

FOR WHOM THE WORLD STOPS  
THE HIMALAYAN SADHU IN A WORLD  
OF  
CONSTANT MOTION

BY

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Submitted to the Media Arts and Sciences Section of  
The Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Visual Studies

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ABSTRACT

The sadhu is a man who, according to the tradition of Hindu philosophy renounces his worldly possessions and becomes a recluse in India, for the purpose of attaining a more comprehensive knowledge of human existence.

Anthropological research on the sadhu and related subjects was conducted in the U.S.A. over a period of two years prior to location research and filming for five weeks in northern India.

An extensive analysis of the sadhu, within the context of Indian civilization and society; Western philosophy, psychology and literature was also undertaken. Subsequently, a method toward depicting the subject on film and video was formulated; recommended and executed. A copy of the video For Whom The World Stops, is available for reference at the Film/Video Section of the Media Arts and Sciences Section.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Richard Leacock

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## INTRODUCTION

I had become fascinated by "outsiders" in society, particularly since the fall of 1986, my first semester at M.I.T., when I had encountered a gentleman called Roy Swanson (Swanny). Swanny, was a homeless alcoholic who wandered about the streets of Cambridge. However, he had at one time been a lecturer at M.I.T., in Mathematics. I had made a short documentary about Swanny in which he spoke about his life. I had expected it to be a sad story, and to a large extent it was. But there was something refreshingly inhibited about Swanny; something very simple and yet profound. He seemed to be liberated and unencumbered by cluttered thoughts and concerns. I had the notion that ultimately, he had chosen his lifestyle and was not so discontent as I first thought he was. His life was difficult from the point of view of comfort and material lack, but there was also something very pure about his attitudes that made him endearing and made me trust him more than most people. He was not always pleasant but he was always honest.

The essence of all this was that there was little ego with Swanny. He had no occupation, no hobbies, no friends, not even a home. He had few of the elements that help create an identity and develop an ego. Whatever identity he had

formally had as an M.I.T. lecturer, he had long ago, left behind. Thus, there were no formalities, no pretenses. Only total and spontaneous honesty.

Upon first encountering Swanny and engaging in a conversation with him I had been very ethnocentric in my approach.

I had witnessed him as he appeared- a disheveled, old man, who, though sober at the time, had been a drunk most of his life and slept on the streets and in homeless shelters. After considering my own position as a healthy M.I.T. graduate student, I had resolved: "I must try no to embarrass him by making him feel inferior to me because of our contrasting circumstances."

However, I was wrong. It was I who was embarrassed. Swanny did not ever ask me what I did or where I came from. Formal conversation was no longer a developed part of his language. Instead he spoke in an objective manner without ever asserting his individuality, as normal people speak about the weather; without implying that they have the capacity to change the weather or that they created it.

It was Swanny who made me realize just how developed the ego is in a human being in normal society. How guarded our

words, gestures and opinions can be at all times when attempting to reconcile our personal identity against the society at large.

In the presence of Swanny my ego felt naked and undisguised. I could see it more clearly. It was an experience that was both terrifying and liberating. For the first time I was able to see how unconsciously we assert our identities, protect them, defend them and nurture them. How much this is part of our nature. In the presence of Swanny, I felt as if my ego was standing separate from me. It could not go, as in normal conversation, to the other party. My ego could not go and make conversation with Swanny's ego. It could not compare jobs, nationalities and so forth because Swanny did not speak the language of the ego.

The ego could not merge unnoticed into the conversation as it normally does. Instead, it was left out of the conversation, and so I could feel it's presence.

It was as if I had been dreaming and believing the dream to be the only reality. In the presence of Swanny I suddenly woke up and realized that I was the dreamer and not the dream.

It was this sensation with Swanny, which I still feel today, whenever I talk with him, that initially made me see the parallels with Hindu philosophy which I had learnt as a child. Until the encounter with Swanny, what I had learnt of the philosophy was purely academic. With Swanny, it came to life and gave me a better perspective.

In Hindu philosophy all of man's life is considered to be an illusion; a dream.

The "sadhu" is a man whose quest is to "wake up" from this dream of life.

The philosophy explains that although life is a dream, in order for it to even be a phenomena of perpetual illusion, that is, in order for a dream to even exist, there must be a dreamer. Logically, it would be impossible to have a dream without a dreamer.

The dream of life, according to the philosophy is constantly changing and evolving. The dreamer himself however, is always stable and is eternal. The dream is perpetuated by what in Western psychology is the "ego" of the man. The dreamer is the soul of the man.

We can agree that in Western philosophy, although

philosophers may differ widely in their opinions, and although they may arrive at different ends, their basic impetus is always the same: the quest for some firm and tangible Truth.

Colin Wilson, in his book, The Outsider, makes this case after an extensive analysis of Western poetry and philosophy:

"....we can see at a glance that we have here a strange group of men-Blake, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky: two violently unorthodox Christians, one pagan and one tormented half-atheist-half-Christian, all beginning from the same impulse and driven by the same urges.....these impulses are fundamental in the Outsider...."<sup>1</sup>

The sadhu also is driven by this same "impulse". However, it is the approach which is different:

All of Western philosophy is intellectual and has been composed by some of the greatest intellectuals known to man. Western philosophy is derived from the intellect, and seeks its answers through the intellect.

Hindu philosophy is derived from the intellect but seeks its answers by rejecting the intellect. In Hindu



philosophy it is the ego of man which perpetuates the intellect which in turn perpetuates the "dream" of life. Thus, one cannot wake up from this dream by analyzing it no matter how brilliant the mind. One has to "stop" the dream and the way to do this is to stop intellectualizing. The way to stop intellectualizing is to first remove the basic need for intellectualization. This basic need is rooted in the ego.

It is for this reason that Hindu philosophy proposes renunciation of world desires in the hopes of cutting off all stimulation for the ego. However, renunciation in itself does not rid the mind of intellectual activity. For this reason, silence is practiced.

The sadhu is a man, who according to the philosophy, relinquishes his worldly desires and practices austerity and meditation in order to arrive at a still and silent mind. It is this silence which is his ultimate aim. At this point he will feel a "oneness" or "moksha" with the world. Thus, whereas Western philosophy advocates intellectualization, analyzation and discussion Hindu philosophy advocates complete silence.

Professor Amin, a philosopher at Kashmir University, described the relationship between Western and Hindu

philosophy thus when I spoke to him: "In the west, people are always thinking about Truth; in India people do not believe that you can think about Truth. You either know it or you don't. Truth is equated with light. Thinking with darkness. If a blind man is thinking about light, no matter how brilliant a logician he is, he can only hypothesize about what light looks like. Logic is not what is necessary, it is eyes to see."

Infact, in Hindu philosophy, the word for Truth is "dharsan" which means "to see".

The point of seeing, of "dharsan" comes when the mind is silent.

Biographer Ted Morgan, in his biography of W. Somerset Maugham describes the subject's visit to India and his subsequent visit to a man who is similar to a sadhu: "Maugham....had in mind a novel about a young man who adopts the Hindu philosophy of renunciation, and he thought that he had better go to see the country for himself.

"He met a sage who sat in silence. He sat like that for a quarter of an hour then asked Maugham if he had any questions. Maugham said he was feeling too weak....The sage then said: "Silence is also conversation." He resumed his meditation for another quarter of an hour,

bowed, smiled a farewell and limped out. Maugham instantly felt better (after) the meditation."2

The reason why poverty is considered so sacred by most Indians, is because poverty is considered conducive to attaining this silence of the mind.

I experimented with this concept, both while studying Swanny and in preparation for my visit to India. I slept in libraries, park benches, editing rooms at M.I.T. and lived on very little food.

For some weeks, the necessities that one takes for granted, such as a mattress to sleep on and a hot cup of coffee in the morning are excruciatingly difficult to break away from. Moreover, the activities of "making a future" such as saving money, cultivating relationships and financial and career opportunities can be sorely missed when all ties towards such endeavors are completely severed. The action breeds a sense of insecurity and a feeling of losing one's identity.

Eventually however these feelings begin to subside and are replaced naturally with a new calm and a less cluttered and less anxious state of mind.

It is difficult to pinpoint why exactly this state is reached; it is mostly to do with the fact that former "realities" such as "I must make money"; "I must make a future for myself" become less real and almost comical in retrospect. One begins to realize that there is much more to a human being once all these outer ego-developing elements are removed.

The writer George Orwell, spent over a year in both Paris and London, living alternatively as a homeless, penniless tramp and as a lowly-paid dishwasher. His description is appropriate in this context:

"Within certain limits it is true that the less money you have, the less you worry. When you have a hundred francs in the world, you are liable to the most panics. When you have only three francs you are quite indifferent; for three francs will feed you until tomorrow, and you cannot think further than that. You are bored but you are not afraid. You think vaguely: 'I shall be starving tomorrow-shocking isn't it?' And then your mind wanders off to other topics."<sup>3</sup>

These "topics", as Orwell himself found, are rooted in a new surge of creativity and a newfound calmness and silence of mind. One feels "unblocked" by the ties to the ego.

Moreover, as Orwell points out: "...there is another feeling that is great consolation in poverty....You have talked so often of going to the dogs-well, here are the dogs and you have reached them and you can stand it. It takes off a lot of anxiety."<sup>4</sup>

The "taking off" of anxiety results in a tremendous feeling of liberation.

This liberation is manifested in the form of an imagination that is no longer restricted within the confines of the ego and its consequent boundaries of identity. Western civilization is full of examples of men and women who have felt their imaginations confined by their identities and have often taken desperate measures to break away from it. The painter Paul Gauguin for example, was a comfortably-off Parisian stockbroker with a wife and children who felt claustrophobic in his imagination to the point where he completely disbandoned his family, his bank account and Parisian society, to move first to Marsaille and then finally to Tahiti which he considered wild and savage enough to allow the full force of his imagination to flourish.

Ironically, this is precisely the step that is advocated in Hindu philosophy for the sadhu. The sadhu breaks away from

all financial, family and societal obligations in order to arrive at a childlike state of wonderment that is conducive to a more bountiful imagination.

Whereas someone like Gaugin diverts this imaginative energy toward his paintings, the sadhu applies his imaginative energy towards extending the preconceived notions of human thought. For example, human beings in civilized societies have a very developed sense of time. Less civilized societies such as the nomadic Masai tribesman of Kenya have no specific concept of time. For them time is just "is", and is thus eternal. It is more ephermal in nature rather than tangible and specific.

It is this "less civilized", more childlike state of time, space and identity that the sadhu is attempting to achieve by breaking off ties with society and ego-driven desires. Just as a child must "learn" what time is the sadhu is attempting to "unlearn" it.

In widening his imagination the sadhu is widening his focus away from his own ego-driven concerns toward a wider spectrum that ultimately embraces all of humanity. This is "moksha", the "oneness" which the sadhu seeks. It is the sensation that there is a bond between all of humanity.

Thus, an interesting paradox occurs here: The sadhu severs his ties; his bond with his ego that is perpetuated and nurtured by society. In doing so, he becomes more aware of a more all-encompassing bond between all of humanity.

Thus, we see how vitally Hindu philosophy considers the notion of rejecting intellectual development and achieving a more childlike, imaginative, perspective of the world.

It is only when an anthropologist or a documentary filmmaker applies this perspective, that he or she can begin to comprehend the perpetuation of mass poverty in India. The Indian people are from an ancient civilization and have much intellectual potential as a race, and yet they persist in "downplaying" their intelligence. They stubbornly hold on to crude forms of agricultural technology and approach the notion of industrial progress with a very childish and lackadaisical attitude much to the chagrin of institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations which attempt to aid them in applying modern industrialization methods. The masses of India reject every structure of modern civilized society from condominiums to condoms. In the process, they stunt their industrial growth; inhibit trade opportunities with other countries; and in general, seem to voluntarily perpetuate their own poverty. That this mass poverty is a great tragedy is undoubtedly a fact, but it is

only one dimension of the issue. The other dimension is rooted in Hindu philosophy and percolated through Hindu religion which results in the belief that poverty is "sacred". Poverty, as we have discussed, makes a person confront his ego; disbandon the anxieties created by the ego and transcend towards a calmer and more silent state of mind.

A silent state of mind is conducive toward "seeing" or "dharsan". Through dharsan one achieves a state of oneness with the world, the Sanskrit translation being "moksha".

Moksha is the stated objective of the sadhu. It is his quest.

Thus, we see that the quest of the sadhu and the state of the masses of India are subtly but firmly intertwined. The sadhu represents the epitome of Hindu philosophy. The masses of India, through their attitudes toward education, industrial and material progress and so forth reveal a subconscious desire to emulate the ideals of the sadhu. When we understand the sadhu we can better understand Indian civilization.

For example, through my travels in northern India, I found most of the working people to be dull, listless and



lethargic particularly with regard to exercising their minds. From a Western perspective this can be infuriating, particularly when one confronts Indian bureaucracy at the railway stations. However, when viewing this through the Hindu philosophical perspective, we see that though they are intelligent people, they are subtly rebelling against intellectual development. Intellectual development even in the form of exercising their brains to co-ordinate the exchange of train tickets is continually resisted with a sense of disdain. A small example such as this can be extrapolated through the larger spectrum of Indian history and civilization: India has had many talented and intelligent people and yet throughout its history it has never produced anything close to a Leonardo Da Vinci or an Albert Einstein. Cultivation of the intellect is simply not a priority to the masses and this factor is of constant irritation to Indian politicians and industrialists not to mention all those who have conquered India from Alexander the Great to the British.

In summary, a study of the sadhu offers us a vital insight into the Indian people and Indian civilization at large. Moreover, the sadhu offers us the Indian perspective of the search for Truth a concept which is different from the Western philosophical approach but nevertheless driven by the same basic "impulse".

For these reasons I consider the sadhu a fascinating and very valuable subject of study. Consequently, I have undertaken to devote the subject of my master's thesis at M.I.T. to an in-depth analysis of the phenomena of the sadhu.

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SECTION ONE

HINDU PHILOSOPHY  
AND  
EVOLUTION OF THE SADHU

## SECTION ONE

### PART ONE

#### THE HINDU PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORLD

##### MOKSHA

"Moksha" is an ancient Sanskrit term that deals with the theme of fusion. In Hindu philosophy it represents the goal of awareness that creates the fundamental fusion of the human being with the infinite. This goal is an attainment of 'oneness' with the world and the universe; the phenomena of 'oneness' is described by the term "moksha".

In the West, many philosophers, poets and psychologists have in various ways tried to describe this phenomena. Sigmund Freud generally refers to the phenomena as an "Oceanic feeling" in his Civilization and its Discontents.<sup>1</sup>

The playwright and novelist, W. Somerset Maugham, in the last years of his life wrote a book that summed up his life, his beliefs and his values, in which he describes a similar feeling:

"Indeed, I have myself had on one occasion an experience that I could only describe in the words the mystics have used to describe their ecstasy. I

was sitting in one of the deserted mosques near Cairo when suddenly I felt....and overwhelming power and import of the universe, and an intimate, a shattering sense of communion with it."2

Whether we use the term "import of the universe" or Freud's "oceanic feeling" or the Hindu terms "moksha", "samadhi" and "zazen" ....the essential issue here is an ecstatic feeling of oneness which, in terms of Hindu philosophy, is the goal of human existence. It is, according to the philosophy, the state of being to which one should ultimately aspire to and which is in the final analysis, the purpose of life. This is what the sadhu is in search of. The "oceanic feeling" is resonant in much of Western poetry such as the following excerpt from Blake:

"All are Human, and when you enter into their Bosoms you walk in Heavens and Earths, as in your own Bosom you bear your Heaven And Earth and all you behold; though it appears Without, it is Within."3

The poet Wordsworth, in the first edition of The Prelude resonates a similar feeling:

"I felt a sentiment of Being spread O'er all that  
moves, and all that seemth still  
I saw one life...."4

The ancient Hindu text, the Bhagavad Gita, goes to great lengths to explain that the reason why this "oceanic feeling", this "moksha" is so formidable to describe in words; the fundamental reason why it is "beyond words", is that the ego is completely lost in the process. Without the ego, there is no reference point from which to offer an adequate description.

By "ego" I mean the inner agency of the psyche which screens and synthesizes the impulses, needs, emotions and memories from within and the impressions, ideas, expectations and opportunities from outside, both of which become part of our consciousness and call for some kind of action.

If we use Freud's model, the ego is one of the three principal psychic substructures, its counterparts being the primitive id and the constraining superego. The individual ego is in a constant state of flux, mediation and exchange between inner and outer, past and present, unconscious and self-conscious, self and society, between instinctual and the institutional in human life.

The ego is unconscious in that one can become aware of its work but not of it. The self, on the other hand, following E.H. Erikson in Identity: Youth and Crisis,<sup>5</sup> is preconscious in the sense that it becomes conscious when "I" reflects upon it, or rather upon the various selves-body, personality, social roles-which make up the composite, or whole self.

"Moksha", then, can be understood to mean that a person living in this state, such as the sadhu, assuming the sadhu has attained the "oneness"; this person has an all-pervasive current of "I ". "I" is a constant and a continuous presence in all the transient selves whether it be playing, dreaming, working and so on. According to Hindu philosophy, this presence, this sense of the "I", the self, has to be acknowledged to the point of full awareness.

But "moksha" is not limited to the composite self. Rather, it holds that man's meaning is not realized until a person also has a similar feeling in "I" in the selves of others, an empathy amplified to the point of complete identification. Until this awareness of "I" in the composite self and in the generalized "other" selves is established and maintained, man, Hindus would say, is living in "avidya": ignorance or false consciousness.



It is for this reason, that I stated in the introduction of this section, that the sadhu cannot be studied in isolation for the purposes of philosophical, anthropological and documentary film research. For the sadhu, he is not alone, although he has physically detached himself from the mainstream of society and civilization. For him, there is no distinction between his "I" and the "I" of other selves. To him, there is only one single, all encompassing life force.

The difference between the sadhu and the rest of Hindu society and indeed the rest of Indian society at large, is not that he belongs to this "oneness" and everybody else does not. This would be an illogical paradox. It is simply that the sadhu is fully aware and relishes his awareness in the state of "moksha" while the rest of society is living in "avidya". For the common man in Hindu philosophy, who has not attained "moksha", the perception of himself, of the outside world and others around him remains "maya": a fragment, an apparent reality which, even if it is socially shared and sanctioned as "matam" (opinion about reality) is not "tatvam", the ultimate, true reality known only to the liberated man such as the sadhu.

## MAYA

We have established that "moksha", the state of oneness with the universe is the goal of human existence in accordance with Hindu philosophy and that this goal is emulated by the sadhu.

In order to now ascertain how that goal is achieved and how that awareness becomes manifest, one needs to make a distinction between the Hindu perception of reality and the Western perception of reality:

Reality, according to Hindu beliefs, can be apprehended through unconscious, preverbal processes of sensing and feeling; of intuition or extra-sensory perception which are thought to be in touch with fundamental rhythms and harmonies of the universe. The Hindu conception of the ego-propelled "maya" helps us to understand why there is so much interest and fascination in the everyday Indian life with the occult and superstition. The sadhu is considered to have transcended such interests which are rooted in the state of "maya" or fragmented consciousness which is ego-centered, to a state of "moksha", where there is no more ego and a sense of total "oneness".

This is the distinction between the sadhu's level of

awareness and the average Hindu's level of awareness in accordance with Hindu philosophy.

If we now look at the Western perception of reality we find that it revolves very much around ego boundaries. Between "I" and "others"; between the sensory experiences and social relations based upon these separations. Western psycho-analysis would say that a good reality sense is one that shows itself in the absence of a conscious feeling of the self or the various selves.

This situation is precisely what the Hindu process of attaining liberation and awareness attempts to reverse.

In the West, children learn to differentiate between themselves and what is not part of them, between "me" and "not-me". This is a process by which the individuals sense of space, time, causality and individuality is formed, and ego boundaries are constituted.

Hindu philosophy tends to undo this process of ego development. This distinction causes fundamental differences between Indian and Western society as we shall see later on in section III.

For the moment however, the distinction that is significant is that Hindu philosophy places a much higher value on the instinctive aspects of the human psyche than most of Western philosophy which is centered in the intellect.

Accordingly, the first step in achieving "moksha" is to disbandon all intellectual and ego-centered distinctions and to arrive at a more childlike state of perception where distinctions of reality become more and more blurred until finally, no distinction can be made.

It is only from this viewpoint that we can now understand the words of Vivekanda, an Indian philosopher who says in his The Yogas and other Works:

"I am fully persuaded that a baby, whose language consists of unintelligible sounds is attempting to express the highest philosophy".<sup>6</sup>

The Indian thinker Navayanananda, in his The Mysteries of Man puts it thus:

"The child is much nearer the vision of the self-We must become as little children before we can enter

into the realm of truth..It is said that the wisdom of babes is greater than that of scholars."<sup>7</sup>

This view of disbandoning the self and becoming more childlike is rooted in practicality according to Hindu philosophy. The basic premise here is that a child first "learns" to be a well-defined self; as he or she does so, he or she becomes stronger and thus the chains that bind us and which we so laboriously make with our thoughts and works become more and more difficult to break. The only way out of this vicious circle an back onto the road of ultimate realization (moksha) is to "unlearn" what we have learned in terms of making ego-centered distinctions and thus become more like children again.

In a 1912 edition of Gitanjali, a collection of Indian songs by Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet laurette who was an advisor to Ghandhi and Nehru and who won the Nobel prize for literature; the poet W.B. Yeats quotes a translation of one of Tagore's songs from the original Bengali, with the following preface:

"Indeed, when he is speaking of children, so much a part of himself this quality seems, one is not certain that he is no also speaking of the

saints."8

Yeats then goes on to quote the song which is an appropriate illustration of why Hindu philosophy advocates a childlike state in order to venture on the road to "moksha".

"They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of the worlds. They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets."9

#### DHARMA

There are various translations of what "dharma" means in Hindu philosophy: "the law", "moral duty", "right action"....Essentially, "dharma" is the means through which man approaches the desired goal of "moksha".

The distinction to be made here is "dharma" is a process by which to achieve "moksha" but the process must be thoroughly individual. Only the individual can

determine exactly what "right action" is according to his own, personal make-up as a human being. One way to put it would be to answer Shakespeare's Hamlet who asks: "To be, or not to be?" Hindu philosophy would answer "be". Because, by "being" one is flowing with the life force and will eventually be led to "moksha".

But how does the individual determine what "to be" is to him personally? In order to answer this question he has to answer the question "What is right action?"

It is this larger question which makes "dharma" a concept which is simple in theory but more difficult to define in practice.

Turning once again to W. Somerset Maugham, who, in the very last paragraph of the very last book that he wrote about his own personal philosophy, ends as follows:

"What then is right action? For my part the best answer I know is given by Fray Luis de Leon. To follow it does not look so difficult. With it I can end my book. The beauty of life, he says is nothing but this, that each should act in conformity with his nature and his business."<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps for Maugham, to follow ones own nature and business did not look so difficult since he possessed the luxury and talent to do so but to the masses of Hindus in Indian Society such individualism would create utter chaos as we shall discuss in Section II. The alternative, which is explored in more depth in the next section, is that Hindu society deviates from Hindu philosophy in the sense that instead of following individual right action, the average Hindu follows collective right action and this collectivism is manifested in the form of traditional kinship and caste groups.

This is a good opportunity for me to illustrate why this is singularly a philosophical discussion and not a religious one. Hindu religion embraces caste systems, systems of worship and ritual but this is different from Hindu philosophy.

The philosophy of the ancient Upanishads (a massive work written in Sanskrit between 800 and 400 B.C.) who were infact a group of anonymous sadhus support the philosophy and not the religion. Infact, this is the reason they remained anonymous, fearing that if they identified themselves then the masses would identify them, he Upanishads, as gods which would create another



religion full of "collective right action", ritual and hierarchy, like the Hindu Rig Veda.

Moreover, the Upanishads went even further as Juan Mascaro explains: "We find in the Upanishads a reaction against external religion. It is the permanent struggle between the better that kills and the spirit that gives life...The composers of the Upanishads were thinkers and poets, they had the vision of the poet...."<sup>11</sup>

This, then, is the essential distinction between dharma as it is stated by Hindu philosophy and dharma as it is prescribed by Hindu religion.

The philosophy says: just be.

The religion says: accept the caste system; look up to the higher castes with respect; worship this god and that god; throw yourself on the funeral pyre with your burning husband etc.

My concern is more with philosophy than with religion, although religion will be discussed in the appropriate context. Therefore, the definition of dharma as that of "just being" until one rises naturally to the heights of "moksha" is sufficient within the context of this

discussion.

### KARMA

The prevention of the individual from living in "dharma" and being separated from his intuitive understanding of right action, which in turn hinders his progress towards "moksha" is addressed in Hindu philosophy by the concept of "Karma".

Hindu psychological theory assumes that a new born infant comes into the world with a highly individualized unconscious characterized by a particular mixture of three fundamental qualities, or "gunas": "satva" (clarity), "rajas" (passion, desire) and "tamas" (dullness, darkness).

The Upanishads state that: "a person consists of his desires; as is his desire so is his will; and as is his will so is his deed; whatever deed he does that will he reap."<sup>12</sup>

Thus, according to the theory of "karma" the individual is assured that none of his efforts are wasted since he will start the next life with the balance of "gunas" attained at the close of his previous existence; this balance being titled and reportioned according to his

deeds. "Karma" is not just a doctrine of reincarnation, fatalism or predestination; it is promise of hope.

According to Hindu philosophy it is a means by which a person can continually steer his own course over many lifetimes towards the ultimate state of liberation, "moksha".

## SECTION ONE

### PART TWO

#### THE QUEST OF THE SADHU

Having discussed the Hindu philosophical concepts of "moksha", "maya", "dharma" and "karma" we can now move toward a clearer definition of what the Indian Sadhu represents in Hindu philosophy.

To recap, the goal of the sadhu is to attain a state of "moksha", or oneness with the universe. In order to achieve this oneness he transcends from "maya", the ego-centric, self-centered perception of reality; to a more childlike, non-judgmental and universally compassionate state of being. This occurs gradually through time and through numerous lifetimes in the overall flow of life or "dharma", during which he can live and "be". Successive lifetimes affect the composite of his inner consciousness and this evolution is "karma".

Thus the sadhu represents one who has transcended the "maya" through "dharma"; who has a favorable balance of "sattra" (clarity) from birth due to successive karmic accumulation and is now prepared to attain "moksha".

This is the philosophical theory. In practice, the actual search for an authentic "sadhu" has religious connotations

in India, and thus we must once again address the implication of the Hindu religion.

I have explained how in practicality, the theory of "dharma", the expression of the individual to be completely and equivocally unique in thought and action is distorted by the phenomena of religion; how individual right action is substituted for collective right action.

The purpose of dharma, when taking such a course, becomes self-defeating.

But the process does not end here:

Hindu philosophy is structured in a way that man, having followed the course of "dharma" gradually and naturally seeks a state of "moksha"; he does so after seeing the illusion of his desires for what they are - an illusion. He then becomes disillusioned and seeks something more fulfilling which leads him to "moksha".

Hindu religion holds the same pretext, but the difference is that the religion prescribes a systematic method by which to attain "moksha".

Briefly, the Hindu religion suggests stages of life through which a man must pass. He must first concentrate on

earning money, fulfilling his desire for power and prestige in the community; be a family man and so on, for most of his lifetime. In his old age he must then relinquish all that he has worked for, leave his family and travel deep into the forests or high in the Himalayas in search of "moksha". The point at which he leaves his family and his material goods and detaches himself, he is called a "sadhu" in Indian society.

The problem with the religious approach is that it is structured and therefore inhibiting and unnatural. I may work but usually it does not. The testimony to this fact is that the "sadhu" is a dying tradition as far as the religion goes and the few that remain are usually not authentic in spirit though they may appear to look so in practice: they are usually competent crooks and hustlers who are there to intrigue tourists and make money off them.

The most appropriate way to make the distinction between the "philosophical sadhu" and a "religious sadhu" to a Western reader, is to offer a Western example:

Consider the case of two persons for the sake of comparison: Television Evangelist Jimmy Swaggert and the Irish rock singer Bob Geldof.

Geldof, in his autobiography Is that it?, describes his life in uninhibited detail: his indulgences in promiscuous sex, alcohol, excessive drug use, lying, cheating and even stealing during his days as a rebel youth in Dublin.

Swaggert. on the other hand, presented a clean image of puritanism to his millions of religious followers.

Yet the outcome of recent events shows that Geldof raised millions of dollars for the starving in Africa while Swaggert was caught entering a seedy motel with a prostitute and was thus forced to step down from the pulpit.

Geldof is a good analogy for Hindu philosophy. He did not follow any course except his own individual desires and indulged in them with full gusto; that is, he practiced "dharma" to the fullest.

Swaggert did what the masses of India do; he followed a procedure; a systematic system towards "moksha". In the process however, he repressed his "dharma".

This is not to say that the Hindu religion is damaging or corrupting, it is merely not as pure as a philosophy or

poetry that was inspired from this philosophy, because it imposed behavior on the individual. Indeed, a prime example of how the Hindu religion and the Hindu philosophy can find a harmony in the flesh of a human being rather than in abstract in Mahatma Ghandi.

However, it is important to be aware, as a documentary film-maker that a sadhu, simply because he may have the outward appearance of a person who has attained "moksha" because he resides in the Himalayan caves and wears a loincloth, may have the inner understanding of "maya".

The documentary film-maker has to search deeper than the outward appearances which may merely be conditioned by religious ritual, which has more form than substance.

This is a subject I shall take up in more detail in section Five. However, for the purposes of defining the sadhu in terms of Hindu religion, he is a man who, according to the tradition of this religion has relinquished all his material possessions and his family and moved permanently into isolation, usually in the deep forests at the foothills of the Himalayas or in the caves of the Himalayas close to ancient sacred villages and towns.

This is the general definition of the "sadhu".



The particular definition of "sadhu" which I shall apply from this point onwards, is that "sadhu" who has not merely carried out religion ritual but is a "sadhu" inspired by the substance of Hindu philosophy. This is, by my definition, the authentic sadhu: one in whom the Hindu religion and Hindu philosophy are harmonious and not in conflict.

The basic reason why the sadhu chooses to remove himself from society is a case of not wanting to miss the forest for the trees. The ego of man, according to Hindu philosophy, becomes wrapped up in the pursuit of wealth, power and other fulfillments of desire. As long as the circumstances surrounding the individual create the dynamics that sustain desire one cannot rise above the ego and see humanity and the world at large in terms of total oneness.

Thus, in terms of physical movement, we consider the sadhu to be "removing" himself from the world he knows. From the sadhu's perspective however, he is removing himself from a "small world" of family, friends, community and so on; and moving into communion with the entire universe.

It is a symbolic move:

The ego is considered small and meagerly compared to the vast dignity and eternal quality of the soul of man. But the ego has one enormous force during the "maya" state of consciousness. It prevents a man from seeing his soul. If we consider a transparent pane of glass to represent the soul of man and say that through that clear pane of glass we can see all of time, space and life in all forms through all ages past, present and future, then this sense of complete clarity, the sadhu would consider a state of "moksha". For this a childlike state of consciousness is required.

We now have a perspective from which to see what Hindu philosophy considers the systematic "staining" of this glass.

A child, when he is born, is "clear". He or she has no perspective of time, for example. The child is then taught, conditioned to comprehend the human concept of time. This creates a large stain on the clear pane of glass. Now all the child can see is the human state of time.

A child is, as he grows up, conditioned by society to differentiate himself or herself from others: he is white;

she is black; she is Western; he is Eastern, and so on.

Systematically more and more stains are created upon the glass.

The drive of the ego which is in constant motion in order to acutely define and differentiate itself then does so, in the adult states, through a specific profession, material status, community power and so on. This only serves to narrow the perspective through the glass by creating more and more stains.

A point is reached then, when the clear glass has been so soiled that nothing but the ego can be seen. This is egocentricism.

This is the point of disillusionment that is reached by all human beings who indulge fully in their desires. Coming back to Bob Geldof, who reached a point of wealth and fame, the question then becomes: now what? It is for this reason that he has named his autobiography "Is That It?".

Hindu philosophy would say that this is the point at which you become a sadhu.

You must wash clean all the stains on the glass in order to

make it transparent again. It is interesting, that even psychic phenomena, or the concept of reincarnation, according to the sadhu I interviewed (Section Four) is still "masya" state of consciousness; one that is looking through a stained glass. It is analogous to wiping a tiny little speck of soil off the glass. Essentially, it means that instead of initially being conditioned only by the human sense of time, you now feel that you may be part of existence in another age. But that in itself is not relevant. It does not tell you you are part of the eternity of time.

Similarly, one can pinpoint certain occurrences and start calling them coincidences that are part of a psychic phenomena. But this even, is merely wiping clean a tiny speck of the soil on that stained glass. It merely addresses that some thought may be related, not that all thoughts are related completely and unequivocally throughout eternity.

Similarly again, one can travel more to other countries, read literature, history, science and so on, and this may expand the ego and make it more "worldly". Instead of the ego defining the self in a narrow and definitive dimension of what the individual represents, it expands in order to acknowledge and comprehend a larger spectrum of humanity.

But this still is a narrow and definitive dimension compared to the vastness of eternity. For eternity, and the experience of it (moksha), according to the sadhu, has no definitive dimension. It is not defined as such and such. You cannot say it "is" this and that. You can only say that "it is".

Thus, in order to completely wash clean the pane of glass, the sadhu must remove himself from all "stain creating" situations. Contact with society and humanity at large only develops the ego further in its drive to differentiate itself. The goal of "moksha" however is to "undifferentiate"; to abort the development of the ego.

The first step towards this abortion of the ego is to step out of normal life, and, in the case of the sadhu that I interviewed, move to the Himalayas and be completely alone.

What has been accomplished by this disassociation however, is the first step toward "moksha". The first step which the sadhu has taken is to stop the ego from developing any further. He has cut the cord of the ego's ability to keep living and thriving upon worldly desires.

The sadhu's ultimate aim now, is to kill the ego.

Thus, he has first taken away the "food" of the ego. Now, the ego has nothing further to feed upon.

His next step occurs in the Himalayas. The ego is now analogous to a chicken which has just had its head chopped off. Now the ego will keep making noises, will go through a massive withdrawal process as a drug addict who has no more access to drugs.

The sadhu now sits in quiet contemplation and meditation. But his mind is still being controlled by the violent ego which is undergoing a massive withdrawal system.

The mind of the sadhu, is thus still very active with latent desires and a whole spectrum of thoughts. Even though the sadhu's surroundings are peaceful, his mind is not. It is in fact more "noisy" than the average human being. The normal person whose ego demands, lets say, a night on the town, may go and have a night on the town. The sadhu cannot do this. He has cut himself off from the world of nightclubbing. So the reaction of his ego in this situation is much more exacerbated. His ego will rant, rave, scream and yell for that night on the town. It will try to "force" the sadhu back into normal existence so that he can go to a nightclub.

The sadhu however tries to remain steadfast with the knowledge of two important factors:

1. That the desire of the ego is perpetual. Thus, if temporarily fulfilled, another desire will surface. If the sadhu goes to a nightclub, he may then wish to seduce a woman and after that earn some money so that he can go to yet another nightclub. The ego will never be satisfied until the sadhu takes a firm stand and says: No more nightclubs for you ego, that's the end of it.
2. That eventually, the ego will stop being "noisy" and gradually become silent. That is, it will die, just like the chicken without the head will, after fluttering about violently, collapse and die.

The first factor tests the sadhu's faith that there is "something" worth pursuing that is better than the fulfillment of the ego's desires.

The second factor tests the sadhu's endurance since the withdrawal symptoms of the ego can be devastatingly arduous and painful and can potentially drive a person mad. It usually takes many years for the ego to finally become silent. However, eventually, the sadhu believes that the

ego will silence itself; the glass pane will be completely washed away of all egotistical stains, and this silence, this clarity is the experience of "moksha".

In Buddhism the state of "moksha" is known as "nirvana" and it is interesting here to draw a comparison between Buddhist monks and the quest of the Hindu sadhu.

The Buddhist monasteries that I visited in Nepal after visiting the Himalayan sadhus, were full of monks who were as young as thirteen years.

The rationale here is that the less contact the child has with the outside world, the less "polluted" he becomes and the less stained is the pane of glass that represents his consciousness. Therefore, in theory, there is less work to be done on the ego; less stains to wash clean off that pane of glass if he is whisked quickly into a monastery.

Hindu philosophy differs here:

In Hindu philosophy, as explained earlier, one must live life to the fullest and indulge the ego to its utmost. Only then can individuals reach a point of disillusionment and consider the ego's desires to be frivolous and only at this point can the individual then proceed on the path of



"moksha".

Professor Suriakhan Amin, a theologian and philosopher who teaches at Kashmir University in Srinagar, Kashmir, explained it to me thus:

"One must reach a point of absolute disillusionment before embarking on the path of "moksha" (or nirvana). Otherwise the process of detachment from society and the subsequent turmoil of contemplation and meditation creates only more doubt of the experience of moksha. A sadhu must be inspired to leave the world of possessions and desires. It must not be a forced action as in the case of monks. The sadhu has to be absolutely sure that he is fed up; he's had enough of this world and now he wants something more meaningful. Otherwise his body may be isolated from society but his mind will doubt the action.

"Buddhists try to speed-up the process by going straight for the ultimate and the eternal, through the monastic tradition. One cannot ascertain the results of this process in its entirety. The Dalai lama of Tibet, for example, is I believe a shining example of one who has 'attained'; who knows the experience of nirvana (or moksha). And yet he entered a monastery when he was only seven years of age. So perhaps it is not necessary to go

through indulgence and then disillusionment.

"On the other hand, Hindu philosophers would argue that Buddha himself was born a prince who had enormous wealth, hundreds of concubines, gorged on the best food and so forth. It was because he was so inundated with all that the ego desires that he was able to reach a point of being fed up and disillusioned and then only did he drop his ego in order to reach nirvana.

"So ultimately, it is difficult to make generalizations about which is the correct approach-conditioned disillusionment through monastic discipline or voluntary disillusionment through living life indulgently. Ultimately, it is an individual phenomena and not a religious one."

The "conditioned disillusionment" that Prof. Amin spoke of, applies equally to sadhus who follow strict Hindu Brahmin tradition of leaving the normal world at a certain age (usually, in modern times, in their fifties) regardless of whether one has reached "voluntary disillusionment" or not.

However, in the final analysis, what seems significant is whether the individual can transcend his ego and reach a state of moksha, through whatever rationale whether it be

religious tradition, monastic discipline or simply personal inspiration.

This then, is the stated goal of the sadhu: to attain moksha by transcending his ego.

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SECTION TWO

THE LINK BETWEEN THE SADHU  
AND  
THE MASSES OF INDIA

SECTION 2

PART 1

THE IGNORANT MASSES

In a 1913 edition of a book entitled "The Peoples of India", written by J.D. Anderson, a Cambridge University Don, the following reference is made towards the impact of the Hindu religion upon the masses of Indian society:

"....the more ignorant and simple folk who profess and call themselves Hindus are in fact at the animistic stage of intellectual evolution."<sup>1</sup>

Anderson, in my opinion, has got it half-right.

It is true that the mass of Indian society is ignorant and simple but this ignorance and simplicity cannot be measured in terms of intellectual evolution. The basic fact is that the masses of Indians are ignorant and simple because they choose to be; they have no intention of evolving intellectually. Furthermore, whenever it was the British Raj or before that the sixteenth century Moghuls from Persia and before that by Alexander the Great in northern India; throughout Indian history in fact, the Indian masses have stubbornly resisted intellectual evolution and progress. This has been the biggest frustration by far of

all the empires that have ruled India over the centuries.

The friction that has been created throughout Indian history between outside forces such as the Moghuls and the British and the masses of India, is then as follows:

Whereas outside forces and indeed, Western civilization at large places a high premium on intellectual evolution as a means by which to assert progress in civilization through industrial revolutions, democratic government and so forth; the Indian masses do not place a high premium on intellectual evolution. Infact, the Indian masses place no importance whatsoever upon intellectual evolution. They may superficially display a temporary adherence toward intellectual progress through education and vocation, but ultimately the resistance to intellectual progress is so deeply and powerfully rooted in their psyche that it manifests itself throughout history and still continues to do so.

In order to comprehend this deep resistance by India's masses against intellectual evolution one must thoroughly comprehend Hindu philosophy and religion.

In Section 1 we compared the Western perception of reality against the Indian perception of reality. We saw that

whereas in the West, children are encouraged to develop their identity in terms of what is "me" and what is "not me"; Hindu philosophy seeks to do precisely the opposite. It seeks to undo the process of ego development and disband all distinctions so that one arrives back at a childlike state of consciousness. Given this distinction we can now see that the fundamental difference between Indian culture as it is affected by Hindu philosophy, and Western culture, is as follows:

Whereas in Western culture intellectual evolution is equated with "progress" and arriving at a level that is more "civilized", the Indian perception is precisely the opposite. To the Indian masses, intellectual evolution is equated with "lack of progress" and is in a sense a step towards being "uncivilized", in terms of the overall goal of Hindu philosophy which is the attainment of "moksha".

Thus, to the Indian sadhu who has attained "moksha" intellectual evolution and progress is merely something to be transcended. In terms of Hindu philosophy it is a state of "maya", a fragmented consciousness that has to be transcended in order to attain "moksha". And this process of transcendence initially requires achieving a childlike state of consciousness.



The Trinidadian Indian writer, V.S. Naipul interviewed Dr. Sudhir Kakar, a psychotherapist at Nehru University in New Dehli on this subject. Kakar's opinion is as follows:

"There seems to be a different relationship to outside reality, compared to one met in the West. In India it is closer to a certain stage in childhood when outer objects did not have a separate independent existence but were intimately related to the self and its affective states. They were not something in their own right, but were good or bad, threatening or rewarding, helpful or cruel, all depending on the persons feelings of the moment."<sup>2</sup>

While I agree with Kakar's assessment of the Indian concept of reality based upon my travels and observations in India, I should mention, before closing this part of the discussion, that Western culture is not completely devoid of tremors of Hindu philosophy.

With regard to the need to maintain a childlike state we can view the words of the rock group Pink Floyd's song The Wall, the chorus of which is as follows:

"We don't need no education  
We don't need no thoughts controlled  
The dark sarcasm in the classroom

Teacher leave those kids alone  
Hey -- teacher  
Leave those kids alone  
All you are is just another  
Brick in The Wall"<sup>3</sup>

At first glance this seems purely rebellious but the subtler implication I believe, of Pink Floyd's verse, is as follows:

"The Wall" in terms of Hindu philosophy would be between those who have a higher and more childlike state of consciousness and those who have a more intellectual but cynical and darkly sarcastic state of consciousness. The wall is thus a wall of communication, a wall that confines the natural wonderment and concept of reality that a child possesses. The wall is a wall which is attempting to categorize and impose a certain identity and ego-centered concept of reality, whereas the child naturally possesses a more profound sense of reality than does the adult.

In Hindu philosophy and culture this is a perfectly acceptable and prevalent phenomena. In the next part of this discussion, when we discuss the vulnerability of the Indian masses, we can see how this concept of "The Wall" makes the masses resist formal education, vocational

training and any other form of intellectual development. Further, we shall see how this very concept of resisting to be confined in "The Wall" of a particular intellectual identity and perception of reality, has made the country vulnerable both in the past and in the present.

## PART 2

### THE VULNERABLE MASSES

When the consciousness of the masses remains stubbornly at a childlike level, it makes the country vulnerable to outside forces and influences as well as internal conflict.

Like children, the masses are easily amused and easily aroused. But when viewed as a nation and a civilization, this characteristic has catastrophic consequences. Hindu India, as Naipul explains below, when subjected to all these outside and internal conflicts and influences becomes self-destructive:

"Hinduism has not been good for the millions. It has exposed us to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation. It has given men no idea of a contract with other men, no idea of state. It has enslaved one quarter of the population and always left the whole fragmented and vulnerable. Its philosophy of withdrawal has diminished men intellectually and not equipped them to respond to challenge; it has stifled growth. So that again and again in India history has repeated itself: vulnerability, defeat, withdrawal. And there are not four hundred millions now, but something nearer seven hundred million."<sup>3</sup>

Naipul is absolutely correct: Hinduism as a religion, has been detrimental to India in many ways. History has proved this and the problems of modern India continue to confirm this hypothesis.

This aspect of vulnerability can be taken even further. The whole notion of vulnerability implies a force within the nation or outside the nation which overpowers; overwhelms. The forces outside have been outside rulers from the time of Alexander's conquest of Northern India, to the Moghuls and then the British.

To understand this we must revert back to Hindu philosophy and the concept of "dharma" which, to paraphrase both Shakespeare's Hamlet and Paul McCartney of the Beatles, is essentially a level of acceptance of life that says one should "be and let it be". If "dharma" can be described as "live and let live" then "karma" can be described (as it is interpreted by the masses of India) as "what will be will be".

These two aspects of Hindu philosophy, "dharma" and "karma," after being percolated from their pure theoretical form, through the mass interpretation which is childlike; end up in the practical religious residual form of Hindu philosophy, as merely an excuse to be lazy, listless,

unbothered and unaffected by life.

The tragedy here, the fundamental tragedy of India that perpetuates itself in the form of poverty, corruption and war, is as follows:

The Hindu philosophy, in its profoundness and complexity can only be competently and accurately interpreted by relatively few Indians, such as authentic sadhus, Mahatma Gandhi and the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

To the masses however, Hindu philosophy is beyond comprehension precisely because they are not intellectually developed. Infact, the masses are largely illiterate. Gandhi however, was well educated as was Tagore. Both these men subsequently down played their intellect in order to reach and affect the mass consciousness, but the fact nevertheless remains as follows: with an underdeveloped intellect one can only grasp rituals and prescribed values and beliefs of the Hindu religion, and then blindly follow these beliefs.

So here we have the ultimate irony of India as it pertains to Hindu philosophy. The philosophy says the intellect has to be transcended; that it is not important in an of itself, it is merely a state of hand-consciousness or

"maya". What has to be attained is full consciousness or "moksha".

The masses interpret this something as follows: If the intellectual development is not what is ultimately important then why even bother going through it? Why make the effort to travel from a state of childlike consciousness to a state of intellectual development if one then has only to revert back once more to the childlike consciousness? Why bother crossing a bridge if all you do once you cross it is walk back the way you came?

This is the irony of Hindu philosophy.

The answer would be that in theory it is unnecessary to develop intellectually but in practice it is necessary because one is dynamically subject to outside forces and internal conflict.

Ghandi is a good example of this. Ghandi's intellect grasped Hindu philosophy to its totality and used the philosophy in a very practical way, particularly the concept of non-violence which is a direct derivation of the concept of "dharma".

Ghandi himself lived like a simple Hindu and was in fact

very childlike in his mature years. Thus, he epitomized Hindu philosophy. He had no possessions and no personal material resources. He was essentially a "working sadhu": However he had an intellect that was well developed. Because of this developed intellect, he was not vulnerable. He could negotiate with viceroys and kings on an equal footing intellectually. After doing so, he could always go back to his village in his loin cloth and spin cotton. The fundamental difference between Gandhi and the masses apart from his charisma, was not the outward appearance or lifestyle, but the internally developed intellect.

Thus, one of the roots of India's vulnerability is an underdeveloped intellect. This underdeveloped intellect prevents the masses from comprehending Hindu philosophy and applying it effectively as Gandhi did. It leaves them in a stagnant area of continual disruption from internal and external forces from which they do not have the intellectual capacity to protect themselves.



### PART 3

#### THE SADHU AND THE MASSES

We have just seen how the masses of India have substituted an intellectually sensitive interpretation of Hindu philosophy an obsessive belief in Hindu religious ritual, Naipul makes the following comment on this phenomena:

"When men cannot observe they don't have ideas; they have obsessions. When people live instinctive lives, something like a collective amnesia steadily blurs the past."<sup>4</sup>

This is precisely the perpetual syndrome of the Indian masses but the question now becomes: What happens to men who can observe and who do have ideas? The answer to this question is two-tiered from a Western perspective:

The first tier, consists of men, who, through their ability to observe and exercise their intellect, have applied themselves for their own benefit. These are men of ideas but the ideas consist of ways and means of fulfilling base desires such as wealth and power. The combination of these men and the fact that the masses are largely ignorant and vulnerable as we have discussed; makes Indian society very ripe for rampant corruption and political and economic abuse.

The second tier, are those men who have a sensitivity toward the masses and possess the intellectual capacity to apply their ideas for the benefit of those other than themselves. An example might be a long time cabinet member in India who is descended from the Kashmiri nobility, Dr. Karan Singh. In his autobiography, Heir Apparent, Dr. Singh speaks of influences upon him by Ghandi, Nehru, Mountbatten and others from both East and West which helped him to develop his ideas. Singh also describes how intellectual development inspires idealism:

"I resumed reading my favorite thinkers-Bertrand Russel and Aldous Huxley-and was deeply impressed at their mastery.....It struck me how superior the realm of ideas was to the realm of men: none of the grasping corruption, the crass opportunism, only dazzling concepts moving through the clear mind. ....I discovered Plato and was enraptured. The Symposium remains my favorite book and though I later turned to the Vedanta (ancient Hindu scriptures) I continue to value my early encounter with the great seer of the Western World".<sup>5</sup>

In this second tier, we can see at least the potential of men of ideas in Indian society. Moreover, we see that an understanding of Hindu philosophy such as the Vedanta does

not prevent Singh from acknowledging Western thought and the philosophy of Plato or Huxley. In this sense we see that a philosophical mind in Indian society can rise above the confines of set beliefs in Hindu religion.

Thus, we see that while Hindu religion confines the masses, those who comprehend Hindu philosophy do not confine themselves to it but see parallels in Western thought as well.

The difficult however, is in trying to distinguish between the first tier and the second tier which I have articulated. How can we say exactly that there are some in power who are corrupt and others in power who have lofty ideals? How do we know that those with seemingly lofty ideals aren't just making token gestures and rhetorical remarks while greedily lining their own pockets?

This is a cynical view but a very appropriate and significant one, which is explored in depth in Hindu philosophy:

I have explained how the ego-centered path of desire, according to Hindu philosophy, represents a fragmented consciousness or "maya". This concept is very strict in its application. From a Western perspective, a man like

Dr. Karan Singh whom I have just mentioned, and more so Mahatma Gandhi, would be considered at a much higher level of consciousness than the mass of people. But, according to Hindu philosophy there is no distinction: Gandhi, and for that matter, Bob Geldof, Martin Luther King and Mother Theresa, would all be considered at a "maya" level of consciousness, in the same category as the masses.

Hindu religion of course, is another thing altogether. The masses that blindly follow Hindu religion consider Gandhi to be a God. But this is religion and my concern is with Hindu philosophy.

The rationale that Hindu philosophy offers is very simple: Anyone who lives by desires and does not practice "dharma"; that is, does not allow themselves to just be and let others be is exercising their ego and thus can never be in a state of "moksha".

Thus, from a Hindu philosophical perspective Gandhi, although he had the best of intentions, was manipulating and distorting the law of "dharma" by not allowing himself to "just be" and others to "just be". In the process, he remained at the conscious level of "maya".

It must be remembered, as discussed in Section 1, that good

deeds are not wasted, and that whatever good Ghandi did before he died positively affects the balance of "gunas" in a karmic sense, so that, according to Hindu philosophy, he would be reborn with more clarity (sattra) and less dullness and darkness (tamas) with which to begin his next life.

Nevertheless, the fact remains that according to the philosophy, Ghandi could not possibly have been in a state of "moksha".

The only person in Indian society and in the Hindu philosophy who has the potential to attain "moksha" is the genuine sadhu.

This is because the sadhu detaches himself physically and allows himself to just be and others to just be. He does not impose a belief system or an opinion. He merely and just "is". In doing so, the sadhu becomes as close to nature as a human being can possibly be.

To comprehend this one must extend the concept of "dharma" to the elements of time, space and nature. When nature is allowed to "just be", without any intervention from mankind then there is sunshine and rain: there are droughts and floods. The extremes of nature may wipe out millions of

living things but in the strictest sense this is the dynamic of dharma, and, according to Hindu philosophy must not be disrupted. The rationale is that just as man will be led to "moksha" through an uninterrupted state of dharma, so, in the aggregate, will mankind. Any interruption of this state of "dharma" merely retards the process. Moreover, in an overall cosmic sense, there are ice ages and land shifts and these also are considered to be part of the overall purpose of "dharma". Just as these should not be altered, so, the fate of other living things should not or cannot be altered.

A very simplistic though inadequate way of putting it would be to say that the sadhu according to Hindu philosophy is saying: Whatever I do I end up altering the course of fate so its better if I just stay out of the way like the grass and the trees and "just be".

The issue here is that the philosophy can only be explained so far in Western language and then there is a point at which a limit is reached. Words such as "dharma" can only be translated to a certain extent:

For example, in Section 1, I explained how Bob Geldof lived his "dharma" to the full whilst Jimmy Swaggert did not. In the context of explaining the phenomena of attaining

"moksha" by abiding to "dharma" this is a thoroughly accurate explanation.

In this section I have just explained how the sadhu in Hindu philosophy detaches himself from society in order to not impose himself on others and "just be". This action of "no action" is also "dharma" in terms of explaining the life of a sadhu.

But my first example and my second example are absolutely contradictory. With Geldof and Swaggert I am implying that "dharma" is rooted in action and with the sadhu it is rooted in no-action.

The answer is that both are accurate in their own right. Dharma is a multi-faceted all encompassing phenomena which I have explained in the English language to the best of my abilities but ultimately one has to recognize that it is an Indian (Sanskrit) word and only in that language can it be done further justice of comprehension.

Indian languages are much vaguer and less defined than the English language. They are more instinctive and childlike as reflected in the philosophy. Within the vague confines of Indian language the meaning of "dharma" is "felt". But when brought into the more definitive English language

which is structured toward absolutes, the concept of "dharma" becomes fragmented in contradictions. Therefore, the best way to understand "dharma" in English is to view it only in the particular context and example from which it is being explained. I therefore, respectfully request the readers co-operation in taking this approach.

It is perhaps this concept of "dharma" in Hindu philosophy that Shakespeare was struggling with in Hamlet. Hamlet belabors the question of whether "to be or not to be" and ultimately answers thus:

"there are more things in heaven  
and earth, Horati  
Than are dreamt in your  
philosophy."<sup>6</sup>

Thus, after a certain point things are simply "felt" rather than categorically understood Prof. Richard Leacock voiced a similar opinion to me upon my return from India, when we discussed this subject: "People always feel the need to constantly explain things-people like psychologists and sociologists....maybe somethings are better understood by just plain intuition...."

Nevertheless, for the purposes of explaining the sadhu in



Indian society, suffice to say that ultimately, the sadhu holds the highest dharmic and karmic ideal of Hindu philosophy.

For this reason, throughout history, the sadhu has been revered by the Indian masses as the most respected individual in India. According to strict Hindu tradition the sadhu is more respected than kings, Moghul emperors and nawabs, politicians and industrialists.

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SECTION THREE

THE SEARCH FOR THE AUTHENTIC SADHU

PART 1  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HINDU PILGRIMAGE  
AND  
THE SADHU

One of the earliest allusions to the practice of pilgrimage in Indian literature is to be found in the Aitareya Brahmana volume of the ancient text the Rigveda (composed between 1500 and 1000 B.C.):

Flower-like the heels of the wanderer  
His body groweth and is fruitful  
All his temptations disappear  
Slain by the toil of his journeying<sup>1</sup>

It is quite possible that the concept of pilgrimage existed in some form in this ancient period, since even today, the pilgrim undertakes the journey to sacred places for the purpose of purification and redemption from sin and temptation.

The Aryan people at the time of the composition of the Rigveda (known as the "Vedic" period in Indian history), had a great reverence for the rivers. The Aryan law book, the Manu-Smriti, makes references to the Ganges and the Kuruksetra rivers, both of which later became highly

celebrated and deeply sacred rivers:

If thou art not at variance with  
that divine  
Who dwells in Thy heart, Thou  
needest neither  
Visit the Ganges nor the (land of the) Kurus<sup>2</sup>

Ancient references and inferences such as these, during the Vedic period of Indian history, seem to have formed the roots of the subsequent Indian expression: "tirtha-yatra." Literally, "tirtha-yatra" means "undertaking journey to river fords". "Tirtha-yatra" in Hindu philosophy not only means the physical act of visiting a sacred place in India but also implies mental and moral discipline.

Following the Vedic period, the practice of pilgrimage gained considerably increased popularity as shown by the relevant sections of the great epic Mahabharata (300 B.C.).<sup>3</sup>

As Hindu philosophy began to crystallize into a more formalized religion the significance of ritualistic elements within it greatly increased. Activity, such as bathing in the river Ganges and receiving blessings from the officiating priests of the sacred towns and villages

became the mainstay of the mass of pilgrims. The underlying motive of pilgrimage was to purify oneself by being in the presence of holy men.

The sadhus that lived in these holy places were usually left alone after offerings of food were made to them. However, numerous priests, shamans, yogis and "false holymen" who looked like sadhus, but were in fact expert confidence tricksters also began to emerge. This was because the philosophy, which did not impose any financial or otherwise sacrificial burden upon the pilgrimage, became formalized into a religion which encouraged such sacrificial ritual. Therefore, the sacred places became profitable little enterprises for the thousands of hustlers who purported to be authentic yogis and sadhus.

This is another good example of how the philosophers departs from the religion:

The Hindu philosophy in its basic form, suggests that one should naturally rise towards a state of disillusionment, as I have detailed in earlier sections, is the result of an indulgent ego. Once this stage of disillusionment is reached, the individual concerned can feel very devastated. He has lived life to its fullest and now life has no more meaning. At this point he is ready to look for something

more meaningful, the path of "moshka"; that is, a genuine sadhu.

We can now, at this stage, using the same example, track the evolution of the Hindu philosophy into religious ritual.

The devastatedly disillusioned individual will benefit from the experience of being in the presence of the sadhu and for this reason he visits the place where the sadhu resides.

But the key word here is "presence." The individual, according to the philosophy does not need to converse with the sadhu. He does not need to have discussions with him on cosmic qualities, or even seek advice on how to proceed on the path of the "moshka." The path is totally individual for each human being and no human being can, strictly speaking, advise another on how to get there. If he tried to, based upon the philosophy, all he will succeed in doing is to impose his own individual opinions which are based upon the sadhu's particular character. This would be an egotistical action which is precisely the opposite of what the sadhu is attempting to accomplish in the first place.

One can even go further in interpreting Hindu philosophy to understand that the individual "seeker" need not even physically see the sadhu. He just needs to visit the general area where the sadhu resides and he will "feel" the aura of one who is on the path of "moshka." This way he will be "inspired."

"Inspiration" is a vague word when trying to define it in terms of physical action or dialogue, but nonetheless a very powerful word in terms of trying to comprehend the essence of the relationship between the individual and the sadhu.

Using the words "inspiration" and "presence" which are vague words in the English language but perhaps the most precise words in Sanskrit and Hindu philosophical thought, we can explain the relationship as follows:

The individual is living in the world of human desires and temptations that perpetuate the growth of his intellect and egocentricity. Thus, he is living in an environment that "inspires" his ego.

If this individual then removes himself from this environment and places himself in an environment where there are sadhus who are seeking the path of "moshka," then the ego is no longer "inspired." But now, the soul of the



man becomes "inspired" because now he can feel the aura of others who are seeking oneness with their soul..

It is for this reason that I mentioned the key word to be "presence." Whatever presence the individual is in, that presence will inspire either his soul or his ego.

We can now see how this action becomes ritualized. The place or environment where the sadhu resides, becomes a "sacred place" in the religious context. The individual who goes to visit this sacred place becomes known as a "pilgrim."

Moreover, the deep and profound subtlety of the sensations of "presence" and "inspiration" are beyond the comprehension of the mass of Hindu religious followers, as was discussed in a political and sociological context in Section 2. For this reason, rituals have to be invented. The result of this, is as follows:

The concept of "presence" is too subtle and intangible for the Hindu (religious) pilgrim. The pilgrim needs something more tangible than this. He needs someone who he can physically communicate with. Consequently, priests and unauthentic sadhus emerge in the holy and sacred places, so that they can advise the pilgrims upon how to attain

moshka.

The concept of "inspiration" is also lost on the masses of pilgrims; instead they require someone to tell them what to do to purify themselves and proceed towards "moshka." Thus, in addition to mere advice, the priests often simply tell the pilgrims their opinions of what they must do in order to attain "moshka" and also tell them what terrible and sinful things will happen to them if they do not follow the strict orders of the priests. It is from this phenomena that the notions of superstitious rituals, evil spirits, exorcism and so forth, proliferate.

To join this circus of new beliefs, fears and superstitions, a whole host of enterprising shamans; exorcists; vendors of "lucky charms" such as crystals and beads; psychics; fortune-tellers; faith healers; gypsy and hypnotists emerge out of the woodwork. All these entrepreneurs levy fairly hefty "donations" from the pilgrims, considering the subsistence level means of the average Hindu in India.

Thus, we can see that the ancient Hindu philosophy which first began to allude toward a relationship between the individual and the sadhu based upon concepts, which, roughly translated into English, are "presence" and

"inspiration," have precipitated into a religion which consists of "pilgrimages" to "sacred places" where exchanges with a whole slew of pseudo-priests and conmen occur.

Keeping in mind that the ideals of the average Hindu in India are confined more toward healing a toothache or making a little more money or receiving a better harvest in his rice paddy, than they are on the more lofty notion of attaining oneness with the cosmos, we can see that the sadhu's presence has little effect upon the mass of pilgrims that visit the sacred places.

Moreover, it becomes practically impossible to find the genuine, authentic sadhu when we consider that the real sadhu's usually bolt from most of the sacred places in India for a very simple reason: the "sacred places" become the most enterprising, money-centered, ego-tempting areas for any genuine sadhu to be in.

The whole purpose of becoming a sadhu is to avoid such places, and this is why the sadhu bolts from it, as soon as his peace is disturbed by the commercialism of religion.

In the next part of this discussion, I shall explain how, given the above knowledge and the inherent difficulties

presented to the documentary film-maker, I attempted to search for the genuine sadhu.

## PART 2

### THE SEARCH FOR THE AUTHENTIC SADHU

On December 7, 1987, I took a train from New Delhi to a small, traditionally sacred town in Northern India called Hardwar, in search of an authentic sadhu.

I travelled through various sacred villages in Northern India that are clustered around Hardwar, by bus, rickshaw and on foot, hiking through the Himalayan foothills.

In part 1 of the discussion I explained how the sadhu has become an elusive figure due to the fact that religion in India, particularly during seasons of Hindu pilgrimage, has become rampantly commercial in the sacred places.

Another factor which exacerbates the elusiveness of the sadhu is the curiosity of Western tourists which have frequented the sacred places for decades, but particularly since the late 1960's. For the local Hindu pilgrims who swarm to the holy places of pilgrimage by the millions during the summer months when the climate in the north of India is more comfortable, there are plenty of shamans, pseudo-priests and other characters I have mentioned, ready to offer a quick "blessing" for monetary remuneration.

For the Westerner there is another type of character ready to cash in on the curiosity of the tourist: the swami or the guru.

Thus, in addition to the slew of characters I have mentioned, who are awaiting the Hindu pilgrims, there are also highly articulate English-speaking, often Western-educated "gurus", ready to offer their blessings and guidance for a monetary remuneration -- this time in foreign exchange if possible. I met and spoke with many of these gurus, who were all too ready to offer their version of a packaged philosophy. Most of the gurus do not ask for money upfront. Instead, they attempt to recruit the loyalty of the tourist to their "ashram," or commune.

There were many ashrams in and around Hardwar, where I saw both Europeans and Americans, usually in their twenties and thirties, doing simple manual labor and studying under a guru in the evenings. A select few had stayed for a number of years, but most remained for a month or two.

The author V.S. Naipaul sums up the syndrome of these Western recruits as follows: "The hippies of Western Europe and the United States seem to have entered into the Indian reality but they haven't. Out of security and mental lassitude, an intellectual anorexia, they simply cultivate

squalor. And their calm can easily turn to panic. When the price of oil rises and economics tremble at home, they clean up and bolt. Theirs is a shallow narcissism; they break just where the Hindu begins: the knowledge of the abyss..."<sup>4</sup>

I travelled for fifteen days through the sacred villages recording my encounters with the various characters that have commercialized the religion. I had not yet found a sadhu, but there were two important factors in my favor:

1. I was traveling in the winter months when the sacred places are usually quite deserted, except for the odd pilgrim who happens to stop by because it coincides with a business trip or a visit with a relative. Thus, the lack of masses of pilgrims which become prevalent during the summer months was reflected in a lack of pseudo-priests and other hustlers. There were some priests who seemed very genuine representatives of the Hindu religion. They were not sadhus and spent most of their time in small temples on the foothills overlooking the Gunga (Ganges) river.
2. The extensive research I had conducted on

Hindu philosophy and religion prior to arriving in India combined with the fact that I spoke or understood fluently most Indian languages had already given me an acute sense of what not to look for. Thus, I may not have been sure what an authentic sadhu looked like but I immediately recognized one that was not authentic.

On the third day of my travels last of Hardwar I met a Hindu priest in a small town known as Derprayag. He seemed to be fairly authentic as a representative of the religion and the fact that I had observed him in silent meditation for over an hour at a stretch made me feel that he was at least not the type who dons a loincloth during his lunch break as a railway clerk in order to fleece the tourists.

I spent two days with the priest, discussing ancient Hindu scriptures, and indeed found him very selfless in explaining and classifying some of the questions I had. He was very knowledgeable and was very much a humanitarian.

Within the first hour of meeting with him I questioned the Hindu priest about the possibility of finding an authentic sadhu. At that time, he simply said that there was no



longer culture such a thing and that it was a dead culture in India.

After the first day and a half however, the priest voluntarily brought up the fact that there were such people, but they were very hard to find and always aloof. Most were so removed from society and so isolated that whenever they witnessed another human being they hid in the caves on the foothills. The priest did not venture more information than this. He conceded that he had only told me this much because I had won his trust having spent time with him. I did not, incidentally, offer him any money.

After travelling for fifteen days I returned to Derprayag en route back to Hardwar. My plan was to simply take the train back to New Delhi. I had met with various characters over a fortnight in the sacred places and had found nothing close to a concept of a genuine sadhu.

In Derprayag however, I once again met the Hindu priest and explained my predicament to him. He agreed to reveal the source of the sadhus to me, but made me make a lot of promises and took a laborious and roundabout way of explaining how I could find them. His essential concern was that I should not disturb their "peace" and most importantly, I must not take a camera with me.

I did not keep most of the promises, particularly with regard to my camera. I justified that the camera would have been easily stolen if I had "entrusted" it to anyone, and by such means talked my way out of most of my promises to the priest.

There were sadhus in a neighboring town called Rishikesh, according to the priest, and so I set out straight away to this location.

In the next section, I shall discuss my encounter with the sadhu.

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SECTION FOUR

SPEAKING WITH A SADHU IN RISHIKESH

## PART 1

### INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE SADHU

#### THE FIRST DAY

The town of Rishikesh is located on the foothills overlooking the Ganges River in northern India.\* It is one of the most ancient sacred places of India and frequented by thousands of pilgrims in the summer months. The slackest period is December, when the weather is relatively cold for India.

Rishikesh was a day's bus ride from Hardwar. After wandering about the town, which seems to subsist mainly on terraced agriculture on the lush cliffs overlooking the Ganges I made my way down to the bathing area on the Ganges where bathing rites and ritualistic prayer sessions and meditation is conducted.

I there witnessed, over a full day, five different sadhus, who systematically would meditate and pray on the flatrocks next to the gushing Ganges, and then proceed back up to their dwellings in caves higher up in the foothills. The meditation sessions usually lasted between two to three hours. After observing the meditation sessions for a full day, I returned to my lodging in the village.

\* Please note reference map at end of this section.

## THE SECOND DAY

The next day I went back to the holy bathing area and instinctively chose to follow a certain sadhu whom I had seen the day before, up to his dwelling in the hills. He was wearing a simple loincloth and seemed younger than the others, perhaps in his late forties. He was of medium height, and very lean. His stomach was flat and muscular lines ran horizontally across it.

The sadhu had received an earthenware bowl of vegetable curry and curd from a local of the village. This same villager had made precisely the same gestures to all the sadhus on the previous day. At the end of the previous day I asked the villager the significance of this gesture. He simply replied that it was the tradition of the town of Rishikesh to contribute to the subsistence of the sadhus. Local families usually donated portions of their cooked food to this cause and the local himself was an unpaid volunteer.

The sadhu whom I followed as he trekked up the foothills noticed me following him but made no comment.

After a few hundred feet of climbing he found a patch of soil surrounded by grass and sat down upon this patch which offered a spectacular view of the Ganges and surrounding

mountains. He then looked at me without changing an expression which was quite emotionless yet endearing; gestured to his earthenware bowl with an open hand and effectively invited me for lunch.

I said a few words of greeting and made a comment about the view but he did not respond. He merely gestured for me to eat out of the earthenware bowl. We ate out of the same bowl and completed the meal.

The sadhu licked his hands clean and I followed suit. He then placed the bowl, which was inbetween us, to his side. After this he spoke for the first time. He said: "Sit with me today and tomorrow we will talk."

He then turned from facing me, to face the view of the Ganges and the mountains more directly. I again followed suit.

We sat together in this position until approximately an hour after sunset. That is , a total of six hours.

The sadhu then arose and headed toward a nearby cave which he entered. He did not speak a word the entire time. After he entered his cave, I made my way back down to the riverside and then into the village to my lodging place.

### THE THIRD DAY

The next morning I arose at 5 a.m. and after some tea made my way back to the spot where I had left the sadhu the previous day.

The night before I had made some notes about my encounter with the sadhu and the following is a brief excerpt of the notes in my journal:

"I felt an immense presence, but I'm not sure if it was because I was expecting to because of some romantic notion or because I actually felt it ... no, there was a presence but it was not a sacred or holy presence ... it was just very pleasurable in its simplicity ... but then, perhaps it was nice because of the novelty of it, I'd probably get bored if I did it everyday like he does ..."

It took me close to an hour to find my way back to the spot, because I lost my way. When I arrived, the sadhu was sitting in the same spot as the day before. I joined him as I had done the day before. He sat in silence for some time but the time was hard to track since I did not look at my watch the entire time.

He then slowly pointed to a dew drop on a blade of grass next to us and said: "after we talk about this, I must be



alone."

He spoke in great detail for some time and then stopped and sat silently. I took this as my cue to leave and then headed back to the village. I did not see the sadhu again.

## PART 2

### THE NATURE OF THE CONVERSATION WITH THE SADHU

Much of the formality of everyday conversation seemed irrelevant to the sadhu. He spoke fluent Hindi, but there were periods of long silence when he spoke, often in midsentence.

A description of his personality is difficult because one ends up in paradoxes, as I did continually in my journal. For example, I am tempted to say there was something "special" about him, but the most special thing about him was that he was not special at all. He was absolutely ordinary. Another example would be that his life seemed the epitome of boredom and yet his presence was rather exciting, particularly when he was silent.

Since the only time I could film him was on the first day while he was meditating by the river, I cannot convey his presence anymore effectively than through this footage. The most uncanny aspect about him however, seemed to be an extremely clear mind which perceived my questions before I even asked them. In fact, I did not really verbalize my questions, he seemed to intuitively anticipate what I was thinking and responded accordingly.

Before documenting the conversation, I would like to make note of the following observations:

1. The conversation was in Hindi, which, as explained in Section 1, is a more intuitive than definitive language.
2. The sadhu did not speak as a person with an identity. He never referred to himself as an individual. Rather he spoke in generalizations and metaphors.
3. Due to the less definitive and generalized nature of the discussion, my interpretation is bound to stem from an individual perspective. I can only relate what is said to my particular level of comprehension.
4. The sadhu's manner was simple, matter-of-fact and emotionless but by no means indifferent. He was extremely clear although he paused for uncomfortable periods of extended silence between sentences.
5. My intuitive sense tells me that his decision to speak about a dew drop was spontaneous and not prepared.

### PART 3

#### THE DEW DROP AND THE BLADE OF GRASS

(What follows, is a documentation of my conversation with the sadhu based upon the notes taken down in my journal subsequent to meeting him on my third day in Rishikesh. I have translated the essence of the conversation from Hindi.)

The "dew drop on the blade of grass" is symbolic of man's attachment to the world.

When the dew drop is attached to a single blade of grass, that blade of grass becomes the world for the dew drop. It does not have the perspective to see beyond that blade of grass. Moreover, the dew drop knows that it will not exist in its present form for very long. Soon the sun will melt it away into thin air and it will completely lose its form. For this reason, the dew drop clings desperately to its blade of grass and also becomes overly concerned with its outer shape and form. This outer form is roughly equivalent to the "ego" while the blade of grass is equivalent to the world the ego identifies with.

The dew drop also becomes overly concerned with the concept of time ... feeling that the sun will soon melt it away, it invents a system of counting the time it takes before it

melts away and begins to allocate an item of agenda for itself during that time.

Thus, the dew drop's perspective is narrow and restricted and an unnecessarily complex system of numbers; language and literacy is developed in order to attempt to understand every aspect of its own outer form (ego) as well as the form of the blade of grass (the world as the ego perceives it to be.)

Just as the dew drop has invented a system of counting time, it also invents a system by which it can best understand, comprehend, decipher and explain the intricacies of its outer form and the form of the blade of grass. It does all this due to anxiety.

The dew drop knows that the sun will soon melt it away and so it begins to panic and expends tremendous energy trying to decipher itself and its world, feeling that it has missed something and wanting to find it before it disappears into thin air. All the energy it expends is counter productive since it constantly puts itself out of sync with the natural balance of nature.

The natural instinct of a child is to view the universe from all angles. Like a dew drop whose focus is not on a

particular blade of grass. However, sooner or later it is made to identify with a particular blade of grass and told that this is "truth," this is "reality." This process of "education" makes the dew drop blind. Ironically, children have to be "taught" how to "tell the truth" and "taught" to not imagine and not "tell lies" when it is they in fact that know all truth naturally without expending energy.

The dew drop has now been prevented from seeing through a universal perspective. Thus, it has lost "dharsan" the ability to see the truth.

Once this ability is lost, it becomes more and more difficult to gain it back because now the dew drop is living out of fear and becomes a constant "definer" and "explainer." It no longer has the ability to "just be" as it did naturally as a child.

Moreover, its focus is fixed.

Occasionally, if it is particularly daring, it may temporarily shift its focus and then perhaps instead of seeing just the blade of grass it will see a raindrop falling quickly from the sky. But it will not be content to just experience seeing a simple raindrop falling because it is a fastidious "definer" and "explainer" which is

fearful of something is cannot comprehend.

Therefore, it might consider that there is a resemblance between itself and the raindrop and feel intuitively that it may be made of the same basic substance. But, this is not enough for the dew drop; it must "identify" and "define" the raindrop.

For this reason it will invent terms such as "past life" to describe the raindrop and theories such as "reincarnation" to explain the phenomena of raindrops in general.

Just as defining a blade of grass as your entire world is narrow, limited and a complete and utter waste of energy, attempting to define a raindrop in terms of "reincarnation" "psychic phenomena," "extraterrestrial" and so on, is also a complete waste of energy and is also narrow and limited.

In the same way as the raindrop, the dew drop may sense that there is some moisture and vapor in the air which seems to be made of the same basic substance as the dew drop itself. Once again, in its fastidious desire to "invent," "define" and "categorize" the dew drop will unnecessarily expend energy in creating terms such as "spirit" to define the formless moisture in the air. It may even go further and try and define what is a "good

spirit" and what is an "evil spirit" all of which is further wasted energy.

The one thing that "is" is this energy. But the energy is constantly wasted in the process of "defining," "explaining" and general activity.

Thus if the dew drop stops all definitions and all activity, if it simply becomes silent, it then becomes less concerned with the forms of the blade of grass as well as its own outer form.

This is what the sadhu does. He leaves the society he knew ( the blade of grass) and then contends with leaving his own ego (the concern with the outer form of the dew drop) through meditation.

Once these concerns of form are relinquished the dew drop can have the perspective to look within itself. When it does so it will finally see substance rather than form. This substance is water and symbolically represents the soul of man.

Thus, the dreamer has awoken from the dream and discovered itself. The dew drop has "awoken" from the concern with its outer form and discovered its inner form.



This is "dharsan," this is truth.

Once the dew drop sees that its inner substance is water it will further realize that the vapor in the air is also water as are all raindrops all glaciers all springs all lakes all rivers and so forth.

This is "moksha," the feeling of "oneness." This feeling has tremendous energy because this energy is not being expended in activity of thought or motion it is simply being conserved in the moment awareness of "moshka." The energy thus creates a feeling of ecstasy.

It is for this reason that the Ganges is such a symbolic river of the state of "moshka." All dewdrops, raindrops, ice and so forth lose their form and merge and melt in to the Ganges in one complete and energetic stream of existence.

Energy cannot be defined, it just "is." It is the result of just "being." Man, in his fastidious mission to constantly "define" and "explain" attempts to categorize energy into definitive laws. For example, man creates an energy law called "The Law of Gravity," but this is purely an illusion that man sees because he chooses to see it just as "past lives" and "psychic phenomena" are all illusions

man has invented for himself through his fastidiousness of wanting to continually "define" and "explain."

If man "invents" the law of gravity then he will subsequently "invent" the illusion that all things fall toward the ground. This way he is less fearful and more comfortable that he has understood a law. But in fact there are no laws in nature. In a dream state one can create any illusion one wishes to create because a dream is only a dream. Thus, if man creates the illusion that there is a law of gravity man can also create the illusion that there is no law of gravity...

(Upon saying this, the sadhu did a remarkable thing: he levitated about three feet above the ground for about three or four seconds.)

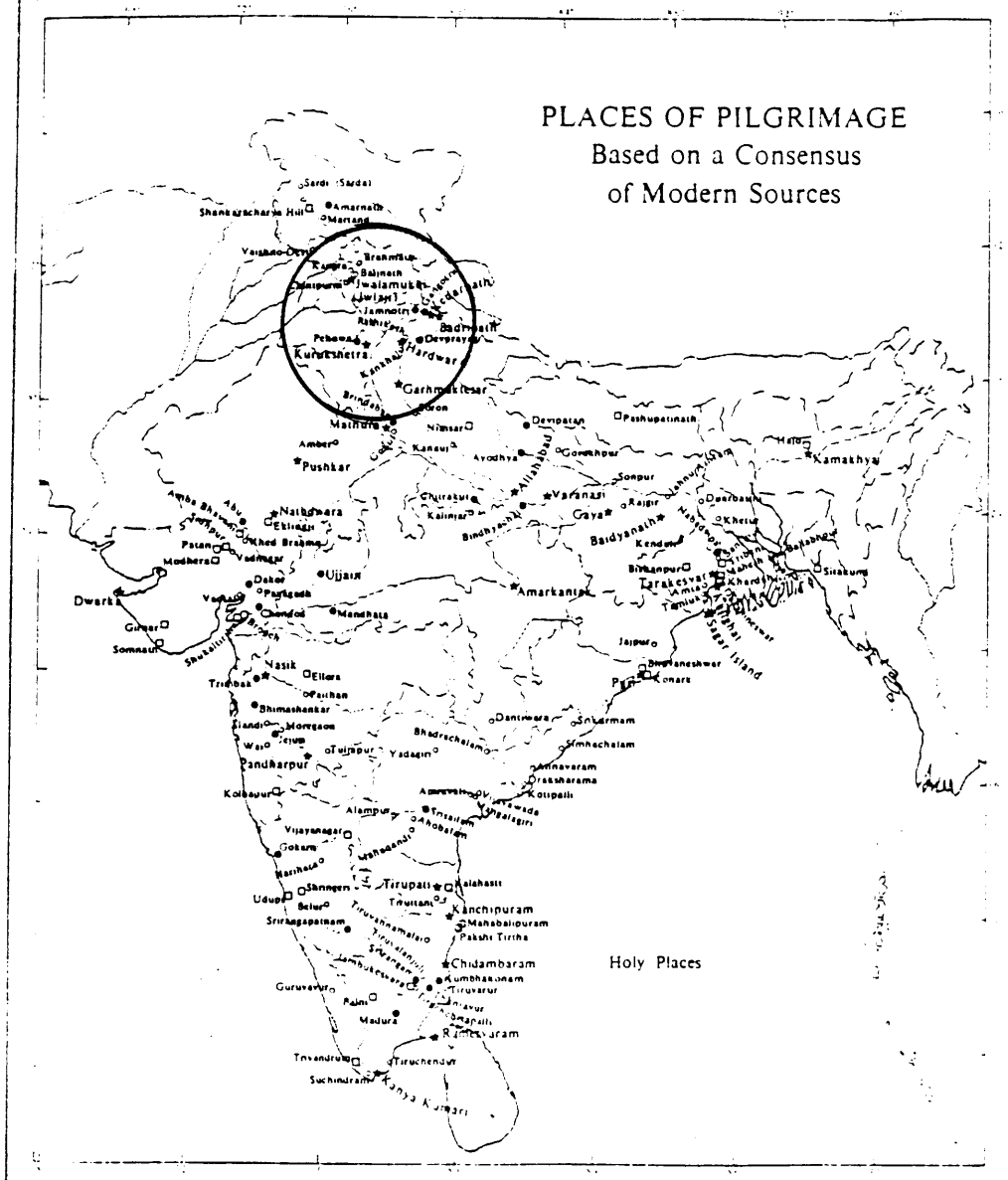
Finally, all religions are not a solution to "dharsan" or to "moksha" but merely a means. Just as the dew drop is concerned with its outer form, most religions are like large clouds: they are merely a large collection of dew drops but there is no difference conceptually; they are still concerned with the outer form.

It is the inner substance which is relevant to "dharsan" and ultimately to "moksha;" not the outer form.

Once the dew drop discovers the inner substance it is liberated from the anxiety of defining and explaining because it realizes that even when the sun melts away, it still remains the same substance. Concepts such as "time" and "scientific law" and "religion," also become irrelevant when this substance is known because these concepts were created through the anxiety of not being aware of the substance.

REFERENCE FOR SECTION FOUR

The following is a map of places of Pilgrimage in India. My travels through sacred towns in northern India during the month of December, 1987 were conducted within the area encircled:



Source: BERREMAN, Gerald D.; Hindu of the Himalayas;  
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SECTION FIVE

CONVEYING THE SADHU PHENOMENA ON FILM

## PART 1

### THE DOCUMENTARY APPROACH

My background academic research was very thorough. I delved into all aspects of ancient Hindu philosophy, religion, poetry literature and history in order to receive a coherent sense of the phenomena of the sadhu, for close to two years.

This research offered me the perspective of what the sadhu represents, theologically, religiously and sociologically.

However, there was one fascinating aspect about the subject of the sadhu that made him very unique when considering the documentary approach:

I knew that if I found a genuine sadhu, he would not speak from the perspective of a developed ego. The whole purpose of the philosophy was to disengage the ego and the personality from the essence of the man. Moreover, the essence of the life of a sadhu is silence, the minimum of motion, and austerity.

All told, from a physical, cinematic perspective this did not make the sadhu an interesting man to observe for an enduring length of time. It is only possible to watch a

man meditating for so long, then it becomes monotonous. The essence of the life of a genuine sadhu, is however, this monotony.

These factors presented an interesting challenge. I would have to convey the fascinating philosophy that underlines the motives and purpose of the sadhu's life as opposed to simply offering the viewer a lot of footage about a man sitting and meditating for a long time, which is less fascinating if continued for too long. It was wrestling with these issues and challenges in the editing stage, that ultimately led me to the film structure which I shall discuss in more detail in Part 2.

The other major challenge was to film the sadhu while he was praying. In Cinema Verite in America, Richard Leacock and Gregory Shuker are interviewed about their experience in making the documentary "Nehru". Initially, the filmmakers did not speak to the subject but just filmed them. It was considered chancy because:

"to interview Nehru would jeopardize the chance for further filming...In a strange way, the relationship of subject to filmmaker is treated as a mystical spell that can be broken with a single word."<sup>1</sup>

This "spell" best describes the relationship I had with the sadhu as he sat down to pray by the Ganges. I was sure he had noted my presence but any approach toward him, or even a greeting would have, I felt instinctively at the time, jeopardized the candid nature of the footage. Instead, I took the chance of going within a few feet of the sadhu with my 8mm video camera and shooting frantically from all possible angles.

To a large extent, it turned out to be the correct approach. The sadhu politely objected to my camera when I asked to film him that same afternoon as I followed him up the foothills, and again the next day. I do not think he would have offered permission if I had asked him while he was praying by the Ganges River either.

My ideal approach, in the documentary tradition would have been one such as Robert Flaherty:

"Flaherty's habit was to search into the lives of people to find what was to them of vital significance; by beginning with the simple, every day things this led him to feelings and thoughts which lay at the heart of their lives."<sup>2</sup>

The issue of the infringement upon the sadhu's privacy was the major constraint here. There was no question of



spending time with the sadhu and winning his trust, of making him get comfortable with the filmmakers presence. The whole purpose of the sadhu's quest lay in the fundamental premise of being alone.

Thus, much of what I learnt about the sadhu was through academic research as well as interviews with theologians and philosophers in America and in India.

## THE EAST-WEST PERSPECTIVE

In addition to considerations about the traditional documentary approach of getting to know the subject, I had to maintain a balanced east-west perspective when filming in India in general.

Once again, referring to the Leacock/Shuker film, "Nehru", the French critic Jean-Claude Briquier makes the point: "Nehru is not Kennedy.....Nehru's Indian sensibility is not sufficiently akin to the kind of American character that is on the go all the time and able to tolerate more easily the presence of a camera...."<sup>3</sup>

I found this to be quite true in most of northern India where I travelled and filmed, as well as in Nepal. If forced to generalize I would say the Indian character is by no means as easy to film as the American one. Indians are never in a hurry, always ready to drop everything and simply stare idle into the camera lens. This is precisely what the documentary filmmaker is continually trying to avoid.

Therefore, I found that my most interesting and candid footage was that which was taken without the subject's prior knowledge. Getting to know the subject in India, was

I found, not the most effective method because the subject is more interested in the camera and its cost, than in his or her own life story.

Another significant discovery I made from the filmmaking perspective was that it is difficult to "explain" India. The film form is an effective one if images and sounds tell the story in this particular case. But the vastness and diversity of cultures and interactions cannot be explained by any single commentary. In most cases this only adds confusion rather than classification. A good example, would be a film called Calcutta made by Louis Malle, a documentary that was made during the time Malle was a cultural attache in India:

"Malle felt the need for stretches of explanatory narration; between these the viewer was left to his own devices. Far from drawing conclusions, Malle's comments expressed his inability to reach any, and virtually invited viewers to share his helplessness over the contradictions in his vast canvas."<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, my purpose was to depict the sadhu against the backdrop of Indian society and Western society in a way that would create a presence. Any narration, no matter how effective, would detract from this presence. The basic

problem would be the language. The English language would imply a Western perspective. An Indian language an Eastern perspective. Neither was representative of the sadhu whom I considered beyond language.

The deeper meaning here is that language itself, as McComel explains:

"...is the first of human technologies, the first medium through which consciousness takes stock of itself as consciousness and, at the same instant, takes command of the world by organizing it around a perceiving subject, a self."<sup>5</sup>

The sadhu represented one who was reaching beyond the "perceiving subject" in the egotistical sense. In effect he was going beyond language and also beyond the phenomena of an ego-evolved personality which is both an Eastern and a Western phenomena.

Thus, the sadhu, as perceived from documentary subject perspective broke the Eastern an Western barriers to reach to a new dimension. He was initially an Eastern (Indian) phenomena, but ultimately, he was a human phenomena.

## PART 2

### FINAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE FILM

It is based upon discussions in Part 1 and 2 of this section as well as the philosophy underlying the sadhu, that my final construction of the film was conducted.

#### SOUNDS

I avoided all dialogue that was coherent and intelligible.

The rationale for this was that the main subject of the film was the sadhu, who is, by definition, silent.

Therefore any dialogue in the film would only be a distraction. Moreover, I have discussed how language itself, (Part 1, this section), even if it is appropriate language such as a narration or an interview with a philosopher about Hindu philosophy, is ultimately a "perceiving subject, a self" and therefore an individual phenomena.

It is for these reasons that I disbandoned sounds of dialogue or narration in any language. The phenomena of the sadhu went beyond language in my opinion; it was this "presence of silence" that I felt was the most essential element to be conveyed when depicting the sadhu.

In order to contrast the silence, to enhance it, I chose to depict sounds of movement, and particularly, of transportation.

My rationale here was twofold:

1. The "noise" of masses of people constantly on the move, in trains, cars, rickshaws and horses and carriage depicted a world that was frantic and audible, which I hoped would enhance the contrasting stillness, calm and silence of the sadhu.
2. Another reason for this contrast was to illustrate the meditation process. When a person initially sits down to meditate, there is much "noise and motion" of thoughts. Eventually however, one reaches a calm. This is the goal of moksha, a calmness in which the oneness can be felt. The final scene in the film is symbolic of moksha.

#### IMAGES

In order to enhance the stillness and motionlessness of the sadhu, I wished to show continual motion. Moreover, my purpose was also to show that in the larger sense, the

sadhu is very much a part of the world around him. Infact, he is attempting to attain a "oneness" with the world around him.

For this reason, the world at large is an integral part of the sadhu according to the sadhu's basic objective.

Through experimentation, I discovered that the most effective method by which to convey this syndrome would be to intercut shots of the sadhu meditating amid a world of masses of people in continual motion.

It is for this reason that I did not restrict the footage of people in motion to India. I wished to convey the Indian heritage of which the sadhu was a descendant, but also the fact that his objective was to transcend his cultural, religious and even philosophical heritage, in order to attain a "oneness" with the world. Thus, the most appropriate "movement" footage I considered to complement the Indian "movement" footage, was the footage, in New York City, which is a melting point of all races and social classes.

Finally, my objective in focusing upon the water of the Gunga river in the final scene, represented more than its religious significance. It represented the sadhu's own

view that all of life eventually merges into one large mass such as raindrops and dewdrops and merging into a large volume of water.

This was the sadhu's own personal statement in visual form.

In Celluloid and Symbols, the phenomena of Film, Reality and Religion are explained by Wagner in the following light:

"Much of our world is never experienced directly but, although invisible, at the level of nuclear or cosmic events for example, it may be visualized through film images which, infact, precede our concrete experiences in many fields. From the early animal locomotion studies of Muybridge and Marley to man's first step on the moon, the human animal through his unique gift of imagemaking, is gradually creating, a trustworthy picture inside his head of the world beyond his reach".<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, this was my objective in using the film form as a vehicle to depict the 'Himalayan Sadhu in a World of Constant Motion.'; that of creating an image on film of a world that was beyond my personal reach.



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CONCLUSIONS IN TWO PARTS

PART ONE

THE UNIQUENESS OF INDIA

Whether we study older civilizations such as Ancient Greece or the Holy Roman Empire; or, modern industrialized nations such as Western Europe and the United States; we must ultimately go deeper than political or socio-economic and cultural analysis and reach the basic philosophical premise of the particular civilization. If we do not arrive at the basic philosophical premise of a civilization then our viewpoints will inevitably be biased and ethnocentric.

For example: If we study the civilization of seventeenth and eighteenth century France, we see that ....

"Not since Augustus had any monarchy been so adorned with great writers, painters, sculptors, and architects, or so widely admired and imitated in manners, fashions, ideas, and arts, as the government of Louis XIV from 1643 to 1715. Foreigners came to Paris as to a finishing school for all graces of body and mind. Thousands of Italians, Germans, even Englishmen preferred Paris to their native lands."<sup>1</sup>

When we examine the reasons for this flourishing culture, we learn that one of the main reasons was that France had a dominant military structure and manpower of some 20,000,000

people. This was precisely the same amount of manpower that the Holy Roman Empire had in Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Hungary.

Thus, if we merely compare the military structure and use of manpower of the French during this period and the Roman Empire during this period we can gain much insight into the disparities of military strategy and economically efficient uses of labor.

This approach, though useful and interesting, is still shallow.

In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the French civilization during this period verses the Roman Empire we must attempt to arrive at the philosophical premise for the civilization and the Empire in the first place.

Upon conducting a deeper analysis, we can then perhaps find that the French saw the use of both manpower and military strength as a means of preservation for French culture in order that the culture may flourish; whereas, the Romans saw manpower and military as a means of spreading Christian ideals and increasing their power over other countries...

Such an analysis, brings us closer to the philosophical

premise from which we can begin to understand not just how military strategy and the use of manpower differs between civilizations, but why the phenomena occurs in the first place.

When we merely keep our focus upon how civilizations differ, then our opinion becomes tainted by our own personal value systems and this leads to ethnocentric viewpoints.

If a person is a fanatical Christian, he may, upon seeing how France differed from the Holy Roman Empire during the stated period, consider French culture to be a debauchery of Christian ideals and in this sense "underdeveloped."

Conversely, if a person is fond of literature and the arts, he may consider France during this period to be a highly developed nation while the Holy Roman Empire would be considered very "underdeveloped."

Thus, we see that a superficial analysis of how cultures and civilizations differ lead only to personal viewpoints and are ultimately ethnocentric.

In the same way, if we now turn our focus to the current period and compare the United States to India, we see the

occurrence of precisely the same syndrome:

If a person's personal value system is that of intellectual development; technological development and industrial development, then, from this viewpoint, the United States is a highly developed nation. When we then compare how India differs from the United States, we say that India is a "Third World" country; or, that it is a "developing" country; or, that it is simply "underdeveloped".

To view India as an "underdeveloped" country is a very superficial and highly ethnocentric perspective.

The viewpoint is superficial because it merely addresses the issue of how India differs from industrial nations such as Japan, West Germany and the United States. It does not address why differences occur by arriving at a philosophical premise.

The viewpoint is ethnocentric because it assumes that India deeply desires intellectual, technological and industrial development just as the United States does. It is true that the leaders of Indian politics and industry deeply desire to emulate such development; but, as we have seen from our analysis, particularly in Section 2, the masses of India, although they may appear to "go through the motions"

of developing in this manner; are not completely convinced that such development is good for them.

It is for the purpose of understanding not just how Indian civilization and culture differs from that of other countries, but why that I have undertaken the study of the sadhu. The sadhu is a vehicle through which we can better understand the Indian phenomena at large.

Therefore, I would conclude that a thorough analysis of the sadhu is a means by which to not only understand India; but to understand why India is different from other countries and in so doing disspell all ethnocentric viewpoints in order to arrive at a deeper, more considered and more mature comprehension of Indian civilization and culture.

## SECTION SIX

### PART TWO

#### THE UNIQUENESS OF THE SADHU

The genuine, authentic sadhu, as I have stated throughout his thesis, is one who emulates the ideals of Hindu philosophy and of Hindu religion where the philosophy and the religion are interpreted in harmony.

Throughout the thesis I have illustrated how the Hindu religion has been interpreted differently by the masses of India and is thus not in harmony with the philosophy for the masses as it is for the sadhu.

The sadhu's interpretation of the Hindu religion is thus in the greater context of Hindu philosophy and thus stems from a highly considered and sensitive approach towards its comprehension.

The masses' interpretation of Hindu religion is not rooted in a highly considered and sensitive approach towards its comprehension. Instead, the masses have approached Hindu religion in a very literal context, thereby succeeding merely in adopting prescribed rituals and practices while being completely ignorant of the greater profundity of the religion in the light of the original philosophy.



Once again, we must not only look at how the genuine sadhu's interpretation differs from that of the masses, but why:

The basic underlying distinction is that while the sadhu's interpretation is inspired the masses' interpretation is imposed.

The people who originally composed Hindu philosophy in the form of texts such as the Upanishads, were poets. They wrote down what they had experienced in their search for Truth; for dharsan; for moksha, in a poetic manner. The verse of this poetry was very lyrical. Its purpose was to raise the awareness of beauty. Its purpose was not to impose ritualistic behavior and worship. Moreover, its purpose was not necessarily to explain this poetry to the masses of India. Rather, the intention was that anyone who was "inspired" to read the poetry may gain a pleasurable benefit from doing so.

However, once the poetry was made into a religion and imposed on the masses, the inspirational element was completely lost to most of the people.

A good analogy would be the interpretation of great poetry

and literature by the "masses" of school children in the West. This analogy is particularly appropriate with regard to the works of Shakespeare since there are many similarities between Shakespeare and the Upanishads as Juan Mascaro points out in the following example:

"All men of good will are bound to meet if they follow the wisdom of the words of Shakespeare in Hamlet where, we find the doctrine of the Upanishads:

'This above all,-to thine own  
self be true  
And it must follow, as the night  
the day  
Thou canst not then  
be false to any man'"<sup>2</sup>

As with the Upanishads, most of the inspiration of Shakespeare's work is lost on the masses of people who read plays like Hamlet literally; recite the words literally; recite the words literally; but all along are completely unaffected by the great sensitivity of the poet. The reason is that the masses of India and the masses of school children in the West do not read the Upanishads or Hamlet when they are "ready" to; when they are at the right level of sensitivity. Before this stage is ever reached, the

poetry is imposed upon them and this only results in deadening their senses rather than livening them. George Bernard Shaw, the playwright and essayist, discusses the subject of imposing Shakespeare in education in detail and makes the following point:

"Why is it that people who have been taught Shakespeare as a school subject loathe his plays and cannot by any means be persuaded ever to open his works after they escape from school, whereas there is still, 300 years after his death, a wide and steady sale of his works to people who regard his plays as plays, not as task work? If Shakespeare, or for that matter, Newton and Leibnitz, are allowed to find their readers and students they will find them."<sup>3</sup>

It is this "task work" attitude that Shaw refers to, that is precisely the syndrome of the Hindu religion. The masses of India, like children who have to do a book report on Shakespeare for their homework assignment at school; view poetry such as the Upanishads as "task work". It is something that has to be recited as a matter of procedure and there is no inherent sensitivity, beauty or inspiration in doing so.

Moreover, these recitations of ancient Hindu scriptures have a resultant effect similar to the effect of promoting

literacy in schools:

".....for all the effect their literacy exercises has left on them they might as well have been put on a treadmill. In fact they are actually less literate than the treadmill would have left them; for they might now by chance pick up and dip into a volume of Shakespeare or Homer if they had not been driven to loathe every famous name in history. I should probably know as much latin as French, if Latin had not been made the excuse for my school imprisonment and degradation,."4

One can find many people in the West who have read Shakespeare and can even recite his verse literally and fluently. But one can find very, few people in the West who genuinely and sincerely are moved and inspired by the underlying feelings behind his verse. The verse is only form, but the depth of sensitivity beneath those words is the real substance.

In the same way, one can find many millions of people in India who have read ancient Hindu scriptures but very, very few who genuinely and sincerely are moved and inspired by the underlying feelings behind the verse. The genuine sadhu is one of these rare individuals, and for this reason I have made an indepth analysis of him.

By understanding the sadhu we begin to understand how Hindu philosophy was meant to be interpreted.

Once we understand this, we can then turn to the masses of India and see how Hinduism has actually been interpreted. We can then understand why "Hinduism hasn't been good for the millions. It has exposed (them) to a thousand years of defeat and stagnation."<sup>5</sup>

Thus, using the sadhu as a vehicle for my analysis, I am of the opinion that India would have been better off without the Hindu religion. Once again, we can find an analogy with regard to reading literature in the West;

The writer D.H. Lawrence, was even more vehemently opposed to the institutionalized imposition of literacy on the masses:

"The great mass of humanity should never learn to read and write-never."<sup>6</sup>

D.H. Lawrence felt that man was better off being uninspired than having inspiration imposed upon him.

I would conclude the same for the masses of India. There

are few such as the sadhu, Ghandi, Nehru and Tagore who have derived natural inspiration from works such as the Upanishads; these people "found" the Hindu philosophy by a natural process just as Shaw suggested that Shakespeare's readers should "find him" on their own.

The inspiration of Hindu philosophy does, I believe have a positive effect upon persons such as the sadhu. The imposition of Hinduism has a negative effect: it begins by simple ignorance and treadmills over the centuries into fanaticism and bloodshed.

At the end of Part 1 of this section I stated that India must be comprehended in terms of its unique characteristics and not in an ethnocentric manner that labels it as a "developing" or an "underdeveloped" country.

Having viewed it in this manner I would conclude that the authentic sadhu is perhaps the only genuine representation of ancient Indian culture.

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