stories were narrated in various dialects of Hindi. I have translated them for the purpose of this dissertation. The first story, “The Healing Donkey,” deals with healing. If the title seems funny to the readers it is because I found the elements of the story structure amusing. The second story, “The Twenty Rupee Bill,” is about the need for honesty with the guru. The third story, “Against All Odds,” is about divine will and the perception of grace, as well as the process of building a community.

#### 1. The Healing Donkey:

This story was narrated to me by Chaman Munim, the accountant of Haji Suleman, a prosperous Muslim businessman in the city of Varanasi, in whose garden at Maruadih Sarkar Baba had spent some time during his early years. He had narrated a number of stories to me, each one more fantastic than the other. I chose this story for presentation here because it deals with two crucial elements recognized as intrinsic to mystics: the ability to heal and, an all-encompassing sense of humor. Of course, there is also a lesson to be learnt, but that will come at the end of the story:

A washerman used to wash clothes right next to the Maruadih garden. His son was a mute from birth, he could not speak. Someone told him to go see the Baba who lived in Suleman Sahab’s garden. The washerman said, yes, I know the Munim Ji who comes to the garden. I will ask him. He came to me and related the whole thing. He said, “I do not recognize Baba.”

I said, “Baba wears a red loincloth and sits on the chair. Every morning when he washes his face I pour out the water for him. So come and greet him, and tell him whatever you want to.”

The next day, Baba came out and sat down on the ground, not on the chair. He also put on a *lungī*, as I used to wear. I began to pour water for him. Baba said, “Hey, the muddy water is splashing on your feet. Sit down on the chair.”

I sat down on the chair and he began to pour water to wash the mud from my feet! By then, the washerman arrived. Now, he could not make out who the Baba was, because Baba had reversed the roles. He asked me, “Where is Baba?”

Baba glared at me, so I could not speak clearly to him. I just kept looking at the washerman, dumbfounded. By then, Baba said to me, “Go outside and bring two eggs.”

I went. After I left, Baba asked the washerman, “Who are you looking for? What is the matter?”

He said, “Munim Ji had asked me to come here to meet with Baba.”

Baba asked him, “Have you given him any money for this. He has taken money from many people. He is just an agent. Don’t get involved with him. Baba has gone outside for his walk. But I will tell you this. I have heard that a mute person was cured by this method. You go outside, and if you find a donkey, put its mouth to your child’s, and rub them together. Your son will speak again. And don’t come here again. If Baba finds out about this, he will ask you for a lot of money.”

The washerman went out and right then, rubbed his son’s face to that of a donkey. His son began to speak. But from that day on the washerman became angry with me. He thought I (the Munim) was trying to trick him. A few days later Baba walked out of the garden and called the washerman while he was washing clothes. He asked him, “Say, is your son cured?”

He said, “Yes, he was cured that very same day. Since you had asked me not to, I did not come into the garden lest Baba should spot me.”

Baba said, “Yes, yes. Don’t come here again. That is why I have come out of the gate myself to ask you about your son.”

While all this was happening, one Raghunath Mama arrived on a *ricksha*. He got down and bowed at Baba’s feet. Baba instantly went inside the garden with him. But the washerman became suspicious. He waited outside the gate. When Raghunath Mama came out, the washerman asked him, “Who was that?”

Mama said, “That was Baba, don’t you know?”

The washerman said, “He said to me that he is not the Baba, Baba had gone out for a walk. He told me to rub my mute son’s face to a donkey’s, and my son was cured.”

Mama said, “You made a mistake. That was Baba himself. Go, and meet him. This is how he always speaks.”

The washerman came inside and touched Baba’s feet. He said, “Baba, I made a big mistake, I did not recognize you. I don’t even speak to Munim Ji from that day on.”

Baba said, “Hey, go. Go and don’t come back again or your son will become a mute again.”

The washerman came out and narrated the whole thing to me. (Personal communication during fieldwork, July 1997, Varanasi).

This story is interesting for several reasons. First because Chaman Munim was a complete stranger to Sarkar Baba when he first met him, he had no pre-conceived notions about his mysticism. Over time, as he got to know Sarkar Baba during his personal transactions, he realized he was in the presence of something extraordinary and began to pay attention to events. Second, this story sheds some light on Sarkar Baba's attempts to not be branded as a miracle worker, his attempt at hiding in plain sight. Otherwise, he need not have reversed the roles with Chaman Munim and asked the washerman not to come back? This reversal of roles and Chaman Munim's reaction to the role-reversal add comic elements to the story, as a fouling of great plans laid by men. It was not as if Sarkar Baba was averse to helping people who came to him. It was his attempt to disguise the fact that he was actually helping someone that makes it funny. It may also have to do with Chaman Munim's own sense of importance at feeling as if he was an active agent to bring succor to someone's life, the ever present pitfall of the ego in divine interactions. That is why, I think, Sarkar Baba branded him as an "agent" of sorts and pretended to accuse him of charging money, well-intentioned though Chaman Munim's action may have been. As mentioned before, Sarkar Baba let people suffer to the extent that their bodies and psyche could handle it, and then took upon himself the extra that would otherwise push them over the limit. In this case, the washerman did not have to do much at all, because even the cure that Sarkar Baba suggested to him, finding a donkey for his son's muteness, is too easy, because washermen in India do carry their loads on donkeys anyway. Whatever negative karmic effect this cure unleashed, was suffered by Chaman Munim because the washerman stopped talking to him and thought of him as a

dishonest person, thus harming his reputation. Also, Sarkar Baba was not like a bank where someone could walk in and get cash as needed. His was a holistic approach to life and people where, they learnt things and benefited by interacting with him. Sarkar Baba would have had a whole slew of ailing parents standing outside his door if he had not acted with the washerman as he did.

## 2. The Twenty Rupee Bill:

This story was told to me by Ghasi Ram of Chhatisgarh, although the state used to be Madhya Pradesh when the event happened. Ghasi Ram had acted as a mason on several of Sarkar Baba's ashram building projects in the region, and after a divine experience with the Goddess Ashtabhujā at Vidnyachal, he had become an ardent devotee of his. He also had an acute element of the *sevā-bhāva* (willingness to serve), a sentiment which community service in a voluntary organization like Sarkar Baba's necessarily entails. This story is remarkable for the subtlety with which it imparts an important lesson to the person concerned, a Seth Ji (prosperous businessman) in the Jashpur area.

At the Narayanpur ashram, construction work was in progress. All the day laborers worked with all their might. Under my (Ghasiram) direction, they all used to work very hard all day long. Every Friday, like clockwork, Baba would pay all the laborers through me. This process had been going on for many weeks.

One week a laborer could not reach the ashram on time to get his pay. A child in his family had become sick and he had to go to the doctor with him. The next Monday he came to the Narayanpur ashram. It was winter time, about nine or ten in the morning. Baba was sitting in the warmth of the sun, surrounded by many devotees, joking. That laborer came to Baba. Baba looked at him and said, "Do you need something?"

The laborer joined his palms and said, "Sarkar, please give me my last week's pay, my child is sick."

"You did not take your pay last week?" Baba asked.

"No Sarkar," he replied.

"Alright, take your pay," Baba said affectionately and called for me and asked "How much is his pay? Please give it to him."

I calculated. It came to twenty rupees. I did not have twenty rupees on me at that time and so I mentioned it to Baba. An Aughar's company, his joyous mood! Baba asked the people sitting around him, "Say, does anyone have twenty rupees, I will reimburse later."

Everyone sitting there checked their pockets. Per chance, no one had twenty rupees with them. A Seth Ji was also sitting there. Even he did not have twenty rupees on him. When everyone had checked their pockets and did not find twenty rupees, Baba said to the Seth Ji, "Please go to my room. In the cupboard there you will find twenty rupees. Please bring it and give it to this man."

Seth Ji went into Baba's room. He saw two iron cupboards there. He opened one of them and was stunned at what he saw. It seemed to him that the whole cupboard, from top to bottom, was stuffed full of hundred rupee bills. The bills were stuffed so tight that he could not pull out just one bill, try hard as he did. When he could not pull out a hundred rupee bill from this cupboard, he opened the second one in the hopes of finding twenty rupees there. He was amazed even more on opening the second cupboard. This one, too, was stuffed equally tight with hundred rupee bills. Seth Ji swooned on seeing this and fell to the ground.

When he did not come out for some time, Baba sent someone to check on him. By then Seth Ji had regained consciousness. He came out with the man Baba had sent to check on him. Baba saw him and asked, "Say, did you bring the money?"

Seth Ji shook his head in the negative.

"Why?" Baba asked.

What was Seth Ji to say? He replied, "Baba, there were only hundred rupee bills, that is why."

Baba looked at him and smiled, "So what. You could have brought a hundred rupee bill, we would have had it changed."

Seth Ji went pale. He did not have a twenty rupee bill in his own pocket when he had checked, but there had been a hundred rupee bill kicking around. Seth Ji had not been willing to part with it. This fact was not hidden from Baba. Baba had the laborer paid after taking the money from someone else. In this process, perhaps, Seth Ji also learnt a valuable lesson. (Personal communication during fieldwork, June 1998, Chhatisgarh).

It is evident from this story that Sarkar Baba made the Seth Ji aware that he knew all along he had the money to pay the laborer, but wanted his own honesty and faith to show through before making a final decision. And the way he communicated this to Seth Ji, only the Seth knew what was going on, no one else. He conjured up a vision that only Seth Ji could see. This vision can be classified as a miracle because everyone in the ashram knew there was never so much money to fill two steel cabinets so tight. How,

then, did Seth Ji see them there? The lesson in humility and service that Seth Ji got was subtle because he would have had to think about it long to realize what had happened.

Only he could realize it, no one else could do it for him.

### 3. Against All Odds:

This story was narrated by Mr. Vivekanand Sahay, a long time devotee of Sarkar Baba whom I have already mentioned above in relation to the “I Want Him to Become the

Railway Minister: story. Mr. Sahay was a gifted story-teller with an acute memory.

Hence this story is long, full of interesting descriptions of places, events and ceremonies.

Although I have edited the story considerably, I am presenting it here in his own words

because of the plethora of interesting elements it contains.

To talk about Baba is to provide a detail of 29 years of my life. If I sit here and tell you all my life, even then I will not be able to finish it. But first let me tell you how I met Baba for the first time. I was then the district Magistrate at Saharsa, Bihar. At that time I had landed in a difficult position with regard to my job....

In this condition I went to Ranchi on vacation and heard about a saint, Baba, from my paternal brother Mr. Jagadanand Sahay... I listened quietly to him talk about Baba, but since I had grievances against god himself, I really had no faith in listening about this saint. During my vacation another gentleman arrived on the scene, Mr. Lakshmi Narayan Singh. He was a police officer and used to work with my brother in Simdega, Bihar. He and my brother extended a donation book to me and told me that Baba did social work, and that I should also donate something towards his cause. With an empty heart I donated twenty rupees. That night, though, I began to think. Everyone had told me that you could think about Baba wherever you were; Baba would get to know of it, that he was omniscient, and extremely compassionate. People with the most debilitating diseases came to him and they all found respite with his blessings. I began to think if Baba was so powerful, would he understand my mental agony? Would he listen to me? And even if he did listen, would he remain silent like god, or would he do something about it?...

Nothing happened that night. But two days later, as I dozed off thinking similar thoughts, I had a dream. I saw a young saint of wheatish complexion who was wearing just a loincloth, who had a very impressive face shadowed with a

light growth of beard, and with piercing but compassionate eyes. I do not remember now whether he said something to me in the dream or not. But in my dream, he definitely had me sit with him for some time. Anyway, I woke up by and by with the feeling of having seen something firsthand. After this, I was transferred from Saharsa to Daltonganj, Bihar. I was given the charge of a sub-divisional magistrate (S.D.O) there.

I had been in Daltonganj for barely fifteen days. It was March-April, and I had just returned home in the evening after a long and tiring day at work, when two gentlemen arrived at my house. I was still changing inside when the peon came in and informed me that Raja Sahab Sonpura had arrived with a gentleman named Alakhniranjan Srivastav to see me. If I narrate truly the frustration of my heart at that time to you, I will have to say I did not appreciate people dropping by my house in this way, although Raja Sahab was still a very impressive man who had been a big landlord, almost a king in his own time and had all the trappings that his status accorded him.

I had heard the name of Raja Sahab Sonpura from my brother Mr. Jagadanand Sahay and Lakshmi Narayan Singh in Ranchi. I had been told that he was a great devotee of Baba's, and that he had Baba's grace. The person accompanying him was also a devotee of Baba's, and his nickname was Buchchanlal. I asked the peon to seat them in the living room. Then, half-heartedly, I came out because I was feeling very tired. I did not show him the appropriate respect due to a former king. In my authoritative style I asked him, "How can I help you?"

He was a great soul. He was a true gentleman. He perceived my arrogance, but in a very sweet voice he said, "Please be seated. We have come just to see you."

I sat down next to him and said, "Yes? I have just come back from work and I am very tired. If it is not a pressing matter then it will be better if you came back later."

Then Raja Sahab did a strange thing. With great intimacy, he scolded me thoroughly.... I felt sheepish when Raja Sahab scolded me in this manner. I felt I had truly made a mistake. I realized he had not come for personal work, but with some special purpose. I said, "Forgive me. I am very tired, so I behaved so uncouthly."...

He asked, "Do you know our Baba?"

I said, "Who is your Baba?"

He said, "Have you heard the name of Baba Bhagawan Ram?"

I replied, "Yes, I have heard it from my elder brother, just recently. I have heard he is very compassionate, and that he has great spiritual powers. But I do not know any more than this."

Raja Sahab used to wear an old country jacket. He took out a letter from one of its pockets, gave it to me, and said, "Please read this."

I read the letter, "Dear Raja Sahab. One of my devotees, Vivekanand Sahay, has come to Daltonganj as a Magistrate. He is new to Daltonganj. Please go and check on him to make sure he does not face any inconvenience or problem in this new place. And if he has some problem, please work towards its solution.

Vivekanand Sahay Ji is the younger brother of Jagadanand Sahay. Please convey my blessings to him.”

I felt stunned. It was as if the ground had slipped away from beneath my feet. I had never seen Baba, I had never met him. And I don't believe there would have been any circumstance in which Baba would have heard about me. So how did Baba write such a letter? Then, suddenly, a thought flashed through my mind. I had been praying to him within my mind to solve my problem. Perhaps he had heard me! I said, “Raja Sahab, first I beg forgiveness for my arrogance, and second, I have never met Baba. How did he write such a letter?”

Raja Sahab said, “One should always read very carefully what Baba writes. He has written, ‘a great devotee of mine Vivekanand Sahay.’ Surely, you must have felt some devotion when you heard about Baba from your brother, and he got to know of it. Surely, there is some problem in your mind for the solution of which you have prayed to him, and he heard it. That is why he gave me such instructions.”

I did not feel it right to disclose the enquiry being carried on in my case. But I certainly bowed to Baba in my mind, in the same form that I had seen the saint in my dream.

After that, Raja Sahab began to visit my place almost daily. Buchchanlal also always met me with great affection. It was then that I got a chance to hear about Baba in great detail. I was about 32 years old then. I had some arrogance, I had some rudeness. When they used to tell me about Baba, that nothing is hidden from him and that one finds solutions to all one's problems on meeting him, I would ask them in my innocence whether Baba could give me a huge bungalow with a beautiful garden and a fountain? Was Baba powerful enough to make me an Indian Administrative Service Officer (I.A.S.)? Was Baba so powerful that he could solve all my financial and material desires?

They used to say, “Vivekanand, only your name is Vivekanand. You talk like a very uncouth person. All the things that you have asked for are very simple for Baba. But you should think higher. Whatever you think that is still higher, can be found.”

At that time I used to wonder how I was ever going to meet with Baba, but I never discussed this with them. They told me that, often, while traveling to his ashram in Sogra, Jashpur, Baba used to pass by this way. When he came here next, they would try to arrange a meeting with him. In this way five months went by. I began to nurture both curiosity as well as devotion for Baba in my mind.

Let me mention here that I did not have very good relations with the then Collector of the region, Mr. J.G. Kunte... The situation was such that we did not even talk, when, normally, and S.D.O and his Collector speak at least a thousand times a day on various administrative matters, either on phone or personally. We used to communicate on little slips of paper, in writing.

Slowly, September of 1963 came by. That day too, Raja Sahab came carrying a postcard. It was written on the postcard, “You must have met Mr. Vivekanand Sahay. Please inform him that I am celebrating *navarātri* at Lucknow this time. If he so wishes, he is welcome to join us. Please explain this to him.”

Raja Sahab said, “Sahay Ji, this means that Baba has called you.”

Mr. R.K. Singh was the Chief Engineer at Precision Instruments Factory at Lucknow. Raja Sahab gave me the address. While leaving he told me he and Buchchanlal were leaving immediately to meet with Baba, and that they would spend the whole month with him. They asked me to make sure that I came to Lucknow.

Naturally, the Bihar government did not allow vacation time to magistrates during major holidays like Holi, Dashahra, Eid, Bakarid, Muharram, Ramnavami and Durga Puja, so as to maintain law and order in the state during these religiously charged periods. The S.D.O. used to be a crucial person to maintain peace during this time. I had received my temporary charge for this occasion. I was not on speaking terms with the Collector from whom I had to ask for leave. So I laughed in my mind. But I told Raja Sahab, I was not likely to get leave time during *navarātri* period. He said, “You don’t worry. If Baba has called you, you will get there. You just maintain your devotion, and a desire to see him.”

Raja Sahab went away. Next day he and Buchchanlal left for Banaras. As days passed I almost forgot what they had asked me to do.

I think it was the sixth day of spring *navarātri* in 1963. As I was sipping my tea in the morning I suddenly remembered Raja Sahab had asked me to arrive during *navarātri*. Today it was already the sixth day of it. If I left today, I would possibly reach Lucknow by the eighth, as Raja Sahab had insisted I should. To do that, I would have to take my family to Ranchi in Bihar, and then make my way onwards from there. And here, there was no chance of my getting leave. I did not have the courage to talk to the Collector. If I did, he would have reported against me thinking I was trying to shirk duty the first chance I got to show my talent. My wife advised me to trust in Baba and just send the leave application. Whatever had to happen, would happen.

I did so. There was a very simple and naïve peon who used to work for me. I gave him a note, halfheartedly. I wrote only this, “D. C. (Deputy Commissioner). I have some religious business. Please grant me leave for such and such dates of Dashahra and three days of personal leave. Vivekanand.” I told the peon, “Sahab will come to his Bungalow office shortly. His P.A. (Personal Assistant) will be there. Give this note to him and tell him, the S.D.O. has sent this note. It should be presented to the Collector immediately.” I explained to him not to hand the note to any peon in the Collector’s office.

The Collector’s Bungalow, sprawled in a compound of sixty acres, was merely fifty yards away from my house. I had not even finished my cup of tea when the peon came back. I am full of many weaknesses, instantly my anger flared up. I was livid with rage. I imagined he must have handed the note to another peon, that is why he had returned so quickly. As soon as I saw him, I burst upon him, “Why! You came back so soon?”

He began to say, “Sahab...”

I yelled at him, “What sahab-sahab!”

I yelled at him terribly. I kept scolding him for five minutes. Tears began to flow from his eyes I was so harsh on him. My wife stopped me, saying, the

peon was trying to say something, why didn't I give him chance to say it. I said to him, "Fine. What do you have to say."

He said, "Sahab. When I reached the Bungalow on my bicycle, I saw the Collector and his wife had come to the gate while strolling. When they saw me at the gate they asked me the purpose of my visit. I told them, I had come from the S.D.O.'s bungalow, and that you had given me a note. The Collector took it immediately."

I was nonplussed on hearing what the peon had to say. "Then?" I asked.

He replied, "He asked his wife to bring his pen. She went in and brought out his golden Parker pen. The Collector stood quietly till the time she came back, turning the note over in his hand, looking at it closely. Then he scribbled something on your note, gave it back to me, asked me to deliver it to you and also that I should ask you to talk to him on the phone."

I leapt for the note. On it, in English, was written, "Leave granted. The S.D.O. may please contact me before he proceeds on leave."

Now I was completely stunned. This was the second episode of Baba's grace on me. First, Baba had heard me when I had prayed to him in my mind, he had given me his *darśan* in a dream, and had sent a message through Raja Sahab. And this was the second episode of his grace. "He has heard my prayers, he is calling me to find a solution for it" I thought. From that day, devotion for Baba became even more deep in my heart. I called the Deputy Commissioner immediately, for the first time since I had been posted here six months ago. I said, "Greetings Sahab, this is Vivekanand."

He said, "Yes, yes, S.D.O. Sahab. You are very upset with me. What are you doing? Please get ready and come have breakfast with me. Please come immediately."

It was the strangest thing to happen, considering the background of the situation. I changed quickly and went to his place. He asked me, "Where will you go?"

I said, "Sahab, I have to go to Banaras."

He said, "Oh! You are going to perform *pūjā* there?"

I replied in the affirmative. "Then do one thing for me" he said, "I have heard you can get very beautiful sea-shell and *rudrākṣ* necklaces there. If it is no trouble to you, can you get one each for me and my wife?"

I said, "Certainly.:

"How will you go?" He asked.

I said, "I want to take my children to Ranchi, and then proceed."

"Oh my god!" He said. "It is already nine." He rang the bell immediately, called his P.A. and said, "Look, find out which bus goes to Ranchi after twelve in the afternoon. And take S.D.O. Sahab to his house."

The Collector sent the bus to my house via his P.A. I got on to the public bus at my home. With my family I went to Ranchi on that bus. I had never been to my natal home, Ranchi, after joining employment and so I was apprehensive my parents wouldn't let me go to Lucknow. But even there, Baba's grace prevailed. When I reached home my father asked, "How many days are you going to stay?"

I told him, I was going to leave right away to meet with Baba in Lucknow. “The children will remain here?” My father asked. I said yes. And that was that. I got the permission to go forward on my journey. When I asked my mother she handed me a hundred rupee bill and said, “Go, and go happily.”

This was a novel experience for me, for I had not expected to get permission to leave so easily from my parents. By now, it was four in the afternoon. I asked my nephew to quickly get me a bus ticket to Gaya, so I could catch Siyaldah Express from there for Lucknow at night. He told me there was no chance of my getting a ticket. But the railway station was also right in front of the bus station. He took me there with the idea that if I did not get the bus ticket, he would find a way to get me onto a train.

I and my nephew approached the bus conductor, who ignored us completely. After we had addressed him three times, he looked at us with disdain and replied, “Where are you coming from? There is no ticket. It all sold out by three today.”

Here, my ego of being a magistrate took force. I realized with a shock the transience of things. Just a few hours ago, the bus had come to my house to pick me up. And here, this lowly conductor was not even willing to talk to me straight. I was still in shock when someone put his hand on my shoulder from behind. I heard, “Say magistrate Sahab, no one recognizes you, eh?”

I turned around and found myself looking at my childhood friend from primary school till matric, Mahabir Prasad, who had by then become the P.A. to the governor of Bihar. On hearing him, even the conductor from Raj Transport realized I was a magistrate. He folded his hands in supplication and said, “Really, we don’t have a single ticket. But why don’t you call my owner, we will arrange for a special bus for you.”

Mahabir Prasad said to him, “Let it be, don’t worry. I will send off S.D.O. Sahab.”

He took me by my hand and we walked out of the bus station. He said, “We have met after a long time. I keep track of you, but you have forgotten the rest of us. Now you have become a big officer.”

After making some small talk, we had tea at a tea stall, then he bought a dozen bananas. Remember, these bananas have their own importance in this story. He bundled the bananas in his own handkerchief and put them in my hand. He said, “Keep them.”

I said, “What have I got to do with them?”

He insisted, “Keep them, keep them.”

I said, “Friend, give me the ticket quickly. I have to catch Siyaldah Express tonight.”

He smiled, “Don’t worry. It will happen. I will send you.”

I said with a little chagrin, “How in the world are you going to send me?”

He explained, “Look, I have five tickets for the deluxe air-conditioned bus. Now four of those travelers have arrived, but the fifth one has come down with a bad case of nausea and diarrhea. I had gone to the counter to return that ticket. When I saw you and realized what better use of this ticket than to give it to you! That is the ticket I have saved for you.”

I bowed to Baba in my mind thinking Baba, what Raja Sahab had said seems to be true. You are the one arranging my travel. If that is what is happening, I am not the one going to you, you are the one pulling me to yourself.

Anyway, I went to Gaya by the air-conditioned bus. At Gaya I got down at the railway station. Let me mention here that my travel budget at that time was very tight. I had approximately only three hundred rupees with me, that is why I had to travel in the third class compartment. When I looked at the line at the ticket counter I realized I wouldn't be able to buy the ticket even in four hours. I had a suitcase in my hand, a pillow tied in a rug under my arm, and a small bed tied in a bundle in my other hand. Both my hands were full. With all this luggage I somehow made my way through the crowd till the ticket counter, and then slowly turned back as I realized the futility of my exercise. I thought I would get on to the train without a ticket, and then ask the ticket conductor to give me a ticket right on the train. There was no other solution. By then, the fourth or fifth person standing from front of the line came out and asked me in a low voice, "Where will you go?"

I told him I had to go to Lucknow. He said, "Give me the money, I will get you the ticket."

At that time a third class ticket cost about thirty rupees. Without thinking, I gave him the money. He got back into the line with my money in his hands. After five minutes his turn came. He brought the ticket, handed it and the change in my hand, and ran so fast through the crowd I could not even thank him! I have never seen that man again. With the ticket in my hand and with the assistance of a coolie I made my way to the anticipated place for the second class sleeper coach because most likely, that would be the only compartment in which I would get space. When the train arrived I saw all the compartments packed like cans of sardines. The train was so full people were sitting on its roof. When the compartment door opened people from inside could not even get out because of the rush of the people trying to get in. Two or three ticket conductors were trying to make some space so people from inside could get out. The people outside waited for about a minute as I stood amongst them with despair. But after that suddenly a wave of people rushed from behind and my feet left the ground. I flew through the door with my luggage in both my hands, and landed with a loud thud against the door across the other side of the compartment. I was hurt. Blood began to spurt from my elbows and knees. The railway conductors inside the compartment, still focused on the crowd thronging from outside, pushed out ten-fifteen, however many people they could lay their hands on, and slammed the door shut. They thought they had pushed every infiltrator out. I lay next to the door on the other side, groaning in pain. When they had locked the compartment door they turned around and found me in the corner. One of those conductors was a Bengali gentleman. He exclaimed, "Hey, he remained inside!"

Then he spotted the blood gushing from my wounds. He exclaimed again, "Hey! You got hurt. Now if I give you space to sit you will ask me for a berth to sleep on."

I said, "No brother, I won't ask you for anything. Just give me some space to sit somewhere."

By then the guard's whistle sounded and the train left the station. That Bengali conductor said, "That, over there is the seat number thirteen. Go and sit there quietly. Don't ask me for anything more."

I bowed to Baba again. I had been able to make it inside the train. A little later that Bengali conductor came and sat down next to me for he had to check the ticket and charge me the seat fee. Very affectionately he asked, "How is your injury now?"

I told him I was feeling better. He asked, "Where do you work?"

I did not think it proper to mention that I was the S.D.O. from Daltonganj, so I just told him I worked in Daltonganj. "What work do you do?" he persisted.

I said, "I work there at the court."

He replied, "Ah! That is why I am asking you. What work do you do at the court?"

Then I told him I am the S.D.O. of Daltonganj. He became emotional and said, "That is why I thought, Sahab, that I have seen you before. My brother is a lawyer there. I have seen you in court when I was there with him. You are a gentleman, you got hurt so bad. Sahab, let's do one thing. Forgive me for your injuries, but we had no other option left. Let me check. If there is a berth being vacated at Mughalsarai or Dehri-on-Son in any compartment, I will try to get that berth for you. Otherwise I will arrange something else for you."

He checked when the train arrived at Dehri-on-Son and informed me that there was not an inch of space in the entire train to give to me. But he had consulted with his fellow conductors and devised a plan for me. I asked him, "What is the plan?"

He replied, "The luggage booth in this compartment is vacant today. You can go in there and we will lock you inside. You can sleep in there. I will get off duty after a few stations, but my fellow conductors will wake you up at five in the morning when the train reaches Faizabad."

Again I bowed to Baba because after my ordeal with so many obstacles I really wanted to sleep. I said in my mind, "Baba, you are great. This can only be your grace."

They did as per the plan. They made my bed inside the luggage booth and locked me in. I could not get out under any circumstance. I hadn't eaten anything since my departure from Daltonganj in the morning and so pangs of hunger were racking me. Now I noticed the dozen bananas Mahabir Prasad had forced upon me at Ranchi. I made short order of them. I ate the bananas and put their peel under my seat for I could not get out to dispose of them. After this meager meal, without drinking water or rinsing my mouth clean for there was no water, I bowed in my mind before the Baba of my imagination, whom I had never seen. The next morning I was woken up by railway officials at five in the morning for Faizabad was about to arrive. They tied my bed for me, cleaned up the banana peels, and let me off at Lucknow station. As I stepped down on the platform the desire to eat something and drink tea took hold of me. I entered the station restaurant and ordered some fish fry. Then I began to munch upon them meditatively. Now, for a few minutes, leave me here in the restaurant and listen to what was happening in Lucknow at that time.

At Mr. R.K. Singh's place in Lucknow where *navarātri* celebrations had been observed Baba called Raja Sahab and Buchchanlal and gave them some instructions, which I found out later. Baba said to Raja Sahab, "Raja Sahab, you had mentioned that the magistrate is going to come here?"

Raja Sahab replied, "Yes Baba, he had said he would try, but he did not think he would get leave time."

"Ye-e-s," Baba said, "it is possible he did not get leave. It is very difficult for those people to get leave time. But, per chance, if he did get some time off, do you think he might be coming?"

Raja Sahab later told, "I knew how Baba talked. Instantly I said, 'Yes Sarkar. We two should go and check the train station once.'"

Baba smiled, "Yes, please take the jeep and go check. He is new in this town, per chance if he has arrived he may have some difficulty finding his way out of the station. You *did* give him the address, didn't you?"

Raja Sahab answered, "Yes Sarkar. I have given him the address."

"Ah, then he may be able to find his way. But there is no harm if you two went and checked at the station." Baba said.

So Buchchanlal and Raja Sahab arrived at the station. They checked from the engine to the guard's bogey, then back from the guard's bogey to the engine. They did not find even a trace of me. They returned and informed Baba that I had not arrived.

"Ye-e-s, he must not have come," Baba said. "He must not have come, he must not have got time off. These magistrates and such, they are just like that. But Raja Sahab, where all did you look for him?"

He answered, "Sarkar, from the engine till the guard's compartment and then back. Buchchanlal was standing at the exit gate and I looked through all the compartments. We didn't find him anywhere."

Baba said, "Ah yes, let it be, he must not have come. But there is one thing Raja Sahab. These magistrates and such, these people are used to drinking tea in the morning, aren't they?"

Raja Sahab said, "Yes Baba, he must drink tea. Yes, I know Sahay Ji drinks tea."

"Hey, then is it possible he might be drinking tea in some hotel?" Baba asked.

Raja Sahab later told me, "At that time we both felt our ears going red and hot! We said to Baba, 'Sarkar, it is possible. Sarkar, we will go and check again right now.'"

They both returned to Lucknow railway station. When they were setting foot in the railway restaurant, I was finishing the last bite of my fish fry. Raja Sahab came and yelled at me. He said people go to visit their guru first on arriving at some place, and you are so uncouth you devoted yourself to food as soon as you arrived here!

Anyway, I went out of the station with them. When I reached Mr. R.K. Singh's place I found that the *navarātri* celebrations had already concluded the night before. The place where the *pūja* had been performed, in the living room, looked very beautiful with the *kalaś* (clay pot with water inside) covered with

flower garlands and the smell of incense in the air. I got a chance to observe how courteously and humbly Buchchanlal and Raja Sahab spoke with their guru. Raja Sahab took me to the door of a room and spoke very quietly to me, “Baba is inside. You go in and greet him.”

Hesitantly, I said, “You come with me.”

He said, “No. We won’t go in. You go.”

Once again I bowed to the Baba of my imagination. I took off my shoes and quietly entered the room. I saw a saint sitting in lotus position on a square cot which was covered with white sheets, and on either side of which were thick, long, round pillows, also covered in white covers. His hair was very small. His eyes were very large and exuding an enormous power and attraction, with a slight smile on his lips, I saw him sitting there. I felt overwhelmed on seeing him. An electricity ran through my body. My mind felt stilled. I cannot describe that moment now. I was so benumbed I did not even greet him properly. I just folded my hands and said, “*Praṇām* (greetings) Baba.”

In our first meeting, the first sentence that Baba spoke to me was, “Oh, you have arrived! I have been waiting for you for so long!”

Now I came to. I bowed to him and put my head at his feet. Baba blessed me saying, “*Nārāyaṇ, kalyāṇ ho* (God, bless you).” Then he said, “You go, eat something, and then go to sleep.”

I came out and found myself surrounded by a whole group of new friends. Daltonganj party also came to me. I began talking with them when suddenly Raja Sahab appeared from somewhere and said, “Baba has asked you to eat something and go to sleep. What he says, should be done.” Then I realized it was not enough to just see a saint. To be one with him, one needs to follow the inspirations coming from him. They brought some snacks for me and then made me sleep on a cot. In this way I had my first *darśan* of Baba.

It was also on this very night – now I understand because at that time no one had told me, not even Baba – that I was initiated. On the night of *mahānavamī* during the 1963 spring *navarātri*, I was initiated at Naimisharanya.

It so happened that I ate and slept as Baba had asked me to do. I slept like a log. At five in the evening I woke up. I heard a lot of noise outside in the foyer. I got up and peeped out. In the foyer were about 70-80 people. Raja Sahab Sonpura was standing next to Baba. Buchchanlal was also there. Raja Sahab had a pen and a paper in his hands. I guessed that some sort of a list was being prepared. I went quietly to the foyer and stood behind everyone else. Within two or three minutes I noticed that everyone present was saying “I will go” and Baba was saying to most everyone “No, not you. And not you. And not you.” I heard only no’s from Baba, not a single yes. My heart began to beat fast with the thought that if Baba leaves this place then what am I going to do here. Will Baba take me with him, wherever he was going? But I couldn’t ask anyone, nor could I reach Raja Sahab because that would have meant wading through the whole crowd.

In about an hour’s time the meeting dispersed. It was now six in the evening. I saw all those who were sitting in the meeting rush out with their luggage. Some began to run. Then I went and asked Raja Sahab what was going

on. He replied that Baba was going someplace, but I shouldn't worry, because I was to go with him. All these people who were rushing about will also reach that place. Some will take the train, some will take the bus, although Baba had asked most of them not to come. No one will listen, they will all be there. I asked, "But *where* will they all reach?" He said, "I cannot tell you that right now. You will get to know when the time comes."

I felt relieved that I would go with Baba, that I wouldn't be left here alone. But I was dying of curiosity about our destination, wondering why was it being kept so secret.

In the evening a caravan of five cars left R.K. Singh's place. At the head of it was the jeep with some young people of the ashram in it. Baba was in the second car, and I was in the fourth. We went on driving, and driving. About sixty miles from Lucknow we stopped at a well-populated town. By now my car was right behind Baba's. When the car stopped I walked quietly to Baba's car and stood by the window with my hands folded expectantly. Baba called out, "Hey magistrate, listen."

This was Baba's first conversation with me, in Lucknow, I had just received his blessing. I replied promptly, "Yes Baba."

"Can we get some spicy chick-peas here?" Baba asked.

I asked, "What kind of chick-peas Baba?"

Baba said, "Oh, don't we call it *canājor garam* (roasted, highly spiced chickpeas), can we get it?"

This was a totally new town for me, but this was Baba's first request to me so I felt exceedingly happy. I said, "Let me check Baba, it should be available somewhere here."

I started walking and crossed a square, then I crossed the next one, then I crossed the third one. There were many kinds of vendors, some were selling spicy puffed rice, some were hawking highly spiced water puffs, some were yelling out about spiced fritters soaked in yogurt, but there was not one hawker selling spicy chickpeas. I felt very disappointed, very sad, that Baba asked me for a little thing and I was failing in that mission. But it was getting late. I realized I would take at least fifteen minutes getting back to the car. I started walking back at a fast pace. As I reached our caravan I saw a chickpea hawker standing behind the last car. I went so far and returned, but I found it where I had started from.

I had him prepare about 15 cones of chickpeas and handed them to Baba respectfully. Baba extended his hand and very affectionately he took them. He counted out three packets and gave them to me. I realized there were two other companions in the car with me. Then we started driving again. We stopped after fifteen more miles. As we got out of the car, it was about nine-thirty in the evening. Baba had a flashlight in his hand with which he guided the path for us. By chance I found myself walking right behind Baba. Baba glanced back almost imperceptibly to make sure I was following him, and then he began to tell me about the place. He asked, "Have you ever visited this place before?"

I replied, "No Baba."

"This place is called Naimisharanya," Baba said, "have you heard of Naimisharanya?"

I answered, “Yes Baba, I have heard about it in our myths and legends. It is also mentioned in the *Satyanārāyaṇ kathā*.”

Baba seemed to smile, “Yes, this is the very same place. Ancient Ṛṣi and munis used to come to this place. We are going to their seat. The place where Vedavyas had written the Vedas, we are going to that place in Naimisharanya.”

We walked on for a mile and then we came to our designated place. It was a beautiful place. It was not thickly forested or surrounded by mountains. There was a small hillock next to which the river Gomati was flowing. There was a huge banyan tree under and all around whose trunk had been built a cemented platform for people to sit on. On it was written “Vyas Seat.” There were many other such cemented platforms on which people could sit or sleep. It took some time for the people to get organized. What happened after that was the first strange but invaluable experience of my life.

Baba asked everyone to follow him. We all walked up to the banks of river Gomati. Baba addressed me there. He said, “This is Gomati river. It has great significance. People have done many penances and ascetic practices on its banks. Look, this is regarded as the place where even Vedavyas used to live.”

Baba showed us the whole place and we returned to the Vyas Seat. R.K. Singh, Buchchanlal, Raja Sahab, all the other people who knew Baba from before got busy in organizing things. By then many others had arrived by train and bus and had joined us. In all we were about 125 people there. Quickly they unloaded leaf plates and many kinds of foods. It included *roṭī*, boiled rice, cooked lentils, stuffed and roasted dough-balls, and many kinds of finger foods. We all sat down in a large circle. I began to walk towards the edge of the circle when Baba signaled me with his eyes to sit next to him. I sat down next to Baba, on his left side, in that circle.

I had no idea what was going to happen. I saw a leaf plate (*pattal*) placed before every person in the circle. I thought, oh, seems like Baba has come for a picnic, for up until now, this kind of eating-out was associated only with picnics in my family. Next, every food item that had been brought was served to each individual on those plates. Whatever was served to everyone else was also served to Baba. The serving used to begin from Baba, then to me, and onwards around in the circle till the server reached Baba again. Baba’s large sea-coconut begging bowl was lying next to him. When everything had been served Baba picked it up. He took it in his left hand and raised it up. A devotee poured in three bottles of whiskey, filling it. Baba recited some *mantras*. Now that I try to remember, it seems they were “*Śivohaṃ, Bhairavohaṃ, Gurupadaratoḥaṃ*.” Then Baba drank from that bowl and extended his hand with the bowl towards me. I did not know that I should take it from him. Raja Sahab Sonpura was sitting next to me. He whispered in my ear, “Quick, quick, take it.”

I took it and began to look at Raja Sahab. He said quietly, “Hey! Quick, quick, quick, drink some and pass it on.”

I felt my limbs going cold. I had never tasted alcohol in my life before. I had no idea what it would taste like. Apprehensively, I took a sip, and quickly passed the bowl on to Raja Sahab. I didn’t taste anything, it felt like water although the bowl was full of undiluted whiskey. There was a slight whiff of

alcohol, but that was all. By the time I collected myself I saw that the bowl had gone around the circle from hand to hand and had come back to Baba. Baba again recited some mantras which I don't remember anymore. Baba extended the bowl to me again. This time I took courage and swallowing a deeper gulp, passed it on to Raja Sahab without any problem. By now I had become an expert. The third time when the bowl came to me I made no mistake, I bowed to Baba in my mind, drank without any trepidation with a stable mind, and passed it on. After this everyone ran to Baba with food from their leaf plate in their hand and they would put the handful in Baba's mouth. Baba would also pick up food from his plate and put it in their mouth. I did the same. Baba also picked up a handful from his plate, whatever came to his hand which included *roṭī* and egg, and put it in my hand. That was my *prasād*. Raja Sahab, who was my unofficial guide, signaled me to eat it myself, not to share it with anyone. We finished our meal and then we sat down at our respective places in the circle. Baba recited some *mantras* again with a very peaceful, joyful countenance, and I just cannot describe the beauty of that scene, or the feelings it evoked within me. Every pore of my body felt joyful. Baba spoke aloud the *mantra* "Om" and everyone repeated it. There were many other *mantras* but I have no recollection of them. After this the *pūjā* ended (I did not know then that this was *pūjā*). Then one by one everyone went and bowed at Baba's feet and Baba hugged everyone individually. I did the same.

After everything was over Baba went and sat at the Vyas Seat. He asked everyone to find a place under the trees and rest. Then he got up from his seat and indicated a particular bench with his flashlight for me to lie down upon. Baba went back to his seat and I sat down on that bench. After that, I was surprised, people who knew me as well as those who did not, came and hugged me and congratulated me. I could not understand why. Raja Sahab said, "Such a big event happened in your life today Sahay Sahab. Your past karmic effects were changed and you were initiated. Guru has given this initiation to you himself in the ritual of *Cakrapūjan*. You are great. You are blessed." (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, New Delhi).

This story has all the elements of angst, skepticism, action, fortune, and descriptions of ritual detail that remind us of Sanskrit dramas or period novels. But more importantly, it is a very honest and human story that takes us through the process of becoming faithful, a believer, a devotee, and an initiated disciple. Mr. Sahay, an officer in the Bihar government administration, had his own ego and viewpoint on life till he got into difficulty with his job. That insecurity, and not some grandiose quest for the truth, opened him up to divine intervention. I don't know how Sarkar Baba found out about him – many a times he just seemed to know things – but his letters, and his devotees

narrating stories to Mr. Sahay began to build his faith. The test became to get to Lucknow in time for *navarātri* against all odds – getting leave from a job with a higher officer not on good terms; taking immediate leave from parents in a joint family situation after a long absence; getting a bus ticket; getting a railway ticket while encumbered impossibly with luggage in an endless line; getting into a packed train, finding place on the train; and finally, a reception party from the saint of his dreams! Each one of these problems was solved as if by a miracle. All throughout the narrative we get an overwhelming sense of grace and thankfulness. But the final sense of acceptance by the divine comes at the end of the story – after the *cakrapūjan* ceremony at Naimisharanya – when Mr. Sahay becomes initiated unbeknownst to him! The story has marvelous instances of how a community gets built by the simple act of telling stories, and how faith can propel folks to untiring service.

It is also true that once Sarkar Baba began to wander in the city after enlightenment, there were certainly folks who did not have faith in a young man dressed in rags who was attributed with Shiva-like powers. Sarkar Baba never countered their criticism directly, but there are instances from his life where he did demonstrate to them the authenticity of his abilities in an indirect manner, without overtly performing a miracle. This story about the *mahant* (priest or abbot) of Kāla-Bhairava<sup>19</sup> temple in Varanasi is illustrative of this point. Kāla-Bhairava is widely understood as the “sheriff” of Varanasi. All denizens of the city are under his rule. The priest of the temple, therefore, certainly had pride in his position as being associated with that temple. Here is an excerpt from the book *Brahmaniṣṭha Pādya*:

One day the priest of Viśvanāth temple came to visit Baba. Mahāprabhu (Sarkar Baba) was strolling in the garden at that time. As he was strolling, (Sarkar Baba)

picked up a rose flower and asked the priest if he could take him for a visit to Kāla-Bhairava (temple)? The priest replied with pride in his voice, ‘Why not?’ His ego was not lost on Bhagwan (Sarkar Baba). With great pride the priest put Baba in his car and started. The sky was absolutely clear at that time but by the time they reached Bhairavnath Chaumihani a few minutes later, suddenly the sky became dark and within seconds it began to pour. The whole road became flooded. It became impossible to move forward. As a result, the priest had to turn back without succeeding in taking Baba to Kāla-Bhairava. When they reached back to the garden Baba got out of the car. He threw the flower away in one direction. The priest’s pride had been shattered. He humbly took his leave from Mahāprabhu and went home. (Pandey 1965:21, my translation, gloss added.)

These incidents suffice to present the perception of Sarkar Baba as endowed with socially recognizable charisma in the city of Varanasi and its hinterland. With this recognition also came authority which was based on the recognition of spiritual accomplishments. It also implied, however, that the solitary life that Sarkar Baba used to follow would have to be given up, and he would need to become available to all those who came to him for numerous different reasons. Sarkar Baba did have the choice, at this point, to walk away from social life which was building around him, but he chose not to. Instead, he chose to institutionalize his charismatic authority in a social service organization, Shri Sarveshwari Samooh.

The recognition that Sarkar Baba had as a spiritually enlightened saint, however, is not exclusive to him, for saints in other traditions even within Hinduism have similar recognition, either as pointed out by their gurus, or through their own actions and behaviors. Amongst the Radhasoamis the spiritual talents of their founding guru Shiv Dayal Singh (1818-1878, later known as Soamiji Maharaj) was recognized by Tulsi Saheb, who was the guru of Soamiji Maharaj’s parents, although some disciples do claim that he was a spiritually autonomous person (Babb 1986:20-21). Among the Brahmakumaris, Dada Lekhraj (1876-1969) who founded the movement began to have

visions later in his life which induced states of trance in him, and these were recognized by his family and friends, who then came and listened to his discourses (Babb 1986:99-101). Sathya Sai baba, who was born in 1926, had a birth “heralded by miracles,” and his miraculous powers were later recognized even further. At age thirteen he revealed that he was an incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi (Babb 1986:162-163).

What is prominent in Baba’s life is that he went through a whole elaborate process of hard *sāadhanā*, just as Buddha is said to have done, to arrive at the accomplishments that were recognized in him. It is because of this life process which stresses renunciation for a spiritual quest, that the aghor tradition differs from other movements. The Radhasoami movement, for example was perceived as a householder’s path right from the start where the presence of *sādhus* was not encouraged. The Brahmakumaris remain largely an urban based group which stresses communal yoga practices, and Sathya Sai Baba’s life portrays miracles right from the beginning, without the need for *sāadhanā*, and his discipleship is also primarily urban and affluent (Babb 1986). It is because Sarkar Baba left his home and wandered along the riverbanks and cremation grounds that those who came in contact with him during that process later returned to him when his authority was recognized. As a result, Sarkar Baba’s following began more as a rural, grassroots movement, which began to have urban participation at a later date. Perhaps it was for this reason that he situated his main ashram, the Kusht Sewa Ashram, on the outskirts of the city of Varanasi, on the periphery between the urban and the rural.

These stories also establish Sarkar Baba’s position as a natural leader but, as Weber has mentioned about charismatic leadership, Sarkar Baba’s life’s charisma draws

from the way he actually used to live, not by his birth status, and not only by what he used to say in his public talks, or during interactions with devotees in “individual transactions.” These individual transactions, however, do have a crucial role in how Sarkar Baba imparted his knowledge to those who came to him, slowly, meticulously, “normally” in an everyday mundane manner so that, if there were miracles happening, they were understood as a light going off in the person’s own mind as realization came to him in a flash, not as a performative act, which marks some other contemporary saints, most prominent among them Sathya Sai Baba. There are other saints and movement leaders such as the founding fathers of the Radhasoamis and the Brahmakumaris, where their charisma draws from the vision that they have had, and the faith that their devotees have in their person, and again, miracles are perceived in a very subjective manner in the everyday lives of the individual, rather than as a show and tell variety of it. Babb aptly terms it the principle of devotional ‘recognition’ and qualifies it:

“... Given Radhasoami assumptions about the way the cosmos works and their implicit notions about the logic of interpersonal transactions, inward recognition of a ‘true guru’ can be a medium for a special kind of redemptive self-recognition. This involves a social-psychological dimension of religious experience that we shall see exemplified, though differently, in other movements too... Once we penetrate to the symbolic subsurface of the Brahma Kumaris’ millennial expectations and gender concerns, we find... the question of identity implicates matters of history, memory, vision, and interpersonal transactions. In both traditions we find a similar stress on the recognition of spiritually significant others as a basis for a deepened or transformed sense of self.” (Babb 1986:10-11)

In Sarkar Baba’s case too, when the devotee in question realized internally the fact of a miracle having taken place, he or she would feel a very different, usually elated sense of joy and elevated sense of identification with him, as someone who has the spiritual wherewithal of receiving the grace of an enlightened saint. For those who believe in a spiritual quest, these stories also throw light on the nature and power of a

spiritual quest, especially, how a person driven by that quest remains focused, whatever the odds may be.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have looked at Sarkar Baba's life and behavior in the context of nationalism and formation of a civil society organization, an institution called Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, which could be active in the social life of India in particular, and more generally, be open to humanity. I have tried to show that unlike the nationalism that emerged, as shown by scholars, as a reaction to the colonial experience, which tried to present Hinduism as a monotheistic religion and resorted to abstract theories of the Vedanta, Sarkar Baba's was a very organic and homegrown kind of view and practice of Hinduism. His Hinduism, as well as nationalism, was based on a perception of Indian history of course, but it was not fuelled by rhetoric against rival groups, but in fact, was energized by his own ascetic way of life and his love for humanity, his sense of justice, and his feeling of equal treatment for fellow beings. While Sarkar Baba avoided politics, he could not avoid politicians who came to him, and he found a way of contributing to the larger political national scene by helping those politicians he thought had the character and merit to do something for society at large, as well as the institution he had founded. While remaining away from politics, he was actually hurt by the pain inflicted on India by the downing of the Babari Masjid, as well as the assassination of Indira Gandhi on religious grounds. He did not shy away from criticizing such acts when he could, but his activism remained very personal and very low key so he would not come into media limelight. But remaining low key did not mean that he would neglect the

society he founded. He worked tirelessly to create Shri Sarveshwari Samooh into a civil society organization that had a real purpose, of integrating humanity as best as it could, generated an atmosphere of equality and justice that was based on respect and affection for each other, not necessarily on a rule of law. This, of course, led to his kind of universalism, as I have discussed in the preceding chapter.

Further, as with all aspects of his life, there was a certain sense of mysticism in all he did, and that included politics, as well as a sense of unbounded mysticism in personal transactions. The stories of Sarkar Baba's conversation in a strange language with a seemingly ethereal saint who appeared and disappeared at will as discussed in the previous chapter, or his intercession on behalf of politicians like Shri Hanumathaiya or Shri Morar Ji Desai already give us a good picture of this mysticism which appears liminal and beyond categorization. But more important are his everyday life so-called miracles, with a washerman, with a jeweler, with a Seth Ji, with a government servant, which made people begin to understand that once the halo of mysticism descends in a person, it imbues every aspect of their life. Also, in contrast to Swami Dayanada's take on Blavatskian spiritualism where he dissociated himself from it, Sarkar Baba's spiritualism subsumed it, and therefore, there were many more variegated stories to assure devotees that he was something more than an ordinary human being, and being in his presence, somehow, they were touched by divine grace. Simple things like creating a situation to make a devotee aware of something, like he did with the Seth Ji and his hundred rupee bill, or ensuring that Mr. Sahay had divine help every step of the way till Lucknow, are all a part of mystique and persona which turned all interaction with him into something more than ordinary. For the devotees and believers, besides the social

work program that his institution carried on, on a personal basis, this was the core attraction which brought them to him. Once this individualized transaction was confirmed by a subtle event that bordered on miraculous, it increased their faith in his powers, and motivated them to follow the teachings he was imparting and to work with him in eradicating the social evils he was fighting against.

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<sup>1</sup> See footnote 22 above.

<sup>2</sup> In Hindi, *Mahāvaiśvānar*

<sup>3</sup> For an engaging discussion of food or “grain” as an epitome of the divine see Gold 1998(2):150-171.

<sup>4</sup> A dead body burning on the pyre sometimes sits up when heat begins to warp the muscles. The dead body is then made to lay down forcibly so it may burn faster.

<sup>5</sup> Murar Ji Desai had become the Prime Minister of India at a later date.

<sup>6</sup> Jagjiwan Ram had been on several important cabinet posts, including defense and had also become the Federal Minister for Food and Agriculture.

<sup>7</sup> Sarojini Mahishi, Kannada writer, politician, educator.

<sup>8</sup> The then Prime Minister of India.

<sup>9</sup> The district (county) adjacent to the south of the district of Varanasi.

<sup>10</sup> The post of the Railway Minister is considered very important. It is definitely, a higher echelon cabinet position.

<sup>11</sup> This incident, which happened near Jorhat in Assam on the 4<sup>th</sup> of November 1977, is recorded in the resolution passed by the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly:

Sl. No. **RESOLUTIONS - 1977**

Date

- |     |   |          |
|-----|---|----------|
| .1. | <b><u>Resolution : Resolution concerning the providential escape of the Prime Minister of India, Shri. Morarji Desai.</u></b> | 16.11.77 |
|-----|---|----------|

The resolution was moved in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by Capt. Williamson A. Sangma (Chief Minister).

**The text of the Resolution was -**

"that the Members of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly assembled at a meeting of the House on the 16th November, 1977 do hereby express their deep sense of relief on the providential escape of the Prime Minister of India Shri. Morarji Desai, when the plane in which he was travelling crash landed on the 4th November, 1977 near Jorhat in Assam and pray to the Almighty to grant him many more years of valuable service to the Nation.

The Members of the Assembly also do hereby place on record their homage to the members of the crew of the ill fated plane who made the supreme sacrifice of laying down their lives in the discharge of their duties and express their heart-felt condolences to the bereaved families.

The Members of the Assembly also convey their appreciation of the timely help rendered by the people from the villages situated near the place of the accident.

The Motion was carried and the resolution was adopted.

Source: <http://megassembly.gov.in/resolutions/1977.htm> (downloaded 4/23/2007)

<sup>12</sup> *Brahm* is the Hindu word for the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God. *Brahm*, unlike Vishnu or Shiva or Brahma, does not have any form, color or any other perceptible attributes.

<sup>13</sup> Hindu scriptures view time as cyclical in nature, with very long periods, or ages, that repeat. Four such yugas are Satyug, Tretā, Dvāpar and Kalyug, the present yuga. Each age has its own particular characteristics.

<sup>14</sup> *Svacchandatantra* regards the body as having six sheaths, namely *man* (mind), *buddhi* (intellect), *ahamkāra* (ego), *gyānendriya* (senses of perception), *karmendriya* (senses of action) and *guṇas* like *sattva* (purity) (ST II:4-5). However, it also qualifies that Vedānta recognizes five sheaths, namely *annamaya*, *prāṇamaya*, *manomaya*, *vjñānamaya* and *ānandamaya* (ST II:5 fn).

<sup>15</sup> For a comprehensive treatment of the “divine birth” instances in the oral epic stories of India, see Blackburn (1989:15-32).

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.swaminarayan.org/lordswaminarayan/biography/1.htm>. Accessed 6/21/2007.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.babajiashram.org/pages/about-haidakhan-babaji.php>. Accessed 6/21/2007.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.avatarmeherbaba.org/erics/bababiog.html>. Accessed 6/21/2007.

<sup>19</sup> Kāla-Bhairav is a fierce form of God Shiva. Kāla-Bhairav is also regarded as the protective deity of Banaras.

## Chapter 6

### Concluding Summation

Writing this dissertation has been a very interesting exercise for me. It has allowed me to put together two kinds of diverse areas of human activity into one. On the one hand, it has been a labor of love, generated by the experiences and curiosities I have had in association with Sarkar Baba; on the other, it has been an academic exercise, an anthropological attempt to bring together micro-history, hagiography, folklore, religious and comparative studies together in an attempt to understand how a modern day religious-spiritual scenario has been shaped by the past, if only with reference to a single case study.

David Gary Shaw makes three very perceptive observations when he writes that, on the one hand the cultural functions that history and religion fulfill respectively could almost be substituted one for the other, because of the close identification of the way in which they reconcile human beings to their freedom and their limitations. On the other hand, history is opposed to religion in that it works against it, a notion which he states to be an “artifact of modernity” (Shaw 2006, 45:1). His emphasis is that while talking about modernity, history has to be taken into account, a notion I agree with in the context of my first three chapters, which situated the ancient Kāpālikas and the modern Aughaṛ ascetics within a historical context *vis à vis* the Buddhist tradition specifically, and Nath, Sufi, etc. traditions generally, where I looked at the relationships -- the continuities as well as divergences -- between them. The third point Shaw makes, which he attributes to Herodotus, is:

...the gods, their saints, or their oracles typically entered the scene only to help direct and illuminate *human* actions... Herodotus loved the doings of

people, the stranger the better, and confirms the value of one traditional view, namely, that historiography's special role is to study humanity, its notable people or groups of people and their actions. If this is so, the relationship between history and religion may contain some fundamental tensions of orientation, for religion very often asks, as does astronomy, about worlds beyond... By contrast, for many and for a long time, history was essentially a turning away from religion... an effort to focus attention on the purely human. (Shaw 2006, 45:2-3).

This is an important point that he makes, one that is intrinsically relevant to the task recognized as the innate field of anthropologists, for it links seamlessly the triad of history, religion, and modernity. Religion has long been taken as anti-modern with the understanding that as modernity gains ground, religion will fade away into insignificance. But in fact, it is the opposite that seems to be happening in the modern world (Shaw 2006, 45:4). Not only has the human curiosity about the "worlds beyond" not diminished, religion has gained more ground for forming the basis for politics, economy, health and fitness, and even international terrorism. Commenting on the writing of Constantin Fasolt, Shaw attributes to him the idea that:

...modernity has indeed undermined the ability of *traditional religion* to fulfill the role that the world and human nature had once given it. Fasolt tells us that something may well have changed with the coming and going of the modern age that has left 'traditional religion' transformed, some of its necessary functions performed by other cultural forms. If... traditional religion was once effective at reconciling the existential gap between the self and the world, the self and its limits, then it is certain that for many people... this is no longer the case. They turn elsewhere for help... (Shaw 2006, 45:8).

Within this historical progress through the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries was a tension between the need to find the truth on the one hand, and on the other, the necessity to care for the other (Shaw 2006, 45:9). I take these two points, the need to seek the truth, and the necessity to care for the other, as elements which are intrinsically related to the spiritual quest, and one does not find completion without the other. Especially in the Aghor tradition this is a fundamental tenet as enunciated by Sarkar

Baba, but it is reflected also, in varying degrees, in other traditions that have developed with the coming of the modern age, the Radhasoamis, the Brahmakumaris and the Sathya Sai Baba tradition. Contrary to the quote above, instead of losing the “traditional” function of religion, these modern traditions, or in the case of Aghor, an ancient tradition in the modern times, not only still fulfills this function, it also expands it to subsume other areas of life which may be regarded as more secular.

When I consider how Sarkar Baba established a new seat for the Aghor tradition with his leprosy hospital at Parao, not too far away from the well-established and recognized seat of the Aghor tradition at Krin Kund Sthal at Bhelupura, Varanasi, I cannot but notice the change he has administered in the way in which his disciples conduct themselves as social beings. His establishment of a civil society organization dedicated to social service has certainly added a new dimension to the traditional view of Aghor practices.

In presenting Sarkar Baba’s life story before the readers within the framework of micro-history of lived religion which I had discussed in the first chapter, especially those stories that form a part of the oral tradition in the hinterland of Varanasi, I have used some even though they may seem outlandish, if they portray a certain point or shed some light on the Aghor way of life. Although my fieldwork yielded many more stories that can be narrated either in a gathering of devotees for *satsang*, or around a campfire in the woods for entertainment, I have not included all so that the narrative would not exceed the specific purpose of this academic exercise.

My academic exercise, of course, has been to look at the life of Sarkar Baba in the context of religion in modern society and the development of religious traditions over

history, as well as the nature of individual transactions that illuminate his ideas on nationalism, humanism, universalism, and aspects of guru particularism reflected in his daily life and behavior. I have attempted this exercise comparatively as well as historically. Since my interest is in the Aghor tradition specifically, I have provided as much as can be gleaned of its history, and of its perceptions through the ages. Through discussion and presentation of historical material, I have demonstrated the strong possibility of links and exchanges between the Aghor and the Buddhist traditions, as well as other traditions like the Naths, especially, and Sufis, more generally, who have influenced each other mutually over the centuries. They form, as it were, an almost inseparable helix in time where the give and take between them is so complex that it is hard to extract with exactitude which tradition influenced which. It also sheds some light on why, through the centuries, Aghor ascetics have been perceived in a particular way.

As discussed in the first and the second chapters, the motivations of colonial administrators and their largely Brahmanic sources, were biased by their limited understanding of the Aghor tradition, as well as the idiosyncratic way in which Aghor ascetics portray themselves. My discussion of Baba Kinaram's life, in conjunction with the translation of his *Vivēksār*, however, gives us a good perspective on the fundamentals of Aghor philosophy. Further discussions on this topic also show how the Aghor philosophy of Baba Kinaram's tradition has a lot in common with the Vaishnava philosophy, while retaining the Shaiva-Shakta core intact.

My comparative discussion of the nature of ascetic practices of the Buddha and Sarkar Baba gives us a perspective on common threads of history and practice between the two traditions. It also sheds some light on why Buddhist monks were so comfortable

in Sarkar Baba's company, participating in the activities of the Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, and why Sarkar Baba had deep respect for Buddhism. This fact also highlights why, when Sarkar Baba taught during his talks, he did not recommend lengthy rituals or attention to the external aspects of worship. He recommended self-control, self-investigation, and a recognition of the core self-element, the *Prāṇa*, in every living being.

To understand better the changes introduced into the tradition by Sarkar Baba, I have looked syncretically at his life in a micro-history manner, using folklore and oral tradition liberally to fill in the gaps left by the published hagiography, or other ritual or social texts produced by the press at Shri Sarveshwari Samooh. The exercise here has been to tie his views to the background of prevailing anti-colonial, nationalistic or universalistic movements that may already have been under way, and to see how closely Sarkar Baba's life and views, and his own special kind of guru particularism tallied with that. In this context, looking at the similarities and dissimilarities as they exist in relation to other saints and contemporary traditions in India, it appears to me that the antinomian behavior Aghaṛs display cannot be regarded necessarily as antisocial. If anything, the close look at Sarkar Baba's life illustrates that not only can it be of social benefit, in some instances, it is the only tradition that benefits the society where other traditions fall short.

In the course of this endeavor, I have shown the existence of the "miraculous" in the life of gurus in India, which can begin at or before the time of birth, and can continue throughout their life. I have discussed how this miraculous, whether it is owing to a liminal status, or consequent charisma, can, and does provide spiritual authority to the guru to lead his devotees. This charisma – or mystical power to cause miracles – is perceived in the everyday human transactions of the mystic with his devotees. This

reflects a perennial human need and quest, because it is these specific abilities that have led to the acceptance of specific individuals as renowned gurus in India. Buddha's own stories reflect this, so do those of the erstwhile Kāpālikas, as also Shankaracharya. There are gurus in India who are content to provide only a mystical spiritual leadership to their disciples. But Sarkar Baba was not content to do so. Like some other saints of his time, he decided to come back to the fold of society and do something for it.

I have tried to investigate if this inspiration had any nationalistic background to it, and concluded that while Sarkar Baba did have a love for India, the nation he lived in, he loved human beings more, and his social service was not dictated by tenets of nationalism and universal Hinduism, which themselves were a result of contention with the colonial rule. He was as much at home in the United States or Afghanistan, as he was in India, and everywhere he went, he had similar things for all who came to him. Sarkar Baba's social service – to look after the leprosy patients who had been discarded by their families -- not only raised social and bureaucratic consciousness about it, it also gave the Aghor tradition a social face. It made the tradition more socially conscious, as well as socially engaged. It also made it more socially acceptable. Sarkar Baba shares this element of social engagement with the tradition of Sathya Sai Baba, and the Radhasoamis, as well as the social service and social reform traditions started by Rammohan Roy, and continued by Dayananda and Vivekananda, even though his motivations for doing so differ from the latter two.

In looking at other contemporaneous saint traditions with Sarkar Baba's, one factor stands out starkly, that of the rural base of Sarkar Baba's devotees as compared to the primarily urban base for Radhasoamis, Brahmakumaris, and Sathya Sai Baba. Sarkar

Baba started his penance in the rural hinterland of the holy city of Varanasi, where he moved from village to village on a daily basis, and so, his devotees and followers, to a great extent hailed from this rural hinterland. Time and again I have been amazed at the devotion and tenacity of old, half-clad village women who would walk for 15 or 20 kilometers in the blazing heat of the north Indian summer, carrying a heavy bag of rice, or flour on their head as a gift for Sarkar Baba, to have his *darśan* during the festival of *gurupūrṇimā*. Sarkar Baba also had a wonderful understanding of this rural society, and he identified himself as either a farmer, or a social worker, but never anything more. On his part, he would meet individually with every single devotee who came for his *darśan*, sometimes sitting for up to ten hours in one posture without food or drink, so none who took all the trouble to come to him would be disappointed.

As discussed in chapter four, I have also tried to throw some light on how Sarkar Baba tried to communicate his thoughts and ideas to a variety of audiences ranging from initiated disciples, lay devotees, rural and urban faithful, as well as politicians. His power of communication was so strong and subtle at the same time that he could address a gathering of thousands, yet a single person with a pressing question in their mind would feel Sarkar Baba was addressing only them as they discerned solutions to their problem on hearing him. He could at once use very high register Sanskrit words in his talk, at the same time maintaining the rural and colloquial register to get his thoughts across with ease, humor and appropriate context. He could speak one word, or a phrase, or a sentence, and a whole plethora of differing audiences could impute their own meaning depending upon their familiarity with the tradition. Sarkar Baba would usually end his talks with the sentence -- "...if you understood where my *vaikharī* (voice) was expressing

from...” – and I truly believe his voice had the power to provide answers to people who found themselves in tune with him and his tradition. Besides just the spoken words, his manner of communication used to have such genuine empathy and compassion that anyone listening to him with attention would not remain unmoved. His stories, his sometimes funny, sometimes deep manner of narrating them according to context, the pain and concern in his voice, his references to everyday situations faced by everyone in their daily life, all rang with force with his audiences.

In this way, Sarkar Baba made the Aghor tradition accessible to the general public while earlier, Aghors used to be understood only as a part of the cremation ground. That is why Sarkar Baba has often been described as a saint who has departed from the beaten path. It is true that Baba Kinaram before him had also helped people through his magical powers, and he had also established a number of monasteries. But the form that Sarkar Baba has given to Aghor, that of a coherent social organization through the establishment of Shri Sarveshwari Samooh, is unique in the history of the Aghor tradition. He has joined Aghor to society in such a manner that common people can understand what Aghor stands for, and they can also participate in its practices rather than regard it only as a transgressive, cremation ground based mystical tradition.

Another stark contrast I see between Sarkar Baba’s life and those of saints of the other traditions mentioned above is the existence of a harsh *sāadhanā* period in his life. He spent the larger part of his young ascetic days doing penance in cremation grounds, caves, jungles and mountains, remaining hungry and cold and in solitude, while the same is not evident from the hagiographical material available on initiations of the Radhasoami, Brahmakumari or Sathya Sai Baba traditions. In this way, I think, Sarkar Baba provides

a role model for transcendence of the human condition, for he has shown that a human being, through focus and work, can rise to the level of the gods, and can perform tasks which are normally regarded as impossible for a human being with limited capabilities.

Despite the success of his organization, Sarkar Baba fiercely maintained his independence and political neutrality. Such fierce independence appears to me to be a hallmark of the Aghor tradition. To that end, he shunned making his organization too big, or coming under the influence of, or overtly associated with, any particular political party or person. He would not even accept large donations from his numerous rich merchant devotees living in Calcutta. Did this fierce independence and political neutrality obstruct his goal to serve leprosy patients, or to make his devotees rise above caste distinctions, or to educate the poor children of the city, or towards a better social condition for women in society?

I think his focused goals of serving the leprosy patients and educating children were served very well. Remaining small and relatively unknown did not affect Sarkar Baba's mission in life at all. He had enough children from the rural and urban areas in his ashram that could be handled safely and educated properly. As for the leprosy patients, the hospital did wonders in treating them, and in providing medication for them.

For the more general goals, those of helping the social condition of women, as well as rising above caste distinctions, I think the overall results are quite mixed. Within his ashram complex and within his circle of devotees in other corners of the country, his ideas were implemented and practiced. Within his ashram at Banaras women became very active, and remain so even today. Making his discipleship rise above caste distinctions, however, is not something that can happen in one person's lifetime, or

through the process of speeches and exemplary behavior alone. It also involves issues of education, and economic upliftment, and a better exercise of democracy, as well as a political will to reform the structure of Indian society. Swami Dayananda fought for it, Vivekananda worked towards it, Sarkar Baba fought for it, and I am sure there will be many others who will spend their lives in this quest before it is fulfilled. Even today we have a debate going in India whether to include caste in the census count, with arguments from both sides being advocated enthusiastically.

Does that mean that Sarkar Baba has changed the course of life for all adherents of the Aghor tradition for all time to come? I will not say so. As Ishwarachandra Sinha mentioned:

One day Baba and I were sitting alone in the ashram. Baba said to me, "I have built so much, all these bricks and stones, cement and mortar, of what use will all this be after me?"

Sometimes I used to talk with him quite openly. I said, "What else Baba, people will fight for its control."

Baba said, "And this trust (Aghar Bhagwan Ram Trust), I see, will be of use only if the trustees are friendly towards each other, otherwise who is going to distribute a whole kingdom for free. Then what will remain after me?"

I said, "Sarkar, all your talks, whatever you speak on various topics amongst so many people, that is the only thing that will remain. Neither will your body remain, nor will all this brick and mortar. I don't know much about them at all, but your thoughts will always remain." (Personal communication during fieldwork, 1998, Varanasi).

Mr. Sinha's words were almost prophetic. Developments after Sarkar Baba's passing away saw his disciples disagree on matters of administration of the ashram, and drift apart. Now, instead of one center, we have many. The upshot of this development is that instead of being administered centrally from one ashram in Varanasi, now each prominent disciple has their own central office, but many more peripheral ashrams where Sarkar Baba's teachings are practiced. Looking at this development, I think Sarkar Baba has started a new stream within the very diffuse and diverse Aghor tradition, and it is

entirely possible we may have a new sect of Bhagwan Rami Augharṣ in the times to come. As mentioned earlier, Ron Barrett (2008) has classified Augharṣ in Banaras into “old style” and “new style” Augharṣ. Old style Augharṣ still maintain the practice of the cremation ground and the use of intoxicants, and their interface with domestic society is limited to seeking alms. The new style Augharṣ are the followers of Sarkar Baba, those who do meditate in the cremation ground, or wherever their guru asks them to, but do not use intoxicants, and are also active participants in society, setting an example that can be followed by others. I think this has been Sarkar Baba’s biggest contribution to the tradition – to bring the Aghor tradition into society in such a manner that – while remaining only one subcurrent in the larger flow of the Aghor tradition – it can provide a role model for social reform.

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## Glossary of Foreign Terms

Abhāva – Scarcity of desired things.

Ācār – Mode of behavior.

Acchē vicar – Good thoughts.

Acyut – Infallible; one whose seed does not fall.

Āḍambar – Ostentation.

Ādarśahīn – Destitute of principles or immoral behavior.

Adhama – Non-virtuous.

Adhūrī saccāi – Half-truth.

Adhyātm – Spiritual pursuit.

Advaita-bhāva – The sentiment of non-duality.

Ādyā – Primal mother.

Agahan (Sanskrit Agrahayāṇa) – November.

Aghor – Name of a face of Shiva; name of a sect of renunciates.

Aghor Mat – Aghor philosophy.

Aghor Pad – The Aghor state.

Aghor Panth – The Aghor path.

Aghor vṛtti – Aghor mood or sentiment, the Aghor way of life.

Aghori – A follower of the Aghor tradition.

Aghorpanthi – Commonly, a follower of the Aghor tradition.

Agni – Fire; name of the fire-god.

Ahaṃkāra – The instrument of ego.

Ahiṃsā – Non-violence. a philosophy about not hurting others common to Buddhism, Jainism as well as Hinduism. Opposite: Hiṃsā.

Aiśvarya – Majesty, opulence.

Ajanmā – Unborn.

Akartavya – Non-performance of social duty.

Ākāś – The sky.

Akhārā – lit. gymnasium or religious compound.

Alagāva – Separateness.

Alakh niranjan – A common cry of Gorakhnathi ascetics.

Alakh, alakh! – A trademark cry of Gorakhnathis.

Ālasya – Laziness.

Ālocanā – Criticism.

Ālū-gobhī – Potato and cauliflower.

Āmlavat – Like a myrobalan fruit.

Anāgāmī phal – fruit of liberation where the person does not return back to illusory life

Anahad vāñī – Unstruck primordial sound.

Anāhata – The un-struck note.

Ānandamaya kośa – Body sheath made of bliss.

Anaśvar – Indestructible.

Añdhaviśvās – Superstition, blind faith.

Aniścitā – Uncertainty.

Āñkh uṭhākar dekhanā – idiom: To look at someone squarely.

Annachhatra – Food pavilion.

Annakṣetra – Food region.

Annamaya kośa – Body sheath made of food.

Antahkaraṇa – Conscience.

Anucit – Wrong, inappropriate.

Anusaraṇa – To follow.

Apaharaṇa – To snatch, to kidnap.

Āpāna – The breath that flows down.

Apanāpan – A feeling of belongingness.

Āratī – Ritual performance involving anointment with lamp-light.

Arhar – *Cajanus cajan* lentils.

Arhar dāl – Pigeon pea soup.

Arth – Wealth, money.

Aśarīrī – Gross body-less.

Ashram – lit. A place of refuge. More commonly, it is often a place of religious importance to a sect, their monastery or their temple, surrounded by a complex where monks and devotees live either permanently or temporarily.

Āśram dharm – lit. Duties appropriate to life in an ashram. It is also used for duties respectively appropriate for the four-fold stages of a man's life.

Aṣṭāṅga yoga – The eight limbs of yoga: yama (ethical standards), niyama (self-discipline and personal observances), āsana (posture), prāṇāyāma (breathing exercise), pratyāhāra (sense-control), dhāraṇā (concentration), dhyāna (meditation) and samādhi (union with the divine)

Aṣuddh – Impure or unholy.

Asur – Commonly understood as demons; lit. non-Sur, i.e. non divine.

Āsurī pravṛtti kē log – People of a demonish temperament.

Ātmā – The soul.

Ātma rakṣā – Self-protection, self-defense.

Ātmajñāna – Self-knowledge, or the knowledge of the ātmā (the soul).

Ātma-tattva – Self-element

Aucitya – Appropriateness.

Aghar -- A follower of the Aghor tradition.

Aughar aur ghar ke hote haē – Augharṣ belong to a different house.

Aughar masān – An Aughar who frequents the cremation ground and has a detached mental temperament.

Avadhūta – A spiritual seeker who has transcended all considerations of duality.

Avadhūta Mat – Avadhūta philosophy or tradition.

Avasthā – Condition.

Avatāravād – Incarnationism.

Avināśī – Indestructible.

Āvirbhāva – The state of manifestation of the divine power.

Avyāvahārik – Impractical.

Bahera – Terminalia bellerica tree.

Baiṅgan-bhartā – Roasted, pureed eggplant and tomatoes with garlic, cilantro and chopped green chilies.

Baiṭhanā – The act of sitting.

Bālamukunda – A description of lord Krishna as a baby, lying on a ficus leaf, sucking on his toes.

Bālonmattapiśācavat (Sanskrit) – Like a child or like a ghoul.

Bālū mein sir gāḍ kar – idiom: To bury one's head in the sand.

Banāvaṭī bāt – Superficial statement.

Bandhan – Shackle/s.

Barahī-terahī – The 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> days of the death ritual.

Bargad – Banyan, Ficus bengalensis.

Bartan-bāsan – kitchen utensils.

Bāt karanā – The act of talking.

Bauddhas – Followers of the Buddhist tradition.

Bedāntī – Toothless.

Bēl tree – Aegle marmalos.

Bhādrapad – August-September.

Bhāi – Brother.

Bhāi-bandhu – Relatives, friends, and associates.

Bhairavī cakra – Ritual performed in a circle of devotees without caste distinctions.

Bhairavī sādhanā – Practice that involves participation of a female partner.

Bhajans – Devotional songs.

Bhakti – Devotion.

Bhautik – Material or physical.

Bhāva – feeling or sentiment.

Bhāv-tāv – Haggle over monetary value.

Bhayabhīt – Fearful.

Bhikhārī – Beggar.

Bhikṣā kapāla -- A skull begging bowl

Bhṛkuṭī – Eyebrows. Usually implying anger or serious query with a raised eyebrow.

Bhunē bīj – Roasted seeds, that do not germinate.

Bhūtagaṇādhīpati – The lord of ethereal beings (a term which could refer to either Shiva or lord Ganesha).

Bhuvaneśvarī – Mother of the world.

Bidēsī – (Sanskrit) Vidēśī. Of a foreign origin.

Binā yukti kī bhakti na hoī – Colloquial truism: devotion will not bear fruit without prudence.

Binu viśvās na kauno siddhī – Colloquial wisdom: without faith there is no success.

Bodhagamyā – Understandable, realizable.

Brahm – the unmanifest divine.

Brahmacarya – sexual abstinence.

Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya Śūdra – The four castes in the classical four-fold hierarchy of Hindu society: priests, warriors, merchants, menial workers.

Brahmāṇḍa – The cosmos or the cosmic egg.

Brahmavicār – Contemplation on the divine.

Buddhimatā – Wisdom.

Caitanya – Super-conscious. Used for a spiritually realized person.

Cakkar – Twists, circle.

Cakrapūjan – Ritual involving a circle of devotees assembled without caste distinction.

Camatkārik – Miraculous.

Canājor garam – Roasted, highly spiced chickpeas.

Cāndāla – Regular officiants at the cremation ground.

Caraṇa – Feet.

Caraṇa śaraṇa jāo – Colloquial: to go to the refuge of someone's fee, implying, to go for assistance or education to someone.

Cārvāka – Most commonly, understood as proponents of a hedonistic philosophy.

Chatni – Condiment.

Chhala-chhidra – Faults (of people), pretensions.

Chilam – Generally, a hukka tobacco receptacle or marijuana pipe.

Chinna-bhinna – Wrecked, in shambles.

Chuā-chūt – Considerations of untouchability.

Cīntan – Reflection, thinking.

Citta – Thought/intention/reflection.

Cugalkhor – Backbiter.

Daihiḱ – Physical, pertaining to the body.

Daivik – Divine or supernatural.

Dākinī – A malevolent spirit in Hindi; a powerful, divine, female agent in Buddhism.

Dakṣiṇāyaṇa – Downward or southward journey, most commonly applied to the annual trajectory of the Sun.

Dambhī – Conceited.

Dar-dar bhaṭakanā – idiom: wander from place to place in search

Dargāh – Tomb complex of a Muslim saint.

Darśan – Holy vision, glimpse.

Daśanāmī – Name of a Shaiva sect.

Daṭ kar virodh – Steadfast opposition.

Dayā – Kindness.

Deg – Large pots used for cooking.

Deha – Body.

Dehavada – A philosophical school which regards the body as the focus of all practices.

Dēsī – Of local or regional origin.

Devadūt – Divine messenger, angel.

Devalōka – World of the gods.

Deva-mūrti – Divine idols.

Dhairya – Forbearance

Dhakosalā – Hypocrisy.

Dhanañjaya Prāṇa – The life-force which resides in the crown of the head.

Dhanī-mānī – Affluent and prestigious.

Dharma – Most commonly used as denoting religion that one follows, although very often it also implies one's duty according to their station in life; meritorious act.

Dhārmik matāvalambī – Religious incumbents or believers.

Dharm-karm – Religious duty; pious acts.

Dhikkārate – Revile.

Dhikr – Continuous chanting of god's name, (Urdu zikr)

Dholā – An oral epic in North India.

Dhoti – Several yards of plain cloth, either white or yellow, tied in a traditional fashion around the waist.

Dhūl aur miṭṭī – Dirt and soil.

Dhūnī – Ascetic's bonfire.

Dhyāna-yoga – That branch of yoga that emphasizes meditation.

Digambara – Most commonly, a specific kind of Jain religious mendicant. Lit. sky-clad, implying, naked.

Digbandhit – Ritually or mystically defended.

Dīkṣā – Initiation.

Dīnatā – Humility.

Dopahar – Afternoon.

Dukkha – Suffering.

Dumukh – Double-faced.

Durāv – Ill-feeling towards someone.

Durbuddhipūrṇa – Negative-thought; wicked.

Dusah – Difficult to bear; aggravating.

Dusah bhāvanāyē -- Unbearable sentiments.

Dusah vicar – Unbearable thoughts.

Duṣkar – Difficult.

Duṣpragya – Of ill-knowledge; wicked.

Dvāpar yuga – The second eon according to Hindu scriptures.

Eschatia (Greek) – Geographical periphery.

Fanā (Urdu) – self-dissolution in divine love.

Faqīrs (Urdu) – Muslim holy men.

Gaddī – Seat or monastery.

Gagana – Sky or space.

Ganesh Pīṭh – Lit. seat of lord Ganesh.

Gānjā – Marijuana.

Garam masālā – Combination of hot spices. This term implies a mixture of five kinds of spices generally considered hot, but the spices included in this list varies from one region of India to another.

Garjanā – To roar.

Ghat – That part of a river or lake shore which is used for regular human activity.

Ghee – Clarified butter.

Ghṛṇit – Despicable, hateful.

Gṛhastha āśram – The householder stage of a person's life in the four-fold division of a man's life.

Guhya sādhanā – Secret practices.

Guhya – Mysterious, secret, or deep.

Guṇas – Characteristics or essences.

Guṇī – Talented, virtuous person.

Guru – Most commonly, a spiritually realized teacher.

Gurumukh – Initiated by the guru, and devoted to the guru.

Gurupūrṇimā – Full moon of the Guru.

Hāl-cāl – Condition, well-being.

Haluā – The sweet halwā dish.

Haṃsa – Living being, soul

Har-Har-Mahadev – lit. Glory to Shiva.

Haṭhayogic – Pertaining to a system of yoga which emphasizes different kinds of physical exercises and postures.

Himali and Girnali Aughaṛ – The two streams of Aughaṛ renunciates, one hailing from the Himalayas, generally ascribed to Guru Gorakhnath, the other hailing from Girnar in the Gujarat state, generally ascribed to Guru Dattatreya.

Himṣā – Violence. Opposite: Ahimṣā.

Holi – The festival of colors in India.

Hṛdayakamal – Lotus of the heart.

Hukkā – Water pipe for smoking with a tobacco receptacle on top.

Huzūr – lit. Sir.

Īḍā and Piṅgalā – The left and the right channels respectively in the subtle body.

Iṣṭ -- A divinity dear to the seeker.

Īśvara-tulya – Like a god.

Īśvaravād – God-ism.

Jāduī/karāmātī – Magical.

Jāgarūk – Aware, awakened.

Jal – Water.

Jallād – Executioner.

Jamhāi – Yawn.

Jananī – Progenitor, mother.

Janaśruti – Folklore.

Janma-maraṇa – Birth and death.

Jantar-mantar – (Sanskrit: yantra-mantra). Lit. magical rites and rituals.

Japa – Meditation on a mantra or name.

Jātaka – Corpus of Buddhist stories about Buddha's births before he became enlightened.

Jāti – Caste.

Jāti-pānti – Considerations of caste distinctions.

Jīva – The living being.

Jīvātmā – Living beings.

Jñāna tatva – The element of knowledge.

Jogi – Colloquial rendition of the Sanskrit term “yogi”. However, the term is applied to a variety of renunciates in India.

Kabirpanthi – Follower of the Kabir tradition.

Kadalī van – Banana or plaintain forest. The term has esoteric meanings in the Nath as well as Buddhist traditions.

Kāl – Time; death.

Kālakūṭa – Himalaya dwelling; time-subduing; name of a poison.

Kalap-kalap kē, taḍap-taḍap kē – Writhing in agony and misery.

Kalaś – Clay or metal pot with water inside.

Kalyāṇa kā devatā – Angel of mercy.

Kāma – The erotic desire.

Kamānā – To earn.

Kāmanāyē -- Desires.

Kāma-sādhanā – Erotic ritual practice.

Kamjoriyān – Weaknesses.

Kānpaṭa – A yogi of the Gorakhnath tradition with split ears.

Kanyā – Young woman, girl.

Kāpālīka – A sect of ancient Shaiva renunciates, believed to have assimilated into the Aghor tradition.

Kapāl-kriyā – The act of smashing the skull while burning on the pyre, so it will burn completely.

Karma – Action, deed.

Karmakāṇḍa – Rituals related to stages of life passage, propounded and officiated by Brahman priests.

Kartavya – Social duty.

Kārtik-Agahan – The months of October-November according to the Hindu ritual calendar.

Karuṇā – Compassion.

Karz – Debt, loan.

Kātil – Murderer.

Kaṭorīs – Metal bowls.

Kaupīn – Loincloth.

Kāyā paricaya – Description of the body

Khaḍg – A sword shaped like a sickle.

Khān-pān – Dietary considerations.

Khaṛāun – Wooden sandals.

Khicaṛī – Rice and lentils cooked together.

Koṭi – Trillions.

Kotwāl – Sheriff.

Kriyā-kalāp – Actions, behavior.

Krodha (Sanskrit) – Anger.

Kṣati – Harm, loss.

Kṣiti (Sanskrit) – Earth.

Kṣamā – Forgiveness.

Kuḍhan – Chagrin.

Kukarmī – Miscreant.

Kunḍal – Large ear rings.

Kunṭhita – Dull, frustrated.

Kūpamaṇḍūk – Sanskrit idiom: frog in a well.

Kurītiyāñ -- Evil customs.

Kūṭa (Sanskrit) – Mountain.

Labanī – toddy container.

Lagām – Reins of a horse.

Lalitā – Name a goddess; charming.

Laṅgarkhānā – Alms-house

Laṅgoṭī – Lower undergarment.

Laṭṭhamār – Violent.

Laukik mātā – Mother in this world.

Līk – Trodden and grooved path.

Līlā – Divine play.

Lobha – Greed, avarice.

Lobhī – Greedy.

Lungī – Plain piece of two meter long cloth wrapped around the waist without frills.

Luṭānā – To squander.

Madhyam varḡ – The middle class

Māgh Melā – The religious fair held in January-February at the banks of designated rivers.

Mahant – Priest, abbot of a monastery.

Mahāpuruṣ – Great soul.

Mahā-śmaśān – A great cremation ground.

Mahātmās – Great souls.

Malang faqīrs – Muslim ascetics, generally without sectarian affiliation.

Mana – Creative will, desire. Often translated in English as the mind.

Manan – Contemplation.

Mānav dharm – Human duty; human religion.

Mandala – A ritual design often made of geometric figures.

Manomaya kośa – Body sheath made of the mind.

Manuṣya – Human being.

Māraṇa – Magical act in Tantra causing subjugation.

Marī gāya ghās nahīn khātī – idiom: a dead cow does not eat grass.

Marnī – Dying; the rituals performed at the time of death.

Marubhūmi mein āye tūfān se – colloquial: desert-storm.

Maśak – A water-bag made of animal skin.

Masānī Aughaṛ – An Aughaṛ of the cremation ground.

Mastak par savār ho jāo – colloquial: to ride on someone's head, implying, to harass someone.

Māṭṛya guṇa-dharma-dhātu – Traits, characters and substances of the mother.

Māṭṛya-caraṇa – Feet of the mother.

Māṭṛya-śakti – Mother-power.

Māyā – The web of worldly illusions.

Māyāvī – Conjuror.

Mithyādrṣṭi – False vision.

Moha – Delusion, transient attachment.

Mohana – Magical act in Tantra causing enchantment.

Mokṣa – Liberation from the web of the world.

Moṭē – Fatso! A fat person.

Mṛityulōka – World of the dead.

Mukhiyā – Chief, headman. Leader.

Munāfākhōr – Profiteer.

Murīd – Pupil.

Muṛiyā sadhu – Tonsured monk.

Mūrkh – Idiot.

Mūrtipūjā – Idol-worship.

Nāḍīs – Veins; channels of the subtle body.

Namaste – Hindu word of greeting and goodbye.

Namratā – Humility.

Napuṅsak – Impotent.

Nārāyaṇ, kalyāṇ ho! – Nārāyaṇ (a name of god Vishnu), may good things happen (to you).

Nark – Hell.

Nar-piśāca – Human ghoul or ghost.

Nāsamajh—Ignoramus. Un-wise person, naïve.

Naukar-cākar – Various kinds of household help.

Neem – Azadirachta indica tree.

Nidrā – Sleep.

Nirākār – The formless (divine).

Nirarthak karm – Useless deeds.

Nirguṇa – Formless, not having any features or characteristics. Used mostly for the undefinable divine.

Niścaya – Decision.

Nīti – Ethics, policy.

Nivṛtti – Detachment.

Niyam – Rule, law, prescription.

Niyati -- A deterministic worldview based on fate.

Nyāya – Justice.

Oj – Efficacy.

Pañca – Five.

Pañcamakāra – The five Ms in Tantra, viz matsya (fish), māṃsa (meat), mudrā (parched grains or hand gestures and physical postures), madya (liquor), and maithuna (sexual union).

Pandāl – Open air assembly hall.

Panths – Paths or traditions of religious pursuit.

Pāp – Sin.

Para pīrā – The pain of others.

Parā prakṛti – Divine-nature.

Parabhāva – A subtle sentiment akin to the supreme state of being Shiva.

Param guru – Highest or holiest guru.

Paramārtha kī pagaḍanḍī – The pathway of spiritual attainment.

Paramātmā – The supreme soul or God.

Paramātma-tattva – The supreme element, the part that is divine.

Paramvād – Transcendentism.

Paranindak – One who criticizes others.

Paratantratā – Slavery.

Pariśram – Hard work.

Parlaukik mātā – Other-worldly mother.

Pārvatīpati – Husband of Pārvatī (Shiva).

Paśu – Animal.

Pāśupatas – An ancient sect of renunciates dating back to the second century B.C.

Paṭicca samuppāda – Buddhist conception of co-dependent origination.

Pātr – Vessel or appropriate candidate.

Pattal – Leaf-plate.

Pāvaka – Fire.

Pavitra kārya – Holy deeds.

Pavitratā – Sanctification.

Pawan – Air, breath.

Peepal – Sacred Fig, Ficus religiosa tree.

Piṇḍa – The body, often used in contrast to brahmāṇḍa, the cosmos or the cosmic egg.

Pīṛhā – A wooden slab used as a seat.

Pitṛmārga – The path of the ancestors.

Polis (greek) – City.

Postā – Poppy seed. A nice dish is made when sautéed with zucchini and onions.

Pracaṇḍa vāyu – Wind as strong as a storm.

Prahasan – A farce.

Prakaraṇa – Fictional love story.

Prakop – Affliction, natural or divine calamity.

Prāṇa – The life-force resident within the body; the breath which rises up in the body.

Praṇām – A high-register Hindu word of salutation.

Prāṇamaya bodh – Knowledge of the prāṇa (life-force).

Prāṇamaya kośa – The body sheath made of the life-force.

Prāṇamayī-mātā – Mother in the form of the life-force.

Prāṇāyāma – The practice of controlling the life-force within the body through breathing exercises.

Prapañca rahit citta – Consciousness free of illusions.

Prārthanā – Prayer.

Prasād – Sanctified food.

Pratibimbit – Reflected.

Pratyāhāra – Sense-control.

Pratyakṣa satya – Self-evident truth.

Pravṛtti – Tendency, action.

Prāyaścīt – Repentance, reparation.

Preraṇā – Inspiration.

Preta – A ghost.

Primary elements of creation in Hindu cosmology – Kṣiti (earth), jala (water), pāvaka (fire), gagana (sky or space) and samīra (air).

Pṛthvī – Earth.

Pṛthvī par kē devatā – Gods of this earth.

Pūjā – the ritual prayer, often with flowers, water and lamp-light.

Pūjanīya – Revered.

Puṇya – Virtue.

Pūrṇabhāva – The sentiment of a state of absolute being.

Pustak kī paridhi – lit. circumference of a book. Used often as limited by the bounds of a book.

Putlā – Mannequin.

Rahasya – Mystery, secret gnosis.

Rājasic – One of the three innate traits of beings. This one implies imperial tendencies.

Rāmānandī – A Vaishnava sect.

Rasa – Enjoyment, sentiment, mood; juice.

Rātri (Sanskrit) – Night.

Rekhā – Line.

Ricksha – Bicycle cart or trolley.

Roṭī – Unleavened flat bread.

Ṛṣis – Holy men, ascetics, often forest dwelling, of ancient times.

Rucikar – Tasteful, appealing.

Rūḍhitā – Conservatism.

Rudrākṣ – lit. eye of Rudra (a fierce form of Shiva); seed of the Elaeocarpus species of tree with elaeocarpus ganitrus being the principal species.

Rudra-yajñas – Religious ceremony dedicated to the fierce form of Shiva.

Rūpaka or pratīka – An allegorical drama.

Śabd – Sound, vibration.

Ṣaḍaṅga yoga – The yoga system of six aspects.

Sadguru – A true guru.

Sādhaks – Seekers.

Sāadhanā – The process and period of penance that monks undertake.

Sāadhanā pakṣa – The aspect pertaining to the practices of an ascetic.

Sādhāraṇa – Ordinary, simple, mundane.

Sādhikā – A female ascetic.

Sādhu – A monk; a holy person.

Sadhukārī – The language or speech of saints which is so specialized it is not understandable to common folk.

Śādī-vivāha – Marriage.

Sahaja – Natural or innate. Also, a tradition of spiritual practice common to both the Buddhists and the Nathas.

Sahyog – Help, assistance.

Śaitān – Satan.

Śaivite – A follower of god Shiva or his tradition.

Sakidāgamī – Buddhist term implying “to be born only one more time.”

Śakraḡāmī phal – Buddhist term implying “a fruit of the way of Indra (a prominent Hindu deity)”.

Śām – Evening.

Samādhis – Tombs of ascetics.

Samadṛṣṭi – Equal-vision for all.

Samāj – Society or community.

Samajhdār – A wise person.

Samast mānavamātra – Entire humanity.

Samaya – Time.

Sāmayik – Timely.

Sambandhī – Relatives.

Samhāra – Destruction.

Samīr – Air.

Sammān – Respect.

Sampradāya – Religious order.

Samūl nāś – Total destruction

Samvat – The calendar started by emperor Vikramaditya in 56 B.C., often referred to as Vikram Samvat.

Samyak citta – Wholesome mind, mind full of equanimity.

Saṅga-kusaṅga – Good and bad company.

Sangha – Buddhist monastic order.

Saṅkalp – Resolve, determination.

Sant – Saint.

Śānti – Tranquility, peace.

Śāntipriya – Peace-loving.

Santoṣa – Contentment.

Śarad Navarātri – Nine day winter festival of worshipping the goddess.

Saraltā – Simplicity.

Sarbhāṅg sect – Most simply a sect of renunciates who tonsure their head.

Śarīr – Body.

Śarīra/kośa – Sheath of the physical body.

Sarkār – Lord, master.

Sārvabhaum – Holistic.

Sārvabhaum vikās – Holistic, all-round development or progress.

Sarveśvarī – Mother of all.

Saśaṅkit – Suspicious.

Śāstra – Scriptures.

Satāwar – Asparagus racemosus, used as a medicinal herb.

Satsaṅg – Dialogue with saints.

Satya – Truth.

Satya puruṣa – The true being; God.

Satyāgrah – Struggle for justice; also refers to certain events in the Indian freedom movement.

Satyavādī – One who speaks the truth.

Śava-āsan – A posture of yogic exercise where one lies as a corpse.

Śavagati – The state or condition of being inert, or immune to the world, as a corpse.

Sāvan – The Hindu month of June-July.

Śava-sādhanā – Meditation on a corpse.

Sevā-bhāva – Willingness to serve.

Shaivism – The religious traditions that regard God Shiva as the primary deity.

Shaykh (Urdu) – Master.

Shudra (Sanskrit Śūdra) – The lowest caste in the classical four-fold caste hierarchy.

Siddhānta pakṣa – Doctrinal, ideological or canonical aspect.

Siddhas – Spiritually realized beings who have supernatural powers.

Siddhi – Miraculous or supernatural powers.

Simhanād – lit. roar like a lion; deep thunderous sound.

Śivalinga – Phallic iconic representation of Shiva.

Śivamārga – The path of/to Shiva.

Soma – The juice of the soma plant; sacrifice; the moon god.

Sonā – The act of sleeping.

Śoṣak – Exploiter.

Śraddhā – Faith.

Sṛṣṭi – Creation.

Stambhan kriyā – The act, in Tantra, of immobilizing things or making them physically inert.

Stuti – Eulogy, supplication.

Subah – Morning.

Sugam – Easy to reach.

Sūkhī roṭī – Dry, unleavened bread.

Sukhkar – Producing happiness.

Sūkti – Saying, poetic platitude.

Śūnya – Nothingness. In mathematics it also represents the digit zero.

Surakṣit – safe, guarded.

Suṣumnā – A subtle channel in the yogic body running through the center of the backbone between the left and right channels.

Suvidhāyē – Amenities, resources, comforts.

Svābhāvik – Natural, according to temperament.

Svarg – Heaven.

Svarga tathā ākāś kē devatā – Gods of heaven and the sky.

Tablā – An Indian percussion musical instrument.

Tāḍī – Toddy.

Tāmasic – Gross.

Tambūrā – Stringed Indian musical instrument.

Tantra – Generally understood as an esoteric system of spiritual awakening focused on transcending the humanly perceived category distinctions of the society and the nature.

Tantrik – A practitioner of the system of Tantra.

Tarang – Wave or thrill.

Tarkahīna – Illogical.

Tattva jñān – Knowledge of the (supreme) essence.

Tavā – Iron skillet.

Ṭhākur – A high caste Kṣatriya.

Thālī – Metal plate.

Tilak-dahej – Wedding gifts and dowry.

Tīrth purohit – Brahman ritual officiant at a holy place.

Tretā yuga – The third eon according to the Hindu scriptures.

Triguṇātmaka śakti – The three-fold energy or power, generally understood to be feminine in Tantra.

Trimūrti – Embodiment of the three Hindu gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

Tṛṣṇā – Strong desire; thirst.

Truṭiyān -- Faults.

Tyājya – Appropriate to leave or discard.

Uccāṭana – Magical act in Tantra causing disenchantment.

Ucit – Right, appropriate.

Udāsīn – Disinterested, lackluster.

Uddanḍa – Willful.

Ugra – Fierce.

Ujjvala bhaviṣya – Bright future.

Uljhan – Confusion, dilemma.

Upadeś – Sermon.

Upārjan – Earned, amassed.

Upekṣā – Neglect.

Upekṣit jana – Neglected folks.

Ūrdhva dvādaśānta – Top of the crown.

Ūrdhvagāmi – In yogic terminology one whose seminal energy rises towards the crown of the head.

Ūrdhvaretā – In yogic terminology one whose seminal fluids move upwards.

Urs (Urdu) – Annual feast marking the saint’s passing away.

Uṭhanā – The act of getting up.

Uṭpanna dharma – Produced religion (colloquial, idiomatic usage). Opposite: vināśa dharma.

Uttarāyaṇa – Upward or northward journey (generally used for the annual trajectory of the Sun).

Vāh-vāhī – The chant of adulation.

Vaidik – Followers of the Veda.

Vaikunṭha – Heaven, or dwelling place of God Vishnu, as conceived by his followers.

Vairāgya – The sentiment of detachment.

Vaishnava – A follower of God Vishnu’s tradition.

Vaishnava vṛtti – Vaishnava mood or temperament.

Vaiśvānar – Fire in the belly; god of hunger.

Vāma mārg – The left handed path. This path of spiritual practice, common to Tantriks and Buddhists, involves esoteric rituals.

Vānaprastha āśram – The forest-dwelling stage of a person’s life in the four-fold division of a man’s life.

Var – Groom.

Varg – Class or category.

Vargīkaraṇa – Categorization.

Varg-vibhēd – Considerations of category distinctions.

Varṇa vyavasthā – Generally understood as the Hindu caste-system.

Varṇāśram – Caste distinctions.

Vaśīkaraṇa – The magical power that allows one person to completely control another person’s mind.

Vastuvicāra – Reflection.

Vāyu – Air.

Vedāntī – One who follows or expounds on the Vedanta.

Vibhūti – Sacred ashes; the undefinable glow of dignity.

Viḍambanā – Paradox.

Vidhi-niṣēdh – Strictures on proper and improper behavior.

Vidyā – Knowledge, wisdom.

Vijñānamaya kośa – The sheath made of consciousness in the subtle body.

Vināśa dharma – Finished religion (colloquial, idiomatic usage). Opposite: utpanna dharma.

Vīrabhāva – Valor, courage.

Virakt – Detached.

Viṣ Himṣā Poison.

Viśrām – Rest, respite.

Viṣuvat kāl – Eclipsed, encompassed or comingled time.

Viśva – The world.

Viśvās – Faith, belief, trust.  
Vivād – Argument.  
Vivāha paddhati – Marriage system.  
Viveka – Discrimination.  
Vyavahāra pakṣa – Custom, conduct or behavioral aspect.  
Vyavasthā – System, organization.  
Yajña – Fire sacrifice.  
Yāmala-Tantras – The corpus of Union Tantras.  
Yantra – Ritual design or geometric figure.  
Yogācār – Yogic practice.  
Yoginī – Female partner in sādhanā, or a female deity.  
Yug – A long time period; an eon.  
Yukti – Prudence, resourcefulness.  
Zamindar – Landlord.

## EDUCATION

- 2011 ACTFL OPI Tester Certificate, ACTFL, NY.
- 2008 Dissertation completion expected end of December 2011.
- 1989 Master of Arts in Anthropology, Syracuse University.
- 1986 Master of Arts in Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, India.
- 1984 Post-Graduate Diploma in Journalism,  
Indian Institute of Mass Communication, India.
- 1983 Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, Delhi University, India.

**NATIONALITY** U.S. Citizen.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Fall 2007-Present Senior Lecturer – University of Texas at Austin
  - Teach Hindi-Urdu Flagship, intermediate and advanced level Hindi language classes.
  - Develop innovative pedagogical material for effective Hindi teaching.
- 1995-2007 Hindi Lecturer—Syracuse University
  - Taught beginning, intermediate, and graduate level Hindi language classes.
  - Developed internet based language lab for teaching Hindi language with interactive graphics, animation and sound -  
<http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jishnu>
- 1988-89 Hindi Instructor—Syracuse University
  - Hindi 101, 201— First and Second Year Hindi Course.
- 1986-1988 Instructor—Syracuse University
  - Anthropology 101—Introduction to Cultural Anthropology.
  - Anthropology 121—Peoples and Cultures of the World.

## RELEVANT WORK EXPERIENCE

- 1997-2007 Associate Director, South Asia Center—Syracuse University
  - Coordinate institutional alliances with Cornell South Asia Program and Syracuse University faculty, as well as with the Department of Education.
  - Design program evaluation instruments.
  - Create policy for outreach instruction, activities, and community service.

- Visit area high schools and colleges to lecture on the culture in India -- Organize, publicize and participate in outreach activities including public addresses and workshops.
- Oversee budget, payroll, honorarium, purchasing and scholarship disbursement for the Center; supervise creation of forms and databases for reporting Center activities to the Department of Education.
- Supervise organization of lectures, exhibitions and tours by prominent South Asian academics, artists and professionals.

1985-86

Reporter/Copy Editor—Patriot Newspaper, New Delhi, India

## PUBLICATIONS

- Hindi-Urdu Flagship: A Meaningful Step Towards Possibilities (Hindī-Urdū flagśip: sambhāvanāo kī or ek sārthak prayās). Viśva Hindī Patrikā, World Hindi Secretariat, Mauritius. 2011.
- Online Hindi Lesson pages at – <http://www.hindiurduflagship.org/resources/shankar/index.html>. Fall 2009, pedagogical material for classroom use.
- The Book of Aghor Wisdom, Indica Books, India 2007.
- Bhagwanramleelamrit, (The Divine Play of Bhagwan Ram.) Aghor Gurupeeth Trust, Banora, Raigarh, M.P., India. 2000. (A narrative biography of Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram Ji, in Hindi.)
- Swati Ki Boond, (Raindrop in the Asterism of Swati.) Aghor Gurupeeth Trust, Banora, Raigarh, M.P., India. 2000. (A collection of spiritual sayings by Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram Ji, in Hindi.)
- Aghor Vachan Shastra, (The Book of Aghor Wisdom). Sri Sarveshwari Samooh, Varanasi, U.P., India. 1992. (A collection of spiritual sayings on the Aghor Tradition of India, in Hindi.)
- Online Hindi Lesson pages at – <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/jishnu>. May 2005, addition of Extended Vocabulary list sorted by Hindi alphabet and parts of speech, funded by the South Asia Language Resource Center.

## WORKS IN PROGRESS – BOOKS (ENGLISH)

- The Nectar of Aghoreshwar’s Remembered Words (translation of Aghoreshwar Smriti Vachanamrit.)
- Stories of the Aghoreshwar (A biography based on oral narratives of experiences with Aghoreshwar Mahaprabhu Bhagwan Ram Ji.)

## TRANSLATIONS – BOOKS (HINDI-ENGLISH)

- Todarmal’s Dhola-Marū (A medieval Indian epic of love and war.)
- Aghor Guru Guh, (Mysteries Revealed by the Aghor Guru.) Publisher: Sri Sarveshwari Samooh, Varanasi, India, 1982.

- Aghor Vachan Shastra, (The Book of Aghor Wisdom.) Publisher: Sri Sarveshwari Samooh, Varanasi, India, 2000.
- Viveksar by Baba Kinaram, (The Essence of Wisdom.) Publisher: Sri Sarveshwari Samooh, Varanasi, India.
- Mrityu Evam Antyeshti Kriya, (Death and the Last Rites.) Publisher: Sri Sarveshwari Samooh, Varanasi, India.

## PRESENTATIONS

### Invited Papers

#### Hindi Pedagogy

- August 2011      Authentic Materials: Delivery through Powerpoint.  
Hindi-Urdu Flagship Program, Teacher Training Workshop, University of Texas at Austin. Austin, TX. August 22.
- June 2011      Teaching Hindi-Urdu Effectively.  
STARTALK Program, New York University. New York, NY. June 14-25.
- April 2010      The Language of a Saint: Tricky Lines, Trials of Translation.  
Hindi-Urdu Flagship Program, University of Texas at Austin. Austin, TX. April 10, 2010.
- February 2010      Motivation as Strategy: Uses of Hindi, Topic Specific Language, and Registers.  
National Heritage Language Resource Center, University of California at Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA. February 20, 2010.
- January 2009      Hindi Teaching in the US, Flagship, Authentic Materials  
Kendriya Hindi Sansthan (Central Hindi Institute). Agra, India. January 7, 2009.
- Hindi-Urdu Flagship Initiative and Language Pedagogy in the US  
Aksharam Hindi Conference. Delhi, India. January 3-5, 2009.
- December 2008      Register in Hindi  
AIIS Teacher Conference. Jaipur, India. December 30-January 2, 2008.
- Teaching with Authentic Materials  
Hindi-Urdu Conference. Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, Japan. December 12-14, 2008.
- Syllabus, Technology, Technique and Lessons

Language Education and Resource Network (LEARN) Conference.  
Defense Language Institute, Monterey, California. December 4-5, 2008.

- August 2008      The Role of Register in Language Teaching  
Teaching Assistant Training Workshop. University of Texas at Austin,  
Texas. August 21, 2008.
- July 2008      Materials and Technology for Hindi Teaching  
STARTALK Teacher-Training Workshop. New York University, New  
York. July 13, 2008.
- A Very Brief Introduction to Hindi  
Fulbright-South Asia Institute Teachers Workshop. University of Texas at  
Austin, Texas. July 1, 2008.
- December 2006      Hindi Heritage Learners: Mind, Media and Matters of Culture  
South Asia Language Analysis (SALA) conference. University of  
Karnataka and Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore,  
India. December 19, 2006.
- October 2006      Internet Enhanced Teaching and Learning: The Uses of a Virtual  
Language Lab in a Project-Based Classroom  
South Asia Studies conference. University of Wisconsin at Madison,  
Madison, Wisconsin. October 22, 2006.
- April 2006      Student Centered Language Classroom: Some Concrete Activity  
Examples  
NCOLCTL panel on Student Centered Classroom. University of  
Wisconsin at Madison, Madison, Wisconsin. April 27-30.
- January 2006      Performance Based Teaching of Hindi Grammar  
Hindi PBIS Workshop. University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas.  
January 20-22.
- May 2005      Discussion of Different Types of Reading and Reading Phases:  
Developing Related Activities  
“Reading Pedagogy Workshop.” Columbia University, New York. May  
21-22.
- Overview of Hindi Digital Resources and Discussion of Their Use.  
“Reading Pedagogy Workshop.” Columbia University, New York. May  
21-22.
- Fall 1997      Vocabulary and Oral Communication: Using Ramayana as a Teaching  
Tool.  
Teacher’s Workshop. New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS).

Binghamton, NY. Presentation made to South Asia teachers, university academics and artists.

Other

- March 2006      Tantrik Buddhism: And How Ancient India-China Relations Figure In It  
India-China Institute, New School University, New York. March 13.
- December 2005      The Social Interpretation of Aghor in Baba Bhagwan Ram Ji's Teachings  
Second International Conference on Religions and Cultures in the Indic  
Civilisation, New Delhi, India. December 17-20.
- November 2005      Context, Pretext and Text: Modern Aghor Literature  
Society for the Scientific Study of Religion Conference, Rochester, New  
York. November 3-6.
- January 2005      Cremation Ground, the Body, and the Bodily in Sadhana: A Comparison  
of Esoteric Rites of Buddha and Aghor Ascetics.  
Conference on "Aghor Parampara Vyakhyanamala." The Vikram  
University, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, India. January 24.
- Tracing the History of Some Common Elements in Buddha's Sadhana and  
Aghor Practices.  
South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Religion. Annual  
Conference. New Delhi, India. January 27-30.
- Spring 2004      From Liminal to Social in the Modern Age: Transcendent Sacrality and  
Social Service in the Aghor Tradition  
Drawing a Line in Water: Religious Boundaries in South Asia symposium.  
South Asia Center, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY. April 1-3.
- Spring 2002      Ramayana as a Teaching Tool.  
Teacher's Workshop. Open Hand Theater, Syracuse, NY. Presentation  
made to High School teachers and students.
- Fall 2001      Teaching about India with Film.  
Teacher's Workshop. New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS).  
Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Presentation made to South Asia teachers  
and university academics.
- Fall 1999      Ramayana as a Teaching Tool in Culture Instruction.  
Teacher's Workshop. New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS).  
Geneva, NY. Presentation made to South Asia teachers, university  
academics and artists.

- Fall 1998                    Tales from Ramayana as a Teaching Tool and the Use of Multi-media in the Classroom.  
Teacher's Workshop. New York Conference on Asian Studies (NYCAS), New Paltz, NY. Presentation made to South Asia teachers, university academics and artists.
- September 1988            Tribal Knowledge of Forest Resource Use in Nagpur District, India. Gordon Bowles essay contest, Maxwell School, Syracuse University. In a society which is still 70% illiterate, knowledge of the nature and how to use is passed on through the oral tradition. Talk presented a case for the validity of such knowledge in forest resource use with modern forest management principles.

### **Invited Presentations**

- June 2011                    Language for Health – Pedagogical Implications of Language Learning in the Practice of South Asian Medicine  
Presentation for the Hindi-Urdu Flagship Program, University of Texas at Austin.
- March 2008                    TANTRA: An Esoteric Practice Based on the Commonplace  
Videoconference Presentation for Magic and Religion class, Syracuse University.
- March 2006                    What's Unique About Hinduism  
Hinduism 101, Syracuse University.
- March 2006                    Baba Bhagwan Ram and Aghor Tradition  
World Religions 185, Syracuse University.
- May 2005                     Hindu Influence on the Buddha  
Buddhism 101, Syracuse University.
- April 2005                    Some Thoughts on Hinduism Today  
Hindu Student Council Conference, Syracuse University, April 23, 2005..
- Fall 2004                     NGOs, Civil Society Organizations, and the Aghor Tradition  
Governance and Global Civil Society: Department of Public Administration, Syracuse University.
- Spring 2002                    Tantra: A Tradition over Time  
Comparative Anthropology: Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University.

Fall 2000                    A Historical and Cultural Analysis of Tantra and its Practitioners.  
Comparative Anthropology: Department of Anthropology, Syracuse  
University.

Summer 1990                Principles and Themes in Hinduism.  
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY.

### **Outreach Presentations**

Spring 2007                Hinduism  
Outreach talk at the Liverpool Library, Liverpool, NY.

Fall 2006                    Indus Valley, Hinduism and Indian Culture  
Outreach talk at Chittenango High School, grades 10 and 11 in  
Chittenango, NY.

South Asia Studies and High School Social Studies Curriculum  
Talk and meeting with Central New York Council for Social Studies  
meeting, Syracuse, NY

Spring 2004                Hindi Language and Indian Culture  
Semester long, weekly Hindi language classes at New School, a magnet  
school in Syracuse, NY.

Fall 2003                    Hindi Language and Indian Culture  
Semester long, bi-weekly presentations at New School, a magnet school in  
Syracuse; Hinduism - Presentation and class discussion at West Side  
Learning Center, an adult education school, Syracuse; Presentation and  
discussion of Hinduism at OSHA, Hendricks Chapel, Syracuse University.

Spring 1998                Hinduism: Enunciation of the Religion's Basic Tenets and Characteristics.  
Bishop Grimes High-school, Syracuse, NY.

Spring 1988-99            The Ramayana Story on Slide and Film.  
Presentation to high-school students, Syracuse University, NY.  
The epic Ramayana is a living epic that guides the life and philosophy of  
Indians even today. Talk covered the basic story and themes running  
through this epic.

Summer 1991                Hinduism, Social-stratification and Indian Culture.  
Presentation at Auburn High-school, NY.  
Religion in India is not apart from the daily life of its adherents. Talk  
pointed to the hierarchical nature of Indian society and the religious  
themes that guide it.

October 1988      Presentation on Film in India.  
Teacher's Workshop, Syracuse University.  
Bombay film industry is one of the largest in the world, producing more than 900 films a year in various languages. It entertains, teaches, motivates and inspires the Indian populace. Talk presented the salient characteristics of Indian films and their impact on society.

## **FUNDING**

2009-2010      University of Texas at Austin FAST Tex Grant for developing the Language for Health in Hindi and Urdu website.

2005-2007      Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs Research Grant for presenting papers in the US and India, as well as for participating in the NGO Initiative spearheaded by the Moynihan Institute.

2004-2007      Syracuse University Co-curricular Fees grant for maintaing Hindi language web pages.

2004-2005      South Asia Language Resource Center (SALRC) Grant for development of the web based Extended Vocabulary List.

## **PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL WORKSHOPS**

2011      Participated as instructor at thr STARTALK Program. New York University, New York, NY, June 14-23.

Participated as discussant at the "BMS Software Evaluation" symposium. Texas A&M University, College Station, TX, June 25.

Participated as active member at "Curriculum Development for the First Year Hindi-Urdu Course for a New Institution." University of Washington, Seattle, WA, June 2-5.

2010      Participated as Discussant at "Assessment Meeting at ACTFL." Boston, MA, November 11-21.

Taught "Hindi Structure and Culture" at NYU STARTALK Workshop. New York University. New York, NY, June 13-23.

Acted as consultant and observer at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra Hindi Shivar, co-funded by STARTALK. Atlanta, Georgia, June 23-29.

Participated in "SALRC-SASLI Standards and Performance Based Assessment Planning Session and Pedagogy Workshop." University of Madison at Wisconsin. Madison, WI, June 8-9.

American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral

- Proficiency Interview (OPI) Tester Certification Workshop. New York University. New York, NY, February 4-7.
- 2009 Taught Second Level at NYU STARTALK Workshop. New York University. New York, NY, June 6-17.
- The Language Flagship Annual Meeting. Barton Creek Spa and Resort. Austin, TX, May 30-June 2.
- The CALICO Conference. University of Arizona. Phoenix, AZ, May 11-13.
- The NCSSL Flagship Advanced/Superior Workshop. University of Texas at Austin. Austin, TX, January 23-24.
- 2008 American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) Workshop. Hilton at Walt Disney Resort. Orlando, FL, November 17-20.
- Approaches to the Effective Teaching of Grammar Workshop. University of Texas at Austin. AT&T Conference Center, Austin, TX, November 14.
- Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Hebrew (PATH) Listening Proficiency Test Item Workshop. University of Texas at Austin. Austin, TX, November 7-8.
- Learning Second Languages: Building a Network of Experts Workshop. University of Texas at Austin. AT&T Conference Center, Austin, TX, September 11.
- South Asia Language Resource Center (SALRC) Action Research Workshop. University of Madison at Wisconsin. Madison, WI, April 26.
- 2007 American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). San Antonio, TX. November 16-18-3.
- Assessment Tools for Measuring Proficiency Levels in Less Commonly Taught Languages. New York University, New York. February 2-3.
- U.S. Department of Education International Education Programs Service (IEPS) Language Workshop. Washington D.C.. February 22-23.
- 2006 SALTA (South Asia Language Teachers Association) Meeting. University of Wisconsin at Madison, Wisconsin. October.
- WIOC (Wisconsin International Outreach Consortium) Title VI and Fulbright-Hays National Outreach Conference. University of Wisconsin, Madison. April.

- 2004 SALRC (South Asia Language Resource Center) Pedagogy Workshop 1: Appropriate Pedagogy: Language, Culture, and Curriculum: The South Asian Language Classroom. University of California, Berkeley. February.
- 2003 SALTA (South Asia Language Teachers Association) Meeting (sub group of SALA meeting). University of Austin, Texas. October.
- Technology and Language Teaching Workshop, New York University. September.
- Pedagogical Issues in Hindi Teaching Workshop. The American Institute of Indian Studies. Jaipur, India. July.
- Technology, Curriculum Design & Material Development. A workshop for teachers of Arabic, Hebrew, Hindi, Persian & Turkish, Emory University. May.
- Outreach Administrators Meeting in New York, AAA annual conference. March.
- Hindi Workshop SALRC (South Asia Language Resource Center). Pedagogical Materials Project. University of Pennsylvania. January.
- 2002 Integrating Internet Resources into the Language Curriculum, (an ACTFL workshop). Yale University. April.
- 1999 A Practical Course in Strategies-based Instruction. Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition. University of Minnesota. Summer.
- 1997 Computerized Oral Testing, National Language Resource Center. San Diego State University. Summer.

## **SERVICE**

- Member, FLAS committee, South Asia Institute, University of Texas at Austin. 2009-2010.
- Member, South Asia National Outreach Council (SANOC), 2006
- Member, FLAS committee, South Asia Center, Syracuse University. 1997-2007.
- Editorial Board, Project South Asia, Southern Missouri University. 1999-present.
- Reader for the Department of Education's Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program. 2003, 2004.
- Bharati Memorial Grant Selection Committee. 2003.
- Perryman Scholarship award committee, Global Affairs Institute, Syracuse University. 1998-1999.

## **GRANTS**

- University of Texas at Austin FAST Tex grant for developing the “Language for Health in Hindi and Urdu” website.
- South Asia Language Resource Center Mini-grant, University of Chicago for building a Comprehensive Database of Hindi Vocabulary Words. Project in collaboration with Prof. Herman Van Olphen, University of Texas at Austin.

## **MEMBER PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION**

- South Asia Language Teachers Association (SALTA).
- South Asia National Outreach Council (SANOC), 2006
- American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

## **SKILLS**

Instructional development on IBM and Macintosh platforms; web-based lessons including multimedia content; proficient in distance learning issues.

## **LANGUAGES**

Hindi and English– Native fluency in reading, writing and speaking.

Panjabi – Read and write.

Urdu – Speak.