

ASSEMBLING THE FIGURE:  
GURUS, SEEKERS AND THE PEDAGOGY OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION

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This dissertation examines the lives and the worlds generated by three figures namely: Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) and Osho (1931-1990). Drawing on religion, anthropology and media studies scholarship, this dissertation takes a unique approach in understanding these figures. Moving away from the established approaches within guru studies, I propose a new mode of analysis: a theory of the *figure*. A theory of the figure is a broad mode of analysis that enables the study of different relationalities, discourses, media, practices and circulation of ideas. This mode of analysis can be applied to varied contexts to unpack gurus and their worlds.

Secondly, it focuses on the methods and ideas that led to the formation of certain practices of self-transformation as given by each of these figures. By taking these three figures as examples, it aims to understand *discourses of self-transformation* in modern India. Moreover, it focuses on the role of mediation in constructing such discourses. These discourses and their mediations are generated in within a context of *transnational encounter* between seekers and figures that destabilizes categories of “east” and “west.”

The dissertation demonstrates that, by studying the processes by which the figures come into being, new insights on community formation, pedagogy, and circulation of ideas can be gained. In particular by focusing on the role of media in these processes, we can understand how

transformative experiences are structured by them and vice versa. The dissertation argues that the figure of Ramana is produced within the practices of photography, the act of writing, and the method of self-enquiry (who am I?). The figure of Krishnamurti is produced through dialogic modes of pedagogy and a sonic imagination. Finally, the figure of Osho emerges from the multiple and dispersed archives, the technologies of meditation and a discourse on ‘devices’.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Yagna Nag Chowdhuri studied History and Social Sciences at University of Delhi, Tata Institute of Social Sciences and Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta before coming to Cornell University. She defended her doctoral dissertation in the field of Asian Literature, Religion and Culture at Cornell in 2019.

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## Introduction

I had discovered Ramana quite by ‘accident’. I was in grave trouble in 1984-nine months of lying on my back, absolutely still-a time when I could not go out, work, meet friends, read or write. Towards the end of the ninth month of my pregnancy, I started feeling very frightened, and then one day an old gentleman appeared in my dream and smiled at me [...] It was a beautiful dream, the smile was the most amazing I’d ever seen [...] I didn’t know who the old man was, but after he’d smiled at me there didn’t seem anything called fear left. Years later, I recognized a photograph of Ramana as being that of the gentle old man who had smiled at me.<sup>1</sup>

--Susan Visvanthan

A voice inside is screaming ‘I’m here, I’m here,’ but I am struck dumb. And then [...] the eyes. When the master looks into the eyes of a disciple, and He looks, and looks [...] He is seeing the whole story; everything, past, present and future. The disciple is transparent to the Master and He can see the unrealized Buddha [...] Fear is there that He may see things in the unconscious that I would rather keep hidden; but He looks at me with such love that I can only say, yes. Sometimes, such a look can leave no trace in memory- [...] an intense rush of joyful energy that leaves me fit to burst.<sup>2</sup>

-- Ma Prem Shunyo

Many stories of meetings and accidentally encountering the guru or master are found in the memoirs written by seekers. They emerge from glimpses of meeting in dreams and in moments of recognition, while looking into the eyes or in a photograph. Gurus and masters appear through the power of their voice, vision or action. In this dissertation, I analyze the making and remaking of such figures within a complex matrix of recognition and encounter through texts and media. I investigate three figures in particular: Ramana Maharshi, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Osho. While these three have frequently been understood as gurus or masters, my dissertation involves re-reading their thought and practice through the concept of the ‘figure’, to highlight the processes

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Visvanathan, *The Children of Nature: The Life and Legacy of Ramana Maharshi* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2010), 13-14.

<sup>2</sup> Ma Prem Shunyo, *My diamond Days with Osho* (New Delhi: Full Circle, 1999), 1.

by which they came into being and are continually remade. I argue that they drew upon older philosophies of self-transformation and re-fashioned these through media technologies, thus giving rise to new discourses and practices that were further shaped by transnational encounters between gurus and disciples. Out of these discourses, practices and encounters, Ramana, Krishnamurti and Osho emerged as ‘figures’.

In making these claims, I aim to make an intervention within the field of guru studies, the body of scholarship that critically engages gurus and their surrounding worlds; encompassing ideas, people and movements. Such studies have existed within South Asian scholarship for decades. Amanda Lucia, in her book on the emergence of the global movement around the guru Amma, argues that, “the scholarship around gurus has tended to be specific in nature, with studies focusing on select gurus in their sociohistorical contexts”<sup>3</sup>, thus leading to a historiography that focuses “somewhat myopically on the details of particular gurus.”<sup>4</sup> Hence, there remains a dearth in scholarship that comprehensively theorizes the *concept* of the guru. The few exceptions to this include works by Daniel Gold, who has theorized the guru phenomenon in detail, presenting a ‘grammar’ of religious perception.<sup>5</sup> In *Comprehending the Guru* he provides a detailed and rigorous analysis of how different types of gurus appear in their contexts in relation to their lineages and cultural roots.<sup>6</sup>

Another approach in this scholarship focuses on gurus and their movements as a way to illuminate various other social and cultural phenomena. Maya Warrior’s *Hindu Selves in the*

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<sup>3</sup> See Amanda Lucia, *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 236

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See Daniel Gold, *Comprehending the Guru: Toward a Grammar of Religious Perception* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17

*Modern World: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission*<sup>7</sup> focuses on the creation of the middle class in India through their involvement in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission. Similarly, Smriti Srinivas, in *In the Presence of Sai Baba: Body, City, and Memory in a Global Religious Movement*<sup>8</sup> highlights the role of the transnational networks of devotion to Sai Baba through a multi-sited ethnography of cities in India, Kenya and the US. Hugh Urban has studied the global Osho movement<sup>9</sup> to highlight the role of globalization and capitalism in contemporary guru movements. These are all valuable contributions and approaches within the field of guru studies, as they use different sites and gurus to provide an understanding of the wider historical and political contexts within which they operate.

Other attempts at providing comprehensive accounts of different movements and gurus have appeared in the form of edited volumes. These are important contributions and give an overview of the diversity of movements. Examples of such edited volumes covering a range of movements, include works such as *Gurus of Modern Yoga*<sup>10</sup> and *Religion and Gurus in Traditional and Modern India*<sup>11</sup>. Each of these volumes presents surveys of the movements. *Gurus of Modern Yoga* provides an extensive overview of some of the most significant gurus of yoga, their lineages, innovations and strategies. The second volume, edited by Uday Mehta, is the most recent of these and takes a sociological approach to the analysis. The book looks at four prominent gurus from west India and also highlights the idea of syncretism in these movements.

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<sup>7</sup> Maya Warrier, *Hindu Selves in the Modern World: Guru Faith in the Mata Amritanandamayi Mission* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> Smriti Srinivas, *In the Presence of Sai Baba: Body, City, and Memory in a Global Religious Movement* (Boston: Brill, 2008)

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015)

<sup>10</sup> Mark Singleton and Ellen Goldberg eds., *Gurus of Modern Yoga* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

<sup>11</sup> Uday Mehta, *Religion and Gurus in Traditional and Modern India* (Delhi: Kalpaz, 2018)

In another edited volume titled, *The Guru in South Asia: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, scholars Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame have provided provocative conceptual tools opening up new possibilities for theorizing the guru. They highlight the idea of ‘uncontainability’ of the guru phenomena and argue that “guru-ship is a suggestible form: as a principle-cum-model it affords movement between domains; the extension and transformation of modes of power; scaling up/down; the expansion/containment of persons.”<sup>12</sup> Further, they suggest that the guru is a “prolific producer of domaining effects; effects that occur when the logic of an idea associated with one domain is transferred to another, often with interesting or unanticipated results”<sup>13</sup> or even a ‘floating signifier’.<sup>14</sup> Such conceptualizations of the guru are quite compelling as they take the *making* of one seriously and highlight their discursive production. Here, by introducing the term ‘figure’, I aim to alter the very idea of the modern guru.

### **Areas of Intervention**

Within guru studies, I make the following interventions. First, I respond to Lucia’s critique of the field, that much of the scholarship has tended to be guru-centric with an overemphasis on the life details of individual gurus and their movements. I depart from such an approach in significant ways. Studying three figures Ramana, Krishnamurti and Osho, next to each other, I focus on the ways in which they are *constituted* through discourses (media, practices, circulation of ideas, encounters) across different sites and time periods. Doing so allows me to build a *theory of the figure*, which explains the guru phenomena beyond the individual guru or a movement. I argue

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<sup>12</sup> Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame, “The Multifarious Guru: an introduction”, in *The Guru in South Asia: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2012), ed. Jacob Copeman and Aya Ikegame , 1-46

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

that this is a novel move in the field of guru studies. A theory of the figure is a broad mode of analysis, which enables the study of different relationalities, discourses, media, practices and the circulation of ideas. Hence, I contend that this mode of analysis can be applied to varied contexts to unpack gurus and their worlds. I further assert that the theory of the figure emerges from a matrix of relationalities and therefore, does not have a singular place of origin.

Second, my dissertation builds on the approach in guru studies that uses the study of gurus and their movements as windows into understanding historical, social and political phenomena.

Drawing on this perspective, I study the figures to understand the *discourses of self-transformation* in modern India. Moreover, I further focus on the idea of mediation in understanding such discourses. I do so by engaging with a number of other scholars whose work is at the intersection of media and religion, such as Patrick Eisenlohr, Birgit Meyer and Charles Hirschkind. I argue that the mediations in the making of these discourses take place within a context of *transnational encounter*. In doing so, I build on the work of scholars such as Leela Gandhi, Tulsi Srinivas and Hugh Urban. These scholars have highlighted particular processes of encounter, which rely on many factors including political practice, economic motivations, multiculturalism and the language of cosmopolitanism. Emerging within transnational networks of devotion and practice, these discourses, I contend, no longer have a place of origin. That is, the ideas and practices are produced within an ambiguous and liminal space of encounter. The making of the figures I discuss, further became possible *only* within the context of encounter. Those focused on in this dissertation articulated their thought in conversation with others and the ideas took shape through those collaborations. The matrices attributed to the figures I am studying, are produced under the condition of transnational encounter. For figures located in other time periods and contexts the conditions would be different and so would the analysis.

I will now further explain each of these interventions in the field of guru studies in terms of the theory of the figure, an investigation of the discourses of self-transformation and the study of transnational encounters. In the discussion on the theory of the figure, I will also explain the methodological interventions and implications of this theory.

### **Theory of the Figure**

The central contribution of this dissertation is a theory of the figure, developed across each of the chapters. In developing this theory, I build on Copeman and Ikegame's model for the understanding of the guru as: 'multifarious', 'uncontainable' and as an agent with a capacity to 'harvest' in situations in order to carry themselves forward. They argue that

gurus have crossed domains and become apt for given situations, drawing in and re-composing diverse aspects of Indian social life in the process: from sexuality to new media; from slavery to imagination and transgression; from Brahmanical orthodoxy to the arts of government; from milieus of modernizing reformist fervor to those of convention and continuity. Needless to say, while intervening in and mediating these phenomena in various ways, 'the guru' is not reducible to any of them.<sup>15</sup>

This sense of spilling over into diverse phenomena and producing multiple effects emphasizes the idea of uncontainability and multiple relationalities that are inherent in the idea of the guru. Building on such characterizations, I argue that the guru needs to be understood as a *figure* produced within an assemblage that takes into account the multiplicity of relationalities, effects and materials.

I choose the term 'figure' in order to highlight the discourses, practices and circulations in the making of the guru. I am drawing here from several connotations of the term 'figure' and want to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

present a brief discussion of the various connotation of the term. French literary theorist Gerard Genette, in one of the first definitions, describes the term as something that is more than a literal expression, always with a surplus of meaning, which not only pertains to an “object, a fact, a thought, but also their affective value.” The figure is understood to mean multiple things from individuals to objects and affects.<sup>16</sup> Literary scholar Erich Aurbach locates the origin of the ‘figure’ in ‘*figura*’, its Latin root, also related to the Latin “*fingere*” and “effigy,” meaning ‘plastic form’. This connotation highlights the term’s connection with fluidity and molding of a form. This suggests the making of something in resemblance as well as its renewing and remaking.<sup>17</sup> Related to this iteration of the figure, James Clifford explains the practice of ethnographic writing by connecting it with ‘*fingere*’ to mean “something made or fashioned”. He adds that “it is important to preserve the meaning not merely of making, but also of making up, of inventing things not actually real. (*Fingere*, in some of its uses, implied a degree of falsehood.)”<sup>18</sup> This innovative relationship between ethnographic writing and the ‘figure’ is of methodological value within this dissertation.<sup>19</sup> That is, within ethnographic writing the figure comes into being through the stories that are told by the interlocutors and the narratives that I as an ethnographer construct.

These various connotations of the term figure rely on multiplicity of form, fashioning, fluidity and remaking. The idea of assemblage builds on *precisely* these multiplicities. That is, the figure is constituted by and emerges out of an assemblage. The figure is, thus, constituted by a

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<sup>16</sup> Gerard Genette, *Figures of Literary Discourse* (New York: Columbia University, 1984)

<sup>17</sup> Eric Aurbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982),1

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>James Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths” in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 1-27

multiplicity of traditions, spaces and communities, rather than having a single point of origin. It is within such a matrix that the figure comes into being.

According to Deleuze (who coined the most popular usage of the term in critical theory), an assemblage

is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.<sup>20</sup>

In other words, figures *are* assemblages constituted not just by the relationality between individuals (followers, readers, practitioners or commune members), but also, by material and symbolic artifacts. Those making up the figure, include media objects (photographs, books, videos, speeches and meditations), practices of self-transformation and devotion, the spaces of ashrams and schools as well as the modes of circulation of these objects and practices.

Such an understanding of the figure as assemblage defies a historically linear mapping of the trajectories of Ramana, Krishnamurti, and Osho, thus giving rise to a dynamic and non-linear perspective, where time is simultaneous, moving between the past and present. This non-linearity is a result of not just the deep investment in questions of preservation of the past in order to maintain the future, but also, in the endless potentiality or possibilities inherent within such assemblages. Media is recycled into new forms, meditation practices morph and give birth to others, while a book becomes the source of self-help and film. Amit Rai, a media theorist, argues for the 'media assemblage' approach to explain the 'stochastic' and 'non-linear'

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<sup>20</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 69

experiences of Bollywood in the contemporary world. His theorization of the media assemblage approach helps in understanding the experience of Bollywood viewing across different platforms, including movie screens to mobile phones, which shape bodies of viewers and media consumption practices. Such an approach provides insights into the multiplicity of experiences and media forms across time and space. Rai argues that “media assemblages (contagious and continuous multiplicities, or ecologies of matter, media, and sensation) proliferate beyond the dialectic of interruption and continuity—that is, moments where a certain complicity is marked and made strange by its becoming something else.”<sup>21</sup> Taking this idea of assemblage seriously, the figure can be understood as constituted by different parts - community, media and practices of self-transformation. These continue to evolve and transform into other forms, no longer having an originary moment of constitution, but rather, existing as an ongoing mutation. Rai further theorizes duration “in terms of both the nested temporalities that are lived through the assemblage, and the duration it has as an entity in its own right. Like a sugar cube on fire, when audio-visual media catch on there is a specific duration and intensity to its forms that comes from the “internal resonance” of its various capacities and its singular accordances vis-à-vis its ecology.”<sup>22</sup> This idea of temporality is inherently multiple and simultaneous.

In the chapters of this dissertation, I examine the means through which texts and practices have found renewed life through processes of remembrance and preservation. While through these processes the figures have found many afterlives, the practices and texts have also proliferated in their own ways, both constituting the figure and often possessing unpredictable trajectories of their own. In other words, the possibilities of how a book or video travels and creates influences

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<sup>21</sup> Amit Rai, *Untimely Bollywood: Globalization and India's New Media Assemblage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 8

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,5

does not have a limit. For Rai, the notion of ‘contagion’ is central to this kind of proliferation. He suggests “contagious multiplicities distributed across technological platforms through dynamic thresholds”<sup>23</sup>, as being central to the media assemblage. Speaking within the context of Indian cinema from the 1970s and 80s, he argues that “cinema proliferated as through affective contagion, the shock of sensation catching on and becoming population-wide habit. More than a metaphor for the cinema, contagion is the modality of historically stratified media assemblages.”<sup>24</sup> The notion of contagion indicates a form of excess and uncontrollability. It also indicates a certain force or pull, which draws one in. Within such a modality of contagion, the potentialities of the body as well as the different forms of media are important. The capacity to be affected and to affect is recognized as having an infinite set of potentials. The practices of meditation, silence or reading of texts not only change with the creation of different digital and virtual platforms or archives, but also, produce a certain kind of seeker or practitioner, who in turn renews the life of the figure. I am, thus, led to examining the communities of the seekers together with the figures on which I focus. Indeed, it is stories like those told by seekers, who were once drawn to the face of Ramana or Krishnamurti on the cover of a book in a time and place far removed from the figures and then, found themselves spending their lives in communities as followers, which demonstrate the element of unpredictability as being inherent within this model of contagion.

In this section, I have unpacked a theory of the figure and how it is constituted by an assemblage. I have also highlighted two aspects of such an assemblage. First, there is the idea of its non-linearity or the question of temporality and second, the notion of contagion or the potentialities.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,6

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,56

In this next section I will look at some of the methodological implications and interventions of this dissertation that emerge out of the study of figures.

## **Methodological Implications and Interventions**

Theorizing the figure in this dissertation raised certain methodological issues. As discussed in the section above, the figure as an assemblage is produced with the matrix of multiple relationalities between individuals, objects, materials and affect. How does one study such an unruly assemblage of heterogeneous and unpredictable parts? To answer this question, I have imagined new methods of approaching both biographies and archives, making considerable interventions within prior means of their study. I explain some of these methodological implications and interventions in this section.

### **I. Rethinking Archives**

In this dissertation, I have worked with particular kinds of archives that were mostly in the forms of private institutional archives (belonging to ashrams or private foundations), online or digital archives (blogs, institutional websites, websites belonging to individuals, Youtube videos, films, shows, books) and private individual archives (collections maintained by individual seekers). Working with these diverse sets of archives raised certain questions. How are these different from state archives? What different kinds of insights did these archives provide? How were the documents preserved and maintained? What was their relationship to memory? Who did these archives matter to? And finally, can these unconventional archives provide us a way of rethinking archives in general?

I have worked through these questions throughout the dissertation to provide insights into rethinking the notion of archives as well as to unpack how we can understand the figure as an assemblage. In chapter 2, I argue that the Ramana photo archive is a space of memorialization; a porous archive that spills over to the entire ashram space. This archive plays a central role in the reproduction and circulation of the Ramana photographs and in turn, the figure of Ramana. In chapter 3, I argue the Krishnamurti archives are characterized by a multiplicity in terms of both content, form and place, further acting as a pedagogical space based on dialogical principles. I contend that the production of the figure of Krishnamurti as a radical and spontaneous speaker emerges out of these archival spaces. In chapter 4, the Osho archives are also characterized by a multiplicity consisting of diverse forms of media and different temporalities. Most importantly, the Osho archives are experimental and experiential spaces, continuing to generate meditation practices and creating a community of Osho seekers. Given these characteristics of the various archives, I make the following claims: first, they are multiple in nature. Second, they are performative and third, they are to be experienced and play a pedagogical role.

### *The Multiple Archives*

The question of memory is central to that of the archive. The investment in preservation of the words, voice and actions of the figures has remained the central concern for the communities of followers and practitioners. Collective memories of the communities, individual accounts and stories of both the figures and followers constitute these multiple archives. Accordingly, I begin by asking the question - what is the link between memory and the archive? The language of 'containment' and stability of memory has now been challenged by scholars for some time.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ina Blom, "Rethinking Social Memory: Archives, Technology, and the Social" in *Motion in Memory: Archives, Technology, and the Social* eds. Ina Blom and Eivind Rosaak (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press) 11-38

Bergson, who I take seriously, resists the concepts and metaphors of ‘grasping’ and ‘holding’ in relation to memory and argues for the need to challenge “the very notion that memories are object-like entities that we keep safely stored away in some archival system whose stability, durability, and accessibility are always the critical point.”<sup>26</sup> This suggests that memories themselves are to be understood as dynamic and therefore bring into question the idea of a stable archive. Bergson’s claim is particularly cogent in understanding the archive in relation to the shifting technologies of storage that surround it, forming, in the contemporary moment, an unprecedented capacity for storing, regeneration and proliferation of memory.

Extending Bergson, Ina Blom writes that “images or memories are essentially actions, points of connection and disconnection, relays that draw sensations together.”<sup>27</sup> Blom highlights the concordant iterative nature of the archive, contending that “with digital technologies, nothing is *stored* but code: the mere potential for generating an image of a certain material composite again and again by means of numerical constellations.”<sup>28</sup> An example of this can be found in the Ramana photo archives, where multiple images are produced in the archives by color corrections, addition of colors, removal of distortions in an image, cropping of images and so forth. This, in turn, is used as the ‘real’ representation of Ramana to reproduce in the form of paintings within the ashram premises. The photos are also reproduced in various calendar art, book covers and postcards. The archives multiply these photographs, producing different images of Ramana, which then take multiple forms. However, with digital archives, the archival infrastructure and documents become conflated. In other words, there is no longer a physical space necessary for the archival documents to be stored. As Blom explains “once the archive is

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 11

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.,12

based on networked data circulation, its emphatic form dissolves into the coding and protocol layer, into electronic circuits or data flow.”<sup>29</sup> Archives are no longer confined to a single space and continue to be regenerated within a dynamic field. This, in turn, gives the illusion of permanence and endurance. In other words, the idea of storage changes as archives circulate within a digital space, whereby they no longer need a physical space or location and thus, will last forever. On the one hand, the proliferation of the archival field is achieved and on the other, it has a seeming permanence.

The multiplicity of the archive brings to fore the question of temporality. Many different timescapes are produced as a result of these digital archives. New technologies “modulate, compress, distribute, and differentiate time”<sup>30</sup>, which complicates the notion of abstract time and creates a new relationship with temporality itself. Time is no longer an abstract, neutral or given category, but rather, one that gets actively made and *produced*. The changes in the material frameworks, infrastructure and storage of memory also shape the nature of memory itself (and by extension the figure). The archive comes to represent these multiple temporalities and tensions between individuation and the collective memory. The different timescapes allow communities to engage with the archives in multiple ways and make them available to many people. This is how the figures continue to be reproduced.

This raises multiple questions and conundrums. Who owns these archives? How can they be safeguarded? What happens to the documents as they circulate? Is it possible even to memorize anything, if it is constantly in a state of movement? What happens to the personal stories of experience when they circulate? These questions are reckoned with by the communities of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 17

followers as they attempt to store and preserve memory. Some of the manifestations of such dilemmas are found in the case of Osho. His legacy is contentious when it comes to the question of who has the legitimate and legal authority over all the documents, books, audios, and videos in circulation. Over the last decade, the issue of copyright has been intensely debated within the global community of followers. This battle over Osho's intellectual property began in 1992, soon after his death. The Osho International Foundation, based in Zurich, filed trademark applications in the US for all of his books, meditations, and other materials related to him. Today, it claims to be the sole owner of all the copyrights of Osho's works and the trademarks, logos and designs of his various practices. However, since the 2000s, the 'Indian' followers of Osho have been contesting these claims on a number of grounds, particularly over the right to use his name.<sup>31</sup>

Taking the example of Krishnamurti, it can be seen that his video recordings are widely available on the internet. Most followers today are able to watch them at any time, when they remember him or when they feel that he provides answers to an issue or crisis pertinent to contemporary times. The experience of watching these videos is essential to experiencing the words of Krishnamurti. In this experience, time is suspended as one attempts to absorb the words by being 'present in the moment'. Although Krishnamurti was speaking many years ago, he remains relevant to the contemporary listeners. Recent retreats led by Krishnamurti's followers, tackling questions of 'responsibility' in times of crisis, climate change, exploring happiness and work, reflect this desire to make Krishnamurti relevant to today's times.

This is further complicated by the fact that Krishnamurti himself was extremely concerned about the question of time. He defined time not as something that is produced by the clock, but rather

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this controversy see Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement*

that which is ‘between idea and action’ or is defined as ‘psychological time’. According to him, this psychological time needs to come to an end, as this is the cause for all sorrow. In other words, being present and aware in the moment rather than dwelling in the past or future is the way to finding freedom. Such an idea of time moves only from instant to instant rather than being an accumulative idea of the concept. Krishnamurti’s ideas on the notion of time are to be practiced by the listeners as they must be fully ‘present’ when they listen to his words. This shapes the way listeners engage with the archives; allowing his words to ‘do the work’ by active listening alone, rather than taking notes or trying to memorize his words.

Further shaping the multiplicity of these archives is the question of ‘form’. These archives include different forms of media, such as photographs, texts, audio and video. How can all these different forms of media be accounted for and the kinds of effects they generate explained?

Drawing on recent scholarship in media archaeology, I argue that the *materiality* of these forms is central to these figures as well. For instance, the materiality of the photograph is a means of structuring the figure of Ramana. Jussi Parikka explains media archaeologies as a method of analyzing “how stories are recorded, in what kind of physical media, what kind of processes and durations—and as such,[...] the apparatus that conveys the past as fact not just as a story.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, the materiality and the technical apparatus matters and carries meanings, which in turn, structures the way in which figures are produced. Blom explains this further as “the sense that a functioning machine, however ‘dated’, may produce effects in ever-new contexts. It may, in fact, generate ever-new contexts [...] its performative potential is in principle unlimited.”

From such a perspective, the focus is on the diagrammatic aspects of media technologies, an

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<sup>32</sup> Jussi Parikka, “Archival Media Theory: An Introduction to Wolfgang Ernst’s Media Archaeology” in *Digital Memory and the Archive* ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013) , 1-23

operational power that “makes history by unmaking preceding realities and significations, constituting hundreds of points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions or improbable continuums. It doubles history with a sense of continual evolution.”<sup>33</sup> In the dissertation, this regenerative potential of media forms is revealed again and again. It can be seen that, media is not simply a ‘tool’ for remembrance, for it has its own interpretive and regenerative potential. Osho himself reminded his audience that the ‘tape’ could replace the teacher or the guru; only the cassette would play, and thousands of people could meditate.<sup>34</sup> Studying the figures through such a media archeology approach together with the media assemblage model, it can be demonstrated how the forms of media help constitute the figures (including the discourses of self-transformation). In the chapters of the dissertation, I take this argument further to claim that the figures *become* media themselves. That is, the bodies of the figures are surfaces or vehicles for the different forms of media. An example of this in the dissertation is to be found in Krishnamurti as a radical speaker, whose speech and voice is not distinguishable from the body of Krishnamurti himself, which is why he insists that he cannot stop speaking throughout his lifetime just like a flower cannot stop giving out its fragrance.

### *The Performative Archive*

I further argue that these forms of archives are performative: there is an inherent element of ‘action’ invested in them. As Eivind Rossaak has argued, performative archives are “collections that *do* something [...] with things, ideas or images that may embody an argument, a sensation or

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<sup>33</sup> Blom, “Rethinking Social Memory: Archives, Technology, and the Social”, 18

<sup>34</sup> Osho, “Medicine Heals the Body, Meditation Heals the Soul” in *The Last Testament, Vol.3* ( Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1985) <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/medicine-psychosomatic-adler-b9ee21db-aac?p=084792639917876be8f591c6828a7371>

a conception of society and history.”<sup>35</sup> He further argues that, in fact, such performative archives reveal that the performative was always hidden in the bureaucratic or state driven archives. He claims that “the performative was and still is an essential part of the ritual of state formation.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover the performative archives make the rethinking of such state archives possible by asking questions such as: What are the hidden potentials of archives? What kind of affect do they produce? How do they structure and organize information?

Rosaak writes that a performative archive has certain characteristics. First, it does not stand on a principle of neutrality or chronology, but rather, has a “playful or ambiguous relation to the principle of selection [...] The ordering principle may be thematic or genealogical, that is, the material may be delimited thematically or according to a given origin. In the latter case it may concern material that may pertain to a specific event, an institution or a person [...] this brings about a new relational force between the objects.”<sup>37</sup> In chapter 2, I demonstrate how the Ramana photo archives organize information on the basis of important events in the life of the ashram, individual devotees’ contributions to the archive or collections based on the photographers. Similarly, in the Osho archives, multiple iterations and organization principles can be found, around which the popular meditation practices, music produced by the communities or Osho talks are organized. These different iterations are a result of new technologies being introduced along with different communities or individuals, who preserve the archives in different ways.

Another feature of performative archives is the central role of technology. Drawing on the media theorist Friedrich Kittler’s work, Rosaak explains that discourse analysis cannot fully account for

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<sup>35</sup> Eivind Rosaak, “The Performative Archive: New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Theory, Art and New Media Practices” in *Technovisuality: Cultural Re-enchantment and the Experience of Technology* eds. Helen Grace and Wong Kin Yuen (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 113-131

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 114

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

sound archives or film. Kittler claimed that new media technologies must also change our conceptions of storage and communication. These changes within the archives have to be accounted for and require different forms of analyses. Rosaak writes that “while the regime of writing is based on the symbolic, where communication is limited to what is conceivable through alphabetization, new technological media stores and communicates reality differently”.<sup>38</sup> This is an important feature within the context of the archives I encountered. While the textual analysis of biographies or memoirs required certain strategies for reading, the photographs and meditation practices required analyses to be based on the ideas of circulation, interaction, form, display and affect. Hence, such archives are actively changing the way in which they are conceived. This is where the media assemblage approach becomes necessary as it helps in the understanding of the different aspects of the media experience.

Third, Rosaak conceives of such performative archives as allegorical spaces. Building on the work of literary theorist Craig Owens to understand the meaning of allegory, Rosaak writes that, “the term ‘allegory’ comes from *allos* which means ‘other’ and *agoreuei* which means ‘to speak’. The allegorical procedure has to do with making something speak again, somewhere else and at another time. Things are cut off from their habitual situation, being fragmented and recontextualized in another.”<sup>39</sup> Such objects in the archive then get rearranged in random order and produce a kind of excess of meaning which remains unpredictable. Such allegorical functions of the performative archive then give rise to new meanings of objects. In the context of the Osho meditation practices we see that they develop in collaborative transnational spaces, get reinscribed in the archives through media and reinscribed through in the archives through

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.,117

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.,123

different media, subsequently traveling and giving rise to other newer meditation practices, spaces and individual teachers.

### *The Experiential / Pedagogical Archive*

The archives I worked with for this dissertation were also sites for experimentation, experience, and pedagogy. A seeker must read the texts and biographies or listen to the talks, while also envisioning the ways in which he/she will be transformed. The seeker *experiences* the archive, while also *learning* about the self and practices for self-transformation. The experience of these archives is based on the ability to relate and interact with them, in order to imagine a better self. This process also entails *experimenting* in working with and immersing oneself in particular texts or media in the archive, while leaving out others. This act of choosing what is most suitable is based on individual experiences with the archive. In chapter 2, I look at the Ramana archives consisting of the writings and photographs by the devotees as an act of *seva*. This act of *seva* symbolizes a kind of relationality with Ramana through which the devotees are able to find their better selves. The archive acts as a pedagogical tool that stores information and documents, while also providing opportunities for renewal, creativity and transformation. Seekers continue to engage with these archives in different contexts, to relate to the figures and find their own ways to interpret and learn from them. Many of them express and fulfill their desires to become writers, artists and teachers learning from these archives. In chapter 4, one of the seekers talks about her desire to write up until the end of her life. She expresses it as a compulsion to present to the world everything she learnt and continues to learn with Osho and his community.

Hal Foster, a historian of art, proposes that there is a growing ‘archival impulse’ in contemporary art practices, which aims to “make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present. To this end they elaborate on the found image, object, and text, and favor the installation

format as they do so.”<sup>40</sup> In such archival art practices, the artist/archivist brings together different texts, images and objects. These works are

recalcitrantly material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and as such they call out for human interpretation [...] they remain indeterminant like the contents of any archive, and often they are presented in this fashion—as so many promissory notes for further elaboration or enigmatic prompts for future scenarios. In this regard, archival art is as much preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces (perhaps “anarchival impulse” is the more appropriate phrase), these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects—in art and in history alike—that might offer points of departure again.<sup>41</sup>

Since archival art necessitates interpretation, it is based on indeterminacy and openness. The primary principle it relies on is interactivity or, what I call *experience*. These archives have to be experienced in order for them to produce meaning and have a life beyond the figure. The archivist (or artist) at the Ramana archives was constantly in search of new photographs, which often came in the form of donations from the private albums of devotees. Devotees enter the archival space to look at photographs, choose their favorites, ask for them to be reproduced or for more information on them. Each seeker or devotee becomes an archival artist as well as creating her/his own collages and collections of texts, stories, photographs and objects.

This experience of the archive acts as a pedagogical space, which relies on response and creative agency. Eivind Rosaak explains the principle of ‘interactivity’ for such archives in which the viewer is not just a passive participant, but rather, a creative one. Within such an archive, every individual can express and participate in order to create new archival possibilities. The Osho archives continue to multiply as the seekers create a growing platform called the ‘The Sannyas Wiki’. Seekers make new information available and add new sections on a daily basis. One of

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<sup>40</sup> Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse”, *October*, Vol. 110, (Autumn 2004) : 4

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*,5

the founders of Sannyas Wiki writes that “a Wiki is the perfect vehicle for this. I’m now in the process of converting the *sannyas.org* databases into the wiki format. After that, the seed will hopefully grow into an amazing tree. Sannyas Wiki is as much about you as it is about Osho. Go for it!! [sic]”<sup>42</sup> Sannyas Wiki is an unlimited source of information on Osho, which is both accessible to the seekers who lived and spent time in Osho communes and want to relate to their community, while at the same time being so those who may just be drawn to Osho as seekers or even researchers. Another example of the experiential and pedagogical archive space is found in the Krishnamurti ‘study centers’. There are small television sets arranged in private cubicle like spaces for private viewing of his videos. This is an interactive archive, where the seeker can select a video to watch from within the archives and spend hours in the space immersed in the voice of Krishnamurti.

## **II. Doing Biographies**

Attending to biography as both genre and the means through which the figure is constructed, is one of my primary sites of intervention. Throughout this dissertation, one of my primary modes of engagement with the figures is through recollections of their lives by seekers and followers. The distinctive nature of the archives also necessitated the need for a new approach to biographies that are the predominant documents in many of the archives. Through this engagement with these biographies, I was compelled to ask a few questions: What does it mean to write a biography? What does it mean for a scholar to work with biographies? Am I also writing a biography?

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<sup>42</sup> See “The Sannyas Wiki: About”, Sannyas Wiki, 19 February 2020, [https://www.sannyas.wiki/index.php?title=The\\_Sannyas\\_Wiki>About](https://www.sannyas.wiki/index.php?title=The_Sannyas_Wiki>About)

I address these questions at two levels: first, at the level of research and the sources I engaged with and second, at the level of my own writing and scholarly practice. In other words, while I primarily worked with a number of biographies as my sources to think about the lives and worlds of the three figures, I also found myself engaging in the practice of writing or doing biographies. However, the genre of biography remains highly controversial due to its ambiguous disciplinary location between literature, history and the humanities, more broadly. It is also often thought of as being unworthy of scholarly attention.<sup>43</sup> I argue that biography is a productive area of engagement to understand the ways in which the figure is constituted. Hence, my approach in this dissertation has been to write or practice a new way of doing biography. At the core of this praxis lies the idea of a figure as an ‘assemblage’ or a knot who is multiple and fractured, thus resisting a single narrative. In the chapters of my dissertation, I demonstrate how each of these assemblages can be unpacked. In this following section, I situate my own biographical praxis in relation to prior theories of biography that decenter their subject.

Joanny Moulin, a literary theorist, suggests that, with the post-structuralist turn, a new way of doing biography emerges. Taking clues from three major texts, Foucault’s *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (1982), Bourdieu’s ‘The illusion of biography’ (1986), and Barthes’ ‘The Death of the author’ (1968), Moulin attempts to build a theory of biography. Using Moulin’s engagement with these three texts as a guide, I expand on my own theory of biography.<sup>44</sup>

With Barthes’ text, there is an emphasis on the ‘scriptor’ and the ‘reader’ by which biography becomes as much a practice of writing as of reading. In other words, the scriptor is merely ‘performing’ the act of putting different ideas together; there is no preexisting author or thinker.

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<sup>43</sup> See Joanny Moulin, “ Introduction: Towards Biography Theory” in *Cercles : Revue Pluridisciplinaire du Monde Anglophone, Towards Biography Theory no.35* (March, 2015):1-11

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

As Barthes says, “the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text”<sup>45</sup> Once the author is removed, writing can no longer be explained easily. There is a ‘multiplicity of writing’, which needs to be ‘disentangled’ and nothing can be ‘deciphered’. In such a context, Moulin suggests that “Bio-graphy, or life-writing, can thus be defined as both the reading of a reading, and the writing of a writing.”<sup>46</sup> The life of an individual becomes a biographic artefact or an object or “an engram, to borrow from the neurosciences a term that designates, so to speak, an organization of matter encrypting information.”<sup>47</sup> Barthes contrasts what he terms ‘biographemes’ with biographical writing, which uses causality and teleology to construct a coherent life story. Conversely, biographemes are ‘splinters’ of life that cannot be understood by any signifying centre and which are so mobile that they occupy diverse positions in many biographical constellations. They are, thus, always exempt from any individual ‘fates’.

Similarly, Foucault provides another direction with *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, where he insists on the idea of the ‘mutation of the subject’s mode of being’<sup>48</sup>, where this mutation *is* the subject’s mode of being. Moulin takes this formulation further to say that a life is “a constantly evolving engram, a provisional, evanescent process.”<sup>49</sup> According to Moulin, Foucault presents a rigorous history of the subject, which appears as a mode of being encompassing a range of practices and various shifts occur in the formation of the self. One such phenomenon is the shift from ‘care of the self’ to ‘knowing the self’, which brings about changes in the entire gamut of moralities and defined the notion of the self. Hence, an individual’s life is an ever evolving

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<sup>45</sup> Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. S.Heath (London:Fontana, 1977)

<sup>46</sup> Moulin, “Introduction: Towards Biography Theory”, 6

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

process of ‘becoming’, formed by both larger epistemic shifts as well as the micro modalities of everyday life.

Moulin further refers to Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘Biographical Illusion’. This, according to Bourdieu, is the idea that a life has a beginning and an end, being ‘unique’ with a series of ‘self-sufficient events’. He suggests that

proper names cannot describe properties and convey no information about the individual named: in fact, the designated item is nothing more than a composite and disparate rhapsody of biological and social properties in constant change, all descriptions are valid only in the limits of a field of space. In other words, it is not possible to attest to the identity of the personality, as a socially constituted individual, except at the process of formidable abstraction.<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, an individual life is both a network of spatial configurations, which are in a state of constant change, and a product of the social interaction within those spaces.

Given these theoretical registers, my dissertation presents a praxis of post-modern biography that demonstrates the ways in which an individual life and a figure is produced via particular media forms. The entanglements of reading, writing, seeing and hearing produce these figures. Such a practice of writing biographies as engaged in by seekers, followers and even by me, produces decentered biographies, which play multiple roles and respond to many needs. The three figures of this dissertation, as they emerge from these biographies, are constantly evolving, changing and are in motion.

Why do seekers write biographies? I suggest that this is a kind of moral ‘impulse’. The acts of reading and writing biographies center on the act of self-transformation. None of those of the figures would have any value, if they were not understood as pedagogical tools of self-

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<sup>50</sup> See Dan Little, “Bourdieu on post-modern biography”, *Understanding Society* (blog), March 30, 2016, <https://understandingsociety.blogspot.com/2016/05/bourdieu-on-post-modern-biography.html>

transformation. Richard A. Hutch, a historian of religion explains this by giving the example of Erik Erikson's writings on Martin Luther King and Gandhi. Erikson's genre of biographical writing was called 'psychohistory', by which people were to be understood as not just texts, but rather as bodies, which in turn, could transform the reader/writer of those figures. The operative method and paradigmatic quality of Erikson's work is introspection. This process is also one of historicizing both the search for truth, in the case of Gandhi and the search for faith, for King. For example, Hutch writes how in Erikson's book on Gandhi, he enters the text himself by writing a letter to 'Mahatmaji', in which he suggests that psychoanalytic insights compliment Gandhi's philosophy of truth and that Erikson himself can play the role of illuminating these insights. Hutch suggests that "Erikson enters into his own process of realization" or a 'spiritual quest', where he plays the role of the catalyst or interpreter of Gandhi's life.<sup>51</sup> In chapter 3 on Krishnamurti, it is revealed how Pupul Jayakar's biography is an example of this kind of impulse. Her biography portrays her journey through struggles and realizations as she comes to know Krishnamurti more closely. Her own realizations constitute the lens through which she explains Krishnamurti's life.

My dissertation's approach to a decentered biography is further situated in relation to ethnography. James Clifford's essay from 1978 begins by critiquing the 'myth of personal coherence' and the 'age of personality' that Western societies have cultivated and sustained. Taking a Melanesian example, he asserts that "Melanesian relational entities are not, as we tend to see them, composed of two parts. 'Two' is not a sum, 'One' does not exist except as an

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<sup>51</sup> Richard A. Hutch, *The Meaning of Lives: Biography, Autobiography and the Spiritual Quest* (Washington: Cassell, 1997), 48

experience of otherness, as a fraction of two, which is the basic ‘unit’.”<sup>52</sup> Further, he explains the term ‘personage’ coined by ethnologist Leenhardt, which is a ‘multiplicity of doubles’, where “this ‘self’ is not to be visualized as a body moving from one dual relationship to another—a set of trajectories that oscillate out and back through a common center. Rather, personage exists only as a double in an occasion of reciprocity and sometimes of identity with one another. The personage does not hold some part of him or herself apart from a given relation.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, Clifford conceived of a kind of biography which will move away from ‘identity’ towards a way of acknowledging the subject’s ‘doubles’, therefore forming a ‘mosaic’ of life, which juxtaposes the different realities. He argues that “biography remains, then, ‘betwixt and between’, clinging to its subject in a culture where a person’s beginnings and endings have become uncertain. The life writer will be increasingly obliged to admit ‘contradictory versions of the same face.’”<sup>54</sup> Such a conception of biography which recognizes the idea of doubles, which are formed in relationality to other individuals (and media) and which may have contradictory versions, is extremely relevant to this dissertation. I am expanding on these claims by Clifford to stress further the different relationalities including media and transnational encounter. Both Osho and Krishnamurti’s biographies perhaps symbolize this model of contradictions and doubles, for in each of their biographies, it seems impossible to find a single coherent narrative. Krishnamurti claimed throughout his lifetime that he did not remember his life as a child or his life while living under Theosophical society leaders. He also insisted on seeing every moment as new and to not live with ‘images’ of the past. Hence, the biographies highlight different aspects of his life,

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<sup>52</sup> James Clifford, “Hanging up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners: Ethnobiographical Prospects (1978) “ in *Biography in Theory: Key Texts with Commentaries* eds. Edward Saunders and Wilhelm Hemecker (Bosto: DeGruyter, 2017), 191-92

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 197

rather than the chronological events of his life chosen by the seekers. Osho intentionally created a contradictory and provocative persona and clearly stated that it would be impossible to write his biography. His biographies take a range of approaches with some focusing on childhood alone, while others zoom in on his relationships and encounters with seekers. The figures' own approaches to biographies affect the ways in which the seekers conceive of them in their writing as well. I take all these approaches seriously in my conception of the practice of biography.

### **Discourses of Self-Transformation**

The second important intervention this dissertation makes is to argue that there is a new discourse of self-transformation which emerges in this time period at an 'epistemic' level. I am deploying the term "epistemic" here in the Foucauldian sense of "episteme," which he defines as "the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems [...] the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities"<sup>55</sup> In other words, I am interested in the historical *a priori* or the conditions that make certain forms of knowledge possible. I argue that the three figures in this dissertation can provide us with allow for an understanding of the discourses of self-transformation that emerged in their particular socio-historic context. Within this episteme certain discourses of self-transformation became possible and the figures emerged from these historical conditions.

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<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Harper Colophon, 1972), 191

In the aftermath of independence in India, the climate was ripe with new dreams and visions for the nation. While there was a sense of disillusionment and the aftermath of the violence of partition was fresh in the minds of people, there was also a quest for new political visions.<sup>56</sup>

Historians, such as Sunil Khilnani, have also argued that early-postcolonial India was animated by a developmentalist vision that focused on the transformation of the nation through technological development and economic growth.<sup>57</sup> Jawarhalal Nehru, in particular, articulated a socialist vision of development, which he argued would be realized through central state planning and technological progress.<sup>58</sup> Such a vision of development was not completely removed from Krishnamurti's emphasis on education, Osho's dream of a commune and perhaps Ramana's fascination with photography.

I argue that 'development' in the epistemic context of post-independence India was not limited to technological and infrastructural development, but also, included the self-development/transformation discourses, which we see exemplified in the three figures. While the Nehruvian state focused on the nation as the site for transformation, I identify a new discourse of transformation that focused on the self as the site. I show that thinkers like Ramana, Krishnamurti and Osho drew on already existing ideas on the transformation of the self— notably, Advaita, Theosophy, Tantra, and humanistic psychology-- but broke from them in

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<sup>56</sup> See Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Vazira Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). These works capture the violence and the aftermath of partition by foregrounding memories of survivors as well as the implications it had in terms of nationhood and the creation of boundaries.

<sup>57</sup> See Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1997)

<sup>58</sup> The most well-known articulation of such a vision was through the five year plans which defined goals in the domains of agriculture, social services, education and irrigation to name a few. See Llyod Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: the Political Economy of the Indian State* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1998) and Francine R. Frankel, *India's Political Economy: 1947-2004 ; the Gradual Revolution* (New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012)

significant ways. In particular, their innovation lies at the crux of a new mode of thought focused on self-transformation. In the dissertation, I stress the continuities with these religious-philosophical discourses while also demonstrating the innovations made by these figures. The innovations can be seen in the ways in which media defined their legacies and created their personas, the practices or methods of self-transformation introduced and their transnational collaborations.

One of the central themes that developed within this episteme that allowed for these discourses to emerge was that the self is a site of transformation. This can be seen as a new idea, which emphasizes that *everyone* can achieve enlightenment or transform their inner selves. This idea that every self can achieve some kind of enlightenment and it is only a matter of ‘discovery’ was a central notion in the discourses of Ramana (via Advaita Vedanta) in Krishnamurti (via the Theosophical society, which was influenced heavily by ideas of Buddhism) and in Osho (Via Buddhism).

Scholars, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, have suggested that the rise of a particular modern self is marked by a ‘generalized and disembodied observer’, who is capable of noticing suffering and has the capacity for sympathy. He says

The (modern) self has to be generalizable in principle; in other words, it should be such that it signifies a position available for occupation by anybody with proper training. If it were said, for instance, that only a particular type of person - such as a Buddha or Christ - was capable of noticing suffering and being moved by it, one would not be talking of a generalized subject position [...] So the capacity for sympathy must be seen as a potential inherent in the nature of man.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 119

A corollary to this argument might suggest that, therefore, the modern self with a generalizable subject position *can* have the capacity to be Buddha. This capacity to become Him is extended to the status of being enlightened as well, and it is just a matter for discovery to attain that. The particular rhetorical strategy of using the term Buddha as being synonymous with ‘enlightenment’ was an important product of this milieu. Within the scope of this dissertation it would be hard to trace the genealogy of this development; however, I do want to argue that this strategy played a significant role in the imagining discourses of self-transformation for all the three figures. For Ramana, the innate self just needs to be ‘seen’, for Krishnamurti, the self needs to be ‘awakened’ and for Osho, the Buddha needs to be discovered.

Secondly this idea of the self, fitting well into the political ideology of secularism, created a ‘general discursive space unbound by tradition’.<sup>60</sup> Within such an ambiguous space, which is supposedly beyond the ideologies of religion and provides ‘freedom’ of choice, there are many practices and ideas of the self in circulation. Individuals are invested in the idea of betterment of self in such a milieu. The forms of self-betterment take multiple forms drawing from a world of religious or ‘secular’ practices. My intervention in this dissertation has been to trace the pedagogies, tools and practices across three distinctive modes of self-transformation. By paying attention to both the philosophies and figures as well as to the mediated nature of the pedagogies I demonstrate that discourses of self-transformation are products of transnational collaborations circulating beyond the boundaries of nation, religion or philosophy.

Thinking further on the question of how the self becomes a site for transformation, enquiry and enlightenment, the concept of ‘modernity’ also becomes a critical condition. Then, within

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<sup>60</sup> David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 184

modernity and secularism how are the discourses of self-transformation created? The work of Charles Taylor suggests the making of the modern self or the ‘massive subjective turn’ is a result of extraordinary industrial and technological development as well as the explosion of scientific knowledge. He sees the modern individual as rooted in the “eighteenth-century notion that all human beings are endowed with an innate moral sense, an intuitive feeling for what is right or wrong”<sup>61</sup> This idea is central to the development of the individual, who is capable of deciding what is good for himself/herself and therefore, can work towards seeking self-fulfillment and meaning from life. These promises of self-discovery, interior exploration and freedom set the stage for the popularity of meditation practices, in general. David L. McMahan claims that the new turn towards the self and the increased reflexivity is an important site to understand the meeting of modernity and meditation. McMahan’s work, while it concerns the specific context of Buddhist meditation, is particularly relevant to Osho, given that he used terms such as Buddhahood or Buddhafield (to denote spaces which would have the energies to create Buddhas) and also engaged with psychoanalytic terms (as I show in my chapter later). McMahan says that contemporary Buddhist teachers and laity often think of meditation “as a mode of internal observation and analysis akin to empirical science and not bound by authority and tradition [...] it is sometimes described as a psychological method for accessing deeper, unconscious recesses of the mind”<sup>62</sup>. Such an idea of meditation aligns seamlessly with how Osho viewed meditation. Within such a context of modernity, self as a site of change has been further investigated by scholars by paying attention to the role of senses and embodiment, in particular.<sup>63</sup> Charles

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<sup>61</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord: Anansi, 2003), 14

<sup>62</sup> McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, 184

<sup>63</sup> See Patrick Eisenlohr, *Sounding Islam: Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres in an Indian Ocean World* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), which theorizes sound and transduction. Birgit Meyer’s article “Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.109,

Hirschkind's approach unites questions of self-transformation and media, by stressing both practices as well as the forms of mediation produced through technology. He argues that soundscape created by the cassette sermon in Egypt has a role to play in self-transformation and disciplining of Muslim listeners. He says the cassette sermons "[...] create the sensory conditions of an emergent ethical and political life world, with its specific patterns of behavior, sensibility and practical listening - creating a variety of goals, aspirations and desires- on the part of ordinary Muslims to live in accord with the demands of Islamic piety."<sup>64</sup>

By taking seriously the act of listening as something that is active rather than passive, Hirschkind expands his theory of the body and listening further by using the framework of Jousse's 'gestural subject'. He says, "Within the Joussean analytic, oratorical performances are viewed in their capacity to organize the sensorium, to install and attune affective-gestural potentialities at the level of sensorimotor processes."<sup>65</sup> Building on the idea of a gestural subject, Hirschkind proposes that the practice of sermon listening is based on the development of the body as an auditory instrument. The phrase 'to hear with the heart', which was often used by the listeners of the sermon, implied not just something cognitive, but the body in its entirety. The formation of a 'pious sensorium' occurs through an imaginative response during the sermon listening.

Hirschkind also proposes the idea of the 'recitational body', which refers to the bodily techniques used in quranic recitation in particular. This kind of training begins early life and is built into the context of daily living. The practices of recitation draw very much from classical models of Islamic traditions. They require mental concentration and responses corresponding to

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Issue 4 (2010): 741-763, focuses on the materiality of religion. Meyer presents a notion of 'sensational' form of religion.

<sup>64</sup> Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 8

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

the verses (such as humility, awe, regret, fear etc). Finally, Hirschkind proposes listening as a kind of performance. The listening to the sermons repeatedly necessitates a range of ‘illocutionary acts’. There is an expectation of remembrance (*dhikr*), praise (*thana*’) and supplication (*dua*). Listeners may also say ‘basmala’, each time the *khatib* begins to recite a verse.

Throughout the dissertation, I analyze the role of seeing, listening, speaking and doing ‘active’ meditations involving the whole body. By theorizing each of these in their historical, philosophical and social contexts, I demonstrate how they play a central role in the practices and discourses of self-transformation. The role of various media and the sensory affects produced by them are crucial to the creation of these practices and the figures. In theorizing sight, I have demonstrated how the act of ‘looking’ is central to practices of silence and self-enquiry.

Photography as a medium is able to create possibilities for expression, philosophical meditations as well as self-enquiry. In theorizing speech and dialogue, I have developed Krishnamurti’s theory of dialogic pedagogy. In theorizing about Osho’s active meditation, I have argued for it as a form of technology or technological apparatus.

### **Transnational Encounter**

In this dissertation, I locate Ramana, Krishnamurthi, and Osho in spaces of ‘transnational encounters’. I deploy this term to signify a kind of liminal space of tremendous possibility and experimentation crucial to the development of these figures’ ideas. Through the concept of ‘encounter’, I claim that figures come into being through contact with others, in collaborative endeavors, through dialogue and by community formation. A text, image or an individual never

belonged to *just* to one place, for they always exist in circulation, often metamorphosed from one form into another. The journey of self-transformation moves from *being* one thing to being something completely different. In these journeys, many kinds of collaboration, dialogues, exchanges, discoveries and forms of experimentation occurred. In the chapters that follow, I will discuss how Ramana's small ashram in Tiruvannamalai became a space of photographic experimentation, Krishnamurti's dialogic exchanges gave birth to new ideas of the mind and quantum physics, while Osho's dynamic meditation emerged from encounters with humanistic psychoanalysts experimenting with 'eastern' forms of meditation. Throughout these discussions, it can be seen how communities of seekers are formed that are not necessarily restricted to a particular time or place.

I draw from various discussions on cosmopolitanism and transnationalism to make my arguments. Both these terms are relevant for the dissertation since they both have significance in allowing for building an understanding of the possible motivations, ideals and visions of the encounters as well as the ways in which knowledge and media forms circulate.

While many discussions of cosmopolitanism have focused on questions of rights, relationality with distant 'others', making of empires or universal peace,<sup>66</sup> only a few have conceptualized a cosmopolitanism of 'difference'.<sup>67</sup> In my thinking, I am in conversation with scholars such as Leela Gandhi, Tulasi Srinivas and Kris Manjapara. Building on their work, I am interested in

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<sup>66</sup> See the work of scholars such as Seyla Benhabib, *The Right of Others: Aliens, Residents, and Citizens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins ed. *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Etienne Balibar, "We, the People of Europe? : Reflections on Transnational Citizenship" in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 15, no.1 (2005): 108-12 and Georg Cavallar, *The Rights of Strangers: Theories of International Hospitality, the Global Community and Political Justice since Vitoria* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>67</sup> See Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism" in *Public Culture* 12, no.3 (2000), 721-48

thinking about cosmopolitan imaginations and visions that allow for new possibilities to emerge. Manjapara coins the term ‘cosmopolitan thought zones’ to signify ‘treacherous and provisional shared worlds that arise when disparate groups seek to solve problems together in order to address their pressing concerns.’<sup>68</sup> Such spaces arise out of differences and commonalities, shared visions and hopes of new worlds. As he explains further, “cosmopolitan visions were often expressed in terms of virtue, humanity, justice, civilization and the search for peace [...] If nationalism was the main political project of resistance in the anticolonial era, cosmopolitanism was the main ethical project—and both of these often operated together.”<sup>69</sup> Such a conceptualization of cosmopolitanism emphasizes the shared visions of diverse communities of people as a result of common historical or global phenomena. An example can be found in Annie Besant’s discourse on the loss of ‘eastern’ wisdom in her lecture titled, ‘The plea for a simpler life of the East’, in 1917. She claimed that eastern wisdom had to be rediscovered by the west, which then made it possible for the east to realize and recognize it. This early claim had several repercussions. In this dissertation, I will discuss various such circuits and circulations of discovery and rediscovery, of erasure, forgetting and preserving. In these entanglements and dialogues, a new kind of knowledge is produced, one which is no longer tied to a space or figure. I contend that, within such cosmopolitan zones, there is a kind of ‘cosmopolitan knowledge’ that takes shape which is *only* made possible in these entanglements.

The second framework I draw upon is that of Leela Gandhi. By using the trope of friendship, she is interested in thinking about an ‘affective cosmopolitanism’, which she defines as “the ethico-

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<sup>68</sup> Sugata Bose and Kris Manjapara ed. *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

political practice of desiring self inexorably drawn toward difference.”<sup>70</sup> For Gandhi, exploring a politics of friendship is a way to engage with self-consciously creative forms of anti-imperialism. She finds the choice between theoretical paradigms of showing ‘repetitive forms of cultural nationalism’ on the one hand and the ‘subversive but quietist discourse of hybridity’, on the other, rather unsatisfactory. She is interested in exploring a politics of friendship as a way of examining the multiple and unacknowledged friendships and collaborations between anti-colonial South Asians and anti-imperial westerners within various forms of Victorian subcultures of radicalism. The trope of friendship is to be understood as “the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging”<sup>71</sup> I find this idea of affective cosmopolitanism valuable as it highlights those gestures of relationship (between the seekers and the figures as well as between the seekers ), which are formed beyond the ‘communities of belonging’, such as nation or religion, by creating new communities of self-transformation. As I show in the dissertation, encounters with the ‘other’ are an essential component of practices of self-transformation. Whether this occurs through the mode of photography, through dialogic enquiry or through therapy groups, it must occur. It is through these encounters with the ‘other’ and the practices of ‘unothering’ that the practices of ‘unselfing’ also take place. Gandhi explains that a ‘utopian mentality’ is the only way possible for a ‘genuine cosmopolitanism’. It is

always open to the open to the risky arrival of those not quite, not yet, covered by the privileges which secure our identity and keep us safe [...] Of all stories to be told [...] we must recall [...] the Buddha who must leave the consolations of filiality for the unknown

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<sup>70</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anti-colonial Thought, Fin-de-siecle radicalism and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 17

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 10F

and terrifying promise of universal compassion or, of the epic hero Arjuna, who must wage a terrible war against his own kin, eschewing all the learnt maxims of nativist ethics in order to arrive at an as-yet undefinable and unknowable capacity to pluralise the Self and to apprehend it in/as all creatures, all things, *atmaupamyena sarvatra*.<sup>72</sup>

Within my dissertation, time and again, utopian visions emerge in the life worlds of all the three figures. The boundaries of nation, religion and community are crossed by seekers and figures in order to imagine a new futurity.

Tulasi Srinivas's study of the global Sathya Sai Baba movement also argues for a new theorization of cosmopolitanism. She says that the international Sai Baba movement allows for a cosmopolitanism from the margins and a new kind of religious way of being, which transcends different religious traditions. She states that it produces a 'global, modern form of a religious way of being', which challenges our notions of cosmopolitanism as emanating from the west alone. This cosmopolitanism of the margins is termed by her as 'engaged cosmopolitanism'. This notion also moves away from the discussions on the philosophical nature or the politics of its meaning to *how* it operates and the processes of its operation. Srinivas further highlights the creation of a 'grammar of diversity' producing a matrix of meanings, which allows for a 'true sharing of cultures' and a 'multiculturalism'. This grammar rests on a kind of ambiguity allowing for a range of possible meanings and acts of interpretation, thus giving agency to devotees. Such a grammar of diversity based on plural and multiple interpretations also enriches the matrix of meanings. She states that, "the matrix of possible meanings is enabled and engaged by a strategic ambiguity that allows devotees the powers of agency both in picking the required ingredients for their personal transformation as well as in reading the material and spiritual world

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<sup>72</sup> Leela Gandhi, "Friendship and Postmodern Utopianism" in *Cultural Studies Review*, Volume 9, Number 1 May (2003):12-22

and interpreting it.”<sup>73</sup> This idea of engaged cosmopolitanism, which allows for plural interpretations and acts of translation, reflects a kind of openness. The ambiguity of interpretations also functions as a tool to create communities of seekers, who can engage in dialogue and participate in creating their own language of devotion, intimacy and affection for the figures. In the case of Ramana, this can be seen most clearly in the multiple languages of photography, while in the case of Krishnamurti, it manifests itself in the multiple dialogic situations of the ‘talks’ or in the schools where the teachers enact their own understanding of his philosophy and in the case of Osho, it is evident in the communal production of therapies, music and writing.

I use the term ‘transnationalism’ throughout the dissertation to denote multiple flows and movements of people and ideas. For the purposes of this dissertation, such a perspective has meant that I have attempted to understand the relationship between ideas and the multiple forms they take when they circulate, the after lives of figures in such circulations and collaborative efforts resulting from encounters between different modes of thought. These encounters produced new forms of knowledge.

I am also concerned with the ‘auto-orientalist’ projects that the figures and their communities themselves participated in. William Mazzarella introduces this concept in his work on advertising and globalization in India. He argues that auto-orientalist advertising is linked to ideas of aspiration and cultural identity, claiming that, “Consumerism [...] made the realization of the universal community compatible with the particularity of embodied preference [...] The dynamics of globalization were making the realization of universal community dependent upon

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<sup>73</sup> Tulasi Srinivas, *Winged Faith: Rethinking Globalization and Religious Pluralism Through the Sathya Sai Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 329

the rearticulation of cultural identity.”<sup>74</sup> This rearticulation of cultural identity has been as a result of the active participation by consumers interested in certain aspirational states of being. In such a rearticulation the consumers are at once the ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’ of the cultural object/community being sold. Within such a consumerist globalization the assertion of cultural identity gets conflated with a certain civilization pride as well. In the chapters of this dissertation, the tropes of ‘east’ and ‘west’ or ‘Indian’ and ‘other’ are used strategically by the figures to both make claims of uniqueness as well as universalism. Auto-orientalist logics allow for the creation of a dual strategy by which the figures and seekers are able to see beyond the confines of nation or religion as well as use the differences to make certain strategic claims with regard to uniqueness of the ‘east’ or ‘west’.

### **Structure of the Dissertation**

In the following chapters, a theory of the figure unfolds within the space of multiple transnational encounters giving rise to new discourses of self-transformation. In chapter 1, I introduce the figures by going into some detail about their historical circumstances. Further, I highlight the particular mediated nature of the figures and how they manifest. In chapter 2, I work with the Ramana archive to demonstrate how a new discourse on Advaita emerges in relation to photography. Ramana, as a figure, appears within this space of photographic experimentation and continues to be remodeled through the many biographies. In chapter 3, I demonstrate how Krishnamurti as a figure is created within a dialogic pedagogy based on philosophies of the mind and various sciences. His voice and speech play a crucial role in the

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<sup>74</sup> William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 141

creation of these discourses. In chapter 4, I show how new technologies of meditation emerge within a transnational space of encounter. Osho, as a figure, appears as a complex assemblage, creating a contradictory persona drawing on multiple philosophies and traditions. In the conclusion of the dissertation, I reflect on some further areas of research and directions that the findings of the research provide.

## Chapter 1

### The 'Figures' and their Contexts: Ramana, Krishnamurti and Osho

#### **Elaborations: The Three 'Figures'**

In this chapter, I explore the historical locations and trajectories of the three figures. First, I introduce the figures by going into some detail about their historical circumstances. Further, I explain their *particularly mediated nature* and the methods I have used in each of the following chapters in order to unpack this assemblage of the figure.

The main protagonists of this dissertation are three figures situated in overlapping time periods and representing three distinct modes of self-transformation. They are: Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) and Osho (1931-1990). As discussed in the introduction, they are located within a certain episteme that allows for these discourses of self-transformation to emerge. In this chapter, I highlight some of the specific social, political and religious circumstances within which these figures were embedded and charted their own paths. Historical locations refer to the social/political contexts, as well as the religious/philosophical lineages and leanings of the figures. These historical locations give us some clues into better understanding the matrix of relationalities from which the figures arise. However, as will be seen in this dissertation, these conditions *alone* did not create the conditions for their emergence. But rather, they were created within a whole range of practices and discourses of transnational encounter and media.

As the three figures formulated their philosophies, they often stood in tension with their own historical lineages, either by completely breaking away from them or by inventing new questions and traditions. In this chapter, I explore their historical locations and responses to those. For example, Ramana's articulation of the question of 'Who am I' evolved from his devotion to the

Arunachala mountain and his attachment to Advaitic thought. In the case of Krishnamurti, the idea of ‘breaking the prisons of the mind and freedom from the known’, was both a response to and a break from the Theosophical Society principles. Osho’s concept of the birth of the new man or *homo novus* in order to create the ideal society evolved out of his eclectic mix of influences ranging from Tantra to western traditions of philosophy.

In the second section of this chapter, I introduce some of the methods used in this dissertation to unpack the mediated nature of the figure. I draw on Birgit Meyer’s notion of media. She claims that she is moving away from the “conventional” and “everyday notion of media” to a “broader understanding that includes all kinds of stuff- [...] plants, objects- that operate as media in the sense of means and transmitters.”<sup>75</sup> Further she says “Media are not only *means* but *things in the middle* through which people are able to relate to each other and the world. In principle, media open up multiple possibilities for sharing and communication.”<sup>76</sup> It is in Meyer’s broad sense that media in different forms, such as photography, dialogue and speech and technology of meditation, play a central role in my analyses. I define media broadly to include matter and objects which act as mediators between two entities and produce certain affects. These heterogeneous media transmit ideas and practices and in doing so, constitute the figure. I examine these media both as objects and artifacts, and the ways in which they circulated to constitute the figure and the community of seekers. In conversation with theorists of media assemblage, I pay close attention to the non-linearity and potentialities of media objects. This approach opens up new ways of understanding the mediated figure as uncontainable and an ongoing mutation.

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<sup>75</sup> Birgit Meyer, “Religion as Mediation”. *Entangled Religions*, Vol.11. no.3 (2020):7

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,11

My analysis of photography provides a unique and powerful window into the world of Ramana and his seekers. I argue that this medium, in particular, played a central role in the creation of both a practice of self-transformation and the figure of Ramana. I also speculate as to why the medium of photography might have been the chosen medium by both the seekers and Ramana to explore the method of self-enquiry and Advaita. Later in the dissertation, I analyze a few selected photographs from the Ramana archive, the role of photographs within the community of followers and consider the rise of a new discourse around photography. In the case of Krishnamurti, his voice, speech and rhetoric have created a lasting impact on his followers and seekers. By drawing on theories of media ecology and communication, I show how Krishnamurti's discourses emerged from dialogic practice and spontaneous speech. In chapter 3, I further explore his dialogues with scientists and videos of talks and argue for the emergence of a dialogic pedagogy. In the last section of this chapter, I argue that meditation can be seen as a form of technology. I explain the ways in which Osho's dynamic meditation, in particular, developed as a form of technology. Such an approach allows for theorization of the mediated nature of the practices of self-transformation, which shaped these particular meditations and their reproducibility. Looking at meditation through the lens of technology also provides for a distinctive approach towards the understanding of Osho as a figure. Osho's emphasis on practices and techniques of the body and mind shaped his community of followers, opening up possibilities for other kinds of meditation practices to emerge in future.

### **The 'Figures' and Their Historical Locations**

I begin by providing an introduction to the lives of Ramana Maharshi, Jiddu Krishnamurti and Osho. Who were they? How did they come to be known as 'gurus' or 'teachers'? What kind of

historical and philosophical locations did they occupy? I provide glimpses into the lives of these figures in order to introduce the reader to their historical locations. My aim is not to provide a chronology of their life events, but to highlight certain stories which continue to shape the imaginations for understanding the figure. Stories are retold and reconstructed through biographies, memoirs and oral recollections. They are important narratives for creating communities of seekers, attachments with the figures, connecting with new seekers and renewing the figures' lives.

#### Ramana Maharshi (also known as Bhagvan)

Ramana Maharshi was born in 1879 in Tiruchuli, India. In 1896, he suddenly felt as if he was going to die and was also gripped by a sudden fear of death. He described this experience thus: “the shock made me at once introspective or “introverted”. I said to myself mentally: ‘Now death has come. What does it mean? What is it that is dying? This body dies.’ [...] But with the death of this body, am ‘I’ dead? Is the body ‘I’? [...] All this was not a mere intellectual process. It flashed before me vividly as living truth.”<sup>77</sup>

Soon after this experience, Ramana left his home in search of the Arunachala mountains. On reaching Tiruvannamalai, where the mountains are located, he resided in various temples and finally, lived in the mountain caves. By then, many people in the surrounding areas had come to hear of him and would come to visit him. As is described in a popular biography, “About this time, the Swami began to attract the attention of also a few educated people; and the notes they left give us a glimpse of his life and his teachings at the time.”<sup>78</sup> After this, there are several accounts of visitors, such as Kavyakanta, a well-known scholar and poet of that time, Ramasami Aiyar, the Public Works Department overseer of Tiruvannamalai, sadhus in the surrounding

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<sup>77</sup> M.S.Kamath, *Sri Maharshi: A Short Life Sketch*(Tiruvannamalai:Sri Ramanasramam,1936), 2

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

areas and F. H. Humphreys, a police superintendent of the area. He would engage in dialogue and answer questions, as well as stay in long periods of silence. He started walking daily to a spot near the base of the hill and this took the shape of the current ashram. This is the place where visitors, devotees, and seekers from all over the world started coming. The ashram has remained small in size, with a few houses for accommodation in and around its campus being built by devotees over the years.

Upon moving to the ashram, Ramana remarked, “Not of my own accord I moved [...] Something placed me here and I obeyed [...] it is the will of others.”<sup>79</sup> The “will of the others” found a more concrete form in the devotees and visitors, who played a role in making Ramana known and spreading his message. As visitors from all over the world and animals found their way to the ashram, it became a unique and vibrant space. It slowly developed into a transnational community consisting of devotees who also engaged with photography, in particular. Devotees, such as Paul Brunton, Arthur Osborne, and David Godman, played a central role in writing about him and photographers, such as Henri Cartier Bresson (who famously published a series of photographs documenting the last days of Gandhi, Ramana and Aurobindo), made his images available to the world. The interest in documentation and historic preservation was engrained in the minds of the followers and devotees from the time of the conception of the ashram space. Today, visitors can see walls studded with photographs celebrating the life of the ashram. There are photographs of its construction over decades, of the daily life and activities as well as images of devotees with Ramana. This self-conscious preservation is central to the process of being known to the world and of creating the transnational identity of the ashram.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 24

Ramana can also be described as a kind of ‘modern advaitin’.<sup>80</sup> He did so by universalizing his simple message of ‘who am I?’ This message was unique in many ways, since it did not rely on any scriptural understanding or the presence of a teacher. While the ideas of Advaita had been popularized both in India and the West much earlier, Ramana’s version of Advaita differed from those earlier ones. This difference lay in both the content of the message and the ways in which it was popularized. The other two figures central to the historical trajectories of Advaita Vedanta as received today are Sankara, an eighth-century philosopher who formulated a long influential understanding of Advaita in India, and Swami Vivekananda, a turn of the twentieth-century figure who played an important role in making a modern version of it popular in modern India and the world.

Vedanta’s scriptural base lies in the classical Upanishads, which are diverse from each other and can be interpreted in many ways. Sankara’s vision emphasized a Brahman without qualities and the identity of all men with this absolute reality. In other words, the ‘self’ is the same as the eternal absolute consciousness of the Brahman. The knowledge of the Brahman or this absolute reality can lead to enlightenment.<sup>81</sup> In traditional practice, however, the knowledge of Brahman advocated by Shankara required an understanding of ancient texts that were only accessible to Sanskrit-educated elites who often followed ritual regimes that separated them from ordinary people. But philosophically-oriented colonial scholars attracted to Shankara’s Advaita tended to ignore the complex textual, social and political history that gave rise to it. According to the historian Richard King, in the colonial period Vedanta came to be regarded as the essence of

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<sup>80</sup> Philip Lucas makes this claim in "When a Movement Is Not a Movement. Ramana Maharshi and Neo-Advaita in North America", *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 15 no.2 (November 2011): 93–114

<sup>81</sup> See Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi, *The Essential Vedanta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedanta* (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 161

Hinduism and Shankara's Advaita Vedanta came to be regarded by Western Orientalists and many Indians influenced by them as "the paradigmatic example of the mystical nature of the Hindu religion" and umbrella of 'inclusivism.'<sup>82</sup> Religion scholar Andrew Nicholson, in his book *Unifying Hinduism* challenges this Advaita-centric view of Hinduism. He suggests that it depends on a dominant narrative of 'cultural degeneration', which implies that the "achievement of classical Indian philosophers such as Sankara was to systematize the mystical insights of the Upanisadic seers." According to this narrative, Nicholson continues, "by the fourteenth century, the ancient insights of the Vedic seers had been almost irrevocably lost, covered by the pedantry of medieval scholasticism and the effusive superstitions of the devotional Hindu sects."<sup>83</sup> But early modern Hindu intellectual and religious life in fact remained vital, even while remaining true to the classical Upanishads, which by no means exclusively proposed a pure monist or idealistic philosophy.<sup>84</sup> Different traditions of Vedanta emerged as scholars emphasized different strands of Upanishadic thought and combined them in distinctive ways, some devotionally oriented, others not so much. If Shankara's Advaita remained a paradigmatic example of Vedanta for the wider world, many other traditions of Vedanta, sometimes styling themselves as a kind of Advaita, persisted through colonial times.

In globalizing Vedanta, especially to the West, Swami Vivekananda became involved in its complex history, playing a role that has found some scholarly attention. Gwilym Beckerlegge argues that, "As the 'first Hindu missionary' in the West (Brekke 2002:46), Vivekananda anticipated the gurus of global Hinduism of the 1960s and subsequently. In much the same way,

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<sup>82</sup> Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and The Mystic East*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 107-109

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Nicholson, *Unifying Hinduism: Philosophy and Identity in Indian Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 25

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

several of Vivekananda's closest followers prefigured the Americans and Europeans, who made 'the journey to the East'"(either literally or figuratively) during the latter half of the twentieth century."<sup>85</sup> The idea of religious pluralism, universal religion, and Vedanta as a modern religion suitable to all needs became a well-established rhetoric. Further, Beckerlegge argues that Vivekananda's attempts to create a modern organization strategically involved picking up resources from Hinduism in order to include both Hindus and non-Hindus, thus creating a 'universal religion'. He also made Vedanta synonymous with Hinduism, and saw it as the 'highest insight' of the religion. He used Vedanta, Advaita and Hindu interchangeably, and the complexities of these terms were lost and reduced to a generalization.<sup>86</sup>

Ramana's modern Advaita, like Vivekananda's, did not not stick to any strict scriptural interpretations of it and was offered to the world at large. Ramana's message, however, relied on personal experience alone and was more focused, setting seekers to ask themselves the fundamental question: 'Who am I?'. In juxtaposition to Vivekananda's efforts at globalizing, Ramana made no attempts to either travel around the world (or even India) nor did he establish any ashrams. The small ashram in Tiruvannamalai grew out of the efforts by his devotees who started gathering around him. The appeal of Ramana lies in the qualities of standing for a non – scriptural form of philosophy as well as embodying a non-missionary zeal. His resistance to the formation of a lineage may have also allowed for multiple lineages to emerge. This is important to remember as he continues to be thought of as non-canonical, as opposed to teachers, such as Vivekananda. While Vivekananda went on to establish several ashrams all over the world, Ramana's dictum of self-inquiry remained a 'simple' and straightforward means to self-

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<sup>85</sup> Gwilym Beckerlegge, "The early spread of Vedanta Societies: an example of 'imported localism'", *Numen* 51 no.3 (2004) :309-310

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

transformation without the need of a teacher or institution. This gave it a unique quality, which could be easily adopted by a range of other philosophers or teachers.<sup>87</sup> While the teacher remained stationary, the technique circulated throughout the world.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (also known as ‘K’ and ‘Krishnaji’)

Jiddu Krishnamurti is the second figure appearing in this dissertation, occupying an entirely different world to Ramana’s. He was born in 1895 in Madanapalle, India. Before he was born, his mother insisted on giving birth in the *puja* room. She had a premonition that her eighth child would be “in some way remarkable.”<sup>88</sup> He was known as ‘Krishna’ as a child and was supposed to be always lost in his thought, dull in studies, dreamy and vague. He was extremely kind and generous giving away his pencils and books to poor children at school or giving away all the rice to beggars. He also supposedly had a ‘mechanical mind’. As Lutyens states, “One day, when his father was away, he took his father’s clock to pieces and refused to go to school or even to eat until he had put it together again. These two rather distinctive strains in his nature, as well as his generosity persisted throughout his life.”<sup>89</sup> He lost his mother at a young age and lived with his father, who had been a member of the Theosophical Society and was very fond of Annie Besant

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<sup>87</sup> Forstheofel who has written on Ramana’s role in Advaita philosophy suggests that he succeeded in deeply internalizing the truth of non-dualism. This made all external phenomenal differences meaningless, thus giving rise to an ‘egalitarian universalism’. He says “Ramana, by neatly weaving together his metaphysic and internal epistemology, profoundly relativizes traditional renunciant culture...he liberates Advaita from its local context; his internalism facilitates the universalism implicit in Advaita metaphysics.” See Thomas A. Forstheofel, *Knowing Beyond Knowledge: Epistemologies of Religious Experience in Classical and Modern Advaita* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002), 124. Another aspect highlighted by Forstheofel is that there must be personal experience, in order to achieve liberation. This claim was based on Ramana’s own understanding of enlightenment based on personal experience. Again and again Ramana warns his devotees to not get lost in bookish knowledge and that the Self could never be found in books. Forstheofel says “Ramana’s life and teaching thus represents a particularly modern form of spirituality whose appeal in part lies in the promise of an immediate experience of the divine, uninflected by cultural forms, and available to all, regardless of culture or society” This idea that enlightenment was solely possible through an individual experience, appealed to the modern sensibilities. See Thomas A. Forstheofel, “The Sage of Pure Experience: The Appeal of Ramana Maharsi in the West”, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, (January 2001):32

<sup>88</sup> Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 2

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, 4

its founder.<sup>90</sup> In 1909, Charles Leadbeater, another leader of the Society, ‘discovered’ Krishnamurti when he was playing at the Adyar beach. He described Krishnamurti as “the most wonderful aura he had ever seen, without a particle of selfishness in it.”<sup>91</sup> Soon after this, Krishnamurti was adopted by the Theosophical Society and raised to become the ‘World Teacher’.<sup>92</sup> However, at the age of 33, Krishnamurti broke away and did not speak of his time with the Society much after that. While in chapter 3 I discuss Krishnamurti’s life and biography in detail, this account of his childhood introduces us to his deep generosity and his mind, which was understood as being both ‘empty’ and scientific. Both these qualities, point to the ways in which his persona was crafted over the years. He was known as having a very warm and generous presence, while at the same time pursuing a rigorous and assertive approach when he gave speeches.

While all three figures in this dissertation are difficult to categorize strictly within one religious or philosophical lineage, with Krishnamurti this is a particularly challenging task. There is a split amongst his followers about whether his relationship with Theosophy impacted his thought or not and whether Theosophy played a major role in his life. I argue that Theosophy did have an influence on the formation of Krishnamurti’s philosophy. Here I present a discussion on Theosophy to highlight the epistemic importance of its ideas.

Theosophical claims were two fold; first, to recognize the wisdom of the East and its scriptures as important and scientific and, second, to emphasize that religion and science are not in opposition to one another. Writing about the reach and popularity of Theosophy, Philip Goldberg

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<sup>90</sup> Annie Besant was one of the founders of the Theosophical Society and many Indians revered her for her many contributions in the field of education. Krishnamurti’s father had a photo of her in their *puja* room.

<sup>91</sup> Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, , 21

<sup>92</sup> The World Teacher was supposed to be a spiritual entity and Krishnamurti was found to be suitable for that role. I will go into further detail in chapter 3 about the role of the World Teacher.

states that “by the 1920s, Theosophy had about 45,000 members worldwide, 7,000 in the United States, but the numbers don’t begin to reflect the organization’s reach, through books, periodicals, lecture tours, and the celebrated figures who were drawn to its teaching.”<sup>93</sup> Some such figures were Rudolph Steiner, Franz Kafka and T. S. Eliot. While it is hard to measure or find all the concrete influences of Theosophy, it carved out a certain space that was both perennialist<sup>94</sup> and embraced a scientific style. This was later “co-opted by the New Age Movement.”<sup>95</sup>

In a pamphlet titled *A Rough Outline of Theosophy*, published in 1892, Annie Besant the founder of the Theosophical Society laid down the objectives. She stated “We, who are Theosophists, allege that there exists a great body of doctrine, philosophical, scientific, and ethical, which forms the basis of, and includes all that is accurate in, the philosophies, sciences, and religions of the ancient and modern worlds. This body of doctrine is a philosophy and a science more than a religion in the ordinary sense of the word, for it does not impose dogmas as necessary to be believed under any kind of supernatural penalties, as do the various churches of the world. It is indeed a religion, if religion be the binding of life by a sublime ideal, but it puts forward its teachings as capable of demonstration not on authority which is blasphemy to challenge or deny.”<sup>96</sup> In another pamphlet from 1959, Charles Leadbeater, who discovered Krishnamurti, talked about the relationship between Theosophy and science. He stated that theosophy,

shows us also the relation between religion and science- that they are not hostile to one another, as is usually supposed, but that on the contrary true religion should welcome

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<sup>93</sup> Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 51

<sup>94</sup> Strands of this thought can be found in the works by Rene Guenon as well as Aldous Huxley, who wrote the popular book ‘The Perennial Philosophy’ in 1946. See Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2012)

<sup>95</sup> Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*, 51-52

<sup>96</sup> Annie Besant, *A Rough Outline of Theosophy*(South Carolina: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 1

science, as affording the means of proof for its teachings while science may learn from religion the direction in which it may most usefully push its investigations. Theosophy is itself a science, and the greatest of all, for it is the Science of the Soul; it carries scientific methods into higher realms and applies them to the consideration of a vast field of facts which lie beyond the reach of the physical senses. It solves for us many of the most difficult problems of life, and explains for us many mysteries, bringing them all together as parts of a connected scheme, and thus making them at once intelligible and rational.<sup>97</sup>

I argue that, for Krishnamurti, this insistence on the scientific basis of religion meant a reliance on the idea of ‘experience’. For him, an individual can be free only by rejecting all the ‘known’ ideals of society. A true religious experience is understood as one which is experienced and not handed down. This radical rejection of all forms of norms, institutions and even ‘conditionings of the mind’ had already found its basis in some of the discourses of Theosophy. This emphasis on having an internal experience is a common idea among all the three figures in this dissertation. In the following chapters, it will be shown how the various technologies or pedagogies of this experience of the self were created.

After Krishnamurti’s split from the Theosophical Society in 1929, he built several important relationships and networks all over the world.<sup>98</sup> During the years of WWII, he maintained a quiet presence, mostly living in a small community in Ojai (California). Perhaps recovering from the split with Theosophy, this time was crucial in establishing new relationships. He spent a lot of time in silence and introspection. The later years of his life were spent mostly in India. In chapter 3, I will explore these years of his life and the ways in which his experiences shaped his thought.

Osho (also known as Rajneesh and Bhagwan)

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<sup>97</sup> Charles Leadbeater, “What Theosophy Does for Us” in *Adyar Pamphlet no.12* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1959), 3-4

<sup>98</sup> In these years Krishnamurti established his friendships with novelist Aldous Huxley and Gerald Heard, a philosopher. However he mostly spent time in silence, exploring and appreciating the Ojai valley. For more on this see Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfillment* (London: Murray, 1983)

The third figure of this dissertation is Osho, who has remained controversial, but immensely popular, right up to this day. He engaged with many traditions of philosophy and religion and presented the most eclectic philosophy among all the three figures. He also participated actively in discussions on psychology, in particular, to invent techniques of meditation. Chandra Mohan Jain, known as Rajneesh and later Osho, was born in 1931, in Kuchhwada, India. His family was Jain and were followers of the Digambara sect, which opposed idol worship. His father and grandfather were cloth merchants and both had a profound influence on his life. There are many stories about Osho as an extraordinary child leading what is a thought of as a normal childhood. Some of his important reflections from childhood were on the subject of death. He experienced the death of his sister, a close friend, and his grandfather which deeply impacted him. Osho was uninterested in school and found education boring and meaningless. He was constantly playing pranks on his teachers and never found a teacher or a guru he respected, which deepened his own inner search. He was known also for his abilities in drawing and reading countless numbers of books. He was an avid reader and is said to have read 3,000 books by the time he was a teenager. At a young age, Osho established himself as a great orator and debater. He even gave a seven day discourse on spiritual topics as an adolescent. In college, he experienced 'enlightenment' and went through a very intense phase of meditation, which included walking for 16 miles a day, long periods of starvation and sitting on top of a tree for three days. Osho continued to experiment with various states of meditation, with a focus on his body for many days after that. He experimented with his sleep, rising and going to bed at odd hours, fasting and meditating standing in the river or rain. While he had been a rebellious university student as a young person, he became a rebellious university professor later. As a student, he refused to attend classes and

he didn't shy away from debating with teachers. As a professor, he constantly flouted the norms of clothing and spoke on controversial topics.

Osho's childhood is popularly known as the 'golden childhood'<sup>99</sup> due to his unique abilities to counter dominant opinions through mischievous acts. In the later years of his life, the focus is on his rebellious spirit. While I engage with many aspects of his life in the fourth chapter, here I want to briefly demonstrate the ways in which he crafted his 'rebellious' nature. I argue that this became the foundation of his philosophy, whereby self-experimentation was at the core of all the practices of meditation. Osho is well known for his discourses on a range of scriptures, such as Upanishads, Vedas and Vigyan Bhairav Tantra and religious figures, such as Krishna, Kabir, Mahavira, Jesus, and Buddha. While it is clear that he drew from a very wide range of ideas and philosophies; he continued to return to the idea of 'becoming a Buddha' and to the practices of Tantra. Osho's primary idea of Zorba the Buddha and the creation of the Buddhafields<sup>100</sup> were both ways of transforming the idea of Buddhahood into a way of achieving enlightenment for all. Every individual was said to have a Buddha hidden inside, which could be unearthed and discovered. Hence he claimed that Buddhahood is not a unique 'state of being'. This is a significant shift, which formed the basis of Osho's philosophy and this prepared the ground for his meditation practices.

Osho's message was

understand Gautam Buddha, but don't be a Buddhist. Do not follow. Let the understanding be absorbed by your intelligence, but let it become yours. The moment it becomes yours, it starts transforming you. Until then it has remained Gautam Buddha's,

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<sup>99</sup> See Osho, *Glimpses of a Golden Childhood: The Rebellious Childhood of a Great Enlightened One* (Pune: Rebel Publishing House, 1997)

<sup>100</sup> Buddhafields was defined as field of energy which would help in awakening the inner Buddha. It would offer the ideal conditions for spiritual growth.

and there is twenty-five centuries distance. You can go on repeating Buddha's words – they are beautiful, but they will not help you to attain what you are after.<sup>101</sup>

In another talk, he says, “I salute the Buddha within you. You may not be aware of it, you may not have ever dreamed about it - that you are the Buddha, that nobody can be anything else, that Buddhahood is the very essential core of your being. [...]it is the very source you come from; it is the source and the goal too.”<sup>102</sup>

This emphasis on the idea of the individual as being inherently born in the state of Buddhahood is a significant notion for Osho.<sup>103</sup> The history of Buddhism and the shifts in its terminology and practices are beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I argue that the usage of the idea of ‘Buddhahood’ found an easy way into the discourses of self-transformation during this time, as the idea of ‘spirituality’ became more easily assimilated into Buddhism itself. In other words, the idea of the individual self, capable of achieving enlightenment as an inherent a priori notion, makes sense within this context of the secularization of Buddhism. David McMahan writes about how the term ‘spiritual’ came to play a big role in the making of modern Buddhism. The way certain figures used the term ‘spiritual’ rearticulated Buddhism in terms of secular disciplines, which in turn, reenchanting secularism itself.<sup>104</sup> This argument highlights the changing terrain within which Buddhism and ideas of ‘spirituality’ were operating. Moreover, such scholarship on Buddhist meditation practices and the context of modernity are particularly relevant to Osho, because he specifically chose to use terms such as Buddhahood or Buddhafield along with

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<sup>101</sup> Osho, “Godless and Yet So Godly” in *The Sword and the Lotus* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1986) <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/buddha-my-message-h.g.-wells--6b5b3993-40f?p=80f40bdd7c94c65e4905265f09f6857a>

<sup>102</sup> Osho, “The Buddha Within” in *The Heart Sutra* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1977) <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/buddha-enlightenment-look-within-1994a6e9-633?p=559c629f4863eb4550f16a10f82031c0>

<sup>103</sup> It is also an idea that can be seen in the discourses of Krishnamurti and Ramana, although not so explicitly or in the same language.

<sup>104</sup> David McMahan, “The Enchanted Secular: Buddhism and the Emergence of Transtraditional “Spirituality”.” *The Eastern Buddhist*, NEW SERIES, 43, no. 1/2 (2012): 205-23.

psychoanalytic ones. McMahan points out that, contemporary Buddhist teachers and laity often think of meditation “as a mode of internal observation and analysis akin to empirical science and not bound by authority and tradition [...] it is sometimes described as a psychological method for accessing deeper, unconscious recesses of the mind”.<sup>105</sup> Such an idea of meditation aligns seamlessly with how Osho viewed it, with the emphasis being on the ‘psychological method’ and the ability to access the mind. This emphasis is found in both his and Krishnamurti’s philosophy. They claimed that the purpose of meditation is to decondition the mind. This means that a person has to get rid of all psychological, social and cultural conditioning in order to enter a state of transformation. These norms or conditioning are considered inherently oppressive to individuals. Krishnamurti spoke of this in terms of ‘freedom from the prison walls of the mind’ and Osho referred to the ‘No mind meditation’ or gibberish meditation, both of which demonstrate the limitations of the mind.

However, Osho’s meditation practices evolved by drawing from a range of other traditions and philosophies, such as Tantra, Buddhism, and psychoanalysis. Osho has also been understood within the context of reviving and redefining Tantra. His image as a ‘sex guru’ is popular both in India and abroad. While he spoke on the topic of sex directly only in one series of lectures, published as *From Sex to Superconsciousness* in 1968, there were many sexual themes that were present in many of his talks. Hugh Urban’s work on Osho has explored this aspect of his life at length. Urban states, “Rajneesh was arguably the most significant figure in the modern transformation of the Asian tradition of Tantra in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.”<sup>106</sup> He introduced Neo-tantra or Tantra as a ‘spiritual sexology’. The former was a hybrid form that had

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<sup>105</sup> David McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 184

<sup>106</sup> Hugh Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 77

emerged out of the enmeshing of open attitudes towards sexuality that were prevalent in America and Europe at that time, which in turn, influenced the Indian traditions of Tantra. Urban argues that “For Rajneesh, Tantra really embodied his paradoxical idea of a “’religionless religion’, or a spiritual path based on the rejection of all established institutions and aimed at the realization of divinity in and through the body itself [...] As such, Rajneesh’s version of Neo-tantra would have a huge and lasting influence on virtually all forms of New Age spirituality and American popular culture.”<sup>107</sup> This Neo-tantra also drew upon the work of radical psychoanalysts, such as Wilhelm Reich. Osho reimagined Tantra to be a revolutionary path for liberation, which did not need any institutions or authorities, but rather, relied on the supreme divine powers of an individual. In chapter 4, I will examine the encounter groups and the meditation practices that became spaces for experimentation with the body and sexuality.

Another collection of talks, which is extremely popular today and expands on his ideas on Tantra, is titled *Vigyan Bhairav Tantra*. These have now been published in two massive volumes with 40 lectures in each and are important to his career as a guru of ‘Tantra’. These books prescribe methods and techniques, defining Tantra as not a philosophy, but rather, a ‘method’ or a science. He states that Tantra is a science, because it asks the question ‘how’, instead of ‘why’, which is the central question of philosophy. Tantra is also concerned with the question of transformation and mutation, which is not the domain of philosophy. He then goes on to explain that since Tantra is a dialogue between *devi* and *shiva*, it is not one between teacher and student, but rather, between two lovers. Therefore, the attitude of a seeker should be that of a

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 78-79

lover. Throughout this collection, the rearticulation of Tantra into a mode of science and liberation can be seen, with an emphasis on techniques.<sup>108</sup>

These engagements with Buddhism and Tantra demonstrate not only that Osho's ideas emerged from a range of philosophies and traditions, but also, that he transformed those traditions as well. This was the power of his influence and popularity.

### **Unpacking the assemblage: Mediated Figures**

In this section, I introduce frameworks of analysis for each of the media through which these figures were partially constituted, namely, photography, speech/dialogue and meditation. I will explore the medium of photography in relation to the figure of Ramana in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I will examine how speech and dialogue act as a medium for self-transformation. In Chapter 4, I will demonstrate how the experience of meditation is constituted as a technology.

#### The Medium of Photography

The photographic image, I argue, aided the process of 'discovery' of and encounter with Ramana and the dictum of self-inquiry. The moment of 'seeing' is central to his discovery. Paul Brunton describes his experience of 'seeing' Ramana,

the light falls clearly upon the Maharishee and I can take in every detail of his profile, for he is seated gazing rigidly through the window in the precise direction whence we have come this morning. His head does not move, so thinking to catch his eye and greet him as I offer the fruits [...] His skin is slightly copper-colored yet quite fair in comparison with the average South Indian [...] The high and broad expanse of forehead gives intellectual distinction to his personality. His features are more European than Indian.<sup>109</sup>

This beautiful figure of Ramana illuminated by light continues to be evoked by photographers, who came to visit him. Ramana appears as a photographic figure, with a statuesque posture and

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<sup>108</sup> See Osho, *The Book of Secrets: 112 Meditations to Discover the Mystery Within* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1998)

<sup>109</sup> Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret India* (London: Rider, 2003), 139

steady gaze inviting photographers and seekers. The description of Ramana as a ‘fair’ skinned enlightened being, brings out the racial understandings of Brunton and reflects the curiosities of one of his first western devotees.<sup>110</sup> This moment of ‘seeing’ and encounter is similar to the descriptions found in many other first meetings with Ramana. He exudes both an authority and humility to which many seekers are drawn to; in numerous photographs Ramana appears in this form.

In another account, Brunton describes his meditation in the presence of Ramana, during which the dictum of ‘who am I?’ comes to fruition. He describes it as a ‘spell’ being cast by the image of Ramana’s presence, saying

there is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him [...] it is not until the second hour of the uncommon scene that I become aware of a silent, resistless change [...] I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me, that a peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is now beginning to arrive at some rest.<sup>111</sup>

Brunton is both mesmerized and bewildered by this presence of Ramana. He compares it to a ‘telepathic’ process, a ‘radio-active soul’ or simply a flower that emanates a perfume of ‘spiritual peace’.<sup>112</sup>

While in Brunton’s account the presence of Ramana facilitates the process of meditation, seekers today meditate in a room surrounded by his photos. But does this change the experience of meditation? The photos continue to play a role in the creation of a universal language of devotion. The photographic image of Ramana becomes a marker or a template for triggering an

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<sup>110</sup> Interestingly, a few years ago a colored portrait of Ramana was to be put up on the Ashram walls. The image was based on a photograph of Ramana, which had been black and white. But there was a dilemma faced by the ashram residents: how would they decide on Ramana’s skin color? After a lot of debate and on reading older textual accounts, such as Brunton’s, it was decided to show him as fair skinned.

<sup>111</sup> Brunton, *A Search in Secret India*, 141

<sup>112</sup> Ibid

‘inner experience’ or a process of self-inquiry. The image comes to stand for a certain process of self-transformation.

Ramana’s affinity with photography can be further linked to its own silent presence. What does the mind do or want in the absence of sound? Ramana urges us to ask the question ‘who am I?’ and to turn inwards, in the absence of any sound. Such a contemplative practice is based on solitude and is devoid of dialogue. ‘Sight’ is the only sense involved and even though this shifts with the blink of an eye, it also has the power to remain within. The photograph aids the process of self-enquiry by providing a point of focus and remaining with the question ‘Who am I?’ instead of being lost in words or rhetoric. Ramana himself eagerly posed for photos, while he rarely and rather reluctantly talked to his followers. Ramana’s ease with the camera suggests that the camera was not always viewed as an object to fear or an obstruction in being with his followers.

The photographic image has become a medium of reference and of remembrance for many followers. As media scholar Zahid Chaudhry reminds us, we incorporate images into our ‘bodily field’ without being aware of it. He says “a photograph crystallizes some of (these) traces, and while it transforms our senses of truth, memory, and experiences, it also relies upon and molds our affective capacities.”<sup>113</sup> Hence, the photographs have entered into the minds and bodies of followers, thereby allowing for attachments with Ramana and his community. A new aesthetic and discourse on photography was born within this context, this being. Such an aesthetic is based on the practice of *seva* or devotion. In this practice, the role of the photographer is not so important and the photographer himself/herself, is erased. I call this ‘Advaitic photography’ in which the image of Ramana becomes an extension of the photographer. The distance between

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<sup>113</sup> Zahid Chaudhry, *Afterimages of Empire: Photography in nineteenth-century India*(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 189

the body of Ramana and the photographer is erased and the camera exists as an extension of the 'eye' or the 'I' (without the Self), and what emerges is the photograph as the ultimate Advaitic object. I discuss this further in Chapter 3, where I illustrate this argument by analyzing a few photographs.

Ultimately, I argue that the method of photography is also a way of doing biography. Many encounters with Ramana rely on the photographic image and therefore construct the narrative of his life. Followers relate to many images of Ramana by remembering stories of coming to the ashram. Through these recollections the life of the ashram and of Ramana continues to be regenerated. So far, I have argued that Ramana's photographic image facilitates self-transformation, is an extension of the eye for the photographer/devotee and a formative moment of recognition of the guru. Through these multiple relationships with the image, Ramana is produced and constructed in multiple ways. The photographic image is also museumized and memorialized as an object of remembrance. The silence of the photographic image perhaps allows for the multiplicity of photographic objects to emerge. In other words, it is my contention that to understand the philosophical world of Ramana, one must encounter his photographic image.

In this section, I have provided some preliminary ideas on understanding photography in relation to the figure of Ramana. In Chapter 3, I will explore these in further detail by analyzing a few photographs and the life of the ashram.

### Theories of Dialogue

While ideas of voice, rhetoric and speech are recurring themes in this dissertation, as a whole, I have explored these themes primarily within the context of Krishnamurti's speech. I have drawn from various theories of media ecology and communication to do so. In this section I examine

some theories of dialogue and communication, which provide insights for understanding not just Krishnamurti, but also, the other figures of this dissertation.

Walter Ong, a scholar of orality and language argues that rhetoric is always dependent on some form of writing. Ong's argument allows us to investigate the idea of 'spontaneous speech' as practiced by Krishnamurti, which is perhaps the most striking quality remembered by followers. While the listeners and followers of Krishnamurti point to this aspect of speech to indicate his extraordinary power to transform individuals, I interrogate this idea by asking what spontaneous speech means for the creation of the figure of Krishnamurti and why does such speech create this effect on listeners. While I explore this in further detail in chapter 4, here, I will begin this discussion by introducing two interlinked concepts of rhetoric and dialogue.

Ong provides a history to the practice of rhetoric and makes an important distinction between it and logic, whereby the former always relies on the latter, but cannot fully be submerged by it. He states that "rhetoric and logic could not, of course, simply merge. As the art of persuasion, moving men to action, rhetoric is ordered to decision making. And often decisions must be made when the grounds for decision are not under full logical control. Rhetoric has to deal often with probabilities."<sup>114</sup> For Ong, rhetoric is necessarily disruptive. Krishnamurti's art of rhetoric was both invested in persuasion as well as the coining of a new language, which challenged the given meanings of all words and concepts. Through this new language, he was able to imagine a new world and a utopian vision. German philosopher, Hans Gadamer, provides a theory of dialogue through many of his writings. He claimed that dialogue necessarily occurs in language and that understanding is always mediated by language, which is itself formed in the process of dialogue. This primacy of language in the hermeneutical experience determines that our mode of being in

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<sup>114</sup> Walter Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture*(Ithaca: Cornell University Press,1971),7

the world is through our being 'in' language. This means that it is within language that we understand the world, encounter ourselves and do so with others.<sup>115</sup> This insistence on language as a mode of transformation is demonstrated by Krishnamurti. I propose that for him, language was the primary medium of discovering oneself in the world. His repeated attempts at defining and redefining words as well as questioning his own definitions and evolving treatises on particular words, demonstrate an insistence of being in the world through the space of language. In his rhetoric, he did not want to leave any scope for misunderstandings of meanings and wanted to make sure that the listener could truly grasp the meaning of words. However, the question of dialogue is also based on the idea of alterity and otherness. What does it mean to be open to someone else's words? Or how does a seeker want to listen to words of self-transformation? Scherto Gill, following Gadamer, explains,

the presence of otherness and our openness to the other are absolute prerequisites for dialogic understanding to take place. Here, one allows oneself to be put into question by the other, which goes beyond merely keeping an open mind on the meaning of a text or what the dialogue partner has to say to us. It means allowing the questions of otherness to become one's own and putting one's own prejudices at risk. When both dialogue partners do so with regard to the object of dialogue, it becomes a shared inquiry, and the other becomes our co-investigator/co-interpreter. The ethos here is to regard the other as a co-subject and not just as a 'Thou', as such.<sup>116</sup>

While alterity or otherness is an essential condition for dialogue, how can we think of this in relation to the figure? Does alterity dissolve as the seeker listens to Krishnamurti or does the figure remain an unreachable aspirational condition? This play between alterity and solidarity, or alterity and union, is the core dynamic in the project of self-transformation.

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<sup>115</sup> Scherto Gill, "Holding Oneself Open in a Conversation" –Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Ethics of Dialogue", *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, Volume 3, No.1 (2015):9-28

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 16

Another question that emerges in theorizing dialogue is: how does one arrive at the meanings or interpretations of words. Dialogue is always *about something* and therefore, having a common understanding seems important in a dialogue. There has to be a certain kind of equality between the dialogue partners to address the questions in a similar manner as well as provoke the questioning further. There should be an active reciprocity involved that “evokes genuine understanding as not only being intersubjective, but also as being dialectical – a new meaning that is born out of the interplay that goes on continuously between the past and the present, and between different horizons.”<sup>117</sup> The dialectical process of creating meaning develops a bond or solidarity, and community. This is an ongoing and continuous process, in which new interpretations may emerge the creating the possibility of ever expanding horizons. Seekers and listeners are pushed beyond their terms of reference and challenged by Krishnamurti. An example of a dialogue with him is as follows:

The questioner asks - How does one break free of habits?

Krishnamurti responds - What is habit? It is a set of patterns of the brain [...] But let us ask again what is habit? (He then goes on to ask for examples of habits)

As the dialogue proceeds, he asks - who is it that wants to break the habit? Or who will break the habit?<sup>118</sup>

We see that the dialogue plays with the horizons (as Gadamer suggests that dialogue is a game) of the listeners. As they get comfortable with one definition, he immediately moves his attention to another word and its definition, and ultimately, questions the agency of the speaker and the listener himself - by asking ‘who’ is it that asks the question? By posing this question,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 20

<sup>118</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti “How does one break free of habits?’Question and Answer Meeting #1, Brockwood Park, UK, 1983”, J.Krishnamurti Official Channel, November 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ng7Y0phq0Ls>

Krishnamurti engages in the expansion of his own horizon. Clarifying his own position, he puts his ideas under a lens of doubt and engages with the differences between the different interpretations. The dialectic produced within this dialogue is what produces the expansion of horizons and a new vision. This is the space of transformation or understanding.

Drawing on Walter Ong's scholarship on orality, I want to focus my attention on another aspect of speech, which is voice. What is the role of 'voice' as a vehicle of self-transformation?

Krishnamurti and Osho both used their voice tirelessly as such a medium. I argue that this is because of the idea of intimacy, which is associated with voice or sound.

Corey Anton a scholar of communication claims that, vision is always in the distance, whereas voice is associated with closeness. He says "to see [...] is to see things "in" the distance, situated such that I commonly see the spaces intervening, between them as well as the spaces between them and me."<sup>119</sup> He goes on to say that, "sounds seem to liquidate intervening differences".

Additionally, sound is always already heard, "to hear is always to find ourselves already enveloped, surrounded and engulfed within the sense of acoustic space suggested by sounds."<sup>120</sup>

While sight can register everything - from motionless objects to moving ones - sound is only able to perceive that which is active. He explains that "sound, inherently expressing action, movement, or motion, is naturally evanescent [...] Hearing, therefore opens up persons and the world as other senses cannot; it finely registers the living present. It enables us to experience of the reality of the fleeting *as it is fleeting*."<sup>121</sup> That is, sound registers the fleeting nature of reality.

To be able to listen 'finely' and capture every aspect of it enables a transformation. "Please listen

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<sup>119</sup> Corey Anton, "Presence and Interiority: Walter Ong's Contribution to a Diachronic Phenomenology of Voice" in. *Of Ong and Media Ecology: Essays in Communication, Composition and Literary Studies* eds. Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup (New York: Hampton Press, 2012), 74-75

<sup>120</sup> Ibid

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

carefully”, Krishnamurti pleads. Osho changes his tone of voice moving between low to high; giving out a call for something and challenging his listeners. When the listener hears, s/he hears all of these nuances. The listener has to pause and listen again, so as to hear ‘finely’ and register the fleeting nature of sound. This is what reaches the ‘interiority’ of the listener. As Anton suggests, “voice enables an encounter, an opening up with others. We experience an entering into others, not others as things but others as *interiors*”.<sup>122</sup> This is a significant characteristic of sound, and its role in self-transformation.

Media scholar John Durham Peters writes on the history of the idea of communication itself. He theorizes the idea of dialogue and dissemination based on examples from Socrates in Phaedrus and Jesus in the synoptic gospels. Peters challenges the idea that dialogue is the most valuable and ideal form of communication. He suggests that ‘dissemination’ is the opposite of dialogue. Dissemination denotes a scattering of ideas, which are dispersed and circulated through different forms of media. He takes Socrates as the greatest proponent of dialogue and Jesus as the voice of dissemination. By creating these two archetypical figures, Peters presents a powerful argument for understanding media itself.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I find this schema helpful; ‘dialogue’ and ‘dissemination’ are central clues to thinking about the broad question of media and communication. Peters shows that, for Socrates “dialogue between philosopher and pupil is supposed to be one-on-one, interactive and live, unique and non-reproducible.”<sup>123</sup> However, in the synoptic Gospels, “the word is scattered uniformly, addressed to no one in particular, and open in its destiny.”<sup>124</sup> In the synoptic gospel, Jesus delivers the parable of the sower by the seashore to a vast and mixed

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>123</sup> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1999), 35

<sup>124</sup> Ibid

audience. A sower sows the seeds everywhere and while some seeds sprout some never do, and Jesus concludes, “Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!”<sup>125</sup> In these two models, one is oriented towards addressing an individual, whereas the other focuses reaching whoever is willing to hear the message.

I argue that Krishnamurti and Osho represent these two modes of communication. Krishnamurti speaks to the ‘interior’ of the individual, calling for an internal transformation. The individual is at the center of such communication. In the case of Osho, even though speech is central, he creates a range of media and an entire community of people who carry and reproduce his message. Self-transformation occurs in multiple spaces, such as meditation practices, music, everyday rituals of gathering, and modes of recording and creative endeavors.

At the heart of these models of communication and media, lies another important formulation: an individual with an interiority which *can* be transformed. This assumes that many barriers can be transcended by a meeting of the ‘interiors’. Peters argues that within the spiritualist traditions of the nineteenth century, the vision of communication rests on a “vision of the self as an eternal, self-identical soul whose nature is not affected by its embodiment”<sup>126</sup> and thus, the interior self remains eternal. Ong’s formulation of interiority is also fruitful to think with. He makes two claims, first, that interiority is always dependent on exteriority and second, that it is understood by way of ‘voice’<sup>127</sup> Corey Anton interprets this as “to say that voice conveys the presence of a person as an interiority means that in listening to others, we find ourselves meaningfully *co-comported* toward the external world.”<sup>128</sup> Here, he is arguing via Ong that interiority and exteriority are always enmeshed through the voice. Therefore, interiority is always formed in

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 51

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 65

<sup>127</sup> Anton, “Presence and Interiority: Walter Ong’s Contribution to a Diachronic Phenomenology of Voice” ,80

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 81

relation to the exterior and is produced through the media that surround us. In this dissertation, it will be shown that, for Ramana, through the practices of silence and vision, the self is transformed. In the case of Krishnamurti, transformation occurs through dialogue and for Osho, it takes place via a transcendence of the body through meditations.

In this section on theories of dialogue I have presented different ideas, which are relevant and relate to many aspects of this dissertation. These ideas provide the stimuli for what will be comprehensively explored in the subsequent chapters.

### Technology and Meditation

In chapter 4, I will explore the figure of Osho and the practice of dynamic meditation as a technology. I will argue that it is a form of technology that can be reproduced and proliferate into other forms. Osho's articulation of the term 'meditation' and the primacy he gave to the practices of body and mind set him apart from the other figures in this dissertation. According to Osho, meditation as a technique was a crucial step towards enlightenment. He says

So in the beginning techniques are meditation; in the end you will laugh [...] because in the beginning a beginner has to attune himself to some technique [...] So approximately [...] a technique is approximately a mediation [...] Then there is Krishnamurti [...] he says there are no techniques, no meditations [...] but he is trying to help you enter university without the primary school.<sup>129</sup>

This emphasis on techniques that can help facilitate and accelerate the process of self-transformation was the unique feature of Osho. I argue that the notion of technology can help in understanding the multiples processes that go into the making of dynamic meditation.

So why use the term technology to think about meditation? On first glance, the two words - technology and meditation - put side by side, seem to be antithetical. But many scholars of media

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<sup>129</sup> Osho, "Choicelessness: Cut the Root of the Mind" in *Tantra: The Supreme Understanding*, (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1975) <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/choiceless-awareness-the-moment-choice-444a9b26-cd7?p=795b87b504e1e47b13a9cd10933aebc6>

have challenged this view. Jeremy Stowlow, a scholar working at the intersection of religion and technology, argues that there is a need to

reflect further on the taken-for-granted division between the natural and supernatural order of things and thereby to rethink our use of the term *technology* with respect to both religious and nonreligious regimes of thought and action. Broadly speaking, technologies are pragmatic and productive forms of mediation between human subjects and their environments, including the constructed environments of social life and even the environment of our own bodies.<sup>130</sup>

That is, this definition of technology expands its understanding to include various forms of mediation between individuals and their environments and even with their own bodies. I argue that this is a powerful and useful redefinition of technology since it accounts for the productive capacities of many different forms of mediation. Within this paradigm, meditation gets redefined as a form of productive mediation between individuals and their own bodies, minds and environments, which generates a range of effects geared towards a process of self-transformation.

Further, the idea of technology has been theorized by media theorists by investigating the notion of ‘cultural techniques’. Media theorists, such as Bernhard Siegert, explain how ‘cultural techniques’ become ‘cultural technologies’, whereby every technology has a historical a priori, which needs to be recognized. He says “the concept of cultural techniques highlights the operations or sequences of operations that historically and logically precede the media concepts generated by them.”<sup>131</sup> Bernard Geoghegan explains this as follows: “for example, counting historically and logically precedes numbers, singing precedes formalized scales, and casual farming precedes the invention of rationalized agriculture.”<sup>132</sup> What this means for my argument

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<sup>130</sup> Jeremy Stowlow, “Technology” in. *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* ed. David Morgan (London: Routledge, 2008), 188

<sup>131</sup> Bernhard Siegert, “The map is the territory/Radical Philosophy”, *Radical Philosophy* 169(Sep/Oct 2011)15

<sup>132</sup> Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, “After Kittler: On the Cultural Techniques of Recent German Media Theory”, in *Theory, Culture and Society* 30 no.6), (2013), 69

is that even though the bodily practices that constitute dynamic meditation may have existed as a range of movements and motions historically, they have been reconstituted as a technology through certain specific processes and strategic moves made by Osho and his community. Osho's dynamic meditation is a result of transnational encounters and an embodiment of the diverse ideas and processes of collaboration. Music, exercises of breathing, ideas of the body and mind as well as group dynamics all create dynamic meditation. I propose dynamic meditation as being produced within a "heterogeneous set-up of technologies, techniques and signs co-articulated by power and politics"<sup>133</sup> When different ideas and practices come together as components of an integrated symbolic system, they constitute a cultural technology. Bernard Geoghegan suggests further that "although such symbolic systems may be integrated into a single technology or *dispositif*, such arrangements are, at best, temporary consolidations until emergent practices and technologies displace and rearrange the constituent parts."<sup>134</sup> This also suggests that cultural technologies are constantly shifting and reconstituted in order to take on new forms. An example from dynamic meditation would be the use of chaotic breathing as opposed to yogic breathing, where the idea of breathing is reconstituted in order to create entirely new affects. Another example is the use of 'catharsis' in meditation, where people are asked to scream, cry, jump, laugh and express themselves freely. Within this experience of catharsis, accompanied by 'cathartic music,' the practitioner of the meditation feels a sense of release and relief, which is markedly different from the act of crying or laughing in solitude outside the context of the meditation. This is where a cultural technique is reconstituted as a technology. Therefore, "cultural techniques have to be understood as heterogeneous arrangements in which

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 71

technological, aesthetic, symbolic, and political concepts of one or more cultures of writing, image, number, line, and body interact.”<sup>135</sup>

To explain the idea of cultural technique further, I would contend that the very word culture suggests a dimension that has been technologically constituted. Derived from the Latin terms *colere* and *cultura*, it implies the application of technology for cultivation of soil. As Siegert writes,

the concept of cultural techniques, therefore, is vehemently opposed to any ontological usage of philosophical terms: *Man* does not exist independently of cultural techniques of hominization, *time* does not exist independently of cultural techniques for calculating and measuring time; *space* does not exist independently of cultural techniques for surveying and administering space; and so on. The notion of cultural techniques, then, promises to align cultural history and media history by referring back to concrete practices and symbolic operations [...] These practices range from ritual acts and religious ceremonies to scientific methods of generating and referencing "objective" data.<sup>136</sup>

Cultural techniques exist as a set of diverse and shifting practices, which are determined by the context. In other words, they are also *always* on their way to constituting technologies. The productive capacities of cultural techniques come to be materialized through the different processes of encounter, systematization and methods of transmission. In chapter 4, I will discuss how dynamic meditation emerged from a process of experimentation and went through several phases of restructuring. These processes of experimentation are reminders of the productive capacities of mediation and their inherent elasticity.

In this section, I have argued for the relevance of the usage of the term technology to think about dynamic meditation. In chapter 4, I will show how this technology unfolds in its making.

Dynamic meditation is produced as a technology using various techniques of the body and mind

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<sup>135</sup> Bernhard Siegert, "Cacography or Communication? Cultural Techniques in German Media Studies" in *Grey Room* 29(October 2007), 31

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30

based on temporal and sensorial registers - such as music, the five stages of meditation and the expected affective responses in each stage. These are only made possible by the circulation of the discourses and ideas around the body and mind steeped in certain religious, philosophical and scientific frameworks.

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce the figures and the philosophical or religious lineages within which they are located. I have also introduced the three media (photography, dialogue and technology of meditation) briefly to provide some theoretical frameworks that I will build on in the following chapters. I have argued that the medium of photography aids the process of discovery of Ramana and facilitates self-transformation. Further, it provides a window into unpacking the figure of Ramana and his followers. Through theories of dialogue and different models of communication, the ways in which speech and rhetoric work within the context of all the figures can be understood. I have also argued that communication relies on the notion of an eternal 'interior' self. Lastly, I have demonstrated that the notion of technology is a productive concept to think with in relation to meditation. Articulating meditation as a form of technology allows for grasping the different processes that constitute it.

## Chapter 2

### Envisioning Silence: Photography and the Rise of a New Advaita



Figure 2.1: Still from *The Razor's Edge*, 1946

Coalmine worker: Larry, you sound like a very religious man who doesn't believe in God.

Larry: I am not sure I believe in anything.

Coalmine worker: Have you ever thought of going to the east, India for instance?

Larry: No.

Coalmine worker: I went there. I met a strange man, a man I never thought to meet in this world - a Saint. People go from all parts of India to see him to ask for his advice on their troubles, to listen to his teachings and they go away strengthened in soul and in peace. But it's not his teaching that matters, it's the man himself.<sup>137</sup>

This scene from the film 'The Razor's Edge', presents a glimpse of Larry's journey in search of meaning. In figure 2.1, we see him admiring the Arunachala mountain.<sup>138</sup> Larry, the protagonist of the film, which was based on a popular novel, faces a very particular kind of dilemma - a

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<sup>137</sup> Edmund Goulding, *The Razor's Edge* (20th Century Fox, 1946).

<sup>138</sup> As I will discuss later in the chapter, Arunachala mountain was considered by Ramana to be his guru. Devotees and seekers were always advised to walk up it on their visits to the ashram.

desire, a longing and restlessness to find his true self. Larry leaves his fiancé in America, much to her reluctance, to go and spend time in Paris ‘to clear his head’. He works in a coal mine in order to ‘work below,’ and finally heads to India. Having returned from WWI, he has been traumatized by the death of a fellow soldier, something that will not leave his mind. He finally declares that he wants to ‘loaf’ around the world and ends up at the Ramana ashram. Ramana advises him to climb the Arunachala Mountain and spend time in the cave there. Having walked around the mountain, he finds himself transformed forever. Even though he has no desire to return to America, on the insistence of Ramana, he agrees to go back.

In the original novel, the author introduces Advaita philosophy through the interaction between Larry and Ramana, who is disguised as a fictional character named Sri Ganesha. The title of the novel and the film are based on a verse from the Katha Upanishad.<sup>139</sup> The novel was published in 1944 and located in a post-war period of exploration by ‘seekers’<sup>140</sup>, who formed the central category in many of the narratives in this chapter (and dissertation as a whole). I begin this chapter on Ramana by providing a glimpse into the ways in which he came to occupy the imagination of these ‘seekers’. Ramana has continued to be imagined as a saint or teacher, who provided simple methods of self-enquiry and contemplation. As will be shown in this chapter, seekers and devotees from all over the world were attracted to Ramana’s presence through his photographs, his practice of self-inquiry - notably, the dictum of ‘Who am I?’, and his approach towards embracing the ‘other’.

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<sup>139</sup> Somerset Maugham opens his novel with this phrase “The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus, the wise say the path to Salvation is hard. —Katha-Upanishad, 3.14” See W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor’s Edge* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co., Inc., 1944).

<sup>140</sup> I have used the word seeker throughout this dissertation to denote travelers to ashrams, readers and listeners of the figures, who have a desire to engage with their philosophies. They have a quest for knowledge and self-transformation.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that Ramana as a *figure* is produced within a matrix of photography, Advaitic thought and the writing of biographies. In other words, he is constituted by an assemblage consisting of multiple relationalities between individuals (followers and seekers), media objects (photographs and books) and practices of self-transformation. I particularly highlight the *discourses of self-transformation*, which emerge out of this assemblage, such as the method of self-enquiry, the incorporation of the ‘other’ and the practices of photography. I argue that a new practice of Advaitic photography is born out of these discourses, which further defines the relationship between Ramana (figure) and the medium of photography (media). These practices and discourses take shape within the space of *transnational encounters*, which are located at the Ramana ashram and are facilitated through his philosophical discourses on the ‘other’.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, I highlight one of the central and most popular methods of self-transformation prescribed by Ramana, whose philosophy is often summed up in a simple, yet powerful question: ‘Who am I?’ This dictum became the central and most powerful message contributing to the formation of a modern Advaitic<sup>141</sup> tradition. I will explore some of the facets of this question. How does this question transform the tradition of modern Advaita? How does it provide a new pedagogy of self-transformation? I also argue that this method becomes the basis for the neo-Vedantin teachers to formulate their own practices and thus, contribute to a modern Advaitic tradition. In the second section of the chapter, I analyze the

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<sup>141</sup> While I will go into a prolonged discussion on the idea of modern Advaita in this chapter, I want to provide a basic introduction to the idea of Advaita Vedanta here. Eliot Deutsch writes “ Advaita Vedanta is the non-dualistic system of Vedanta expounded primarily by Sankara (ca.788-822)...Sankara’s system is best labeled as ‘non-dualistic’ rather than ‘monistic’ to distinguish it from any position that views reality as a single order of *objective* being. Advaita Vedanta is concerned with showing the ultimate non-reality of all distinctions - that Reality is not constituted by parts, that in essence it is not different from the Self.” Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedanta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1969), 3.

world of the Ramana photo consisting of certain popular images, the various relationships between the photographs and the followers, the lives of photographers and their interactions with Ramana along with the ashram photo archive in order to unpack how the figure of Ramana is constituted within these sites. In the third section, I explore the development of Ramana's ideas of the 'other' through his discourses, in the space of the ashram and through photographs. I contend that within the space of these encounters, a community of followers emerged based on the principle of non-duality and embracing the 'other'. Next, through ethnographic accounts and textual sources, I demonstrate the ways in which Ramana's Advaitic thinking developed. I suggest that this was focused on the ideas of silence, solitude and the practice of self-enquiry. Finally, in the last section of the chapter, I show how the writing of biographies as a practice and 'becoming' a writer are co-constituted. In other words, the practice of writing is both a way of self-transformation as well as an act of devotion.

### **Who Am I?: Ramana's Simple Message**

I was first introduced to Ramana Maharshi as the sole spiritual teacher of modern India, who gave the simplest and most direct path to self-realization. He was the only one to have achieved self-realization in modern times according to many of his followers. "Ramana was a *Jivanamukta* (someone who remains alive as a realized being). There has been no one like him since the Buddha. He gave an easy, one step instruction: Just ask yourself the question: Who am I? and slowly you will find your mind stopping and unable to think any further." This was how a follower described the simplicity of Ramana's method to me. I was intrigued by this claim made by followers and wanted to delve deeper into Ramana's life and thought. The message was popularized through a text titled 'Who am I' (*Nan Yar*, in Tamil), which was compiled and

translated into several languages by many devotees of Ramana. The text is in the form of a dialogue consisting of questions and answers between M.Sivaprakasam Pillai (an official who visited Ramana while he lived in a cave on the Arunachala mountain) and Ramana. The text also exemplifies the idea of silent contemplation as a method given by Ramana, whereby he gave the answers only through gestures or writing. The exchange occurred in 1902 when Ramana didn't have an 'inclination to talk'<sup>142</sup> (which is not the same as a vow of silence). It suggests that being silent was a natural state for Ramana, who went through several periods of silence in his life. It was not something that needed effort. Initially, it is said that Pillai asked 14 questions; however, in the subsequent editions of the text there are 28 or 30 questions to be found. Some questions are: Who am I?, What is the nature of Awareness?, What is the nature of the mind?, Is not everything the work of God?, What is non-attachment? and What is happiness?. The range of the questions is vast and covers many different aspects of life, being the kind that may come to the mind of any seeker. Many devotees have given their own interpretations of the text and added their own commentaries. Ramana himself revised the text in the 1920s.

Within the first version of the text itself, Pillai had already added his own interpretations of the teachings since he was using it as a manual for himself. Therefore, the text at its very conception was a manual and a pedagogical tool. When Ramana saw it in the 1920s, while he was surprised to see these interpretations, he wanted to retain the interpretations as a part of the text. The clearest example of such additions and interpretations is with regard to the first question asked –

Who am I? The answer, as given by Ramana, is that it is the physical body, composed of the seven *dhatu*s, is not 'I'. The five sense organs [...] and the five types of perception known through the senses [...] are not 'I'. The five parts of the body which act [...] and their functions [...] are not 'I'. The five vital airs such as *prana*, which perform the five vital functions such as respiration, are not 'I'. Even the mind that thinks is not 'I'. In the state of deep sleep, *vishaya vasan*as remain. Devoid of sensory knowledge and activity,

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<sup>142</sup> Ramana Maharshi, *Who Am I? (Nan Yar?): The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi*, trans. T.M.P. Mahadevan (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1982).

even this [state] is not 'I'. After negating all of the above as 'not I, not I', the knowledge that alone remains is itself 'I'. The nature of knowledge is *sat-chit-ananda* [being-consciousness-bliss].<sup>143</sup>

David Godman, one of the most popular writers on Ramana explains that Pillai had in fact added the long lists of organs to explain the idea of 'not this' in his interpretations. Godman himself added his own interpretation as follows "[Pillai's] interpolation does not give a correct rendering of Bhagavan's teachings on self-enquiry. In the following exchange, Bhagavan explains how self-enquiry should be done, and why the 'not I, not I' approach is an unproductive one."<sup>144</sup>

Why did Pillai add his own interpretation to Ramana's answer? While it is not shocking or surprising that he did so, given his own educational background with a degree in philosophy, Pillai's additions suggest that a manual of 'self-transformation' or perhaps 'self-help' is created through a process of interpretation and dialogue. Ramana's dictum was translated into a pedagogical tool that created a field of experimentation and enquiry.

By asking the simple question 'who am I?', Ramana was able to simplify and universalize a language of Vedanta. This question became a powerful pedagogical tool and was able to transform Vedanta into gaining universal appeal. The result of this universalization was further experimentation with Ramana's ideas. One prominent example of such experimentation can be found in Paul Brunton's popular book *Secret Path*, published in 1935. Brunton came up with his own manual of the practice of self-inquiry based on Ramana's method and he was one of his first western devotees. His writings formed the bases of a much longer and complex lineage of self-inquiry, all over the world. After Paul Brunton visited Ramana in his ashram and made the 'discovery' of Ramana, he wrote the popular book *In Search of Secret India* in 1934.

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<sup>143</sup> David Godman, "Who am I?," Sri Ramana Maharshi: his life, his teachings and his devotees, accessed October 17, 2019, <https://davidgodman.org/newsite/wordpress/who-am-i/>

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

In *The Secret Path*, he provided a detailed outline of what he called a ‘technique of self-analysis,’ based on Ramana’s method. He wrote

you are about to begin your great adventure of self-enquiry. One key to success in your practice is to think very slowly. The wheel of mind is about to be slowed down, and consequently, it will be unable to rush around from one thing to another, as it did formerly. Think slowly [...] First watch your own intellect in its working. Note how thoughts follow one another in endless sequence. They try to realize that there is someone who thinks. Now ask: “Who is this Thinker?” Who is this “I” that sleeps and wakes up; that thinks and feels; that works and speaks? What is it in us that we call the “I”? Those who believe that matter is the only thing existing will tell you that it is the body; and that the sense of “I Am” arises within the brain at birth and disappears at the death or disintegration of the body. Now in order to understand the real nature of this mysterious “I” and to find out its true relation to the functions of the body and brain we must make a penetrating analysis of personality, the apparent self.<sup>145</sup>

Brunton’s version of self-enquiry can be seen as the first or the proto-type of many self-help manuals, instructions and modules that would be written by neo-advaitin teachers.<sup>146</sup> Brunton set the tone for the later followers or those claiming Ramana’s lineage. His book became extremely popular and Ramana was made known to the world through it.

Currently, the most prominent figures within Modern Advaita all over the world seem to invoke the lineage of Ramana. Philip Lucas has termed this to be the “Ramana Effect” and has examined the reasons behind his popularity. He suggests that “the Maharshi’s influence is at least partly attributable to both the portability of his spiritual method and to the universality and plasticity of his teaching. His basic method, called ‘self-inquiry,’ consists of an introversion of the mind grounded in the question, ‘Who am I?’.”<sup>147</sup> Such a practice did not require any commitment or participation in Vedantic traditions; it required no *mantras* or *pranayamas*. The later Neo-Vedantin teachers all over the world would go by these principles, making Advaita a

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<sup>145</sup> Paul Brunton, *The Secret Path* (London: Arrow books Ltd., 1934), 93.

<sup>146</sup> There are many neo-advaitin teachers who are popular today, such as Andrew Cohen, Eckhart Tolle, Gangaji, Poonja etc. There are numerous books on methods of self-enquiry published by them.

<sup>147</sup> Philip Lucas, “When a Movement Is Not a Movement: Ramana Maharshi and Neo-Advaita in North America” *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (November 2011): 93-114

universal philosophy without any traditional Vedantic practice. Further, Lucas suggests that “By de-emphasizing specifically Advaitic elements (i.e. traditional language, philosophy and theology) [...] and repackaging them within the psychologized thought-world of contemporary North-Americans, Neo-Advaitin teachers are able to transform Maharshi’s Advaitin teachings into a species of self-help accessible to a sizeable number of adherents.”<sup>148</sup> Most importantly, the emphasis on ‘method’ and practice, as a concrete tool that devotees and seekers can experiment with on their own adds to Ramana’s appeal.

Therefore, the question of ‘who am I?’ became a popular method of self-transformation and continues to be practiced by seekers from all over the world. The democratic quality of this dictum, the ease with which it can be practiced, and the lack of any ritual, gives it a universal appeal. However, the means through which this universality was manufactured needs to be understood. The question of whether the practice is truly beyond any religious affiliation, particular tradition or even mediation remains an important one. In this chapter, I demonstrate that mediation is central to this creation. In other words, I argue throughout this chapter that Ramana’s philosophy and the method of self-transformation is in fact constructed within a space of several interpretations, encounters and media, such as photography.

## **Journeys with the Ramana Photo**

### *Encounters with the Portrait*

While doing field work, I unexpectedly encountered the Ramana photograph during conversations with a friend. I met a close friend, Vijaya, for an early morning coffee in Delhi. I was meeting her after almost two years and she started narrating her experience of a recent

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

meditation retreat. I knew Vijaya had been practicing Zen Buddhist meditation for several years now. Many times she had tried to lure me into it too, but for one reason or another, I had never been able to join her. As we talked, my research and travels came up. ‘Tiruvannamalai! Oh, I love that place and the mountains. Many of our retreats happen there!’ I was excited to hear that she had been there many times. I asked if she had heard of Ramana Maharshi. She exclaimed, ‘of course! When I was there the last time, I was smitten by his photograph. I was drawn to his eyes and face. His kindness emanates from the photo. I bought the photo and have placed it on my desk at home. I look at it every day.’ Later she sent me the photo of Ramana over WhatsApp (Figure 2.2).

This was not the first time I had heard of the magnetism of the Ramana photo. On my first visit to the Ramana ashram in Tiruvannamalai, I too had noticed on the wall of my room, the same photo that my friend had sent. The room was quite austere and the only form of decoration was this famous photo known as the ‘Welling Bust’ (Figure 2.3). I found myself pondering over many questions. Was Ramana posing? Who took the photo? Did others also feel drawn to it in the same ways? The ‘Welling Bust,’ as I discovered later in the archives, was taken by photographer G.G. Welling on a short visit to the ashram in 1946. He had taken the photos by a handmade ‘wooden box’ camera, according to the ashram archivist. An ashram newsletter stated “When he was readying to take Bhagavan’s photo, Bhagavan asked if there was sufficient light. ‘Bhagavan, you are the light!,’ Mr. Welling said. Later, the photographer presented Bhagavan with a photo album containing the portraits of Bhagavan, Chinna Swami, and their sister, Alamelu, as well as the images of the Big Temple and the Hill.”<sup>149</sup> The Welling Bust is one of

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<sup>149</sup> “In Profile: Mr. G.G. Welling”, *Saranagati*, Vol. 7, No.6 (June 2013): 1-8

the most popular photos of Ramana today, often sold at the ashram gift shop. It is also be found on stamps issued by the Indian government in 1971 (Figures 2.4 and 2.5).

One feels instantly drawn to this portrait of Ramana; the slight tilt of the face, a faint smile and the eyes convey an endless sense of kindness and grace. The photograph draws all attention to the face of Ramana. Welling had taken a couple of other portraits of Ramana as well and the choice of the portrait as a form is perhaps not surprising. Religious studies scholar Gwilym Beckerlegge has investigated the use of photography by devotees to create the iconic status of Swami Vivekananda. He argues that, “adopting conventions of portraiture [...] were becoming increasingly familiar as photographic studios spread in different regions of the world”<sup>150</sup>. Further he argues that “the face was the window on the inner person [...] It should not display any vulgar emotion, but instead calm-ness, dignity, and self-control”.<sup>151</sup> Following Beckerlegge’s lead, I argue that the photographic genre of the portrait made it possible for seekers to access Ramana directly. The ‘bust’, in particular, allows one to pay attention to the face alone. The fact that the photograph consists of no background or foreground strips it away from any context. In the absence of these, does this form of photograph have any historical context? By stripping away context, it seems as though the photographer portrays Ramana as a timeless figure. Taking this argument further, I suggest that in the Welling Busts, Ramana acquires a divine status: eternal and timeless. This, as we will see, does not necessarily hold true for the numerous other photos of Ramana, where the context is an important historical marker. As Beckerlegge has further

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<sup>150</sup> Gwilym Beckerlegge argues that the concept of the iconic is more suited for the understanding on Vivekananda rather than that of the idol. He contends that the photo-iconic tradition allowed for the creation of a sense of presence, which led to the formation of communities beyond the boundaries of tradition and culture. He demonstrates that the iconic presence of Vivekananda was actively shaped by the shifts in photographic conventions. Gwilym Beckerlegge, “Svami Vivekananda’s Iconic Presence and Conventions of Nineteenth-Century Photographic Portraiture”, *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Apr., 2008): 1-40

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

contended, the role and significance of these photographs needs to be understood within the framework of the idea of the ‘iconic’, rather than that of the *murti* (idol), which signifies divinity and worship.<sup>152</sup> This iconography has been produced through common and identifiable norms of portraiture, which could be easily transferable across geographical boundaries.

Another photo of this kind is the popular ‘Mani Bust’ (Figure 2.6). Taken in the 1930s, Ramana looks younger and his eyes shine, but he also seems to look a bit skeptical with a slight squint in his eyes. These photos were taken by P.R.S Mani, who went on to work in the early film industry in Madras. While Mani also took other photos of Ramana, the Mani Bust series are the most popular. Such portrait photos generate a form of intimacy, where the onlooker is drawn to the image of Ramana and is able to form a unique and *individual* connection. In the moment of looking, only Ramana and the onlooker exist and in some way they forge a union.

Roland Barthes in his most famous work “Camera Lucida” describes the portrait photograph as “closed field of forces”.<sup>153</sup> He explains that there are “four image-repertoires” that intersect, oppose and distort each other. He says, “In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.”<sup>154</sup> Thus the portrait photograph is constituted by the opposing and simultaneous forces of the four image-repertoires producing it as an object for circulation (a universal and portable image), an object of self-making and transformation and an object of intimacy and devotion.

Further, he suggests that in the act of posing, one starts to imitate oneself when one is neither subject nor object, but rather, “a subject who feels he is becoming an object” and hence,

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ronald Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 13-14.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

experiences a “micro-version of death” and becomes a “specter”.<sup>155</sup> In portrait photography, a transformation from a subject to object takes place or as Barthes calls it a transformation to a “museum object.”<sup>156</sup> In the early first portraits around the 1840s, the subject would simulate being an object in that they had to pose for a long time under bright sunlight without moving. In the case of the Ramana portraits (the Welling and Mani Busts) he patiently posed for the photographer. Perhaps it came easily to him to stay still and wait as the photographer adjusted the light.

This stillness prefigures the mortality of the photographed subject. Barthes explains the experience of becoming an object or micro-death further. He writes, “Ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me [...] is Death. Death is the *eidōs* of that Photograph”<sup>157</sup> If death is the essence of a photograph, was Ramana experiencing self-death through these photographs? And by extension, can this form of photography be seen as a form of self-denial, rather than an attachment or reproduction of the self? Each act of posing by Ramana can be understood as a rejection of the self, a denial of the previous pose and multiple experiences of death. This mode of photography made the experimentation with self-denial possible. This act of self-denial was further a way to engage with Ramana’s method of self-enquiry. Therefore, I argue that this mode of photographic experimentation allows for the idea of denial of self or the ending of self. In this unselfing, Ramana conveyed the message and power of stillness to enter into a state of contemplation and transformation by only asking the question ‘Who am I?’ Photography can also be viewed as meditating on the possible lives of an individual *after* their passing. Building on Barthes’ insights, literary theorist Eduardo Cadava argues that

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 15.

“photography is a mode of bereavement. It speaks to us of mortification.”<sup>158</sup> Photography as a form is inextricably linked to death and it is also a way of remembrance after death. As the ashram authorities, devotees, and photographers took photos of Ramana, they also anticipated his death. Ramana himself may have been aware of the photograph as a mode of bereavement. As Cadava writes

the lesson of the photograph for history [...] is that every attempt to bring the other to the light of day, to keep the other alive, silently presumes that it is mortal, that it is always already touched (or retouched) by death. The survival of the photographed is therefore never only the survival of its life, but also of its death. It forms part of the history of how a person *lives* on, and precisely how this afterlife, with its own history, is embedded in life.<sup>159</sup>

Therefore, the devotees and the photographers were already mourning the death of Ramana while he was alive. The abundance of photographs may indicate precisely fear of losing him and the desire to preserve the intimacy with him.

#### *Photographs and Devotees*

Followers and devotees of Ramana related to his photographs in numerous ways. The intimacies created through the photographs took the shape of devotion, healing, inspiration and as an object to facilitate meditation. Susan Visvanathan, in her moving account of illness and recovery through her devotion to Ramana, writes of the photographs at the ashram. She says,

my room has a black and white picture of Ramana looking extremely skeptical. It’s interesting how photographs convey so much of the presence of the Maharshi, the sense of here and now so integral to his philosophy. If there is any deification at the ashram, it is the sense of the photographs functioning as the living image. Devotees plead with Ramana’s pictures - understand us, remember us, give us light, salvation, freedom from fear - and the curious miracle of Ramana’s presence is that there are visible signs of his hearing prayers.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Eduardo Cadava, *Words on Light: Theses on the Photography of History* (Princeton: Princeton University of Press, 1997), 11.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Susan Vishwanathan, *The Children of Nature: The Life and Legacy of Ramana Maharshi* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2010), 115.

For Visvanathan, the photographs are objects of devotion, which claim Ramana's presence in the everyday life of the ashram. This enduring quality of Ramana, the sense of here and now conveyed through the photographs, structures the space of the ashram. All the halls and buildings of the ashram display photographs. There are photos of the different phases of ashram construction, of devotees who lived in it, of Ramana, of the sacred Arunachala mountain surrounding the ashram, and of devotees with their families. The entire space of the ashram feels like a museum, memorializing the life and community formed around Ramana. The dining hall, in particular, has several large photos of Ramana from different phases of his life along with some of his important devotees. As the visitors and devotees eat in silence, eyes only fall on these images. The silence created while eating, surrounded by the large silent photographs, engenders a meditative mode. Being surrounded by these images, one also feels part of a much larger community and establishing a connection with Ramana.

When the devotees saw Ramana's photos, they were captured or drawn to them: a moment of *recognition*. Devotees often expressed during interviews that they were able to identify him as their guru at this moment and felt an uncontrollable desire of being swept up by the image. This is when the charisma of Ramana takes hold. This moment of recognition is central to the narrative of devotion to him and the creation of his community. This moment constitutes both the devotee/seeker and Ramana as guru/teacher, thus being both an autobiographical and biographical moment. As literary theorist Paul de Man says, "the autobiographical moment happens as an alignment between the two subjects involved in the process of reading in which they determine each other by mutual reflective substitution."<sup>161</sup> Similar to the process of reading, this moment of looking at a photograph is also a moment of mutual constitution. The figure of

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<sup>161</sup>Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement" in *MLN*, Vol. 94, No. 5, *Comparative Literature*. (Dec., 1979): 921.

Ramana is constituted by all the attachments and intimacies of devotion as a guru, teacher or philosopher. Art historian Christopher Pinney's analysis of such a moment of looking at an image is termed as 'intermingling'. Underlying this looking is a kind of 'corporetics,' a combination of 'the sensory, corporeal and aesthetic'. In this practice there is a mutuality of seeing and being seen.<sup>162</sup> Thus, all the senses come together in this mutual constitution of Ramana and the devotee. This subject formation then marks the beginning of a journey of self-transformation that the image of Ramana allows for. Further, I argue that there is an *excess* to this act of looking-- an uncontrollable, unmistakable recognition of being drawn to Ramana as *the* guru; a sight similar to that of falling in love. This was often the way in which many of the devotees described the process to me. Many had seen his photos in another part of the world, on book covers or posters and had decided to make the long journey to the ashram, just to learn more about him or be in his presence. Such is the force of the Ramana photographs.

The photographs also play a role in constructing the community of followers and the figure of Ramana himself. While there has been a clear attempt by the ashram authorities to preserve, archive, and display the photographs, they also exist in abundance and in excess. This is reflected in photographs in the archives without any captions, the scattered photos in many spaces of the ashram without an intent to display, and photos in the ashram book store being sold in many forms, such as calendar art, posters, and postcards. The photographs circulate within the ashram and outside, in abundance, having their own lives and afterlives. Anyone is welcome to take photos, buy photos, visit the archive and donate ones that they may have taken in the past. As they circulate, they form new communities and attachments, thus renewing the life of the ashram

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<sup>162</sup> Shaila Bhatti and Christopher Pinney, "Optic-Clash: Modes of Visuality in India" in *A Companion to the Anthropology of India*, ed. Isabelle Clark-Deces (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing), 2011.

and the figure of Ramana. In other words, the photographs not only act as a medium of devotion, remembrance and intimacy for many generations of followers, for they also reach new communities and seekers.

These photos include Ramana going on his daily walks to his beloved Arunachala, him eating a meal, being with his favorite animals, walking in the ashram premises and Ramana reading a book or the newspaper (Figures 2.7-2.12). These can be considered candid photographs, which serve the purpose of creating an image of Ramana as leading a regular life of austerity and simplicity. He is always dressed in his usual garb of *langoti*,<sup>163</sup> clothing often associated with holy men, and never photographed in a studio space. As these images circulated, they perhaps created a resemblance to and referred to the imagined images of holy men, sadhus, and other figures of austerity. By displaying Ramana in what may be called his ‘natural habitat,’ the photographs were also creating a language or a vocabulary to think about him as a spiritual figure. Hence, these photos created a new language to imagine Ramana as an enlightened man living in a small town in India.

Further, these photos play an important role for the devotees, representing an attachment to the *body* of Ramana. In these photos, he is seen in different poses, sometimes with childlike enthusiasm and at other times looking calm and relaxed surrounded by devotees. Ramana’s almost naked body is often in stark contrast to those surrounding him. While looking at these photos, devotees witness the body of Ramana. They notice how he walks, how he tilts his head when he sits, how he sits while eating a meal on the floor and how his body always looks relaxed.

According to many devotees, his relaxed demeanor reflects his *sahaja*<sup>164</sup> and enlightened nature.

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<sup>163</sup> The langoti is similar to a loin cloth and we also see Ramana carrying a cloth on his shoulder or draped around his body.

<sup>164</sup> Sahaja refers to a state of silent awareness, which is continuous and does not change under any circumstance.

As a devotee in the ashram once remarked, “Do you notice how Ramana always sits in such a relaxed manner? He is never trying to sit in any yogic posture.” His calm state of being, especially while conducting mundane daily activities, such as walking, eating, reading or sitting with devotees, all reflected in the photos denote his *sahaja* state at all times. These photos also demonstrate an intimacy of the photographer with Ramana and the desire to capture the many mundane moments of his daily life. These photos give an insight into his personal life and make him a relatable figure, creating new forms of intimacy.

The ashram also houses a photo archive, where devotees come to access them. I met the ashram photo archivist on the first day of my visit itself. When I asked what drew him to the ashram, he had a familiar story to tell. He had seen a Ramana photo in England in the *puja* room of a British woman devotee in the 1970s. He was instantly deeply moved by it and many years later, he found his way to the ashram to finally settle there. He took over the role of the archivist, as he is also a photographer himself and has an interest in the preservation of the photographs. His approach to the archive has been to collect and preserve as many photographs as possible. Many devotees have donated their photograph collections to the archive in recent years. The archive has emerged as an experiential space, where the devotees have actively participated in its making and continue to do so to this day. One of the major objectives of the archive is to provide specific photos to devotees on request. The photos at the archives are often viewed as one might view family photo albums. Many devotees stop by at the ashram photo archive to look at their favorite photos or search for a particular one. Many can recount stories connected to these photos, about the setting or the person in the photo - the devotee, or Ramana himself. His photos are considered to be the most important in the entire collection. While some visitors to the archive come out of curiosity and as part of their day visit to the ashram, others come in search of

photographs that are precious to them as they document the visit of a family member to the ashram many years ago.

### *Towards an Advaitic Photography*

In this section, I build on my previous analysis to read a photograph from the ashram archive, theorizing death, the body, and silence in relation to the figure of Ramana and his philosophy. These ideas are crucial to his method of self-enquiry. Through an analysis of these photographs I will argue for the creation of a unique form or photographic practice, namely Advaitic photography.

Figure 2.13 is a photograph from a series by the French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson.<sup>165</sup> This image is captioned as the ‘Last Day’ in the ashram archives, and was the first image to strike me as I was looking over some of the more well-known photos of Ramana. The last days of his life were extensively documented by Cartier- Bresson. This particular photograph was taken when Ramana was at a severe stage of illness in 1950. One may ask, why did he agree to being photographed at such a time? Was he aware of his impending death? Ramana looks straight at the camera, with a solemn expression and sense of certainty. I found this photograph significant for another reason - the appearance of two important national figures in background; both Gandhi and Nehru appear. By placing these three figures (Ramana, Gandhi and Nehru) in the same frame, what might have Bresson wanted to suggest? While there is no way of knowing the answers to all these questions for certain, I want to use this photograph to advance some interpretations.

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<sup>165</sup> Henri Cartier-Bresson was a renowned French photographer, who traveled across India and took a number of ‘candid’ photographs of Indian life. These photographs are a unique and powerful record, documenting a newly emerging Indian nation. Taken between the years 1947-1950, these photos include glimpses of the last days of Gandhi’s life, images of rural life and scenes from the city of Bombay.

Bresson had also been present and photographed the last days of Gandhi and his funeral procession. This coincidence is hard to ignore as the imagery of Ramana and Gandhi bear many similarities. Both dressed in the garb of an ‘ascetic’ or a ‘renunciant’ and made a claim for austerity. However, both had different approaches towards politics, and the world. The story in the ashram is that Gandhi would often send his political workers to stay there when they felt tired of politics. One of the major distinctions between Ramana and Gandhi, as discussed by followers, has been to view the latter as a man of *karma* (man of politics/the world), while the former is seen as a *jnani* (self-realized), who practiced the path of silence and Advaita.

Returning to the photograph, it can be seen that the calendar on the wall has a picture of a map of India (it is unclear whether the map is one of pre-partition or not), with a rising Nehru in the background. Ramana’s relationship to India as a nation and the idea of space comes across clearly in his talks with devotees. He believed that the category of space was irrelevant, for to him, it was not so important where one lived, but rather, how one did so. In this photograph, we see Nehru, the first Prime Minister and visionary of the new India actively engaged with politics, Gandhi representing the enduring voice of freedom and Ramana representing the inner life and the importance of self-transformation. By bringing these three figures together in the same frame, Bresson, in fact, represents an emerging Indian nation. The past, present and future - Gandhi, Ramana and Nehru - are all represented in the photograph. In doing so he also places Ramana within the political canon of the nation.

This photograph was taken ten days before his death, on April 4, 1950, in Ramana’s room. His arm had been operated on many times before and the bandaged arm can be seen in the photograph. This photograph documents his long period of illness and his approaching death. We may ask what was Ramana’s relationship to death? Many devotee accounts spoke of the lack of

pain he experienced even after multiple surgeries. He was certain that the pain was only of the ‘body’ and the body should be allowed to take its own course. After the third operation on the malignant tumor on his arm, the cancer still seemed to spread through the blood stream. The designated official photographer of the ashram, T.N.Krishnaswami, who spent a lot of time with Ramana, wrote in his account,

it was sad indeed to look at the suffering of his body but the mystery was his attitude to it. He described all the pain and suffering as though the body belonged to someone else. The question arose whether he suffered or not. How could he describe the pain and suffering so accurately and locate it in the body and yet remain unaffected by it? He always said, “There is pain” and not “I have pain”.<sup>166</sup>

In another account of this event, Ramana’s doctor wrote that, “disease and pain left no impression on his mind. If he allowed himself to be treated of the ailment, it was more because his devotees wanted it than because he desired relief.”<sup>167</sup>

In a rather brilliant exposition, Ramana himself spoke of the relationship between the science of photography to pain and the body. He often spoke of photography in order to explain philosophical principles. Once, he said,

when taking a picture, the silver salts are coated over a film in the dark when the film is exposed in the camera, you get an impression caused by the light outside. If the film is exposed to light before you put it in the camera there can be no impression on it. So, it is with our jiva. When it is still in darkness, an impression can be made on it by the little light that leaks in. But when the light of knowledge has already flooded it, there is no impression of external objects to be obtained.<sup>168</sup>

This quote suggests both Ramana’s active participation in the discourse of photography and the articulation of Advaita. It also demonstrates that he found similarities between the technical

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<sup>166</sup> T.N.Krishnaswami, “By an Eyewitness”, *Ramana Pictorial Souvenir*, ed. Arthur Osborne (Tiruvannamalai: Ramanasramam, 1967), 36.

<sup>167</sup> Shankar Rao, “Treatment to Sri Bhagavan- An Eyewitness Account”, *The Silent Power*, ed. V.S. Ramanan (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam), 138-140.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

apparatus of photography and his own philosophical foundations. In creating a parallel between his body and the exposed film, he suggests that if one has already been exposed to the light of knowledge, then no amount of external influences (pain) can cause any harm.

T.N.Krishnaswami accidentally fell into the role of the official photographer of the ashram, after he took the first photo of Ramana as a visitor. He said that, at first, he felt that he had *captured* Ramana in his metal camera, but later, he realized that it was Ramana who had captured him in his heart. This relationship of intimacy and devotion started with him taking photographs of Ramana. He was drawn to the body of Ramana. He said

sometimes, I used to wonder if it was not ridiculous of me to pay so much attention to photographing his form, when Bhagavan's teaching was "I am not the body". Was I not chasing the shadow and trying to perpetuate it? Somehow, so long as I was seeing him with my eyes, the teaching did not assume any importance to me. His person was seen by me and I felt drawn and attracted to him. It gave me immense pleasure to take photographs of him. He was more important to me than his teaching. Every little movement, every one of his acts and gestures, was highly valued by me and they always carried some divine fragrance. Simply to watch him, no matter what he was doing, was highly gratifying. <sup>169</sup>

Here the act of taking photographs can be understood as a performance of devotion for Krishnaswami. This is manifested the form of an intimacy with the body of Ramana - his gestures and body movements. For Krishnaswami, the devotion to Ramana's body even exceeds the value of his teachings. This strong desire to be close to Ramana's presence is at the heart of the practice of his photography, but this desire creates dilemmas, as it seems to go against Ramana's teachings. However, as discussed earlier, photography can also be understood as a form of self-denial in the case of Ramana.

In another account, Krishnaswami writes,

not once did Bhagavan tell me, directly or indirectly [...] to stop taking photos. On the other hand, he unhesitatingly stood or sat in whatever pose I asked him for. No one will

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<sup>169</sup> V. Ganesan, *Ramana Periya Puranam* (Tiruvannamalai: Ramana Asramam, 2013), 370

believe, if I tell now that I used to ask him, ‘Turn your face this side, look up, look sideways, keep the arms down or keep the arms like this’, and then he acceded to my requests instantly [...] If anyone had been there and seen Bhagavan obeying me, they would have mistaken Bhagavan to be obsessed with being photographed. The real truth is that he, as my guru, was fulfilling my desires, my insatiable longing to photograph him and that was all.<sup>170</sup>

Ramana was, thus, actively participating in the process of being photographed, which no longer makes him solely a distant object of reverence. It also reflects a sense of surrender to the will of the devotee or photographer. As Krishaswami asks Ramana to pose, enact and re-enact himself, he imagines not only Ramana as guru, for he also enacts his own devotion. As a guru, Ramana reciprocates the affection and intimacy of the devotee, thus making the distance between the photographer and the object of photography (Ramana) disappear. I argue that this is how the practice of *Advaitic photography* emerges.

Zahid Chaudhary, in his provocative work on photography in nineteenth century India, analyzes the “phenomenological scene of photographic practice itself” and the way it transformed the “perceptual apparatus”<sup>171</sup> According to him, the camera provided the ability to extend the photographer’s sense perception and it became an extension of the body and eye or the *senses* of the photographer himself/herself. Thus, with this interpretation, the camera is both a “sense organ” and an instrument.<sup>172</sup> Krishnaswami’s usage of the camera becomes a way of enabling his *own senses* to connect; to come into contact with Ramana. The camera allows for a heightened sensory experience, which his vision alone could not have made possible.

The photograph is, thus, acted as the ultimate Advaitic object, omitting the distance between the body of Ramana and the photographer. Advaita refers to non-duality and an interpretation of

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid

<sup>171</sup> Zahid Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire: Photography in Nineteenth- century India* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 25-26

reality that is not constituted by parts, but rather, a whole. In this photographic practice, the photographer is erased and the camera exists as an extension of the 'eye' or the 'I' (without the Self). In other words, the distance between the camera, photographer and the figure (Ramana) are all obliterated forming a union. In the moment of encounter between the photographer, and Ramana, they meet through the camera, which acts as a medium of transformation. That is, the space of this encounter is that of transformation and union. The practice of Advaitic photography born in this encounter provides us a way to understand the relationship between the figure (Ramana), the devotee (photographer) and the media (photography).

In another photograph, Krishnaswami is seen bowing to Ramana. In this unique photograph, we see the photographer in the same frame as Ramana with the Arunachala mountain in the background (Figure 2.14). This photograph provides an excellent example of the practice of Advaitic photography. Ramana is Krishnaswami's object of devotion and the mountain is Ramana's object of devotion. When the three come together in the same frame, there seems to be a seamless union between the three.

### **Ramana and the Other**

The theme of the other and foreignness is significant within Ramana's philosophy and community formation. The other appeared in the forms of the animal, the western seeker or the foreigner, and the Arunachala mountain. Ramana had an intimate relationship to each of them and I would argue that these became the hallmarks of his Advaitic philosophy. Ramana's engagement with the other further emerges in photographs. Was photography a way to incorporate the foreign or to transform foreignness? As discussed above, the aim of Advaitic

photography is to establish a union between those involved in the photographic practice. We see this in the case of Ramana's photos with the other.

### *Animal as Other*

There are many images of Ramana posing with animals, western devotees as part of large group photos and him, walking or sitting on Arunachala mountain. Each of these photos enacts or performs an act of incorporation of the other. Little is known about the photographer of these photos and the circumstances in which they were shot. However, the intention of putting an animal and Ramana in the same frame is clearly a staged and performed act. Any animal that came into contact with Ramana was said to enter a meditative state. These photographs, then, are a witness to this transformed state entered by them. There are many such stories of animals, such as monkeys, that regularly visited Ramana when he lived in the cave and even a tiger cub that visited the ashram (Figures 2.15-2.19).

The photographs come to symbolize Ramana's compassion and special bond with animals.

Devotees and seekers today continue to take care of animals within the space of the ashram.

Ramana can be seen holding a squirrel gently between his palms, stroking a tiger cub that looks calm and relaxed. He was also photographed with a regal peacock and looking joyful with cows.

The series of images illustrates the intimate relationship of Ramana with animals. He is seen interacting with the animals, holding them, sitting close to them, talking and smiling at them. He imagined the animals as fellow seekers, meditators, ascetics and enlightened beings. As he said, "in a body, a dull cowherd, a monkey or dog, a knave, a scholar of a devotee, everywhere he beholds the same being and is without the least partiality."<sup>173</sup> Ramana defined a *jnani* as, "one who has a balanced tranquil mind in any kind of situation, one who has universal vision of

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<sup>173</sup> *Bhagavan Ramana: The Friend of All Creation*. (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2013), 16.

equality towards all beings; one who has love, care, compassion and solicitude for all beings; irrespective of whether it is a plant, animal, bird, insect or human being.”<sup>174</sup>

At the ashram today, there are many animals, walking around the grounds freely. They are part of the community, being treated with love and care. There are assigned caretakers for each animal; Ramana refused to accept animals unless individuals volunteered to take care of them. Peacocks, both white and blue, are one of the main attractions of the ashram. They are taken out for walks at specified times during the day and are a great source of joy and amusement for visitors. There are monkeys, dogs and a large cowshed with many cows and squirrels. While I was staying at the ashram, a devotee, a journalist from Argentina, had been bitten by a monkey when trying to feed it, but insisted that she felt no pain and refused to go to the doctor for several days until it finally got badly infected. She thought that the monkeys were part of the habitat of the ashram and that we should learn to coexist with them. The ashram also has memorialized some of its favorite animals, in particular, there are *samadhis* (graves) of three, namely Jackie the dog, Valli the deer and Lakshmi the blessed cow.

Ramana was known to communicate with animals in silence and could sense how spiritually awakened an animal was.<sup>175</sup> The story of Lakshmi the cow is particularly striking as she was thought to be in an enlightened state. She possessed a human like intelligence and showed unending devotion to Ramana. From a young age, when she was donated to the ashram, she would always find her way back exactly at meal times and spend most of her day with Ramana. She could communicate with Ramana when she had not been fed her favorite food, such as *idlis* (rice cakes). Ramana had claimed that she was in the state of Samadhi and as she was about to

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Two peacocks had been brought to the ashram, but whenever they were let loose, they would fly away. Then Ramana said, “It is no use trying to keep them here. They are not ripe in their minds as the dogs in the ashram.” Therefore, no matter how much they tried, the peacocks would not stay. I heard this at the ashram.

die, he had transmitted his power by placing his hand on her “spiritual heart” and forehead. This was a special act that he had only performed on another devotee and his own mother. As she was dying, Ramana said that it was because of Lakshmi that the ashram family had grown.<sup>176</sup> The photographs with animals are extremely popular and continue to be sold at the ashram, evoking a sense of spectacle, curiosity and compassion for viewers. Both Ramana and the animal concerned appear to be at such an ease in the photos that it creates a sense of wonder. The image of an animal with Ramana suggests a worldview in which kindness and openness towards the other is embraced.

This demonstrates a radical sense of equality, which extended not just to all humans, but all forms of life. Devotees found the space of the ashram as initiating the process of ‘self-enquiry’ and an opportunity to cohabit with others - people, the mountains and animals. It also provided a way to experience unselfing by living in austere surroundings, walking up the mountains, especially in the heat, taking vows of silence or restricting speech and committing to a life of devotion to the ashram by giving up any career in the outside world.

### *The Foreigner as the Other*

The embracing of the other was made possible by discarding notions of ‘country’. Ramana believed that the idea of country is all in the mind and not an actual physical space. When a devotee asked him about, while being away in Europe, how one could still feel connected to him, Ramana responded: “Are you in India now? Or is India in you? Even now this notion that you are in India must go; India is in you. In order to verify it, look to your sleep. Did you feel that

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<sup>176</sup> David Godman, on his Youtube channel, talks about the uniqueness of Lakshmi and Ramana’s attitude towards her. He mentions that Ramana, who was extremely frugal to the extent that he would collect the mustard seeds from the kitchen floor to be used or would correct bent, rusty nails for reuse, wanted to build a large cowshed to accommodate Lakshmi. This he somehow saw as being essential for the life of the ashram. See David Godman, “Talks on Sri Ramana Maharshi- Lakshmi the Cow”, YouTube, January 16, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-POLMrAspw>.

you were in Europe or in India while asleep? You were nevertheless existing in the same space as now; space is in you. The physical body is in space, but not you.”<sup>177</sup> The dismantling of the notion of space and country rests on the idea that the self needs to be recognized as having no attachments, including a sense of place.

Many devotees and visitors to the ashram, who came from other countries have written about the comfort they felt around Ramana. Major Chadwick, one of the earliest devotees, who came to the ashram in 1935 from England after reading Paul Brunton’s famous book, *A Search in Secret India*<sup>178</sup>, narrated his experience as follows,

In spite of being entirely new to India and its customs, nothing that happened in these first days of my stay at the Ashram seemed strange to me, it was all quite natural. It was only afterwards when I had dwelt in India for some time that I began to realize how gracious Bhagavan had been to me from the very first [.....] Bhagavan responded to people’s reactions. If you behaved absolutely naturally with no strain, Bhagavan’s behaviour was similar[....]if you responded quite naturally to the all-embracing love of his presence, then he treated you as one of his own.<sup>179</sup>

Today at the ashram, the archivist (originally from England), the editor of the ashram journal (originally from Australia) and the most famous author on Ramana (originally from England) all consider it their home. It is a space for them all to live in a community formed on the ideals of devotion and the practice of self-enquiry.

Scholars have investigated the emergence of the idea of compassion itself. The special quality of the heart to be compassionate is explained by Dipesh Chakraborty as different from the Smithian and Humean position, where reason plays a role in being able to make a person compassionate.

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<sup>177</sup> Munagala Venkataramiah, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2010), 276.

<sup>178</sup> This book was the most significant book, responsible for making Ramana famous all over the world and even in India. Most visitors to the ashram came after reading this book and this was the case for decades after its publication in 1935.

<sup>179</sup> Sadhu Arunachala, *A Sadhu’s Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 1961),11. Arunchala also went by the name Major A.W.Chadwick.

In the Bengali idea of compassion, it is understood as “a person’s inborn capacity for *shahanubhuti* (*shaha*- equal, *anubhuti*- feeling). The Sanskrit derived word is usually translated as ‘sympathy’ however it is significantly different from such a meaning.”<sup>180</sup> The idea of *shahanubhuti* is derived from theories of *Rasa Shastra*. Chakrabarty explains, “the capacity of *shahanubhuti* was, unlike in European theory of sympathy, not dependent on a naturally given mental faculty like ‘imagination’; it was seen rather as a characteristic of the person with *hriday*...A *rasika* person- who could appreciate the different *rasas* or moods- had this mysterious entity called *hriday*”<sup>181</sup> Further, Leela Gandhi’s notion of ‘affective cosmopolitanism,’ defined as “the ethico-political practice of desiring self inexorably drawn toward difference,”<sup>182</sup> is a useful framework for this discussion. This affective cosmopolitanism is based on the erasure of the self and ego with an unconditional openness to the other. Gandhi explains this with the trope of friendship, which is “the most comprehensive philosophical signifier for all those invisible affective gestures that refuse alignment along the secure axes of filiation to seek expression outside, if not against, possessive communities of belonging.”<sup>183</sup> In her discussion of the friendship between Mira Alfassa and Sri Aurobindo,<sup>184</sup> Gandhi explains that Alfassa’s context within occult spiritualism made her amenable to self-dissolution and an affinity with otherness. This led to a life-long spiritual collaboration with Aurobindo. In the case of Aurobindo, his spiritual practice was based on ‘thought sharing’ with ‘crows, butterflies,

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<sup>180</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 126-127.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Affective communities: anticolonial thought, Fin-De-Siècle radicalism, and the politics of friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 17.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Sri Aurobindo and The Mother (Mira Alfassa) developed a lifelong spiritual partnership and established the Aurobindo Ashram or Auroville. Sri Aurobindo was a political revolutionary as well as an important spiritual thinker who lived between 1872-1950. Mira Alfassa, upon meeting Aurobindo, felt completely transformed.

plants, squirrels, and alien human beings'<sup>185</sup>, with the idea that the ego must be overcome.

Ramana's disposition towards the other also resembles such an idea, whereby an affective cosmopolitanism based on friendship and self-erasure provide the bases on which his relationships with the animal and the western seekers were built.

In the archives, there was another set of photographs, placed under the broad title of 'group photos' (Figures 2.22 and 2.23). These are photographs of Ramana with devotees and their families, important political figures of the time, western seekers as well as with his attendants and ashram residents. In these photographs, Ramana poses with western seekers and animals often in the same frame. There is a conscious merging of identities performed through these photos.

Ramana's compassion and the ability to communicate in silence with trees and animals is one of the most significant aspects of his Advaitic thinking. The idea of 'oneness' with another, whether human or non-human, has been one of the central tenets of Advaita. Perhaps the most striking of these images is of Ramana with an elephant. In the past, Ramana had meditated in the temple for many years, where he had an elephant as his sole companion in all those months. In 1949, Chinna Swami, one of Ramana's close devotees, arranged for the temple elephant to greet him and an American devotee took a photograph of Ramana with it saluting him (Figure 2.19). When he went back to America, he sent that picture with these words written behind it, "big Self which does not know the body (meaning Bhagavan) and a big body which does not know the Self (meaning the elephant) are both in one place."<sup>186</sup> A devotee later asked what the photographer meant by this. Ramana replied,

That is easy. Though that elephant has such a big body, he does not know the Self. For that reason, whatever food is given to him, he stands there dissatisfied trumpeting

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>186</sup> V. Ganesan, *Ramana Periya Puranam*, 141.

unceasingly. Perhaps because of that or for some other reason, the elephant is stated to be a big body without knowing the Self. I stood there somehow with shaky body; so again, perhaps because of that or for another reason, it is stated that I am the Big Self not knowing the body; that might be the photographer's idea.<sup>187</sup>

This photograph is much loved by devotees today.

### *Mountain as Other*

There is another form of other - the Arunachala mountain, which Ramana considered to be his guru. The image of the mountain has a divine and magical power in Ramana's life. At a young age, he imagined the place after reading the 15<sup>th</sup> century Kannada epic poem 'Prabhulingaleele'. He then left home in search of that which he had imagined and he held this image close to his heart as he went on this search. This mental image of the Arunachala and by extension, its photographic image, is a central object of devotion for Ramana and the other seekers who come to the ashram.

Arthur Osborne describes the Arunachala as follows, "there is a ruggedness about the scene. Boulders lie as though scattered by a giant hand. Dry thorn and cactus fences, sun-parched fields, small hills eroded into gaunt shapes; and yet huge shady trees along the dusty road, and here and there, near tank or well, the vivid green of paddy fields. And rising out of this rough beauty the hill of Arunachala."<sup>188</sup> All across the ashram space, one can see both photos of the hill as well as the majestic hill in itself. Arunachala never leaves one's sight, creating a communal experience of the image of the mountain. When one closes one's eyes at the ashram you can imagine the mountain, and when you open them you see its physical presence. The mountain is within and outside; it stands for the self and for Ramana (Figure 2.20 and 2.21). In this way,

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<sup>187</sup> Suri Nagamma, *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam*, (Tiruvannamalai: Ramana Asramam, 1972), 42.

<sup>188</sup> V.S. Ramanan, *The Silent Power: Selections from The Mountain Path and The Call Divine*, (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2002), 47.

Ramana's object of devotion captures the imagination of all the devotees at the ashram and becomes one with them.

The other in the form of animal, foreigner and the mountain inhabit and shape the space of the ashram today. It would not be possible to imagine the figure of Ramana or the space of the ashram without the other. Each of them in their own way facilitates and engages with the practice of self-enquiry.

### **Ramana's New Advaitic Thinking**

In this section, I explore Ramana's interpretation of Advaita. In particular, I look at the ways in which these ideas took shape through writings and discourses. The idea of self-realization was not new in itself, but there was something novel and unique about the modern Advaitic formulation as articulated by Ramana. For one, he argued that it was easily attainable by everyone - irrespective of their subject position. The question of method or practice is central to this articulation. How could enlightenment be achieved by everyone? What was the right practice? How long would it take to achieve? Were there multiple practices for different types of people? In Ramana's articulations of Advaita, there is no single practice: *Jnana, bhakti, yoga and karma marga*<sup>189</sup> are all equally valid and important. It is based on what is most suitable for the person. In one of Ramana's clearest instructions on the question of practice/ method of self-realization he says:

An examination of the ephemeral nature of external nature leads to vairagya. Hence enquiry (vichara) is the first and foremost step to be taken. When vichara continues automatically, it results in contempt for wealth, fame, ease, pleasure, etc. The 'I' thought becomes clearer for inspection. The source of 'I' is the Heart - the final goal. If, however, the aspirant is not temperamentally suited to Vichara Marga (to the introspective analytical method), he must develop bhakti (devotion) to an ideal - may be God, Guru, humanity in general, ethical laws, or even the idea of beauty. When one of these takes

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<sup>189</sup> These are the four paths to self-enlightenment, given in various scriptures.

possession of the individual, other attachments grow weaker, i.e., dispassion (*vairagya*) develops [...] In the absence of enquiry and devotion, the natural sedative pranayama (breath regulation) may be tried. This is known as Yoga Marga [...] If the breath is held the mind cannot afford to (and does not) jump at its pets - external objects. Thus, there is rest for the mind so long as the breath is held. All attention being turned on breath or its regulation, other interests are lost [...] If an aspirant be unsuited temperamentally for the first two methods and circumstantially (on account of age) for the third method, he must try the Karma marga (doing deeds, for example, social service) [...] His smaller self is less assertive and has a chance of expanding its good side. The man becomes duly equipped for one of the three aforesaid paths. His intuition may also develop directly by this single method.<sup>190</sup>

Ramana suggests these various methods for different types of individuals. For devotees, this diversity in methods is very useful in claiming Ramana's philosophy as their own. I met several people in the ashram who had their own relationship with his philosophy. For example, the librarian, who had had a successful career in the IT sector, talked about how he had developed *vairagya*<sup>191</sup> and wanted to move to the Ramana ashram. He realized that the space of the ashram had always existed in Indian society and one could move there, if one was not interested in engaging with the world. However, he had found a unique opportunity at the ashram to engage in various roles, such as working in the library and practicing his own method of self-enquiry. While some were more comfortable with *bhakti*, others had followed the *vichara* marg. Both traditions were equally present in the ashram. The brilliance of Ramana's Advaita for these seekers, is in the claim that self-realization is possible for anyone and everyone and that there is *already* a realized self. It just needs to be uncovered from the layers of the non-self or the *vasanas* (desires, distractions, tendencies); once these are removed, there is no going back. Hence, in Advaita philosophy, there is a distinction between the *jnani* (who knows the self) and the *ajnani* (who doesn't know the self). Further he explains it with an example of a necklace:

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<sup>190</sup> Venkataramiah, *Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, 28.

<sup>191</sup> A feeling of disinterest and disillusionment.

A woman, with her necklace around her neck, imagines that it has been lost and goes about searching for it, until she is reminded of it by a friend; she has created her own sense of loss, her own anxiety of search and then her own pleasure of recovery. Similarly, the Self is all along there, whether you search for it or not. Again, just as the woman feels as if the lost necklace has been regained, so also the removal of ignorance and the cessation of false identification reveal the Self, which is always present - here and now. This is called realization. It is not new. It amounts to elimination of ignorance and nothing more.<sup>192</sup>

Another idea that is central to his articulation is that of direct experience as a means of achieving a state of enlightenment or self-realization without any mediation of scriptures, scholarly books, religious authorities, rituals or practices. The notion of direct experience becomes increasingly significant as self-realization is made available or accessible to all individuals. Direct experience also makes 'scriptural' or bookish knowledge unnecessary. Ramana's own life is an example of this direct experience.<sup>193</sup> He spoke of the relationship between books and self-realization when asked by a devotee,

A Ceylonese: What is the first step for Realization of Self? Please help me towards it. There is no use reading books.

M (Maharshi): Quite so. If the Self be found in books it would have been already realized. What wonder can be greater than that we seek the Self in books? Can it be found there? Of course, books have given readers the sense to ask this question and seek the Self.

D(Devotee): Books are utterly useless. They may all be burnt. The spoken word alone is useful. Grace alone is useful.<sup>194</sup>

Devotees came to Ramana with many questions on the different aspects of Advaita and the method of self-enquiry. Through this process, Ramana developed and explicated his ideas. S.S. Cohen, a Jewish devotee from Iraq, came to the ashram after the First World War. He was

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>193</sup> Ramana had an experience of 'death', after which he realized he was 'not the body'. He then decided to leave home and lead a life of 'self-enquiry'. This was claimed as being sudden or spontaneous and not the result of any training or knowledge gained from books and scriptures.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 111.

spiritually inclined and knew that his spiritual search could happen in India. In one of the first questions asked by him to Ramana, he enquired about the necessity of *Brahmacharya* or celibacy for self-realization. Ramana responded that ‘Brahmacharya’ simply means ‘being in Brahman’ (or ‘living in Brahman’) and it has no connection with celibacy. Ramana’s Advaita conveys negligible importance to celibacy as a criteria of self-realization.

Further, he made his point clear by adding that the Self is All; it includes the married and unmarried. If celibacy was the most important condition for self realization, he rationalized, then all celibates would be *muktas* (free and enlightened) and all *grihasthas* (married householders) would be in bondage. But experience and tradition does not show this. It doesn’t matter what environment one lives in, whether at home or away as a sanyasi. He states his own example and says, “look at me. I left home. Look at yourselves. You have come here leaving the home environment. What do you find here? Is this different from what you left?”<sup>195</sup> To this statement, Cohen shows some skepticism and remarks,

Bhagavan says, forgetting for a moment that what he found in the pitch-like dinginess of Pathalalinga (underground cave) in the Big Temple at Tiruvannamalai, to which he had escaped from home in 1896, was entirely different from his home “environment” in Madurai. To strike a personal note of my own, I would add that seeing Bhagavan all day long, and seeing a grasping landlord as an incubus of a neighbor elsewhere, an incubus which certainly was not “according to my conscious desire”, makes a Himalayan difference. But we understand what the Master means. One carries one’s environment with him, which is not other than one’s own mind, as we discussed in the last note.<sup>196</sup>

Though Ramana emphasized the idea that one does not need to change the physical environment in order to gain self-realization, Cohen’s skepticism is important to note. To Cohen, just like many other devotees, the space of the ashram, the space of home and the hill Arunachala all produce different mental states. Hence, they choose to spend time in the ashram in order to enter

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<sup>195</sup> S.S. Cohen, *Reflections: On Talks with Ramana Maharshi* (Tiruvannamalai: Ramana Asramam, 1959), 51-52.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

a special kind of mental state. A devotee from the city talked about how she comes to spend months there since she finds it very difficult to practice solitude in self-enquiry in her life as a householder and mother. Many spend time in the ashram to seek refuge, meditate, get away from home or live a life of renunciation. Today at the ashram, the visitors are mostly ‘householders’ and there are several generations of families that continue to maintain their ties to the ashram. Ramana may have argued that the space or the environment does not matter in the practice of self-enquiry, in order to not exclude anyone. By giving freedom to the devotees to choose both their method of practice as well as the environments, Ramana was able to create an inclusive philosophy and ashram.

According to Leela Gandhi, “new style ashrams” developed post the Chicago World Parliament of Religions in 1893. She says “Vivekananda became the first such popular guru who also initiated numerous western disciples into the collaborative style of the guru-disciple relationship [...] in India, there appear a series of new-style ashrams. Congregated around a great guru or two, these collectives became a hub of spiritualist cosmopolitan exchange and negotiation.”<sup>197</sup>

The Ramana Ashram can be understood as a similar ‘new style ashram’, which welcomed people from different walks of life, for no fixed periods of time commitments or duties. Today, the ashram does not ask for any fees for accommodation and only runs on donations. This policy has existed since the establishment of the ashram and it prides itself of it.

I had often heard during the fieldwork from various people that women were more prone to *bhakti* (devotion) than men, who were drawn more to *jnana* (knowledge). The space of the ashram is a sensory experience, where contemplation and silence reverberate in all spaces along with the playing of certain recorded discourses on Advaita in the evenings. There are certain

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<sup>197</sup>Leela Gandhi, *The Common Cause: Post-Colonial Ethics and the Practice of Democracy, 1900-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 61.

rituals performed at regular intervals at the temple, such as those dedicated to Ramana's mother, which are often the domain of the women who show their devotion to him by performing these. I spent a few mornings with some of the women, making *kumkum*<sup>198</sup> packets, which are distributed and sent to the devotees of the ashram by mail. By getting involved in these chores and tasks, the women performed their *bhakti*. However, some women critiqued the rituals and said that it was contradictory to Ramana's actual philosophy.

I first heard of this discomfort from Reena. She had been drawn to Ramana as a young girl, when after reading the book *Who am I?* she dreamt of the Arunachala mountains; she wanted to go there immediately. After many years of visiting the ashram, she finally decided to move closer so that she could go there every day. She questioned the 'blindness' with which people performed the rituals; she saw no sincerity or honesty in them. According to her, Ramana, or Bhagavan as she referred to him, "was watching every act of people who came to the ashram". Reena had also chosen to remain "unmarried" till her 30s, which created a lot of conflict with her family. She believed that marriage was not necessary and her commitment was to living a life of sincerity doing whatever she chose to do. Coming to the ashram had also opened up a new world to her, as she eventually met her husband there and they read together a lot of other "spiritual masters", including Osho and Jiddu Krishnamurti. Now they are planning to start their own classes and retreats to teach yoga, pranayama and spiritual philosophy.

On the other hand, Shanti, another woman devotee, was comfortable with the rituals and was responsible for overseeing many of them. Originally from Japan, she described herself as having a "restless heart that yearned for India". She first visited in 1977 and after spending a long time with Osho and his communes, she finally found herself being drawn to Advaita. After spending

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<sup>198</sup> Vermillion powder applied by women to symbolize marriage.

time with the American Advaita guru, Gangaji, she decided she wanted a more authentic guru who was “not American”. She then saw photos of Papaji<sup>199</sup> and Ramana, after which her journey with Advaita began. She finally came to the ashram in the 1990s and decided to live there. Shanti had initially been reluctant to serve the ashram as she wanted to maintain her practice in solitude, but soon she took on more duties and now felt that it was her home. She was a very active member of the ashram community and also helped in organizing and facilitating interactions with Japanese devotees who visit. She said with a sense of confidence that she no longer needed to practice many methods of meditation as being in the ashram itself had made her recognize her own holiness.

The discomfort with rituals existed amongst many even in Ramana’s own lifetime. The divide was between those who perceived him as being traditionalist and a believer of rituals and those who considered him as a *Jivanmukta* or a *jnani*, and therefore, didn’t need actively to assert his opinion against anything or anyone. Those who considered him a jivanmukta believed that rituals did not matter to him and that he did not feel the need to assert his opinions either. Can Ramana’s silence and non-verbalization against rituals be read in different ways?

A devotee raised this question with Ramana:

D: They say that there are many saints in Tibet who remain in solitude and are still very helpful to the world. How can it be?

M: It can be so. Realization of the Self is the greatest help that can be rendered to humanity. Therefore, the saints are said to be helpful, though they remain in the forests. But it should not be forgotten that solitude is not in the forests only. It can be had even in towns, in the thick of worldly occupations.

D: Thus then, the saint’s realization leads to the uplift of humanity without the latter being aware of it. Is it so?

M: Yes. The help is imperceptible but it is still there. A saint helps the whole humanity, unknown to the latter.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Another popular Modern Advaita Guru, who was a disciple of Ramana.

<sup>200</sup> SS Cohen, *Reflections: On Talks with Ramana Maharshi*, 52.

S.S. Cohen interprets this and says,

therefore all this talk of working for, and uplifting the poor is intrinsically based on false values [...] The greatest wealth is the peace which flows from true knowledge, which can be imparted only by these 'selfish' yogis and Rishis. This does not mean that philanthropists and social workers should close shop and cease helping [...] But they must stop sneering at the one who alone can give the most valuable of help of all, namely, redemption from ignorance and misery - and forever.<sup>201</sup>

This is certainly a debatable position, but it does highlight the idea that realization of the self is the utmost task, which then resolves other issues that arise in society.

Solitude is a method that further facilitates the process of self-realization is strongly believed by many of the ashram visitors. The number of visitors sitting in corners of its various spaces practicing solitude in their own ways is striking. Someone may sit with a book, others with their eyes closed lost in meditation, others meditating on the photographs of Ramana, some chanting, some writing in a journal and several others drawing pictures of the Arunachala mountain.

People often come to the ashram for a retreat, which they have planned months in advance to get away from their daily life. When I spoke to Thomas, a life coach from London, he told me that I had been the first person he had spoken to in several days since he came to the ashram. This was his fourth visit and it had become his true space of retreat. While on these retreats he mostly kept to himself, engaged in few conversations and would go on daily hikes on the Arunachala mountain.

Another devotee, Rupert, had been living in the ashram for more than a decade. He held a PhD in Sociology and had also been a Benedictine monk. He had always been interested in inter-faith dialogue. In a rather academic conversation, he mentioned that, the desire for retreat is a phenomenon that is increasing in the modern world. He said,

religions in the traditional forms are fading away and people have been moving more towards the monastic traditions. Monastic traditions focus on interiority, whereas formal

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 54

religions are not so deep. It is not clear what this new movement is, but it is emerging - there is an interest in monasteries in the US as well, the number of monks is on the decline, but the number of lay people taking partial vows is increasing, who are interested, but without giving up their family. There is a call to monasticism and the monk in each one is waiting to come out. The number of visitors to such places is also increasing, even in the ashram, the number has gone up in the last 10 years or so. Traditional religious communities are being swamped and reenergized by laity. Their attempt is to seek god through interiority; it is no longer the purview of experts, but rather, is distributed among the general population.

Within the ashram, such retreats are facilitated not through any structured programs, workshops or courses, but rather, by providing freedom by which each visitor and devotee can decide how they spend their time. This allows for the ashram to be the kind of open space that it had been conceived as.

Ramana is primarily remembered as a teacher who taught through silence. The practice of silence or *mauna* has existed among various ascetic traditions in India. I argue that he used silence as a 'language', a means of communicating with the other effectively. It was a way to achieve union with this other, especially when the visitors to the ashram increasingly came from all over the world.

The silence in the ashram is palpable today. It is not enforced by the ashram, but many who come there choose not to speak at all or not much. As a researcher, I found the uttering of words out of the ordinary. Susan Vishwanathan, in her beautiful account of her relation with Ramana as both devotee and as an anthropologist within the ashram, writes that,

One of the interesting dilemmas [...] arises from the fact that by using the accounts of devotees, who use the written and/or the oral medium of communication, one cannot tap the larger resources of those who have ideologically accepted the path of silence. Consent to be interviewed is a major difficulty in a milieu where the text of silence is the most comforting of palimpsests. Both the questioner, as well as the respondent, know in their hearts that once it is understood, the significance of explaining it to another diminishes. But it is the recurring vocation of the anthropologist to record, and that responsibility is larger than the privilege of understanding.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Visvanathan, *The Children of Nature*, 86.

I shared a similar dilemma and in enacting my responsibility as a researcher to talk to devotees I often encountered resistance from them as they directed me to spend time reading in the ashram library, talk to some resident ‘writers’<sup>203</sup> or simply to practice the method of self-enquiry, instead.

The silence is broken at certain moments, when there is chanting of Sanskrit *slokas* or songs are sung in praise of the Arunachala within the ashram. This interplay between song, chanting and silence helps in creating the meditative mode of the ashram. The morning and evening sounds of the *slokas*, chants, or songs structure the day. The afternoons are dulled by the scorching heat emanating from the rocks of the Arunachala mountains. Most ashram residents retire to their rooms for afternoon naps after a heavy lunch at the ashram, while the office remains busy with the commotion of visitors and staying guests all through the day. It is busy as they assign accommodation that has had to be booked months in advance. There are no questions asked regarding the reasons for the stay and there are no rituals to be observed. Visitors only have to abide by the fixed meal timings. These meals are central to the experience at the ashram and the communal eating occurs in silence, but there are no prayers before or after meals. This communal eating experience has been the most important feature of the ashram from Ramana’s time and it continues to be so today.

The sense of freedom felt at the ashram remains one of the most attractive features for the guests today. Devotees talked about not having to adhere to any strict rules of dress, prayer or behavior, which they found refreshing. Even in Pascaline Mallet’s account (a French traveler and devotee) from 1937, she writes that

Perfect freedom, we found, is also maintained at the ashram. All are allowed to come and go at any time and do what they feel like doing. The only strict rule we noticed is that of

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<sup>203</sup> I will discuss these writers in the next section of the chapter.

non-smoking in the hall. There is never the slightest feeling of compulsion and no attempt is made to impose on visitors any special religious belief. Those who wish to read Maharshi's books are welcome to do so, but there is no obligation. Some people ask questions, and Maharshi always answers in the most illuminating fashion, sometimes by questioning the questioner. Others prefer to meditate and keep silent, often finding that their mental doubts and personal problems have been solved without the help of spoken words.<sup>204</sup>

The caring and non-assertive attitude of Ramana has been documented by many writers. This freedom and non-compulsory nature of the rituals suggests a new way in which spiritual life was being imagined by him and his followers.

Arthur Osborne, one of the most revered and well known devotees of Ramana, wrote about how he created a process of silent initiation and a community of devotees irrespective of their backgrounds. He says

There was something mysterious about the initiation he gave - no laying on of hands, no mantra, no outer form at all; only the mouna diksha, the silent initiation. Although silent, this was a definitive event, not a gradual process [...] For those who experienced his initiation no confirmation was necessary. If they were in his presence it was given through a penetrating look of terrific power; if at a distance perhaps through a dream or vision, perhaps formlessly. In any case, a disciple felt taken up, swept forward on a wave of power, thenceforth guided and supported. And in any case there was nothing specifically Hindu about it, nothing to make it available to members of one community only and inaccessible to others. This was one advantage of the silent initiation.<sup>205</sup>

He goes on to explain that the practice of initiating western disciples "culminated in Ramana."<sup>206</sup> Osborne himself was drawn to Ramana after seeing a photo of him and simply felt struck by him and became a devotee through this silent initiation.

As discussed previously, the photographs attain a special importance in this context and the practice of self-enquiry and silence, is well suited to photography. Devotees continue to look at or be surrounded by Ramana's photographs in the ashram as they practice such enquiry. The

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<sup>204</sup> Pascaline Mallet, *Turn Eastwards* (London: Rider and Co., 1937), 43.

<sup>205</sup> Arthur Osborne, "The Maharshi's Place in History", in *Be Still, It is the Wind That Sings* (Tiruvannamalai: Ramana Asramam, 2000), 30,39-40.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

silence of the photographs and the silent practice of self-enquiry, achieve the sense of union that Advaitic photography sets out to achieve, whereby in these moments, the devotee, photographer and Ramana all become one.

### **The Making of Writers at the Ashram**

Many devotees, like Mukta Manu, KVS and David Godman, have become writers through their life experiences at the ashram. They are often thought of as experts on Ramana's life and community. Many visitors come to the ashram to consult with them after reading their books.

Their writing isn't solely on Ramana and the ashram continues to be a space for people to engage in a variety of creative endeavors, such as cultivating an interest in photography, working in the design and publishing of books or even caring for the ashram space. However, writing is one of the most popular forms of engaging with the self and devotion to Ramana. Here, I want to think about the relationship between writing as a practice of self-transformation, devotion to Ramana and the making of his philosophy as an active ongoing process by the writers, who engage with writing as a way of engaging with the self. As will be seen, this engagement allows writers to explore many fields extending beyond Ramana and hence, the cultivation of the writerly self opens up new avenues.

Mukta Manu, an ever smiling and energetic woman, who I met at the ashram, said, "I had not written a single letter before and I wrote four books at the age of 64. I didn't even know how to use a computer!" She wrote two books on the walking journeys on the Arunachala mountain and a children's book on Ramana's relationships with animals. The stories for the books started flowing spontaneously for her, once she started doing "research". Mukta was married into what she called a traditional Hindu family that had been devotees of Ramana. In the beginning, she

would simply accompany them on their annual visits to the ashram. She first came in 1965 when there weren't any living quarters for women and they had to stay outside. After 1986, once her children were older, she started coming on her own. She said "I walk around Ramana's Samadhi everyday for three hours! People may think I am mad but I don't get that at home in Pune. Sometimes I wake up in the morning and feel this pull towards Ramana and leave the same day to come to the ashram. Sometimes I stay for a whole month." Mukta said that in the earlier years of coming to the ashram, she did not understand the philosophy of Ramana. But things were different now and she had come to realize the simplicity of his message. Although Mukta had found her way to Ramana through her husband's family, she had developed her own relationship with him and had been able to find her writerly voice through her devotion. Once she discovered the simplicity of Ramana's message and her own relationship to him, she was prompted to write. Another writer and a scholar at the ashram was KVS. I met him on the insistence of the ashram president, who felt that I would appreciate talking to a "scholarly minded" person like him. When I first saw KVS, I thought that he resembled a very old Tagore. He had a long white beard and was wearing a short kurta and dhoti. He was 84 years old and had an intense and charming presence. Perhaps the president of the ashram was right as I felt very drawn to the mind of KVS. His small room in the ashram compound was next to the *samadhi*<sup>207</sup> of Major Chadwick, who was a famous western devotee. There were books everywhere in Bengali, Tamil, English, Persian and German. "I don't really read all the books, I simply turn the pages and talk to them" he said. He had been drawn to the slowness and poverty of the ashram life. KVS had always found comfort in books and in writing. As a child, he was "shy, not good in studies, bullied by peers and misunderstood by family"; he always felt like he was a failure. Once he left home, he

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<sup>207</sup> Memorial stones.

spent all his time reading history, philosophy, poetry as well as teaching himself French and German. In 1952, he experienced his first “mental breakdown”. He said he became “weak” and lost the urge to live. In overcoming this, he learnt that the “art of living has to be learnt”. In those days, there were no books on the “art of living”, the way they exist today, he said. He was soon gripped by the questions ‘Who am I?’ If money could buy everything, then why were people still unhappy? In 1964, after the death of his father, he had another breakdown; he had an “out of body experience”. One day while walking on the streets of Delhi, he realized that the body is not important; it is just the outermost layer and he is not the body. After this experience, he felt that he wanted to move to an ashram and that he would be content with just living within its four walls. Ever since moving to the Ashram, KVS has continued to write for the mountain path ashram journal, has written several books reviews (one of the recent ones being a review of a book on J Krishnamurti), translated a Bengali biography of Gandhi into English, and when I met him was planning to write articles on the idea of ‘devotion’ in the work of Tagore. KVS has hardly ever used his own name as the author, instead using several aliases.

The ashram space had provided KVS a life and the opportunity to explore his intellectual side as a writer and prolific reader. It was most interesting to me that, unlike some of the other devotees who turned to writing in the ashram, KVS did not only write on Ramana. In fact, he continued to engage in various other fields. His quest of ‘Who am I?’ became an entry point to the discovery of a whole new intellectual world, where he was accepted and respected.

There was another writer in the ashram who was quite the opposite of KVS in terms of his popularity. While KVS had intentionally kept a low profile for himself as a writer and met with only a select few ashram visitors, David Godman emerged as an internationally renowned writer on Ramana. I argue that he could be placed within the tradition of ‘historians’, who have lived in

the ashram and contributed to documenting, preserving and articulating his thought over generations. David has spent several years working in the Ramana library and giving it its current shape. He has emerged as almost a celebrity figure, with people from all over the world coming to the ashram and searching for him. David had a very similar life trajectory to Arthur Osborne, the most famous writer on Ramana from the 1950s onwards.<sup>208</sup> He had been disillusioned as a post-graduate student at Oxford in the 1970s. He saw no meaning in the work that he was doing there and started reading a lot of ‘spiritual books’. He would keep going back for more and more of those. One day in the Oriental section of the bookstore, Arthur Osborne’s ‘The Teachings of Ramana Maharshi in his own Words’ fell out on the floor. He read the book in two hours and felt that all his questions had been answered. He never wanted to read another book again and saw no need in looking for “intellectual answers for a spiritual quest.”<sup>209</sup> He realized that “academia was reductionist and atomist”, and worked with a flawed logic of dissecting a subject and then putting it back together to understand it. He started feeling a “physical revulsion” to his textbooks and would feel nauseated looking at their content. This is when he decided to go into solitary meditation and he took the books by Arthur Osborne with him. Finally, in 1976, he decided to come to the Ramana ashram and felt that it was like home. He decided to start writing soon after, seeing the act of writing as a spiritual activity and as *seva*. He also spent a lot of time building the Ramana library and reviewing books for the Mountain Path journal. He was interested in giving an “accurate representation” of Ramana, which would

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<sup>208</sup> Arthur Osborne came to live with Ramana in 1942. He can be considered another historian of the Ashram. He represents one of the early ‘western’ devotees of Ramana, who contributed to the creation of his ‘canon’ and philosophy.

<sup>209</sup> This continues to be the appeal of Ramana’s philosophy and Advaita philosophy, in general. All questions are answered via the idea of ‘false identification of the self with the body’. Even though the whole format of interaction with Ramana was in the form of questions and answers, the point of the exercise remained to reiterate one given answer.

be easy for everyone to follow. He was asked to write this book by a major London based publishing house. This book, *Be As You Are*, published in 1985, remains one of the defining books in Ramana's philosophy even today. As I talked to David, several visitors at the ashram requested to take photographs with him or have a small chat and this attention seemed to make him uncomfortable.

As a researcher, I was viewed with suspicion for my attempts to verbalize and analyze the philosophy and legacy of Ramana. While the scholarly occupation seemed very familiar to and ever present in the ashram milieu, my research was still looked upon with some derision and suspicion. This deep suspicion was based on the idea that books and knowledge are impediments to the path of self-realization. That is, self-realization means getting rid of these distractions/impurities. The other discomfort with the scholarship was based on the assumption that whatever had to be written about has already been written. Ashram administrators would often direct me to the various publications of the ashram for such information, often refusing to speak more about issues or giving interviews. These publications were seen as being more 'authentic' or valid. The act of writing itself occupies a tenuous position within Ramana's philosophy. Arthur Osborne, who started the Mountain Path journal, and was David's predecessor as the editor, has written the most well-articulated accounts on 'writing' as an act and the process of becoming a 'writer' in his essay titled, 'I Became a Writer-and Cease to Be One'. Osborne reflects at length on his relationship to the act of 'writing'. After writing for many years he expressed his struggles. He says,

I decided that I would not write another book unless the time came when I should be able to write one purely of guidance on the quest and should feel that it was legitimate for me to do so [...] outer activity is useful on Bhagavan's path, but it should be aloof activity which keeps the mind working smoothly on the surface while underneath the current of meditation can continue. Emotionally involved activity, on the other hand, is harmful, since it turns the mind outwards, absorbing it in the activity and thereby impeding

spiritual progress. Such activities may be of various kinds, but three of them are particularly dangerous, and also particularly alluring. Two of these I have mentioned already: reading and acting the guru; writing is the third [...] Writing also is an activity into which a man normally throws himself whole-heartedly and which therefore impedes spiritual progress. I felt that I should desist.<sup>210</sup>

Similarly, Osborne was not comfortable with the act of reading. He said that he only read in a “haphazard way, never buying books or borrowing them from libraries, only reading what came my way for review”.<sup>211</sup> He believed that the act of reading or writing is problematic within the path of self-realization of Ramana, as self-enquiry is the “most direct and efficacious method and it is different from *sadhana*”<sup>212</sup> and it does not need any external media or effort to be achieved. These statements made by Osborne suggest the different approaches to writing that exist within the community of writers. While for KVS and Mukta Manu, writing had emerged as an opportunity to express themselves and their devotion, Osborne’s position is a reminder of the deep engagement that writing itself provides for reflecting on one’s acts in relation to Ramana’s philosophy.

The writers at the ashram also often referred to the act of writing as a kind of *seva*. This is especially true for David Godman, who mentioned that many of his teachers, such as Nisargadutta Maharaj and Papaji, had encouraged him to write instead of “speaking” or “lecturing”.<sup>213</sup> Writing as *seva* was also described by V. Ganesan, who compiled a book on the devotees of Ramana. He writes,

In 1960, I moved to live in Ramanasramam. I worked hard at my ashram duties but somehow I was not completely happy. I could not put my finger on what was missing. Though I received a lot of well meaning advice from the elders at the ashram, my heart was not satisfied. My teacher, T. K. Sundaresa Iyer then [...] directed me to Swami

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<sup>210</sup> Arthur Osborne, *My Life and Quest* (Tiruvannamali: Sri Ramanasramam, 2001), 129.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Both the teachers advised David against speaking about the teachings, as it had to be a product of ‘direct experience’, but they asked him to write about them as the teachings themselves were important.

Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala who in turn sent me to his spiritual heir, Mataji Krishna Bai, a realized saint. I asked her, “How should I serve my master? What is my sadhana?” She said, “Old devotees of Bhagavan have already left the ashram. Go bring them back, attend to them and serve them till their last day. This is your sadhana. This seva to them is your sadhana.” I was taken aback. I had closely studied eastern and western philosophy. Nowhere had I heard of serving the guru’s devotees as a form of sadhana.<sup>214</sup>

In this process, Ganesan decided that he would write a book about the experiences of the devotees of Ramana. Both David and Ganesan were instructed that writing would be performing *seva*. I would argue that while they performed *seva*, they also participated in the creation of modern Advaita as articulators of the philosophy. They gave shape to Ramana’s philosophy by coining terms and concepts as well as collecting data by compiling interviews or stories of Ramana’s life. These are, perhaps, not so different from an anthropological and ethnographic impulse. In this way, *seva* constituted Ramana’s philosophy itself.

Hence, the act of writing and the making of the writers produced different models of relating to Ramana’s philosophy and ashram life. On the one hand, it prompted a deep enquiry into the process of reading and writing, while on the other, it was the performance of *seva*. These practices of writing biographies, memoirs or commentaries on Ramana’s life and ideas all constitute practices of self-transformation. These, in turn, produce the figure of Ramana, through an active participation in the articulation of his philosophy.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the ways in which the figure of Ramana is produced within the sites of photography, the Advaitic tradition, practices of self-transformation and encounters within the ashram. I have argued that the *figure* of Ramana is produced through the *discourses of*

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<sup>214</sup> V. Ganesan *Ramana Periya Puranama*, 10.

*self-transformation*, such as Advaitic photography, the act of writing and the practice of self-enquiry (Who am I?). These discourses take shape within the context of *transnational encounters* and the ashram space. While some devotees and seekers from different parts of the world come to the ashram for retreats others have made it their home. Ramana's emphasis on inclusivity and non-duality by embracing the Other, continues to attract seekers from all over the world.

I began the chapter with a discussion on the simplicity of Ramana's method of self-enquiry, its popularity amongst devotees and the later neo-advaitin teachers. I also demonstrated how the interpretation and commentaries have been an integral part of the formulation of this method. In order to highlight the role of mediation and interpretation further, in the making of Ramana as a figure, I then looked at the role of photography.

Taking the examples of the most popular photographs, namely the Mani and the Welling Busts, I demonstrated that the form of portraiture allowed for an intimate moment of *recognition* between Ramana and the devotee. I argued that the portrait photograph is constituted by the opposing and simultaneous forces - as an object for circulation (a universal and portable image), an object of self-making and transformation and an object of intimacy and devotion. I delved into the question of why Ramana chose to be photographed. I speculated that the act of posing itself may be an enactment of death and the performance of self-denial. That is, this mode of photography made the experimentation with self-denial possible. The photographs also have played a crucial role in forming a community of seekers and devotees. The photographs are found in abundance both within the ashram spaces and outside. They play a significant role in reaching new seekers and thereby, renewing the life of the figure. Finally, I have argued that *Advaitic photography* emerges in this milieu. In this photographic practice, the distance between the camera, photographer and the figure (Ramana) are all obliterated, thus forming a union. The practice of

Advaitic photography provides a way for understanding the relationship between the figure (Ramana), and the devotee (photographer)

Next, I explored the relationship between Ramana and the Other and the ways in which the community of devotees was shaped. The other appeared in the forms of the animal, the western seeker or foreigner, and the Arunachala mountain. I contended how Ramana's compassion and the ability to communicate with all living beings, including animals, is one of the most significant aspects of his Advaitic thinking. The idea of oneness with another - whether human or non-human - has been one of the central tenets of Advaita. Ramana's compassion is born in this space of encounter and mutual constitution of the other.

Ramana's Advaita was unique in several ways. First, a simple method of self-enquiry, which could be practiced by anyone irrespective of their subject positions, was central to this articulation. Devotees and seekers had the freedom to choose both their method of practice as well as the circumstances under which they did so. Second, practices of silence and solitude could facilitate these processes of self-transformation. I demonstrated the different ways in which silence and solitude was practiced within the ashram space through personal retreats, communal eating, Ramana's silent initiation and numerous other activities of reading, meditation and hiking up the Arunachala mountain.

Towards the end of the chapter, I ruminated on the relationship between the practice of writing, cultivation of the self as a writer and devotion to Ramana. The act of writing and the making of the writers produced different models of relating to his philosophy and ashram life. While some writers used their experiences of ashram life and self-enquiry to explore their writerly voice, others took it on to show their devotion to Ramana. These writings constitute the figure through

an interpretation of his philosophy, the creation of a community of followers and by providing seekers different avenues to connect with the idea of self-enquiry.



Figure 2.2 “Welling Bust”  
Source: Sent by Vijaya, 2018.

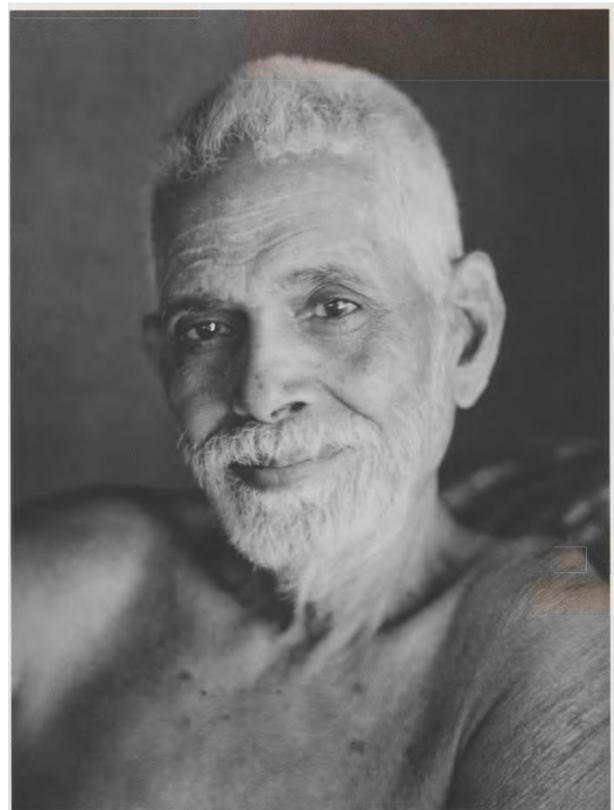


Figure 2.3: “Welling bust” (1946). Taken by G.G. Welling. From Ramana Ashram Store



Figure 2.4: Ramana Stamp, issued on April 14, 1971  
Source: <http://www.istampgallery.com/sri-ramana-maharshi/>

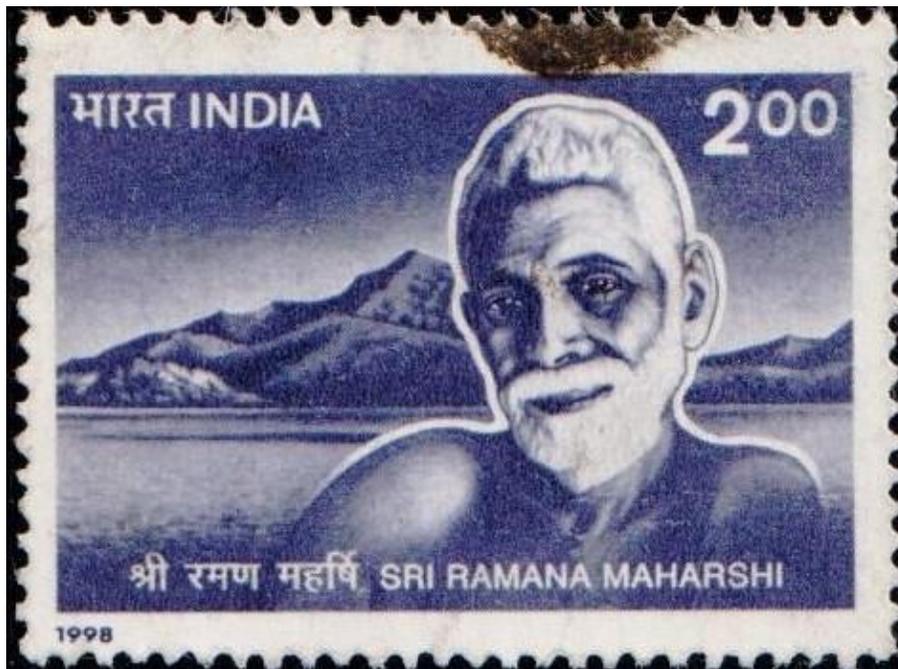


Figure 2.5: Ramana Stamp, issued on April 14, 1998.  
Source: <http://www.istampgallery.com/sri-ramana-maharshi/>

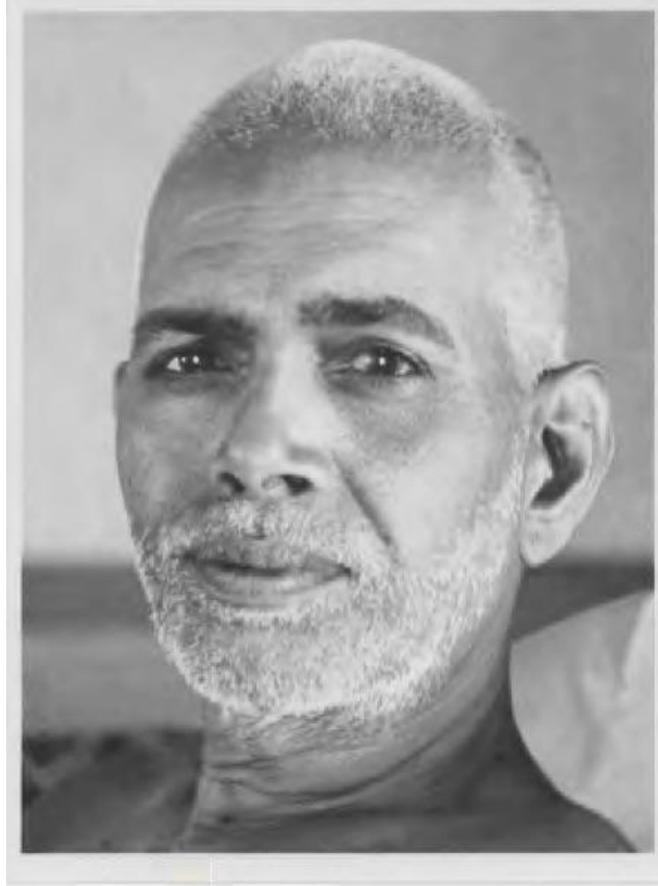


Figure 2.6: "Mani Bust" (1930s). Taken by P.R.S. Mani  
Source: Ashram bookstore

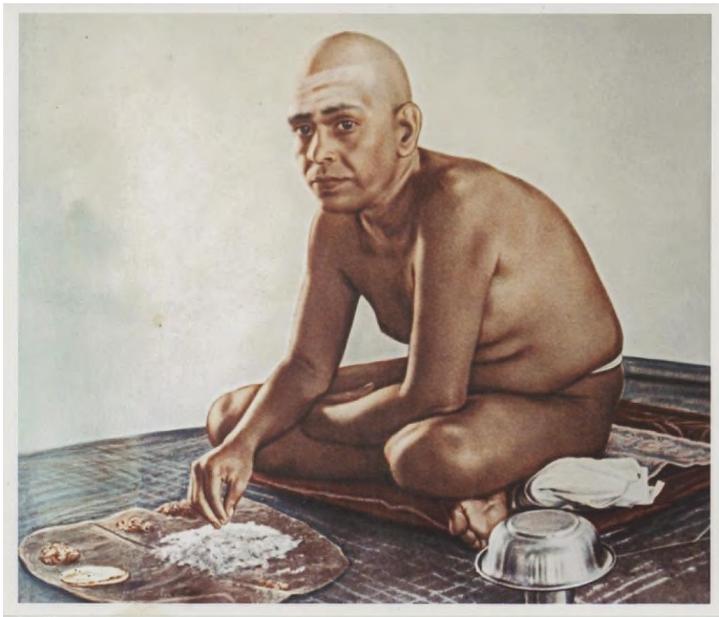


Figure 2.7: Ramana eating (date and photographer unknown)  
Source: Ashram Bookstore

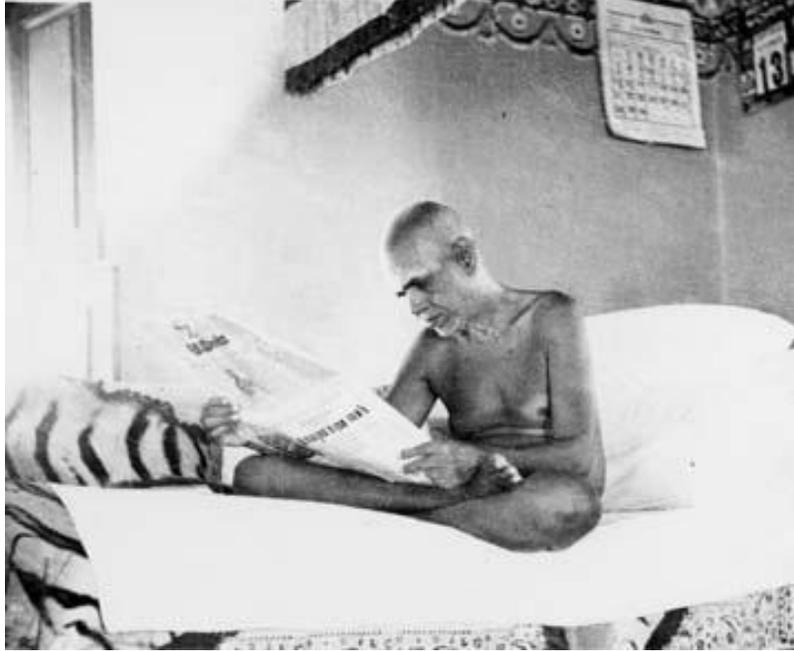


Figure 2.8 Ramana reclining on the couch in the Old Hall, reading the newspaper (date and photographer unknown)  
Source: Ramana Ashram Archive

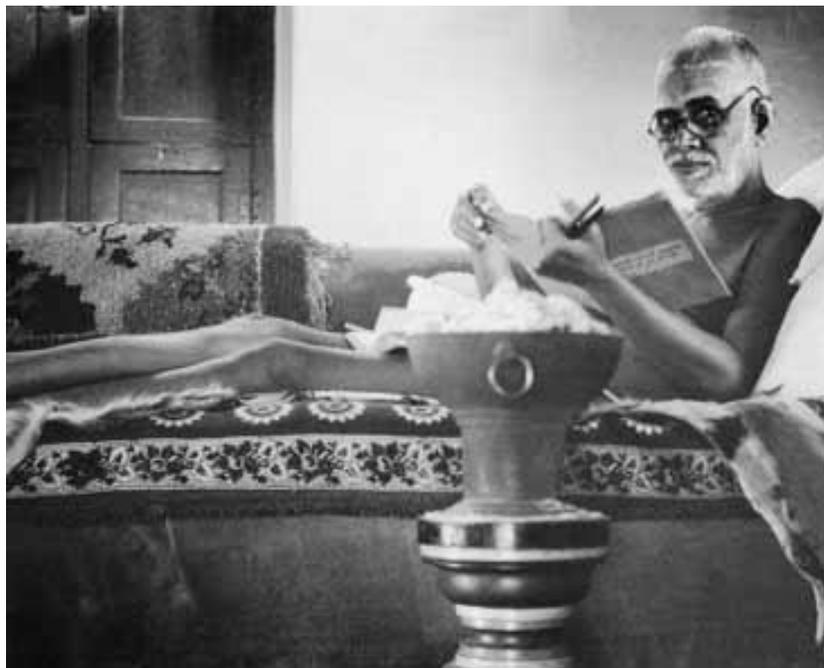


Figure 2.9 Ramana reading (date and photographer unknown)  
Source: Ramana Ashram Archive



Figure 2.10: Ramana smiling with umbrella (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: *Ramana Periya Puranam*, V.Ganesan



Figure 2.11: Ramana with umbrella (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: *Ramana Periya Puranam*, V.Ganesan

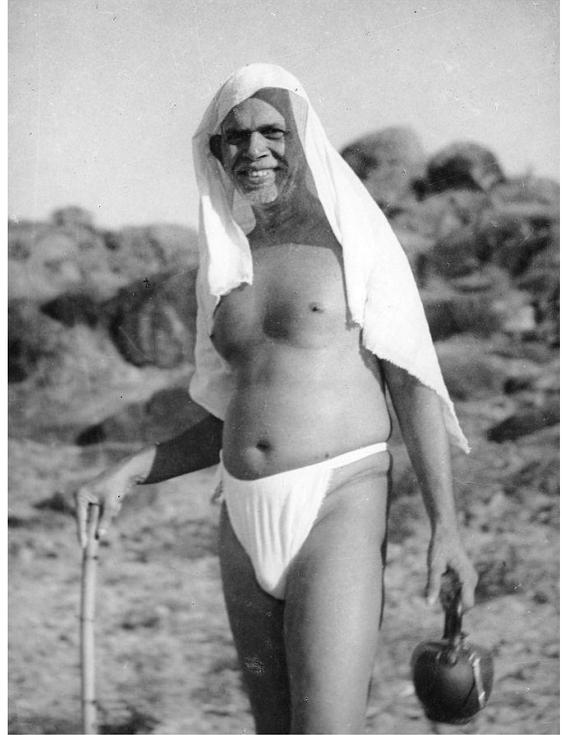


Figure 2.12: Ramana on his walk to Arunachala mountain (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: *Ramana Periya Puranam*, V.Ganesan

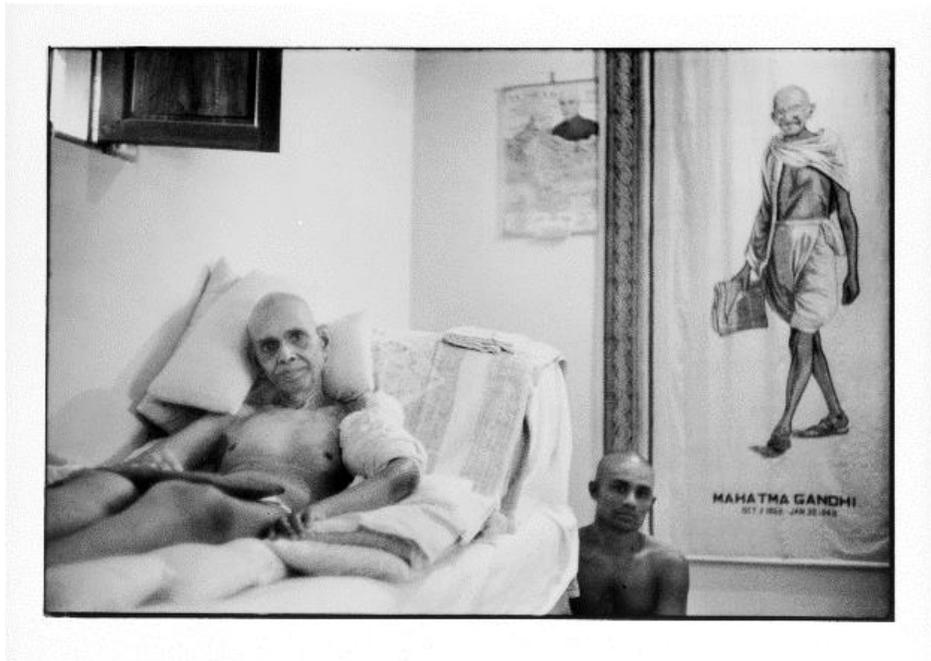


Figure 2.13: “‘Last Day’ of Ramana” (1950). Taken by Henri Cartier-Bresson.  
Source: Ramana Ashram Archive

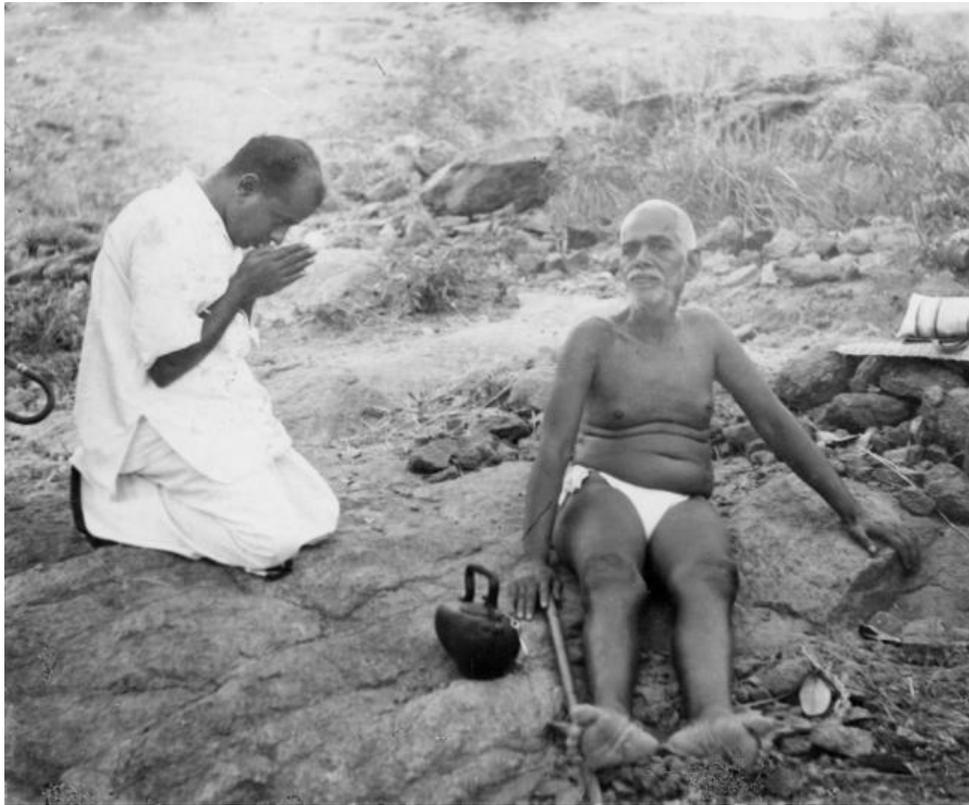


Figure 2.14: Photographer T.N. Krishnaswami with Ramana (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ashram Archives



Figure 2.15: Ramana with peacock (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ashram bookstore



Figure 2.16 Ramana with Lakshmi the cow (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ashram bookstore



Figure 2.17 Ramana with monkey (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ashram bookstore



Figure 2.18 Ramana with squirrel (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ashram bookstore



Figure 2.19: Ramana with elephant (date and photographer unknown).  
Source: Ramana Ashram bookshop



Figure 2.20: Arunachala Mountain (date and photographer unknown).  
Source Ashram Bookstore



Figure 2.21: View of Arunachala Mountain from Ashram (2018). Taken by author.

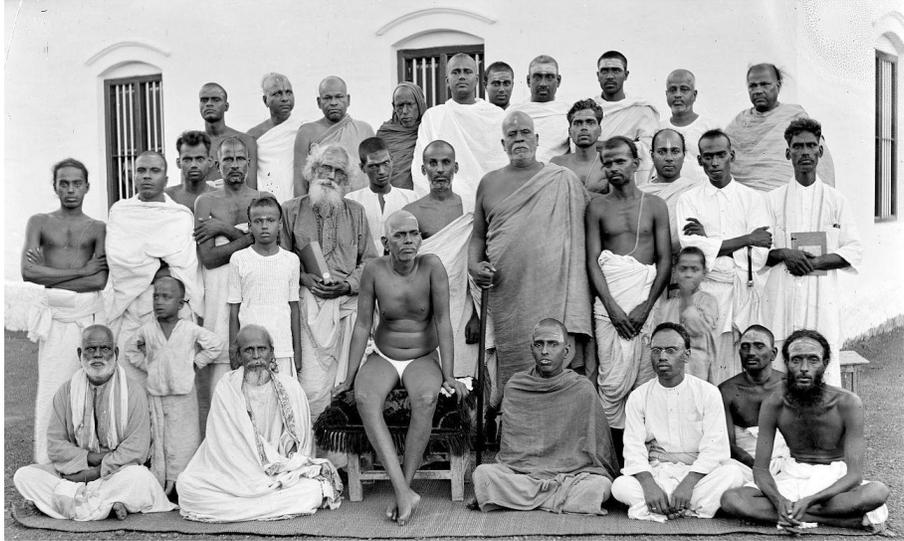


Figure 2.22: Ramana with important devotees: Kavyakantha( a poet and scholar, seated on the left of Ramana) and Chinna Swami (looked after Ramana’s ‘body’ and daily needs, seated on the right), (date and photographer unknown)

Source: *Ramana Periya Puranam*



Figure 2.23: Ramana with important Western devotees: Paul Brunton (seated on the right and holding Lakshmi the cow), Major Chadwick (seated on the left), Pascaline Mallet (who was always in tears when in the presence of Ramana. She is wearing a sari and seated behind Ramana), (date and photographer unknown). Source: *Ramana Periya Puranam*



Figure 2.24 Ashram entrance (2018). Taken by author.



Figure 2.25 Ashram hall (2018). Taken by author.

## Chapter 3

### Absolute Freedom, Radical Speech and the Beginning of a Psychological Revolution

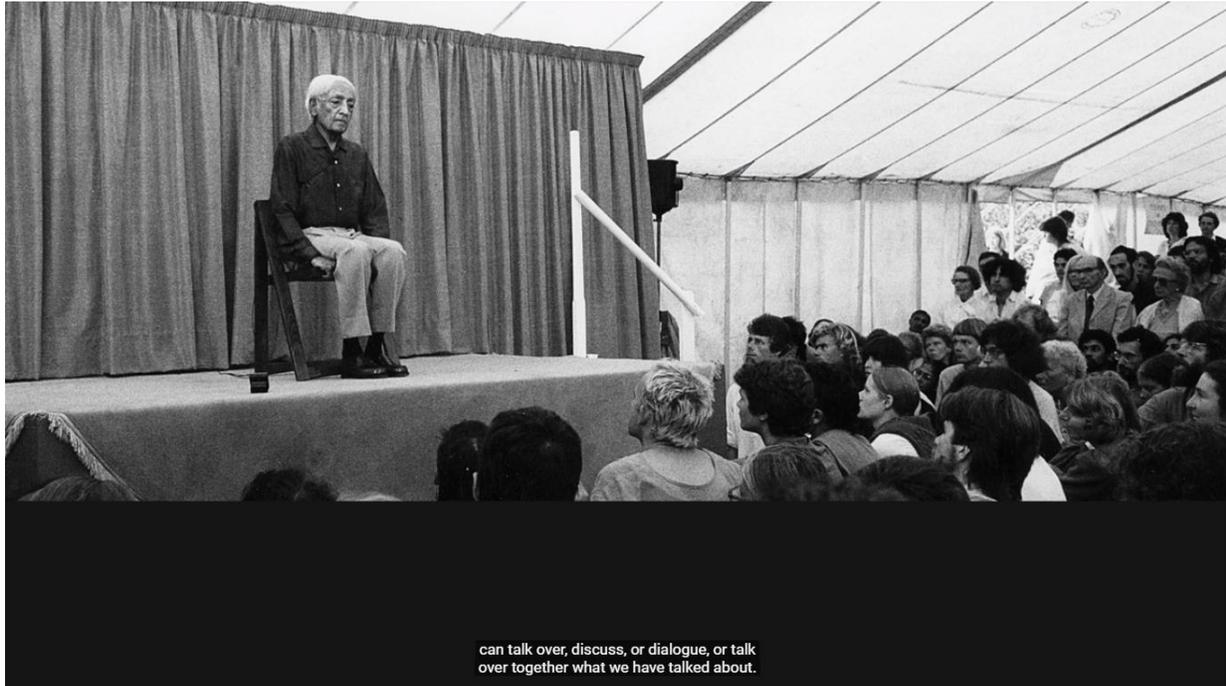


Figure 3.1. Krishnamurti, Brockwood Park, Public Meeting 1: Observing without the 'me', 1970

I am so glad it is such a nice morning. A beautiful sky and lovely countryside. But I am afraid this is not a weekend entertainment. What we shall talk about is quite serious, and perhaps after I have talked a little we can talk over, discuss, or dialogue, or talk over together what we have talked about. I don't know how you feel about what is happening in the world, in our environment, to our culture and society. It seems to me there is so much chaos, so much contradiction and so much strife and war, hatred and sorrow. And various leaders, both political and religious, try to find an answer either in some ideology, or in some belief, or in a cultivated faith. And none of these things seems to answer the problems. Our problems go on endlessly. And if we could in these four talks in this tent and the two discussions that are to take place, if we could be serious enough to go into this question of how to bring about, not only in ourselves but in society, a revolution, not physical revolution because that only leads to tyranny and the heightened control of bureaucracy. If we could very deeply find out for ourselves what to do, not depending on any authority, including that of the speaker, or on a book, on a philosophy, on any structural behavioral pattern, but actually find out irrevocably, if one can, what to do about all this confusion, this strife, this extraordinary, contradictory, hypocritical life one leads.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Public Meeting 1: Observing Without the 'me', Brockwood Park, 1970", J.Krishnamurti Official Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6PHOGhPc6M>

In this talk held at Brockwood Park<sup>216</sup> in Hampshire, UK, in 1970, Jiddu Krishnamurti appears as a petite, stern and immaculately dressed man speaking passionately, words seeming to flow spontaneously. Krishnamurti is remembered today for many talks like this. He challenges the audience in these talks, inviting them to engage in a serious and rigorous discussion on the nature of self, the state of the world and all aspects of life. He pleads with the audience to take the problems of the world seriously and not go on living the way they do. His words hold a power over seekers, opening avenues for new worlds and facilitating a process of self-transformation. Although he is remembered today as a teacher, master, guru, mystic, spiritual thinker, philosopher and orator, he refused to identify with any of these labels or associate himself with any particular role. As a follower said to me once, “Krishnamurti is all of these and nothing at the same time”.

In this chapter, I explore the figure of Krishnamurti, and the ways in which he continues to capture the minds of seekers. I argue that the *figure* of Krishnamurti is produced within a model of dialogic pedagogy, a kind of sonic imagination, which rests on his ‘speech,’ and a vehement critique of the notion of *guru*. The *discourses of self-transformation* formulated within this assemblage do not necessarily take the shape of practices, but rather, they constitute a vision of a new unconditioned mind and radical freedom. I put forward the notion that the act of walking, alone or in groups, can be seen as a practice of self-transformation, as observed through my ethnographic experiences. These discourses take shape in the context of *transnational encounters* as they occur between scientists, physicists and seekers.

The chapter is divided into six sections. In the first section, I analyze the speech of Krishnamurti. I argue that a unique relationship or state is produced between seekers and Krishnamurti through

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<sup>216</sup> The Brockwood Park School was set up by Krishnamurti and some of his seekers in 1969.

a ‘sonic imagination’. This is a therapeutic and transformative relationship. In the second section, I contend that the practice of walking can be seen as method of self-transformation via close attention to the writings of Krishnamurti and my own ethnographic account. Walking is key to Krishnamurti’s vision of a new unconditioned mind and that is the premise for all of his discourses. Next, I unpack Krishnamurti as an assemblage through the analysis of his biographies as well as the relationships between the biographers, readers and himself. The biographies aid in the understanding of Krishnamurti’s discourses and produce a dialogic pedagogy, as seekers read these biographies. In the fourth section, I explore the significance of Krishnamurti’s opposition to the label of guru. I argue that this was a radical position to take within his context and had implications for his style of pedagogy. In the next section, I argue that his discourses took shape within spaces of transnational encounters, such as the rhetoric of science, philosophy of mind, and physics. Within these spaces, Krishnamurti’s ideas were recognized, understood and popularized. Finally, I examine the ways in which a dialogic pedagogy materialized and a Krishnamurtian model of education was established. This is where the discourses of self-transformation took the shape of formalized education systems, engaging, in particular, the ‘child’ subject.

### **Krishnamurti: A Radical<sup>217</sup> Speaker**

#### *The Sonic Imagination and Krishnamurti as Media*

As demonstrated in the opening scene of this chapter, speech was central to the making of Krishnamurti. This act of speaking to audiences around the world, became the defining characteristic of his engagement with the world. In this section, I discuss the relationship

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<sup>217</sup> Krishnamurti often used the term radical to describe the kind of change he wanted to see both at the level of the individual and society.

between the act of speaking, listening, and viewing the speech. I argue that these relationships are central to the unfolding of Krishnamurti's philosophical world. Seekers and followers continue to engage with his thought primarily through his speeches.

Mary Lutyens, Krishnamurti's designated biographer, who spent several years in close association with him, wrote a description of her experience of listening to him. Her recollections are surprisingly similar to my field notes. She says:

The hall was packed; people were standing at the back. I did not see him come onto the platform; at one moment the solitary hard chair placed on the centre of the platform was empty; the next moment he was sitting there on his hands, having made no sound on entering, a very slight figure, impeccably dressed in a dark suit, white shirt, dark tie, feet in highly polished brown shoes placed neatly side by side. He was alone on the platform. (He is never introduced and he never has any notes.) There was a complete silence in the hall as a strong vibration of expectancy ran through the audience. He sat there quite silent, his body still, assessing his audience with slight movement of head from side to side [...] This long silence at the beginning of the talk still disconcerts me. It is immensely impressive. But the reason for it is not to impress. He only rarely knows what he is going to say before he starts speaking and seems to look to his audience for guidance. This is why a talk frequently begins lamely: 'I wonder what the purpose is of a gathering like this?' he may say or 'What do you expect from this?' Or he may begin a series of talks, 'I think it would be as well if we could establish a true relationship between the speaker and the audience.' At other times, he knows exactly what he is going to say [...] but the talk that follows does not necessarily confine itself to those subjects. He is always insistent that he is not talking didactically, that he and the audience are taking part together in an investigation. He will remind the audience of this two or three times in the course of a talk.<sup>218</sup>

During the research, I spent a lot of time watching videos of talks in the company of followers and seekers at workshops or retreats<sup>219</sup>. In my notes during this process I wrote:

As we sat in the same hall where Krishnamurti held many small 'group discussions' during his time in Chennai, I wondered about his haunting presence in the hall. We sat in silence, waiting in anticipation of the video to play on a large projector screen. Krishnamurti made an entrance on screen, taking quick steps and emerged on a raised platform. He sat with his back completely erect, arms at his side and hands tucked under

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<sup>218</sup> Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfilment* (New York: Avon Books, 1983), 122

<sup>219</sup> I attended five retreats and many workshops held in Krishnamurti schools in Varanasi, Chennai and Bangalore. These workshops and retreats had themes, such as the idea of responsibility, the unconditioned mind, how to lead one's life etc. They were attended by seekers and followers from all over the world.

his thighs on the chair. I tried hard to make sense of the surroundings. Who were the people in the audience? Where was the talk being held? It was held in an open space, surrounded by many trees. Later, I found out that this was the setting for the majority of talks held in Ojai, California. The audience sat on the floor and listened intently. Krishnamurti started speaking, in a stern self-assured voice. He said “One hopes that you haven’t come out of curiosity” followed by a long pause he continued speaking and said that the articles that one may have read about him are merely ‘words’, but he is not interested on impressing through words, but rather, what emerges when he thinks ‘together’ with the audience and thinks with ‘seriousness’. I was stunned by the authority, spontaneity and humility of his voice. How were the words just flowing from him? The talk went on for an hour and half...

These observations, made by both Lutyens and me, suggest being captivated by Krishnamurti’s presence. This experience of viewing or listening to him in a state of trance became central to my further exploration. I asked a few questions: What kind of relationship emerged between the listeners and Krishnamurti, the speaker? Why did his words have an impact? What kind of patterns, if any, emerged in these talks? I became fascinated by this seemingly non-performative and rather repetitive sequence of events in talk after talk. Krishnamurti sat on a chair or cross legged on a raised platform, surrounded by audience. The location could be anywhere in Europe, India or America. I was able to identify the location or the country by the setting, often under a tree in India and on a raised platform with a few steps on the side in America. Krishnamurti seemed to get animated and engrossed once he began to speak. He spoke with his eyes closed, gesticulating with his hands, sometimes expressing disgust, anger or sarcasm and a childlike eagerness but almost never a sense of humor. Often, he would jump at a sentence as if it had suddenly been revealed to him, as if it was a discovery made by him and the audience right at that moment.

However, there was one difference between the experience described by Mary Lutyens and those of the current viewers of these talks. Contemporary viewers watch these on computer or television screens, whereas she had been physically present at the talk that she described. She

also noted that, “reading an authentic report of a talk, listening to it on cassette, even viewing him on video-tape, can never be the same as listening to him and seeing him in the flesh.”<sup>220</sup> However, in a number of my conversations with the followers of Krishnamurti it became clear that, for them, it didn’t matter whether or not they had actually met him in his lifetime or heard him speak while he was alive. The power of his speech and words surpassed the absence of his physical bodily presence. I argue that, although these two experiences may have produced different kinds of affects, they do produce a similar kind of relationship between Krishnamurti and the listener as well as a similar mode of engaging with the self. I contend that this transcendence is made possible for two reasons. First, Krishnamurti *is* a form of media himself and second, this experience of listening to him produces a kind of ‘sonic imagination’, which allows for the speech to create a space of transformation. This space does not require the bodily presence of Krishnamurti.

Birgit Meyer, in her groundbreaking work on religion and media<sup>221</sup>, has argued for religion *as* mediation. She states that

While I accept the proposition that religion in modern societies is increasingly mediatized - in that the technologies and formats of mass media and social media become enmeshed with the ways in which religious groups communicate among and about each other [...] - I think that the mediatization thesis does not fully explain the complexity of the religion-media nexus [...] Discarding a dualism of mass media and religion as each initially belonging to entirely separate spheres [...] this take on mediation entails a broad understanding of media as material means for religious communication among humans and material harbingers of a professed beyond what are conventionally referred to as spirits, gods, demons, ghosts, or God.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, 123

<sup>221</sup> Although in this dissertation I certainly complicate the categories of ‘religion’, ‘spirituality’ and ‘philosophy’, I am still concerned with the questions of looking inwards and ideas of self-transformation. Therefore, debates on the concept and category of religion remain relevant for me.

<sup>222</sup> Birgit Meyer, “Religion as Mediation”, *Entangled Religions* 11.3 (2020):14

Meyer emphasizes that the mediation thesis is not enough to understand the dynamics at work between media and religion, instead proposing that media is a *material means* that makes religious communication possible. She makes two critical moves in order to claim that religion is a form of mediation. First, she broadens the understanding of media beyond books, television or the internet to include a range of objects that can act as “transmitters”. Second, she suggests that media are “complex authorized, sensation forms” employed for “making connections between the ‘here and now’ and a ‘beyond,’ between ‘immanent’ and ‘transcendent’.”<sup>223</sup>

Extending precisely these arguments, I claim that Krishnamurti himself *is a medium* or the material means by which the listeners can communicate with their inner selves. In other words, he not only acts as a transmitter by which his speech and voice is carried across to the listeners, but he also is a vehicle for the listener’s own act of self-constitution. Viewed in this way, Krishnamurti’s speeches, whether recorded or seen live can initiate the same desired process of self-transformation. That is, listeners and viewers deploy his speech to initiate dialogue with themselves and enter a process of self-transformation. This is a significant insight and it also aligns with how Krishnamurti viewed himself as a ‘speaker’. He always referred to himself in third person as the ‘speaker’. When asked why he continued to speak all through his life, he replied, “what is the role of a flower? It just exists. And those who like to go and look at it, smell it and like it, say, what a beautiful flower it is, it exists.”<sup>224</sup> The role of the flower is simply to spread fragrance; similarly, the role of speaker is to speak. In the rest of this chapter, I explore the ways in which Krishnamurti emerges as media and the invention of a dialogic pedagogy

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid.,7

<sup>224</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, “The Role of a Flower: A TV Interview( Brockwood Park, 1985)”, Read Jiddu Krishnamurti, August 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rwYGo9Onlc>

through his speeches. He facilitates a process of dialogic self-transformation, whereby listeners communicate with their inner selves through him.

Many scholars working at the intersections of media, technology, and religion<sup>225</sup> have reiterated that it is no longer possible to conceive of media and technology as being in opposition to religion. As Hent de Vries states,

we should no longer reflect exclusively on the meaning, historically and in the present, of religion - of faith and belief and their supposed opposites, such as knowledge and technology but concentrate on the significance of the processes of mediation and mediatization without and outside of which no religion would be able to manifest or reveal itself in the first place [...] mediatization and technology [...] form the condition of possibility of all revelation [...] An element of technicity belongs to the realm of the 'transcendental', and vice versa.<sup>226</sup>

Therefore, the realm of the transcendental or the space of transformation (in the case of listeners) is itself constituted by technicity or mediation. This space is made possible through the TV and laptop screens, which allow for a sonic imagination to develop. In further unpacking Krishnamurti as media, I explore the experience of listening and the role of his voice.

The experience of listening to him or relating to his voice and speech is a 'sonic' one. In other words, the voice and speech of Krishnamurti play a special role in producing certain affects. His speech is considered to be a completely spontaneous act, where his voice plays a role in transforming, waking or disturbing the listener. The listener is 'moved', by not just the words, but by the 'tone' as well. I draw from the work of two scholars, in particular, to argue for what I call the 'sonic imagination' in order to understand the experience of Krishnamurti's speech.

Patrick Eisenlohr, in his work on voice and sound reproduction in devotional Islam, develops a theory of transduction and sonic atmosphere. He challenges two binary arguments prevalent in

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Hent de Vries, "In Media Res: Global Religion, Public Spheres, and the Task of Contemporary Comparative Religious Studies", in *Religion and Media* eds. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 28

the sound studies scholarship. At one end, scholars assume that sound inherently has the power to affect bodies. Alternately, scholars have claimed that cultural practices based on the body and self invest sound with power. Eisenlohr brings these two approaches together and states that “the sonic is powerful in itself; but culturally attuned bodies and selves also ascribe power to the sound.”<sup>227</sup> Further, with his focus on transduction and sonic atmosphere, he argues that “transduction and atmosphere point to the role of energetic flows and movement in sonic events, which provoke perceptions and bodily sensations that can be described in semiotic terms but are not exhausted by them.”<sup>228</sup> With this powerful approach, Eisenlohr makes a contribution to the scholarship on media and religion, by taking sound as the primary unit of analysis. I build on this approach, by taking both the voice of Krishnamurti and the discourses within which it is produced in seriously. That is, I believe that the language and the words of Krishnamurti are equally important in this analysis of the sonic medium.

For Eisenlohr, the categories of transduction and sonic atmospheres are central to his analysis.

He defines transduction as

the transformation of energy from one material modality into another [...] transduction can be understood as a process of “individuation,” in which new entities, such as objects, organisms, or psychic phenomena, emerge from an inchoate [...] For this to occur, two or more dimensions of this milieu have to interact, entering an energetic exchange that in turn produces new entities and phenomena, often more complex in structure.<sup>229</sup>

Further, he explains that he is interested in the potentialities and the generative capacities of transduction to produce states of individuation. When elements of air and body come together (as voice), they produce effects on the listeners, such as “bodily sensations and attendant psychic

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<sup>227</sup> Patrick Eisenlohr, *Sounding Islam: Voice, Media, and Sonic Atmospheres in an Indian Ocean World* (California: University of California Press, 2018), 4

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

phenomena”<sup>230</sup> or being “profoundly seized and moved by a voice.”<sup>231</sup> This analysis of the sonic medium, which produces individuation and the multiple potentialities of being moved or seized by a voice, is relevant to the understanding of the experience of listening to Krishnamurti. As his voice is produced through the interaction of air, the vocal tract and often the other sounds (echo, microphone disturbances, audience reactions, birds chirping), listeners enter a new state, which allows for a dialogue with the inner self. In listening to Krishnamurti, one feels stirred by his words, tone of voice, the pauses and repetitions. This sense of awakening lingers in the bodies and minds of listeners long after the speeches.

I also draw on Charles Hirshkind’s articulation of the idea of self-fashioning through the act of listening to Islamic cassette sermons in Egypt. In the listening to these, individuals aspire to reach certain ethical states and to embody pious dispositions. Similarly, seekers and listeners of Krishnamurti aspire to enter into a dialogic space by which they can be opened up to a rigorous questioning of the self and society. I am particularly drawn to Hirschkind’s emphasis on ‘maieutic listening’ and ‘feeling tone’, which he borrows from the psychologist Peter Wilberg. Maieutic listening is based on the model of musical sensibilities with a focus on the affective and intersubjective dimensions of listening. As Wilberg explains, “the medium of maieutic listening is not the airy medium of words but the fluid medium of feeling tone - the tones of silence that communicate “through the word” [...] These may not be echoed in the tone of a person’s language or their tone of voice. Rather, speech itself may be regarded as a type of song, one that provides a more “tuned in” expression of the silent music of the soul - the music of feeling tone.”<sup>232</sup> In listening to the speech of Krishnamurti, the listener is drawn as much to pauses, his

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 22

questioning spirit, repetition of words, annoyance, sarcasm, and wit, as to the message of his words. In this kind of listening, one is attuned to the silences, which are crucial to the dialogic process, as much as the forceful reiteration of certain words.

Drawing from these perspectives of maieutic listening and transduction, I argue that a ‘sonic imagination’ is a key analytic through which to understand Krishnamurti. This is a state constituted by entanglements between the flow of energies, sensory responses and semiotic significations. Listeners in this state establish a transformative and therapeutic relationship with Krishnamurti. He often frames his statements as a set of challenges, questions or dilemmas to shake up the listeners and make them feel uncomfortable. He hails each individual and calls them out, the disturbing the listener; the element of disturbance is always present in his talks.

Krishnamurti’s speech triggers a set of responses leading up to a possible opening up of the mind in dialogue. There is a movement of thought as a result of the process of questioning initiated by his speech. In this process, as Krishnamurti said, there is an ‘awakening of an intelligence’<sup>233</sup>.

This sonic imagination comes into being as the words and the tone resonate with the listener long after they have heard it. They are able to create their own interpretations and applications of the speech. This state is dialogic and structured as much by the listeners’ interpretation and interactions with language as by Krishnamurti’s voice.

### *Non-Intellectual listening*

The experience of listening opens up a space for transformation or awakening. As I heard during my fieldwork, this also required a certain kind of listening or a particular disposition, which can be described as ‘non-intellectual’ listening. This means that the words are supposed to ‘do their job’ and no attempt is to be made in trying to unpack the ideas intellectually while listening.

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<sup>233</sup> J. Krishnamurti, *The Awakening of Intelligence* (San Fransisco: Harper Collins, 1987)

Followers often said, “Krishnamurti never leaves you, he keeps coming back to you even if you don’t think of him”. The ‘words’ of Krishnamurti came back to mind in times of personal struggles, crises and when important decisions needs to be made. At such times, the words of Krishnamurti start to make sense on their own and one does not have to make any special efforts to apply the ideas in one’s own life.

However, the challenge for me and for many others was how does one practice ‘non-intellectual’ listening? Lutyens says, “there is an emanation that flashes a meaning direct to one’s understanding, by-passing the mind, and whether one finds a talk more or less meaningful depends, I think, more on one’s own state of receptivity than on what he says.”<sup>234</sup> Hence, the idea that meaning just flashes directly into one’s understanding and also depends on the listener’s receptivity is central to the experience of listening. In order to truly understand the words of Krishnamurti, a certain disposition had to be cultivated. He articulated this in a talk,

Just observe yourself, how you are listening, and you will see that this is what is taking place. Either you are listening with a conclusion, with knowledge, with certain memories, experiences, or you want an answer, and you are impatient. You want to know what it is all about, what life is all about, the extraordinary complexity of life. You are not actually listening at all. You can only listen when the mind is quiet, when the mind doesn't react immediately, when there is an interval between your reaction and what is being said. Then, in that interval there is a quietness. There is a silence in which alone there is a comprehension which is not intellectual understanding.<sup>235</sup>

During research, I was told by various followers ‘Just listen to Krishnamurti, don’t take any notes’. Indeed, I never saw anyone taking down any notes. Listeners seemed to pick up on certain words and make connections with other talks they had heard, to come to their own understanding. I slowly learnt how to keep my notebook and pen aside and immerse myself in

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<sup>234</sup> Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfilment*, 123

<sup>235</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Public Talk 1 Saanen, Switzerland - 10 July 1966* (UK:Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, 2020), <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/public-talk-1-saanen-switzerland-10-july-1966>

the viewing of the videos. As I let myself 'just listen', I would feel the power of Krishnamurti's speech, which often moved me at an emotional and physical level. I often watched these videos in large groups during workshops and retreats and I would notice others around me completely absorbed in the process of listening as well. I suggest that this act of viewing together, produced a hyperawareness of the words and the speech of Krishnamurti. It produced a sense of solidarity and a common language of engagement and understanding. Many sat in silence for long periods of time after watching the videos. During meals and at other times of relaxation, some participants expressed how they had been shaken up by the talks and engaged in discussions. Others said that they felt more silent and had experienced a 'slowing down' of their minds. During retreat, conversations reduced as the days progressed. The common language that had been produced after the viewings allowed for further investigation in solitude or in dialogue with others. Since Krishnamurti's project was one of a fundamental redefinition of all words, retreats and workshops allowed for these new definitions to settle in one's mind and open up further enquiry. Everyone entered a process of thinking further about the challenges Krishnamurti had posed to given meanings of words and how one could think further on their meanings.

### *Non-Comprehension and listening*

The idea of 'non-comprehension' or not understanding what the words of Krishnamurti meant, was a common rhetoric amongst the followers. Everyone at one point or another confessed that they did not understand what Krishnamurti was trying to say. In a conversation with a retired school teacher and a follower of Krishnamurti, I asked him "Why is it that I feel I cannot fully understand many of the talks by Krishnamurti?" His response was direct and maybe even a little hurtful. He said "I can see in your eyes that you are always thinking. You cannot understand Krishnamurti if you can't stop thinking." Some followers said that at least in 'the beginning'

when they heard or started reading Krishnamurti they did not understand, and others said that they had read him almost their entire lives, but still struggled to make sense of what he was saying. This idea of not understanding, however, was not in any way a barrier in their belief in the words of Krishnamurti as a Teacher or Master. They continued to read and listen to talks and immerse themselves in them. A dilemma emerges here, while the listeners claimed to have achieved the correct disposition required to absorb the meaning of the talks, they still struggled to understand. This remains a central dilemma within the seekers and followers, generating many disagreements and different responses.

Whether one truly understands the words or not is often seen as a sign of discerning one follower from another. There are informal ways of testing each other through conversations and life choices that people make. Some have found ways to supplement their understanding of Krishnamurti, by reading read 'other masters' along with him, while others complain that he was only good with words and did not give any practical advice or instructions on how to apply the ideas in one's own life.

The appeal of Krishnamurti relies greatly on this rhetoric of not-understanding. It generates multiple debates on what constitutes true understanding and therefore, who can be said to be in a state of self-transformation or having an unconditioned mind. Followers often discuss among themselves about who understands Krishnamurti and who doesn't. The librarian at a Krishnamurti center said to me pointing towards a reader who came regularly, "You see that woman there, she has been coming here to read regularly for many years, but she doesn't understand anything". Similarly, pointing to another reader who had a religious mark on his forehead, the librarian said that he could not have understood Krishnamurti either, otherwise he would not still believe in such religious marks.

The question of whether my understanding as a ‘scholar’ or an ‘academic’ counted at all was also a favorite topic of conversation amongst many. Making fun of an academic who had studied Krishnamurti, a follower said to me “Well, she knows more about Krishnamurti than Krishnamurti himself!” I became the butt of many such jokes as well. I was asked many questions, such as: Whether I was studying Krishnamurti for my own self or for my PhD? How would I write my dissertation? How could I have an ‘object’ of study, if the point is to study one’s own self? And most probing of all, how could this object of study be Krishnamurti? A follower made me promise that I would not produce a book, which only me and another person could understand. Another said to me, “So you started reading K as an academic interest? I have found most academics to be dumb.” I was asked to explain in group meetings what I had ‘understood’ of Krishnamurti. I played along and participated in these jokes, where sometimes I seemed to ‘pass the test’ of understanding, and at other times I failed for being ‘too intellectual’. These jokes and conversations suggested a deep suspicion of established norms of knowledge production and what constitutes knowledge itself. They emerge out of Krishnamurti’s own mistrust of any second hand knowledge or the creation of ‘objects’ for study, rather than studying one’s own self.

These daily conversations about the rhetoric of non-understanding and the idea of non-intellectual ways of listening to Krishnamurti emerge out of a crucial aspect of his philosophy: the unconditioned mind. According to Krishnamurti, the cultivation of such a mind, which does not rely on any given knowledge, is the way to achieve true freedom. This approach to the transformation of the mind relies on attention to the language, meticulous and rigorous hermeneutic enquiry and ultimately, a dialogic pedagogy. In the next section, I delve deeper into what the unconditioned mind means and how it could be cultivated.

## **Modes of Self-Transformation: Walking and the Unconditioned Mind**

For Krishnamurti, self-transformation is meant to be immediate, rather than gradual or as a result of following and mastering certain practices. In other words, once the mind perceives correctly, there is no going back and no further effort required in achieving absolute freedom. Radhika Herzberger, a philosopher and the current director of a Krishnamurti School, described Krishnamurti as a ‘leap’ philosopher, who does not believe that transformation happens through a gradual transition. She further explained,

Krishnamurti was neither systematic nor a rigorously theoretical thinker. He did not set out to prove his observations, or present his position as a set of consistent ideas. One does not find arguments, deductive inferences and careful laying out of evidence in his work. Instead of abstractions he gave primacy to the personal and concrete, to what might seem ephemeral, in order to make his audiences ‘see’ what he was pointing to. The conceptual connections in his public talks and his writing have therefore to be teased out of his discourse, whose chief aim was pragmatic, his goal, as he put it in 1929, was “to set man absolutely and unconditionally free.”<sup>236</sup>

This ability to ‘see’ would emerge spontaneously while listening to a talk, during an interaction with a friend or while carrying out a mundane task.

In the Krishnamurti circles (consisting of readers, followers or teachers) of today, there is a lot of emphasis placed on one-on-one interactions and solitary thinking. Going for walks alone or in the company of others encourages many reflections. I argue that walking emerged as a form of engagement with the self (and others).

On several occasions, I went on walks with Krishnamurti followers and most long conversations happened during these, accompanied by long pauses of silence for reflection. This seemingly

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<sup>236</sup> Radhika Herzberger, “Private Virtue and Public Space: Education in a Fragile World” in *Education and Society: Themes, Perspectives, Practices*, ed. Meenakshi Thapan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 67

mundane act of walking was practiced as an art to observe oneself, encourage a stillness of mind and to engage in conversations with others. In many of Krishnamurti's writings, there are accounts of what he experienced and saw on his walks. For him, the art of walking is an important concept and metaphor. In what follows, I analyze sections from the 'Krishnamurti Notebooks'<sup>237</sup> that explore how the concept of walking unfolds. I suggest different ways in which this act of walking can be understood as a kind of 'method' for the cultivation of the self. In many writings, walking is described as a *form of meditation*, which brings ideas of space and time to a halt. Krishnamurti says,

Walking and talking meditation was going on below the words and the beauty of the night. It was going on at a great depth, flowing outwardly and inwardly; it was exploding and expanding. One was aware of it; it was happening; one wasn't experiencing it, experiencing is limiting; it was taking place. There was no participation in it; [...] It was happening at such an unknown depth for which there was no measurement. But there was great stillness. It was quite surprising and not ordinary at all.<sup>238</sup>

In this meditation, there is no place for thought or emotion. He even denies the idea of 'experience', because he sees it as being limiting. He writes that the process is extraordinary and cannot be measured. He claims that 'there was no participation' but meditation was happening at a great depth. Denying an active participation in the process of meditation, is an important concept for Krishnamurti. It reasserts the notion of spontaneous or immediate transformation, which does not require any effort or act of doing.

Secondly, walking provides an opportunity to *observe nature* closely. Keen observations of nature, such as the colors, plants, flowers, insects and birds, are an important part of the cultivation of the self. He says, "walking up the road, one was aware of the beauty of the earth and the delicate line of the steep hills against the evening sky; of the massive, rocky mountain

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<sup>237</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Krishnamurti's Notebook* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976)

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*, 16

with its glacier and wide field of snow; of the many flowers in the meadows. It was an evening of great beauty and quietness.”<sup>239</sup> Being close to nature allows for the mind to experience and see things that would not be possible otherwise. Herzberger, writing about the Krishnamurti Notebooks says, “Both the internal world of persons and the natural world are observed with innocent eyes that see and understand things as they are, sharply and without censorship or an overlay of emotional history.”<sup>240</sup> This unique ability to observe without any assumptions or barriers is cultivated within the act of walking. Walking allows for the opportunity to cultivate a *practice of detachment* and the ability to look without an attachment to the act of seeing.

Further walking emerges as a practice of *ending time and space*. Herzberger continues,

walking on that road, there was complete emptiness of the brain, and the mind was free of all experience, the knowing of yesterday, though a thousand yesterdays have been. Time, the thing of thought had stopped; literally there was no movement before and after [...] Space as distant was not; there were the hills and bushes but not as high and low [...] The totality of the mind [...] was empty; and because it was empty, there was energy, a deepening and widening energy without measure.<sup>241</sup>

Here, Krishnamurti gives a glimpse into how the emptying of mind occurs. This is one of the most significant ideas introduced by him, which he goes on to explain and expand upon in much of the later part of his life. The unconditioned mind is born out of this emptiness; it is free from any past “images” or conclusions. How does one arrive at the unconditioned mind? Krishnamurti poses it in the form of questions:

So, what we are going to find out together, if we can this morning, is whether the mind, your mind and the mind of the human being, can be totally unconditioned and therefore, act in freedom and yet together? Society - the culture, the various economic divisions, social activities - has created in us an image [.....] So, we have an image of ourselves. That image is part of our thought. That image shows superficially, outwardly, very little, but inwardly it is deeply seated. Right? Whether that deep conditioning, that deep roots of

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 44-45

<sup>240</sup> Herzberger, “Private Virtue and Public Space: Education in a Fragile World”

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 183

the image can be exposed, understood and gone beyond. That is the problem I would like to discuss this morning. You have understood my question?<sup>242</sup>

Living without any images becomes one of the primary ways of engaging with the world, which can help in achieving an unconditioned mind and thus, freedom. Further, he claims that the achievement of such a state requires a revolution. He says “It seems to me that our many problems cannot be solved except through a fundamental revolution of the mind, for such a revolution alone can bring about the realization of that which is truth. Therefore, it is important to understand the operation of one’s own mind, not self-analytically or introspectively, but by being aware of its total process [...] As long as one’s instrument of thinking is not clear, is perverted, conditioned, whatever one thinks is bound to be limited, narrow. So, our problem is how to free the mind from all conditioning, not how to condition it better. Do you understand?”<sup>243</sup>

Krishnamurti used terms, such as ‘psychological mutation’, ‘revolution of the mind’, ‘complete revolution of the psyche’ or ‘complete change from the roots of one’s being’, in various talks, to suggest that these were ways to transform society. This revolution begins at an individual level. For Krishnamurti, the freedom from all forms of fear and emotions, which bind, is not just the ‘first step’, but is the last. That is, it is the necessary and sufficient condition in order to achieve a transformation of the self and the world. He writes that,

the first step is to be free of all your hurts, psychological hurts, to be free of all your accumulated fears, anxieties, loneliness, despair, sorrow. That is the foundation, that’s the first step. And the first step is the last step. If you take that first step, that is over. But we are unwilling to take that first step because we don’t want to be free. We want to depend - depend on power, other people, depend on the environment, depend on our experience,

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<sup>242</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Can the mind be totally unconditioned?*, Public Talk 4 Saanen, Switzerland, 23 July 1972 (UK: Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, 2020), <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/can-mind-be-totally-unconditioned>

<sup>243</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *As One Is: To Free the Mind from All Conditioning* (US: Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 2007), 9-10

knowledge, we are always depending [...] and never be free of all dependence, all fear.<sup>244</sup>

In this vision of change, taking the first step *is* what leads to absolute freedom. In this philosophy, all violence and sorrows of the world are located within the micro, every day and small occurrences that take place in our lives.

This conception of this change, located in the individual, was different from other conceptions of change prevalent within the political imaginations of India. Although the individual had been at the center of the idea of change for figures such as Gandhi, Krishnamurti was giving a whole new vision. For Gandhi too, the private sphere and individual actions were powerful tools to fight against unjust structures. His rituals of self-purification through fasts, vows of silence and retreats from active politics were all moral actions and modes of denial, which would have effects on the public and political spheres. However, these did not aim at radically altering or questioning the nature of the mind and self itself.<sup>245</sup> Herzberger explains the difference between Gandhi's conception of change and Krishnamurti's. She argues that Gandhi's belief that an "irresistible force' is released when individuals are liberated from baser emotions has its roots in Gandhi's religious sensibilities, in his interpretation of what the Bhagvadgita describes as dispassionate action."<sup>246</sup> Further, she argues that for Gandhi private virtues and public actions are intertwined. It was within this space of both the private and the public, that a 'non-violent energy' was stored. This energy was channeled through the collective actions of individuals as well as through a struggle with one's own self. This non-violent energy was at the source of all change. However, for Krishnamurti, as Herzeberger argues, freedom "is a residual silence, an

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<sup>244</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Fourth Public Talk in Bombay, February 1985", accessed March 23, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1985/1985-02-10-jiddu-krishnamurti-4th-public-talk>

<sup>245</sup> Herzberger, "Private Virtue and Public Space: Education in a Fragile"

<sup>246</sup> Ibid

empty space that follows liberation from fear; it removes barriers between self and the other, barriers created by competition, hatred and fear, impelled by which other selves become objects to be feared, exploited or loved possessively.”<sup>247</sup> This absolute freedom was fundamentally located within the self, as a site and as abovementioned, he was not interested in a gradual process of change.

For Krishnamurti, to pose the question of the unconditioned mind was also to challenge all known notions of tradition, authority, time, thought and belief. Ultimately, the idea of true and complete freedom was ‘freedom from the known’<sup>248</sup>, which involved a rigorous enquiry into all aspects of life and one’s beliefs. Seekers and followers struggled with questions, such as: What does it mean to have an independent mind, free from all conditioning? How does one live in order to have an unconditioned mind? How do we hold ourselves accountable to the society we live in?

As they read and listened to Krishnamurti, many followers experienced the fear of being pushed into the unknown and at the same time, many felt drawn to this ‘unknown’. Many young people, in particular, who felt frustrated by their education experience and wanted to take control of their life trajectory, stopped by at the Krishnamurti Foundation India in Chennai. The head of the foundation mentioned that there had been a constant and steady increase in the number of young people coming in. He said that the ‘younger generation’ seemed to be more open to exploring different ideas and experimenting with them, before settling down with the expected responsibilities of domesticity or professional careers. He himself had discovered Krishnamurti at such a stage in his life. While studying for his Masters, he had once heard a talk by

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid

<sup>248</sup> This term is found in many of Krishnamurti’s talks. There is a popular book by the same name “Freedom From the Known”, published in 1969. See Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Freedom From the Known* (New York: HarperOne, 1969)

Krishnamurti. He was stunned and deeply moved by his persona, even though he didn't understand a word of what he said. From then on, he followed and attended any talks he gave in Bombay. It was as if he could not get Krishnamurti's words out of his mind. Whatever he did and wherever he went, those words would play on his mind. And then, he developed *vairagya*<sup>249</sup>. He could no longer be productive at his work as an engineer and this process escalated after a brief meeting with Krishnamurti. He described the moment with great excitement, "Krishnaji was extremely shy. When I met him, he stood against the wall with his eyes lowered. I also remember another time when a lady kept staring at him directly sitting in the first row. Krishnaji asked her not to stare like that. He started feeling very uncomfortable and gave the rest of his talk with his back facing the audience." The persona and presence of Krishnamurti had moved him greatly. Soon he gave up his well-paying job and decided to take on any role in helping with the schools<sup>250</sup>, which were in the process of being established. He believed he had nothing to fear while taking this step. "Krishnaji had lived his entire life without having any money in his pockets. There is a natural flow of things when one does not have a goal or success in mind. I have always met good people in my life and have *satsang*."<sup>251</sup>

There were many other such stories of transformation that had occurred as a result of Krishnamurti's words or presence. The institutions envisioned by Krishnamurti (and his followers) became spaces where these individuals could explore such processes.

Krishnamurti himself had broken away and challenged authority in his own life when he decided to move away from the Theosophical Society. This becomes a central point of his philosophy: a

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<sup>249</sup> It refers to a kind of disinterest in 'worldly matters'. Many followers of the figures I study in this project used this term for the moment when they felt they could no longer carry on in their 'work' or careers and had to give it up in order to pursue a life devoted to the ideas or communities of the figures.

<sup>250</sup> Many Krishnamurti schools were set up in India, including The Rishi Valley School, The Rajghat School and The School.

<sup>251</sup> Satsang means the 'company of good people' or in the company of moral people.

breaking away from authority and the known. Many followers find inspiration from this act and continue to aspire for this in their own lives. In doing so, they recreate their own self and reconstitute the figure of Krishnamurti.

In this section I have traced the development of practices of self-transformation, such as walking, which help in the cultivation of an unconditioned mind and an absolute freedom. The practice of walking generates multiple opportunities for experimentation with meditation, slowing of mind, detachment and observation. These are some of the key features of Krishnamurti's philosophy and vision.

### **Biography and the Life of Krishnamurti**

In this section, I demonstrate the ways in which the figure of Krishnamurti is constituted by biographies, biographers and readers. Through an analysis of some popular biographies of him, I argue that these texts act primarily as pedagogical tools. The readers engage in a journey of self-transformation by identifying and occupying multiple selves through these texts. I delve into certain life events, in particular, in order to understand the making of his philosophy. However, writing an account of his life poses a challenge, for Krishnamurti had insisted throughout his life that he 'did not remember' most events of his past. This act of self-denial or living without memory aligns closely with his philosophy. Given such a context, the biographers play a significant role; taking on the task of recreating his life events. This process of carefully crafting the figure of Krishnamurti also plays a pedagogical role.

Krishnamurti's biographies are significant and produce three kinds of effects or modes of engagement. First, his life produces a *spectacle*. Krishnamurti's life consists of certain extraordinary events which cannot be explained easily. Thus, making sense of these events

creates a curiosity in the minds of the readers and draws them towards his life. Second, these biographies act as *pedagogical tools*. Krishnamurti's biographies represent certain dispositions or life experiences, which can aid in achieving 'absolute freedom'. Third, a *biographical intimacy* is produced between Krishnamurti, the author of biography, and the reader. Through this intimacy, a transformative potential emerges, where the reader is able to relate to Krishnamurti and the author in order to imagine herself differently.

In many ways, the life events and circumstances of Krishnamurti (referred to as 'the boy', 'Krishna', 'Krishnaji' or 'K') are understood to be quite extraordinary. This extraordinary nature of his life continues to be of great interest to readers. I suggest that this sense of the spectacle or the extraordinariness is produced both due to the lack of information (as Krishnamurti did not have memory of certain events) as well as the ongoing narrativization and creation of beliefs, which maintained an element of inexplicability of certain events.

A glimpse into his life also gives us clues into the formation of his central ideas around freedom and the unconditioned mind. I argue that Krishnamurti's experiences within Theosophy, his life in America and several transnational encounters with experts from the fields of science, had a profound role to play in the formation of his ideas. Krishnamurti's life within the Theosophical Society has been a matter of great controversy.<sup>252</sup> However, rather than either entirely dismissing the role of Theosophy or giving it primacy in the formation of his ideas, my aims are broader. I argue that it is necessary to examine its role as an important factor in facilitating transnational encounters and interaction between diverse philosophical traditions. Krishnamurti's childhood

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<sup>252</sup> The controversy revolves around his breaking away from the Theosophical Society in 1929. The Theosophical Society as well as the Krishnamurti Foundation of India, do not share original documents even for research purposes, from the years before 1929.

struggles with having the role of the ‘World Teacher’<sup>253</sup> or ‘Messiah’ thrust upon him and being compared to Christ or the Buddha, led to a strong sense of rebellion against any form of authority figure throughout his life.

Most of the writing on Krishnamurti exists in the form of biographies describing the different phases of his life or memoirs written by followers. In fact, the sheer volume of such writings that exist is astounding. It makes one wonder, what is it about the life of Krishnamurti that has encouraged so much writing? What role or purpose do these writings serve within Krishnamurti circles? The two most popular accounts of Krishnamurti’s life are by Mary Lutyens and Pupul Jayakar. Both were women who developed deep friendships with Krishnamurti and were encouraged by Krishnamurti himself to write about his life. Their writing demonstrates the connections between his life and philosophy.

Many followers expressed that they enjoyed reading biographies as they were able to connect with not just the world that Krishnamurti inhabited, but also, the world of the biographers. The struggles and revelations experienced by these authors, often mirrored those of the readers as they explored his ideas. As one young follower said

I find it more interesting to read *about* them because otherwise there is a gap, because those who have written about them, they write about their own struggles of understanding them as well [...] because you can’t take the teachings literally without interpreting them. When you read about these people who wanted to learn, when you see this interplay, then *you* learn because just by the words, you can’t. So, I am reading about them [...] they can say contradictory things to each person; it doesn’t apply to everyone, the idea is to go deeper into yourself.”

This experience of the follower raises the question as to whether Krishnamurti’s philosophy can be understood, without the existence of the biographies. By extension, it also suggests that biographies play a central role in the articulation of the philosophy itself. Krishnamurti’s

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<sup>253</sup> The World Teacher was supposed to a spiritual entity who would appear on earth. According to Annie Besant, Krishnamurti might, if he was found worthy, be used as a vehicle for the World Teacher.

biographies do so by highlighting the idea of ‘lived experience’ in the making of him and for the achievement of absolute freedom on the part of the reader. Hence, on one the hand the biographies assert that Krishnamurti’s unique abilities were shaped through his lived experiences, and on the other hand they establish the potentials of self-transformation through such experience for the readers. In other words, ‘experience’ is enough to achieve ‘absolute freedom’. Consequently, the reader is able to connect with the life *of* Krishnamurti, while also seeing the potential of self-transformation through lived experience. Achieving absolute freedom becomes possible through the cultivation of certain dispositions (such as the unconditioned mind), which is made feasible through lived experiences.

Now, I draw on two popular biographies to demonstrate the ways in which they constitute the figure of Krishnamurti and his philosophy. Mary Lutyen’s biography is written in three volumes: *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (1975), *Krishnamurti: The Years of Fulfillment* (1983) and *Krishnamurti: The Open Door* (1988). Each volume describes a different phase of his life. Lutyen’s states that she has tried to present quotes from historical documents, such as diaries and letters, in order not to distort the facts. She did not want her personal friendship with Krishnamurti to come in the way and create any biases. She emphasizes how she wrote the text with complete freedom and did not let anyone interfere with it. She states that the purpose of the text is to demonstrate his ‘extraordinary’ life and achievements.<sup>254</sup>

Perhaps the scene of the ‘discovery’ of Krishnamurti in the first volume is most striking. Charles Webster Leadbeater, or C.W.L as he was often called, joined the Theosophical Society in 1883 and was taken as a disciple of Annie Besant.<sup>255</sup> In 1909, Leadbeater arrived at the Theosophical

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<sup>254</sup> Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1975), ix

<sup>255</sup> Annie Besant was one of the founders of the Theosophical Society, which was established in 1875 and aimed at forming a Universal Brotherhood of Man by bringing to light Eastern religious traditions.

Society Headquarters in Adyar, Madras.<sup>256</sup> One day, he decided to go to the beach along with his attendants. Lutyens describes the scene as follows:

One evening, Leadbeater went with his young assistants to bathe and, on returning to the bungalow, told them [...] that one of the boys on the beach had the most wonderful aura he had ever seen, without a particle of selfishness in it [...] Leadbeater predicted that one day the boy would become a spiritual teacher and a great orator.’ He stated that [Krishnamurti] would be even greater than Annie Besant. His attendant could not believe this was possible since he knew the boy as being ‘particularly dim-witted.’<sup>257</sup>

Lutyens goes on to explain this discovery further. She says

It could not have been Krishna’s outward appearance that struck Leadbeater for, apart from his wonderful eyes, he was not at all predisposing at that time. He was under-nourished, scrawny and dirty; his ribs showed through his skin and he had a persistent cough; his teeth were crooked and he wore his hair in the customary Brahmin fashion of South India [...] moreover, his vacant expression gave him an almost moronic look [...] he was so extremely weak physically that his father declared more than once that he was bound to die.<sup>258</sup>

This description of Krishnamurti, especially the term ‘vacant expression’ was extremely significant in Krishnamurti’s self-articulation in the later part of his life. He claimed that this ‘vacantness’ or emptiness gave him a unique capacity to observe his mind and not be burdened by the past. Krishnamurti said, “The mind of this man from childhood till now is constantly vacant.”<sup>259</sup> He claimed that this vacant mind existed at all times even while giving his talks. However, he asserted that while ‘the boy’ had a vacant mind, it was not to be considered a mystery; it could happen to everyone.<sup>260</sup> According to Krishnamurti, vacantness is a kind of disposition suitable for spiritual transformation. It has to be developed as a desirable quality within Krishnamurti’s philosophy. ‘Forgetting’ is another disposition that he cultivated and held

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<sup>256</sup> Leadbeater had been accused of ‘immoral practices’ and of ‘encouraging young boys in the habit of masturbation’. This had shaken up the whole of the Society, and he had to resign from it. However, he was reinstated in 1909, after three years of standing down.

<sup>257</sup> Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, 21

<sup>258</sup> Ibid

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Mary Lutyens, *J. Krishnamurti: A Life* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005), 532

on to throughout his life. That is, losing memory, living in the present and not holding on to the ‘images of the past’ all became central to his thinking.

After his discovery, Krishnamurti and his brother were trained by the Theosophical Society under the guidance of Charles Leadbeater and Annie Besant. The boys were tutored in English, groomed in better hygiene, taught how to ride bicycles and prepared for the ‘first initiation’.<sup>261</sup> After this first initiation, Krishnamurti was seen as being transformed with a visible glow and radiance. Throughout his life, Krishnamurti was plagued by the role of the Theosophical Society. He refused to answer any questions about their role and the kind of training he received. He always responded saying that he had lost his memory and referred to himself as ‘the boy’ when mentioning his life within the Society. Krishnamurti only remembered fragments of his childhood and youth. This conflict between him and the Theosophical Society is important to note. His relationship with Theosophy and breaking away from it was a major turning point in his life, providing the basis for his thinking.

Krishnamurti’s years of upbringing at the Theosophical Society had shaped his views on authority, freedom and the mind as well. He was trained to become a ‘World Teacher’ or the ‘messiah’ as they called him. There are some significant ways in which his sociality was fostered during the first 32 years of his life. Annie Besant acted as a maternal figure to him and restricted his friendships with others. According to her, emotional attachments were not good for Krishnamurti and would get in the way of him becoming the World Teacher. His relationship with his brother Nitya, had been a unique bond, with them both traveling around the world together and spending all their time in training by the Society. Nitya’s death in 1922, was a

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<sup>261</sup> Maria Moritz shows in her dissertation on the Theosophical Society, that practices of body building, hygiene, dental care, western clothing as well as the playing of sports, such as golf and tennis, were of great importance in creating the ‘World Teacher’. See Maria Moritz, “Globalizing ‘Sacred Knowledge’: South Asians and the Theosophical Society, 1879-1930” (PhD, Jacobs University, 2017) <https://d-nb.info/1132813514/34>

turning point in Krishnamurti's life and acted as a final straw in his revolt against the Society.

Krishnamurti expressed how

the pleasant dreams my brother and I had of the physical are over [...] Silence was a special delight to both of us, as then it was so easy to understand each other's thoughts and feelings [...] We both of us liked the same cloud, the same tree and the same music [...] An old dream is dead and a new one is being born, as a flower that pushes through the solid earth. A new vision is coming into being and a new consciousness is being unfolded [...] A new strength born of suffering is pulsating in the veins and a new sympathy and understanding is being born out of the past suffering. A greater desire to see others suffer less and, if they must suffer, to see that they bear it nobly and come out of it without too many scars. I have wept but I do not want others to weep but if they do I now know what it means [...] I now have greater zeal, greater faith, greater sympathy and greater love [...] I know now with greater certainty than even before, that there is real beauty in life, real happiness that cannot be shattered by any physical happening.<sup>262</sup>

After Nitya's death, Krishnamurti claimed that his suffering had given rise to a new strength.

Throughout his life after the death, his friends and followers noted that Krishnamurti did not feel attached to anyone. While they could feel his warmth and love, he was not tied down by any relationships. He was always surrounded by people who loved him, showed loyalty and provided care for him.

Lutyens' biography remains one of the most extensive and popular ones. Her writing about Krishnamurti focuses on all the different phases of his life, in that she had known him as a close friend for many years. Consequently, her biography gives us an intimate perspective on all the aspects of his life, ranging from relationships to his individual experiences and experiments.

Pupul Jayakar's account of Krishnamurti's life, titled *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography* (1986), provides the story of Krishnamurti in India. It also gives insights into understanding the milieu in which activists and freedom fighters were beginning to imagine a new India. As they struggled with their own disillusionment and questions of what constituted freedom, they came into contact

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<sup>262</sup> Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: The Years of Awakening*, 220

with Krishnamurti. Jayakar's own journey of coming into contact with him, symbolized such struggles. In her writing, she explores her own personal struggles as an activist as well as others' relationship to politics and disillusionment in the context of the newly emerging nation state. Jayakar's book begins with a moving account of her first meeting with Krishnamurti. I continued to hear of this account from several other people I met, as it had had an impact on many. The incident of the meeting, also resonated with many people who found fulfilment through their work as teachers or activists and had been drawn to Krishnamurti. Jayakar, an activist and a political figure with close ties with Indira Gandhi, was moved at a deeply emotional level after her first meeting with Krishnamurti. She wrote, "I felt a quickening of my senses. His refusal to be kind in the accepted sense was shattering. My mind leapt to meet the clarity and precision of his words. I felt that I was in contact with something vast and completely new. Though the words sounded harsh, there was gentleness in his eyes and a quality of healing flowed from him."<sup>263</sup> Further, Krishnamurti went on to ask Jayakar why she did social work. She responded by saying that it gave her life a certain fullness. To this he famously said, "We are like the man who tries to fill water into a pail that has holes. The more water he pours in, the more it pours out, and the pail remains empty [...] What is it that you are trying to run away from? Social work, pleasure, living in sorrow - are these not all escapes, attempts to fill the void within?"<sup>264</sup> This meeting left Jayakar very disturbed and she wrote that she could not sleep for days and wanted to explore his words more. These words of Krishnamurti and this meeting are often discussed among readers and followers today, when trying to make sense of their own careers and chosen paths.

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<sup>263</sup> Pupul Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1986), 3

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

Soon Jayakar asked Krishnamurti for a personal interview, where she wanted to clarify her own position to him and explain that she was an activist and social worker, committed to building a new India of her dreams. But Krishnamurti challenged her position by pushing her towards an exploration of her own self. This, I suggest, worked as counterpoint to the activist life and expectations that Jayakar believed in. Krishnamurti had foregrounded the idea of healing and defined real revolution as revolution of the self alone.

She writes that finally she had a moment of realization when

“Words would not end. I spoke of the many scars of living, the struggle to survive [...] the slow hardening, the aggression and ambition [...] Then another pregnancy, the birth of a little girl, beautiful of face, but deformed. The drowning in anguish and again the death of the child [...] In his presence, the past, hidden in the darkness of the long forgotten, found form and awakened. He was a mirror that reflected. There was an absence of personality, of the evaluator, to weigh and distort. I kept trying to keep back something of my past, but he would not let me. Now, in the compassionate field, there was a quality of immense strength [...] And so the words which for years had been destroying me were said. Saying them brought me immense pain, but his listening was as the listening of winds or the vast expanse of water.”<sup>265</sup>

At the end of this encounter, an entirely new world of listening without judgement and healing had opened up for Jayakar. She had experienced being listened to by a compassionate being as embodied by Krishnamurti. This moment is both a moment of healing as well as one of learning and/or a pedagogical one. Jayakar explains further, “I had touched a new way of observing, a new way of listening, without reaction, a listening that arose from distance and depth.”<sup>266</sup>

Through moments of reflection and learning like these, Jayakar draws the reader in and allows her to experience and explore the learning herself.

Focusing particularly on Krishnamurti’s arrival in India, after independence, Jayakar provides valuable insights into his life in the period. She says “K’s arrival in India, two months after

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid.,5

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.,6

independence could not have been at a more propitious moment. An old age in India was dying and the birth of the new was beset by travail and disillusionment.”<sup>267</sup> She explains that the massacre and violence of partition had been a shock to those who had been nurtured by the theories of non-violence in the previous years. The builders of new India-activists and politicians were driven by action rather than a deeply thought out vision. Jayakar writes that, “there had been little time to pause, to ponder, to look into the distance, to cogitate, to ask fundamental questions.”<sup>268</sup>

In such a context, appeared Krishnamurti. I suggest that his presence provided a form of healing for the activists and challenged some of the existing notions of what freedom meant for India. He represented a counter narrative to the ideas of the ‘nation’ and the newly emerging independent country. These counter narratives are central to an understanding of the transnational communities that gathered around him and later, in the schools established by him. During this phase of his life he worked closely with a few individuals, often one on one, initiating a mode of self-transformation in them.<sup>269</sup> He termed it as a period of ‘full awakening’ and engaged with people in different ways, such as public talks, dialogues and discussions, personal interviews, insights through casual conversations at walks and meal times along with silences. These variant modes of engagement are still remembered fondly by many of the people I met during my research. Many still remember the non-verbal modes of communication with Krishnamurti or other intimate interactions they had with him. Followers recalled the power of looking into his eyes, the way he would hold their hand or pat their shoulder lovingly, or at other times how he

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.,97

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Jayakar provides details of each of these individuals and some of their journeys with Krishnamurti. They came from a range of backgrounds, such as dancers, musicians, scientists, politicians, schoolteachers and religious figures.

would console them by giving a handkerchief if they started to cry, and how he broke the silence by abruptly asking a question while on a walk together. Such personal interactions hold a special place in the life of the Krishnamurti followers.

Between the years 1950-1960, Krishnamurti spent his longest time in India since his childhood, and it allowed him to deepen his understanding of India. He was acutely aware and concerned about a few things in particular: scientific and technological advances and a rapid trend towards chaos and violence. As Jayakar puts it, “with the eye of prophecy, Krishnaji looked into the years that lay ahead.”<sup>270</sup> He said, “The world is becoming something totally new. Space is being conquered, machines are taking over, tyranny is spreading [...] Something new is going on which we are not aware [...] we think we have time [...] there is no time.”<sup>271</sup> After spending a long time in India, wandering and keenly observing every facet of life, Krishnamurti had come to the conclusion that there was a need for a ‘new mind,’ as a response to what he saw as a complete dearth of human integrity. This new mind would have compassion, pity and affection with the old mind having to be completely wiped out. He spoke of the new mind with a sense of urgency, one that had to comprehend the whole. It would see both the inward and the outward: “the quality of going beyond itself belongs to the new mind, which is free of time [...] Time prevents perception [...] The time of the psyche brings about fear and so limits the flow.”<sup>272</sup> Such a mind would be free of all authority and truly have the capacity to observe everything. Finally, he suggested that this new mind could not come into being through knowledge, but rather, by an explosion of creativity, which will bring all knowledge to an end.

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<sup>270</sup> Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 239

<sup>271</sup> Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 97

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid*, 240

In this period, an increasing concern with the idea of responsibility towards the world and especially towards nature, can be seen. He started speaking about the increasing ‘corruption’ of the mind. Towards the end of his life, these concerns took prominence and there was a sense of urgency to solve these problems. In the 1960s, he expressed his determination to save the two schools that he had set up in the Rishi Valley and Rajghat.<sup>273</sup> These schools were supposed to serve as an ‘oasis in the country’, which had to be saved from the chaos that was all around. These places had to be the center of the teachings and emerge as ‘holy places’. In this moment of crisis, these schools needed to be saved and stopped from running as ‘organizations’, based on hierarchical relationships and being run by ‘personalities’.<sup>274</sup> In the last few years of his life, he felt more and more affected by the political situation in India. He felt deeply saddened that his teachings had not been understood in his home country. In a letter to Jayakar he wrote,

as I have repeated and can repeat it again without boredom, I have spent more time and given more talks in India than anywhere else. I am not concerned with the results, what effects the Teachings have in India, how deep the roots have penetrated, but I think one has the right to ask and should ask, as I am asking, why there is not in India, after all these years, one person totally and completely involved in these Teachings, living them and dedicated entirely to them. I am not in any way blaming any of you, but if I may, I would urge you to give your most serious attention to this.<sup>275</sup>

This great sense of dissatisfaction that arose from his belief that his Teachings had not been understood by Indians continues to haunt the followers today. While this dissatisfaction creates a sense of disappointment among the followers, it also sustains a kind of idealism. It allows for the listeners and seekers to work on themselves in order to achieve the absolute freedom that Krishnamurti envisioned. Towards the end of his life, his teachings emphasized totality and the

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<sup>273</sup> I will discuss the setting up of these schools in another section of this chapter.

<sup>274</sup> Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 289-91

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, 342

whole. He insisted that the teachings had not been as a ‘process’ or developed ‘gradually’ and that the teachings were never to be understood partially but always as a whole.

Through the discussion of the biographies, I have demonstrated different facets of Krishnamurti’s philosophy and how they developed through his lifetime. I have also argued that many of these recollections allow for points of reflection, thereby facilitating self-transformation among the readers. These biographies help in unpacking the assemblage of Krishnamurti, constituted by his speeches, the space of sonic imagination and his vision of absolute freedom. They act as pedagogical tools for the readers to relate to the experiences of both the biographer and Krishnamurti, and in turn, engaging in dialogue with their own selves. In the following sections, I discuss the ways in which his pedagogy developed further.

### **Styles of Pedagogy I: An anti-guru guru?**

While all three figures in this dissertation expressed their discomfort with the notion of the guru to varying degrees, this is most prominent in the case of Krishnamurti. His critique of the idea of the guru contributes to his ambiguous identity. How do we understand a figure who continued to speak about self-transformation all his life and who proclaimed to give Teachings, but denied the creation of any following around him? Moreover, if he was indeed *not* a guru, then how can we explain the communities of followers and his legacy?

Krishnamurti dismissed the label of the ‘guru’ vehemently. He made sarcastic remarks about other gurus who were increasingly becoming popular in the west.<sup>276</sup> Along with the label of the

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<sup>276</sup> Krishnamurti’s rejection of the idea of the guru is also interesting at this particular time period. Gurus, such as ‘Osho’ (who I will discuss in the next chapter), had created a whole new tradition of giving ‘sannyas’ (creating disciples) to his followers. Krishnamurti was repelled by such a move. As I heard from his followers, he would mock the Osho followers who came to listen to his talks. Osho sent many of his disciples to Krishnamurti’s talks, partly to annoy him, but also, because he considered him to be a great teacher.

guru, he also dismissed the idea of the ‘disciple’. In several talk he would ask listeners: What are you trying to search for? What will you achieve from the search? Why do you want an authority figure to guide you? What is your fear? What are you running or escaping for? The guru in Krishnamurti’s understanding was a corrupt figure similar to a politician. He said that it is the confusion of people that leads them to seek a guru, who could then help them out of this state of mind. This is simply for their own gratification and certainly not for the search of ‘truth’. Hence, the important question to ask is, why do individuals search for gurus?

However, Krishnamurti’s ‘anti-guru’ stance complicates his legacy. Since he did not fall within the framework of an identifiable ‘guru’, neither wearing a robe or other religious markers nor initiating disciples or prescribing meditation techniques, his identity remains ambiguous. His anti-religious and anti-tradition disposition makes it impossible for him to be easily placed. An example of this is found in the debate among followers on whether to display Krishnamurti’s photographs in the premises of foundations and schools or not. In general, the consensus is not to display many of his photographs.

It should be recalled here that, Krishnamurti had been raised by the Theosophical Society to fulfill the role of the ‘World Teacher’; a role that he gradually began to detest and revolted against. He had been unhappy to play this role and no longer wanted to be associated with Theosophy as an institution. I argue that this context of Krishnamurti also has a bearing on his rejection of the title of a guru. As a transnational figure, he spent his life across different countries and never chose to associate himself with any traditions or any particular historical or political events of any country. Instead, he engaged with people coming from a variety of professions, traveled and lived in different geographical areas, while always emphasizing the need for dialogue.

As Jayakar explains in her book, the denial of the guru in an Indian context was the ultimate form of negation of any authority. The guru had been considered the “initiator, the preceptor, the doorway to truth.”<sup>277</sup> Krishnamurti’s refusal of the guru label also involved rejecting the need for an intermediary between the seeker and the ultimate truth, thus placing total responsibility on the seeker for this discovery. For Krishnamurti, the truth is always there and the seeker should be concerned with the “awakening of a living perception: seeing and listening to the actual in the outer, as revealed in relationship to man and nature; and in the inner as revealed in thoughts and feelings that were the actual content of the mind.”<sup>278</sup> His wider critique was based on the fact that, people worship an individual and forget the teachings. Ultimately, he even challenged the idea that *there is* a discovery to be made.

I argue that, for Krishnamurti, the idea of being in a “relationship” and as a friend to another, replaces the notion of the guru. That is, he saw his primary role in the lives of people as a friend or to act as a mirror. Living with others “in relationship” and how to establish these relationships remained his primary concern. He explained in a talk

Relationship is a process of self-revelation; relationship is as a mirror in which you begin to discover yourself, your tendencies, pretensions, selfish and limited motives, fears and so on. In relationship, if you are aware, you will find that you are being exposed which causes conflict and pain. The thoughtful man welcomes this self-exposure to bring about order and clarity, to free his thought-feeling from isolating, self-enclosing tendencies. But most of us try to seek comfort and gratification in relationship; we do not desire to be revealed to ourselves, we do not wish to study ourselves as we are, so relationship becomes wearisome and we seek to escape [...] But relationship will be ever painful, a constant struggle, till out of it comes deep and extensional self-knowledge. With deep self-knowledge there is inexhaustible love.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 110

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, “The Mirror of Relationship, Ojai, California, 7th Public Talk 25th June, 1944”, accessed March 23, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1936-1944-the-mirror-of-relationship/krishnamurti-the-mirror-of-relationship-55>

In another talk he said,

Have you ever tried to communicate to a friend something which you feel very deeply? You must have found it very difficult, however intimate that friendship may be. You can imagine how difficult it is for us here to understand each other, for our relationship is peculiar [...] Most of us have the attitude either of a disciple towards a teacher, or of a follower, or of one who tries to force himself to a particular point of view, and communication becomes very difficult [...] Free communication is possible only when both the listener and the talker are thinking together on the same point. During these days of the Camp there should not be this attitude of a teacher and a disciple, of a leader and a follower, but rather, a friendly communication with each other, which is impossible if the mind is held in any belief or in any ideology. There is never a friendship between a leader and a follower, and hence deep communication between them is impossible.<sup>280</sup>

In relationships of friendship, one could establish communication and dialogue. This remained central to his pedagogic method. It formed the basis of the schools established by him and his seekers and followers. He reiterated that the establishment of these schools was to demonstrate that learning could best take place in environments where the teachers and students were in a real “relationship”. In a discussion with school teachers in Brockwood Park he explained, “Relationship in the sense we are talking about, in the sense feeling responsible for the student, not only academically but morally, socially, his behavior, his way of thinking, and so on, concerned totally.”<sup>281</sup> Krishnamurti’s dismissal of the idea of the guru, also provided the basis for the rejection of any form of authority. According to him, all traditions, beliefs, ideologies, and institutions were rooted in some form of authority, and nothing was more antithetical to freedom than a form of authority. As a result, in his talks and discourses, new words and concepts had to be imagined. Imagining these new ideas could not be rooted in a place of authority or tradition. It required a ‘new mind’ or the unconditioned mind.

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<sup>280</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, “The Mirror of Relationship, Ommen, Holland, 1st Public Talk 4th August, 1938”, accessed March 23, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/1936-1944-the-mirror-of-relationship/krishnamurti-the-mirror-of-relationship-34>

<sup>281</sup> Jayakar, *J. Krishnamurti: A Biography*, 488

Jayakar, in her book, ponders over the question of his lineage. If he did not believe in any tradition or guru, did he have a lineage? She wondered what could be the summation of his teachings and his lineage. She writes

To me it was vast. It integrated and included the teachings of the Buddha and Vedanta. He could negate the super-Atman, the Brahman, but in the very negation, he emanated an energy which those words conveyed [...] Suddenly Krishnaji caught my hand. (He said) 'Keep it-keep the challenge-work with it-forget the person'. His touch was charged with the strength of nature, as found in storms in oceans.<sup>282</sup>

Finally, he said

“Look what religions have done: concentrated on the teacher and forgotten the teaching. Why do we give such importance to the person of the teacher? The teacher may be necessary to manifest the teaching, but beyond that, what? The vase contains water; you have to drink the water, not worship the vase. Humanity worships the vase, forgets the water.”<sup>283</sup>

Jayakar struggled with this question, since she did not want to let go of her attachment to him as a guide and teacher. To the question of what was Krishnamurti's lineage, she concluded “All humankind. Because in every human being is the capacity to break through bondage; to be in the lineage of impersonal compassion.”<sup>284</sup> Jayakar's internal struggle to make sense of her own relationship to Krishnamurti gives us insights into the ways others continue to relate to him. While many feel attached to the memories of Krishnamurti's presence, others rely on his teachings and what that means to their lives.

Krishnamurti's emphasis on the idea of relationship between teacher and student, challenging the idolization of guru and the rejection of all forms of authority, became the basis for his dialogic pedagogy. In the following sections, I argue that this model provided a new vision for education

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 491

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

in India. This pedagogic model also emerged from the space of transnational encounters between scientists and philosophers.

## **Styles of Pedagogy II: Science and Dialogue**

I contend that Krishnamurti's pedagogy was rooted in ideas of experimentation and transnational encounter. This emerged as he engaged with scientists, philosophers of mind and scientific methods. I also demonstrate how his dialogic pedagogy developed within the format of questions and answers. Within these dialogues there was a cautious, rigorous and slow unfolding of ideas. I suggest that these transnational encounters played a crucial role in the creation of Krishnamurti as a figure since ideas took shape and were interpreted within these encounters.

In his early years between 1930s and 40s, he had established close friendships with novelist and philosopher Aldous Huxley. Huxley wrote the foreword for one of the most popular books on Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom*.<sup>285</sup> Explaining Krishnamurti's unique abilities he writes,

In recent years, logicians and semanticists have carried out a very thorough analysis of the symbols, in terms of which men are thinking [...] All this is greatly to the good; but it is not enough. Logic and semantics, linguistics and metalinguistics - these are purely intellectual disciplines [...] they offer no guidance, in regard to the much more fundamental problem of the relationship of man in his psycho-physical totality, on the one hand, and his two worlds, of data and of symbols, on the other.<sup>286</sup>

Huxley claimed that Krishnamurti was able to provide a "clear contemporary statement of the fundamental human problem".<sup>287</sup> That is, he pointed out that Krishnamurti gave unique insights, which others had not been able to give. It is said that their unique friendship impacted Huxley's ideas and vocabulary. P. Ramesh writes in the journal of Krishnamurti Schools

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<sup>285</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *The First and Last Freedom* (California: Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 1954)

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 3

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

starting with his novel 'After Many A Summer' published in 1939 up to 'Island' which came out in 1962, Huxley appears to have borrowed from Krishnamurti's spiritual vocabulary. More than that, Huxley seriously attempted to live the life he was recommending for others [...] Krishnaji's comment (ed) on their friendship, wherein he says, 'those (he and Huxley) had a strange relationship with each other, affectionate, considerate and, it seems, non-verbal communication. They would often be sitting together without saying a word.'<sup>288</sup>

In his later years, Krishnamurti engaged in series of dialogues with physicists, neurobiologists and psychologists. These talks were titled: 'Brain Seminars (1984)', 'The Ending of Time (1980)' and 'The Power of Illusion (1983)'. In these years, he became concerned about the use of the mind for technological and other innovations instead of the creation of something 'new'. He insisted, vehemently, that if the mind was not discarded of all its conditioning and old traditions, then it could never be revolutionary. Krishnamurti felt that the 'new mind' was the only way a revolution of the mind was possible. This could not be achieved by a collection of knowledge, self-analysis or introspection and it could only come with an awareness of the whole. He conducted a series of dialogues with physicist David Bohm and psychoanalyst David Shainberg on the nature of the mind. There was a growing perception that Krishnamurti's thought represented a philosophy of the mind. His use of terms such as the 'psyche', 'consciousness' and the 'brain' attracted scientists and psychoanalysts. I argue that such possible overlaps or connections made his thought legible to the developments in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis in America.

David Shainberg, an American psychoanalyst, conducted a series of 'dialogues' with Krishnamurti titled 'The Power of Illusion'<sup>289</sup>. These dialogues give us important insights into how new ideas and thought emerged out of their conversations. They worked towards

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<sup>288</sup> P.Ramesh, "Aldous Huxley and Krishnamurti", accessed on March 23, 2020, <http://www.journal.kfionline.org/issue-1/aldous-huxley-and-krishnamurti>

<sup>289</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "The Power of Illusion-1983", February 19, 2012, video, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vONKWdfj\\_hg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vONKWdfj_hg)

establishing a common language for understanding each other. Shainberg opened the first dialogue with the question of loss and how his patients were unable to move on beyond the loss of a loved one. Krishnamurti seemed confused by the question and more specifically the words used by Shainberg. He insisted that he could not understand and asked him to use different words and to put the question differently. He said, “let’s move away from this” and “let’s start again”. These moments of pause, disagreement, non-recognition of words, and meticulous choosing of words remained central to the dialogic process. It was essential for Krishnamurti, to clarify the terms before he could move further.

The conversation then developed into the question of what constitutes the ‘me’ or the ‘I’? Does it have a psychological way of sustaining itself or does it have a physical way? Are they the same or different? What is the role of memory in the creation of the ‘I’? Krishnamurti went on to say that it is not possible to help another person to see these traps of the self. One has to see it for oneself and then break out of it. When one sees this, there will be a *mutation* of the brain cells and it will be possible to be free and move out of the hole. He says “My memory is very selective. All the things that happened to me have gone. The record remains, but not the content of the record.”<sup>290</sup> This insistence on forgetting was a constant theme in Krishnamurti’s thought. He made a distinction between psychological memory, which is based on ‘images’ and needs to be forgotten, versus the memory of ‘facts’, which are essential for survival and living. The dialogue concludes with the recognition that the mind and the knowledge it produces are limited. Mind is unable to be free, as it continues to operate in the same patterns. Shainberg asks again: How to break through this? Krishnamurti says that there can be no helping in this process and “we are in this together”. The only way to break through it is to realize that they are *both*

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

struggling and would have to work together in order to be free. The conversation ends when Krishnamurti exclaims “I have found something new” and Shainberg says “So have I”. In this dialogue, there are multiple disagreements but they both arrive at certain conclusions, together. Another important collaboration was between Krishnamurti and David Bohm, an American physicist. Bohm had been drawn to Krishnamurti for another aspect of his philosophy - the concept of ‘observer’ and ‘observed’. He said,

Krishnamurti’s work is permeated by what may be called the essence of the scientific approach, when this is considered in its very highest and purest form. Thus, he begins from a fact, this fact about the nature of our thought processes. This fact is established through close attention, involving careful listening to the process of consciousness, and observing it assiduously. In this, one is constantly learning, and out of this learning comes insight, into the overall or general nature of the process of thought. This insight is then tested. First, one sees whether it holds together in a rational order. And then one sees whether it leads to order and coherence, on what flows out of it in life as a whole.<sup>291</sup>

This emphasis on the ‘fact’ or what Krishnamurti also terms as ‘real’, resonates with many followers of today. They feel drawn to this ‘scientific approach’ as they feel they can experiment with his ideas in their life and not accept them blindly.

David Bohm and Krishnamurti established a friendship of over 25 years and they met regularly to engage in dialogue on a number of issues. Books of David Bohm and Krishnamurti dialogues include: *The Limits of Thought*, *The Ending of Time*, and *The Future of Humanity*. These dialogues took place between 1970 and 1985. A series of dialogues held in Ojai, California in 1980 was titled: ‘Can Insight bring about a mutation in the brain cells?’, where the idea of the ‘mutation of the brain cells’ was discussed. The idea that the revolution of the mind will alter the brain cells themselves had been a provocative one. Krishnamurti started speaking of this idea towards the end of his life, especially after engaging in dialogues and debates with scientists,

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<sup>291</sup> See “David Bohm’s Introduction to Jiddu Krishnamurti”, accessed on March 23, 2020, <http://dbohm.com/david-bohm-introduction-to-krishnamurti.html>

such as Bohm. In the sixth dialogue of the series, on the question of the brain cells, Krishnamurti and Bohm together come to the statement that ‘insight’ is something that occurs in a flash and not through progressive knowledge, arising from a part of the brain which is untouched by ‘content’ or ‘consciousness’. Krishnamurti then paused and alerted Bohm to the potential dangers of such a statement, saying “That is a dangerous concept! [...] See the danger of admitting to oneself that there is such a part of the brain [...] The danger is that I am admitting there is God in me, that there is something super-human; something beyond the content which therefore will operate on it, or that will operate in spite of it.”<sup>292</sup> But then, in his dialogic mode of discourse he continues with, “Something has just come to my mind”, after a moment of pause and then he says, “Love has no cause. Hate has a cause. Insight has no cause. The material process, as thought, has a cause. Right?”<sup>293</sup> He concludes that insight emerges outside of the content of the brain and has no cause. Further, Krishnamurti explains that an insight arising in this way can never be ‘partial’; it is always whole, unlike the insights of an artist or a scientist, which may be partial in nature. This insight is a ‘flash’, which then dispels all the other material processes and there is no going back from it. This understanding of ‘insight’ is agreed upon by both Bohm and Krishnamurti.

One of the most popular formulations known among seekers and followers is Krishnamurti’s statement that the ‘Observer is the Observed’. I had first heard of this idea, while carrying out research at the Krishnamurti Foundation of India, from the librarian. He had asked me, ‘Why are you doing this research? Is it for your own self-transformation or to accumulate knowledge? What is the object of your study: is it you, yourself or an external object?’ Finally he stated, ‘Did you know that the Observer is the Observed?’ Many followers struggled to understand this idea

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<sup>292</sup> J. Krishnamurti & David Bohm, *The Ending of Time* (Hampshire: Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, 1985), 115

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

and considered it to be the hardest concept to grasp. Bohm had been drawn to Krishnamurti because of this idea as well, writing

What particularly aroused my interest was his deep insight into the question of the observer and the observed. This question had long been close to the centre of my own work, as a theoretical physicist, who was primarily interested in the meaning of the quantum theory. In this theory, for the first time in the development of physics, the notion that these two cannot be separated has been put forth as necessary for the understanding of the fundamental laws of matter in general. Because of this [...] I felt that it was urgent for me to talk with Krishnamurti directly and personally as soon as possible. And when I first met him on one of his visits to London, I was struck by the great ease of communication with him, which was made possible by the intense energy with which he listened and by the freedom from self-protective reservations and barriers with which he responded to what I had to say. As a person who works in science I felt completely at home with this sort of response, because it was in essence of the same quality as that which I had met in these contacts with other scientists with whom there had been a very close meeting of minds. And here, I think especially of Einstein who showed a similar intensity and absence of barrier in a number of discussions that took place between him and me. After this, I began to meet Krishnamurti regularly and to discuss with him whenever he came to London.<sup>294</sup>

The collaboration between Bohm and Krishnamurti facilitated a transformation in the former's own work and he was also asked to join the Board of Directors at the Brockwood Park School. Further, Bohm formulated his own concept of 'dialogue', which focused on its practice in groups. As a result of this, many groups continue to practice 'Bohm Dialogue' through the David Bohm Society.<sup>295</sup> In a proposal on the true meaning of dialogue he suggests,

A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two. Even one person can have a sense of dialogue within himself, if the spirit of the dialogue is present. The picture of image that this derivation suggests is of a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding. It's something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It's something creative. And this shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds people and societies together.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> "David Bohm's Introduction to Jiddu Krishnamurti", accessed on March 23, 2020 <http://dbohm.com/david-bohm-introduction-to-krishnamurti.html>

<sup>295</sup> See "David Bohm Society Projects", accessed on March 23, 2020, <https://dbohm.com/projects.html>

<sup>296</sup> [David Bohm, \*On Dialogue\* \(New York: Routledge, 1996\), 7](#)

These collaborations between Krishnamurti, Bohm and Shainberg give us insights into the ways in which the dialogic pedagogy of the foremost developed in transnational contexts. These encounters created an entire field of possibilities not only within Krishnamurti's thought and pedagogy, but also, within the work of others based in his schools as teachers, or experts in the field of science and philosophy. Although beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be fascinating to trace how Krishnamurti's thought impacted the formation of disciplinary trends in physics or psychoanalysis.

In the next section, I explore some aspects of Krishnamurti's most important contributions within the field of education, who is remembered as a philosopher of education by many seekers. His pedagogical approaches culminated in experiments within the field of education, by the setting up of schools.

### **Towards a Dialogic Pedagogy**

Today, Krishnamurti is known widely for his contributions in the field of school education. I argue that by setting up the schools he was interested in creating a community of students and teachers who would continue to experiment with his ideas long after his death. These schools became the sites for experimentation with pedagogy and teacher-student relationships, redefining these fields, which had an impact beyond the Krishnamurti schools. Although Krishnamurti fundamentally rejected any ideas of authority or institutions and considered schooling, in particular, a space for indoctrination and a conditioning of the mind, he wanted to experiment with it in the hope that education could happen differently. The school was imagined as a

“religious place”, where there could be a learning of the outer world and also the inner world in order to produce a ‘religious mind’.<sup>297</sup>

Krishnamurti envisioned the school as a site for learning about oneself by rejecting the norms prevalent in educational discourse, such as the focus on ideals or the future. In the mainstream ideas of education emphasis is placed on shaping “individuals according to our conception of that future; we are not concerned with human beings at all, but with our idea of what they should be”<sup>298</sup>, whereas for Krishnamurti education was about freedom from the ‘known’. Further, such an education should be a ‘flowering of the mind’ through questioning, a discovery of intelligence and an ‘awakening of intelligence’.

The model of the teacher and the seeker /student has been a constant theme in the lifeworlds of the Krishnamurti circles, a model of pedagogy based on the idea of the ‘dialogue’. The teacher and the student are imagined as equals, engaging in a dialogue leading up to the self-transformation of both. Both also have certain responsibilities in order to participate in this dialogue, which comes with an observing of the self in solitude, as much as it comes with being in dialogue with another. Hence, according to Krishnamurti’s pedagogical practice, this means being in dialogue *and* in solitude with one’s own self. This model of pedagogy also asserts that the process of self-transformation or ‘flowering’ always requires another, whether a teacher or a guide. Krishnamurti bestowed teachers with a great responsibility to ensure that students and teachers both achieved absolute freedom. He wrote in a letter:

Can the educator help the student never to be psychologically wounded, not only while he is part of the school but throughout his life? If the educator sees the great damage that comes from this wound, then how will he educate the student? What will he actually do to see that the student is never hurt throughout his life? The student comes to the school already having been hurt. Probably he is unaware of this hurt. The teacher by observing

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<sup>297</sup> P.Krishna, “The School as a Religious Place”, accessed on March 24, 2020, <http://www.journal.kfionline.org/issue-20/the-school-as-a-religious-place>

<sup>298</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Education and the Significance of Life* (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1992), 21

his reactions, his fears and aggressiveness, will discover the damage that has been done. So, he has two problems: to free the student from past damage and prevent future wounds. Is this your concern?[ .....] if you are concerned, as you should be, what will you do with this fact - that he is wounded and you must prevent at all costs any further hurt? How do you approach this problem? What is the state of your mind when you face this problem? It is also your problem, not only the student's. You are hurt and so is the student.<sup>299</sup>

Such a responsibility to ensure that no 'psychological wounds' are created requires a great sense of awareness, compassion, empathy and vision on the part of the teacher. The teacher must imagine, visualize and in other words, truly empathize with the students. This importance being placed on freedom from psychological wounds and hurt, is seen as being central to education.

"Krishnamurti set up schools, not ashrams," said Radhika Herzberger in an interview. What was his vision for the setting up of schools? Why did he not set up ashrams like many of the other spiritual thinkers? I argue that the most plausible reason is that Krishnamurti was strictly against the idea of any legacy or lineage. While ashrams are communal spaces with possibilities of non-hierarchies, they often revolve around a specific leadership. Given Krishnamurti's critique of the guru, he did not want to be associated with ashram like spaces.

Another reason for this development, I would contend, was that he saw children in particular as having the potential for the right upbringing and self-transformation. Engagement with the figure of the 'child' became a way of experimenting with a new mode of conditioning, which would be in complete contrast to the mainstream traditional ideas of schooling and childhood. The schools were imagined as the 'oases of change'<sup>300</sup> and the figure of the child was seen as having the potential for the 'new mind'.

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<sup>299</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Letter to schools, Feb 15, Vol 1., 1979", accessed on March 24, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/letters-to-the-schools-1/1979-02-15-jiddu-krishnamurti-letters-to-the-schools-1-february-15th>

<sup>300</sup> "The Intent of the Oak Grove School", accessed on March 24, 2020, <https://oakgroveschool.org/intent-oak-grove-school/>

These schools are not only to be excellent academically but much more. They are to be concerned with the cultivation of the total human being. These centers of education must help the student and the educator to flower naturally. The flowering is really very important, otherwise the education becomes merely a mechanical process orientated to a career, to some kind of profession. Career and profession, as society now exists, is inevitable, but if we lay all our emphasis on that then the freedom to flower will gradually wither. We have laid far too much emphasis on examinations and getting good degrees. That is not the main purpose for which these schools were founded, which does not mean that academically the student will be inferior. On the contrary, with the flowering of the teacher as well as the student, career and profession will take their right place.<sup>301</sup>

I spent some time in both Rishi Valley in Andhra Pradesh and the Rajghat school in Varanasi. As I walked around the campuses and their vicinity and sat at the various significant spaces associated with the history of the schools, it seemed that they had a sacred aura about them. Nature has been preserved meticulously, whereby no industries have been allowed to be built in the surrounding regions of the Rishi Valley school. The three hundred acres of land, where the school is located was a barren area once. Now, with much effort, reforestation, and water conservation, the entire area has green cover, with about 150 acres of land having been regenerated entirely. Krishnamurti's primary vision was that the children coming to these schools would get a chance to be close to nature. Rishi Valley is located close to the town of Madanapalle, the birthplace of Krishnamurti. It is indeed a beautiful valley, chosen by Krishnamurti as it reminded him of the valley in Ojai in California. I spent many evenings walking around the valley with teachers and other visitors to the school. Many of them had stories and memories associated the different rocks, boulders, birds and trees. Walks around the valley and climbing up the hills continue to be encouraged for the children at the school.

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<sup>301</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Letters to Schools, Volume 1, 1st September 1978", accessed on March 24, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/letters-to-the-schools-1/1978-09-01-jiddu-krishnamurti-letters-to-the-schools-1-september-1st>

In particular, my walks with a retired teacher from the school are most memorable. After teaching at various Krishnamurti schools, including those started by teachers or students who studied or taught at Rishi Valley, he has now dedicated his life to visiting these schools. He often holds workshops and meets with the teachers there. He spoke to me fondly about incidents that occurred during his various walks along the valley. The teacher had made it his daily ritual to go for early morning walks and sit at a particular rock to practice meditation. This space was magical to him. He mentioned that once he was meditating with his eyes closed and when he opened his eyes he saw a snake. Even though he was scared, he decided not to move at all. The snake hissed at him twice and then slowly went away. In another incident, he kept his wristwatch on the side of a rock while meditating, but he forgot to take it later. He came back the next day to look for it but only found a bird flying around the rock. When he came back the day after, he found his watch in the same place. These incidents made him feel that he was protected at this place of meditation. Another one of his favorite rituals was that of *astachal* or viewing of the sunset with the students, in silence. Many of his former students still contacted him remembering the *astachal* at Rishi Valley. He also pointed out there were three hills in the surrounding areas that Krishnamurti felt special vibrations coming from. As we walked, there were many small shrines and temples, which the surrounding villagers came to pay their respects at.

Krishnamurti would visit Rishi Valley a couple of times every year and spend time giving talks and having conversations with the teachers and students. His ability to articulate his ideas to children was remarkable and many remember his interactions with them fondly. In many of the videos of these talks, I noticed a similar setting; children sit on a stage surrounding him, very close to each other. Sometimes, a few of the children sit next to him and ask him questions, while others join the audience. The topics of discussion range from peer pressure, to competition,

fear of teachers, corruption and talents. Conversations move from being playful to more serious. There is a pedagogic process that takes place through dialogue with the children as he defines and clarifies each idea and term. Children engage in a conversation and in this process they discover new ideas. He reminds them that they must listen carefully without judging, agreeing or disagreeing.

In one such talk, Krishnamurti says,

You know, you live in one of the most beautiful valleys I have seen. It has a special atmosphere. Have you noticed, especially in the evenings and early mornings, a quality of silence which permeates, which penetrates the valley? There are around here, I believe, the most ancient hills in the world and man has not spoilt them yet; and wherever you go, in cities or in other places, man is destroying nature, cutting down trees to build more houses, polluting the air with cars and industry [...] And when one comes to a valley like this - where there are very few people, where nature is still not spoilt, where there is still silence, quietness, beauty - one is really astonished. [...] Since you are young, fresh, innocent, can you look at all the beauty of the earth, have the quality of affection? And can you retain that? For if you do not, as you grow up, you will conform, because that is the easiest way to live. As you grow up, a few of you will revolt, but that revolt too will not answer the problem [...] So, what are you going to do? And you, living in this extraordinary valley, are you going to be thrown into this world of strife, confusion, war, hatred? Are you going to conform, fit in, accept all the old values?<sup>302</sup>

In the talks with children, it becomes clear that he sees them as having an immense capacity both to transform themselves and understand his ideas. Krishnamurti's ability to communicate with children and his willingness to delve deeper into any word or question remains one of the fascinating aspects of his work to teachers and students today.

According to Krishnamurti, the 'child' and the 'mind' are similar. Once, a teacher asked him about how to deal with a noisy child since, "children can be so noisy that it often becomes hard to even hear your own self speak."<sup>303</sup> He replied, "there's a great similarity between the child and

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<sup>302</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Krishnamurti on Education* (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation of India, 1974), 7

<sup>303</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Commentaries on Living Series 3: Commentaries on Living Series III Chapter 28 'The Noisy Child and The Silent Mind'", accessed on March 24, 2020, <http://jiddu-krishnamurti.net/en/commentaries-on->

the mind. Suppression of either only tends to increase the urge to make noise, to chatter; there is an inward building up of tension which must and does find release in various ways. It's like a boiler building up a head of steam; it must have an outlet, or it will burst".<sup>304</sup>

Through conversations like this Krishnamurti discussed various aspects and difficulties of school life and living together in a community. These discussions range from the micro details of teaching to wider and more abstract questions, with both being seen as equally important.

The dialogic pedagogy of Krishnamurti emerges through this range of dialogues and discussions. He emphasized the need for the unconditional capacity to be open to the other. This was also a kind of intelligence to be cultivated in the schools in relationship with one another. Both teachers and students would engage with one another free of judgement and without any fear. Through this intelligence, one is able to be fully present, see the beauty of the world and understand the interconnectedness with one another. The meaning of dialogue, in the context of Krishnamurti is also 'deliberation', which is a collaborative effort between friends who can sit and talk over an issue; contemplate over it.

As Krishnamurti explains, a dialogue happens when participants share a relationship "as two friends who have known each other for some time, who have walked along the same road, and who have lived lives that are very complex, sad, miserable and unfortunate."<sup>305</sup> Krishnamurti also recognized that dialogue is verbal. He says, "unfortunately, it has to be verbal but between the words, between the lines, between the content of the words, if one is at all aware, there will be a much deeper, more profound relationship"<sup>306</sup> Such a dialogue requires that one is able to

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[living-series-3/1960-00-00-jiddu-krishnamurti-commentaries-on-living-series-3-28-the-noisy-child-and-the-silent-mind](https://www.krishnamurti.org/living-series-3/1960-00-00-jiddu-krishnamurti-commentaries-on-living-series-3-28-the-noisy-child-and-the-silent-mind)

<sup>304</sup> Ibid

<sup>305</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, *A Timeless Spring: Krishnamurti at Rajghat* (Chennai: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1999), 98

<sup>306</sup> Ibid

listen to the silence of speech, the pauses, the 'feeling tone' and such a listening arises out of the silence of the mind.

At the beginning and at different points during talks and dialogues, Krishnamurti puts forth qualifiers. He asks such questions as: Are you serious about these questions? Do you find this worth pursuing? How serious are you? In other words, the 'readiness' of the listener matters in the experience and ultimately in the participation in dialogue. He states clearly that these discussions are not 'abstract hypotheses', but questions that deal with real life, all over the world. These are fundamental questions affecting everyone; affecting *you*. These are real questions or 'actual facts', such as fears, pleasure, sorrow and death. He says at the beginning of a dialogue,

So, if you are really serious to go into this matter very carefully and with care, with attention, then you can share a great deal. But you have to be serious, really serious. And if you listen to it, listen with care, with attention, with a sense of affection, not agreeing or disagreeing. That anybody can do, but if you really care to find out how to live properly, what is right relationship between human beings, then you will share completely, I think, with all that we discuss or have a dialogue about during the next few days.<sup>307</sup>

Questions are posed for an open-ended enquiry. The questions immediately draw the listener in, making him or her accountable and creating a kind of tension, a discomfort where one is forced to think and be present. Uncertainty, pause, confusion and disagreement are essential in this process of dialogue. Very often Krishnamurti would say, 'I am not quite sure', 'I am questioning' and 'When I am quite sure I will tell you'<sup>308</sup>. By bringing uncertainties to the forefront of a dialogue, those listening, and those participating in the dialogue are pushed into thinking together.

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<sup>307</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti, "Introduction to 'The transformation of man' series: Small Group Discussion, Brockwood Park, England, 21 May 1976", accessed on March 24, 2020, <https://jkrishnamurti.org/content/introduction-transformation-man-series>

<sup>308</sup> Jiddu Krishnamurti and David Bohm, *The Ending of Time* (Hampshire: Krishnamurti Foundation Trust, 1985), 135

Krishnamurti's dialogic pedagogy was shaped by all the various public talks, the one on one dialogues and discussions, the informal conversations held with friends and the group discussions with teachers and students. The schools became prominent sites for seekers to gather and engage in dialogue. In other words, I would argue that the figure of Krishnamurti was born from this assemblage of dialogic practices. In dialogue, the listeners enter into the spaces of sonic imagination, where they are opened up or awakened to facilitate transformation, Krishnamurti becomes the speech or media and new ideas emerge in these encounters.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have investigated the making of Krishnamurti as a *figure* produced with a model of dialogic pedagogy of self-transformation. Throughout the various sections of this chapter, I have demonstrated how this dialogic pedagogy developed. I have also highlighted certain *discourses of self-transformation*, such as the act of walking and the cultivation of new dispositions, such as the unconditioned mind. Finally, have I discussed some of the unique friendships and collaborations that emerged in *transnational contexts*. Through these encounters, new ideas emerged, which influenced both Krishnamurti and others, as well as leading to a range of possibilities. Finally, I have argued that the culmination of the various encounters and dialogues led to the formation of the Krishnamurti schools and an experimentation with dialogic pedagogy.

In the first section I explored the different aspects of Krishnamurti's speech and the relationships it produced between him as a speaker and the listener. This experience is 'sonic' as it was structured by both the sound and voice of Krishnamurti as well as the interpretation of the words by the listeners. The experience of listening produces a kind of sonic imagination, which opens a

new space for further enquiry and the formation of new ideas. The experience of listening is also dependent on the 'readiness' of the listener, who must practice a sort of non-intellectual listening. Further, I have contended that Krishnamurti has become media himself, whereby his voice and speech continues to act as a means to facilitate a process of self-transformation. Next, I have suggested that the practice of walking could be seen as a mode of self-transformation. Through the act of walking different dispositions can be cultivated, such as detachment, the ability to observe, slowing down of the mind and ultimately, and an empty or unconditioned mind. The unconditioned mind was the basis for finding absolute freedom, for such a mind is free from all fear and rejects authority.

In the section on biography, I argued that the biographies act as pedagogical tool. They produce a kind of intimacy generated between the biographer, reader and Krishnamurti, which helps the reader engage with their own selves. The biographies also reproduce the idea of spectacle and the extraordinary character of Krishnamurti's life. Finally, I have provided evidence on how the different phases of Krishnamurti's life give us important insights into his thought formation.

In the remainder of the chapter, I engaged with the different aspects of Krishnamurti's pedagogy, these being: a strong critique of the idea of the guru, engagement with scientists and experimentation with the child subject in the context of schooling. I have paid attention to the method and process of dialogue by discussing certain examples. Through each of these engagements Krishnamurti's dialogic pedagogy took shape and provided a rich field of possibilities for the future of education and science.



Figure 3.2 Dialogue between Krishnamurti and David Shainberg, “The Power of Illusion” (1983).  
Source: Still from Youtube



Figure 3.3 Dialogue between Krishnamurti and Pupul Jayakar, “Uncovering the Source” (1982).  
Source: Still from Youtube



Figure 3.4 Dialogue between Krishnamurti and David Bohm, “The Future of Humanity” (1983)  
Source: Still from Youtube

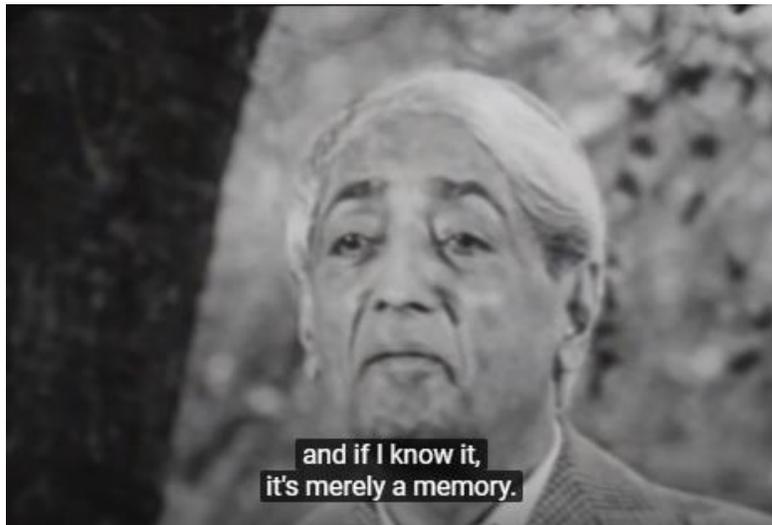


Figure 3.5 Krishnamurti, “The Real Revolution – What is Love?” (1966)  
Source: Still from Youtube



Figure 3.6 Rishi Valley, school discussion (1978)  
Source: Still from Youtube

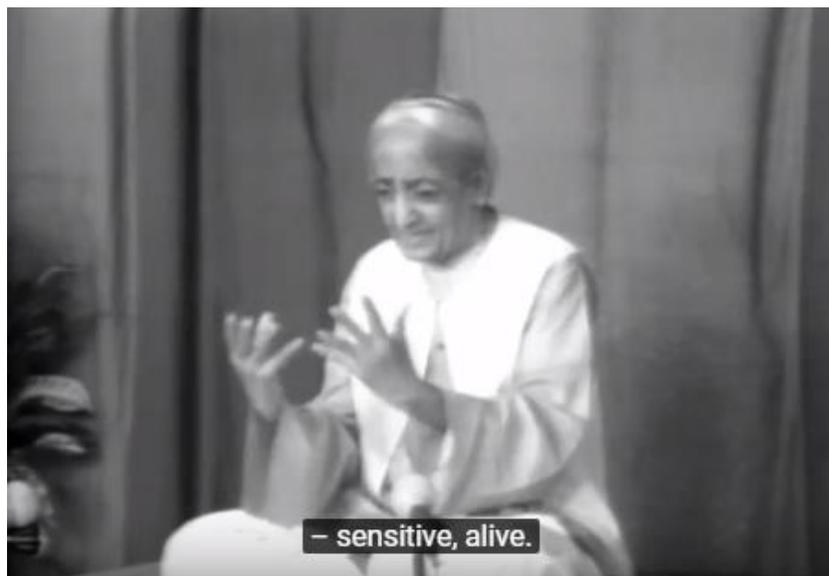


Figure 3.7 Rishi Valley, school discussion (1979)  
Source: Still from Youtube

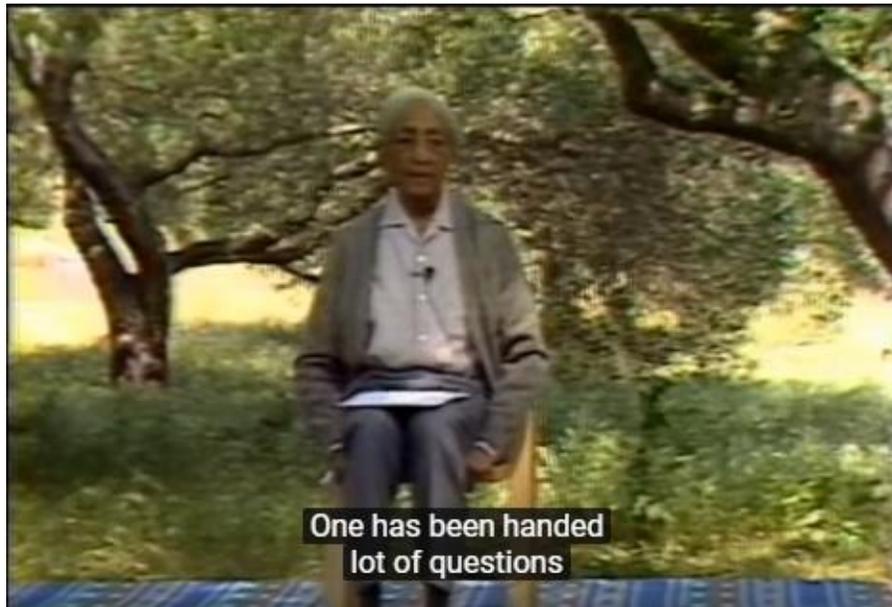


Figure 3.8 Ojai, CA, Q and A meeting #1 (1982)  
Source: Still from Youtube



Figure 3.9 Public talk, Madras. "What is Creation, the Origin, the Beginning?" (1986)  
Source: Still from Youtube



Figure 3.10 Krishnamurti Foundation of India, Chennai (2017). Taken by author.



Figure 3.11 Rishi Valley, Andhra Pradesh (2017). Taken by author.



Figure 3.12 Rajghat School, Benaras (2017). Taken by author.

## Chapter 4

### Technologies of Meditation: The Osho Archives and the Making of Dynamic Meditation

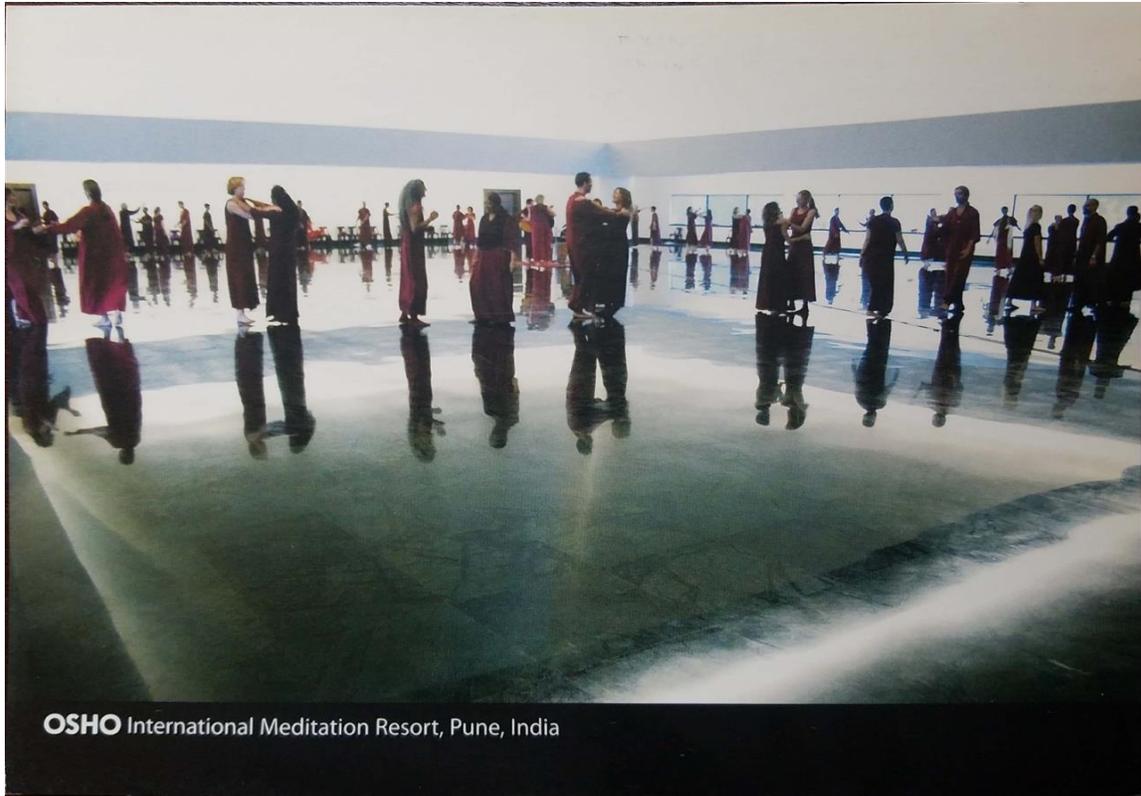


Figure 4.1: Post card, “Here we have gathered to rejoice, to sing, to dance together in such ecstasy that individualities melt into each other and become one organic whole.-Osho”<sup>309</sup>

I walk across the Buddha garden, large purple flowers...so big that I can hide behind them. Maroon robes dancing, whirling, painting and building small houses. Maroon robes hugging, laughing and crying. Shining clean paths surrounding a large open air amphitheater. More maroon robes dancing and swaying. And then a sudden bliss and quiet unlike any other experience. Magnetic energies pulling me in every direction. Thousands of maroon buddhas sitting under large bamboo groves. Minds and bodies melting into one another. Feeling alive and

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<sup>309</sup> Writing at the back of post card from the OSHO International Meditation Resort, Pune

dead. All questions answered. This is the end. “You are the new man.”<sup>310</sup> Osho’s voice fades in and out.<sup>311</sup>

Talking to Osho followers often had a dream like quality; it felt unreal and utopian. I didn’t know how to respond to or absorb all the stories of creativity, passion, obsession and love. There seemed to be endless stories and connections across continents and decades. This was an Osho I had come to know intimately, very recently. There was another Osho that I had heard of while growing up in India. His name was uttered in hushed whispers by some, while being revered as a philosopher or guru by others and most popularly read by passengers on Indian trains, with his books being devoured like pulp fiction. His books instruct people to live fully like Zorba the Greek and be in a meditative state like the Buddha; in other words, to become Zorba the Buddha.<sup>312</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that the *figure* of Osho is produced within multiple archives, which suggest a kind of ‘impossibility’. The archives contain many voices, multiple media and are spread across many locations. The seeming impossibility to access them is created due to the limitless possibilities generated by the archives. Further, I suggest that the figure of Osho emerged from the use of ‘devices’ that were both tools for community formation as well as a

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<sup>310</sup> The new man or *homo novus* was defined as “The new man will be a mystic, a poet, a scientist, all together. He will not look at life through old rotten divisions. He will be a mystic, because he will feel the presence of god. He will be a poet, because he will celebrate the presence of god. And he will be a scientist, because he will search into this presence through scientific methodology. When a man is all these three together, the man is whole.” ( See Osho, “Zorba the Buddha” in *Philosophia Perennis, Series 2* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1978), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/the-moment-men-devil-33a6a81f-011?p=4f13d16b5c748230631acc127d5bb67f>

<sup>311</sup> An excerpt from my field notes

<sup>312</sup> This is the most popular formulation of Osho. Zorba the Buddha signifies the new man who can celebrate like Zorba the Greek and be enlightened like the Buddha. In other words, the new man would be sensual and spiritual at the same time. Zorba the Greek is fictional character drawn from a novel written in 1946 by Nikos Kazantzakis. He is a character full of life and he believes in enjoying life in a carefree manner.

method to generate his appeal. In this chapter, *discourses of self-transformation* are most distinctively situated within ‘practices’ of meditation. I contend that these practices are in fact technologies by which the body and mind can explore a range of transformative potentials. Such technologies of meditation are shaped within the space of *transnational encounters*, most notably through the creation of ‘communes’ or spaces for experimentation as well as through creative collaborations between seekers.

The chapter is divided into five sections. In the first section, I examine selected archival documents to demonstrate the multiplicity of voices, authorities and interpretations found in the Osho Archives. I argue that these archives are performative and experiential in nature. Through these archives, the complex and contradictory figure of Osho and his community of seekers emerges. In the second section, I demonstrate the making of a transnational space of encounter, imagined in the form of a commune or even a kind of ‘institute’ for experimentation with practices. Forms of meditation were developed along with groups therapies in intense periods of experimentation and collaboration between psychoanalysts and seekers. In the next section, I argue that a discourse centered on the body-mind, its capabilities, and skills takes shape through dialogues and discussions, helping to create a technology of meditation in the process. I propose that this attempt set the precedent for many such technologies of meditation to develop. In the fourth section, I explore a unique method of self-crafting and community formation used by Osho. These were ‘devices’ that generated Osho’s popularity, while also acting as pedagogical tools by which seekers developed a relationship with him and their own selves. In other words, the devices were both tools for self-transformation as well as mechanisms by which the figure of Osho came into being. In the last section, I explore the earlier part of his life in order to explain the role of audio tapes in particular. I argue that the relationship between Osho’s recorded voice

and the wide circulation of his writing today is a crucial one. It helps us understand the reasons behind the popularity and validity of his words.

### **The Osho Archives: Multiplicity and Impossibility**

Osho had crafted his persona strategically and was adamant about being non-comprehensible. He dismissed those attempting to write his biography and refused to write an autobiography. Instead he claimed “his biography is to be found in the sum of his work- in his hundreds of volumes of published talks, and the transformed lives of the people he touched.”<sup>313</sup> Addressing scholars who may have wanted to write about him, he had provocatively stated that they are bound to go insane.<sup>314</sup> Osho’s own insistence on his biography as a “sum of his work” is quite telling. It closely resembles my view that, in fact, the figure is to be understood as emerging from an assemblage. The assemblage represents the many relationalities between individual seekers and the biographies. Further, Osho also self-consciously crafted a complex and contradictory persona for himself, saying that “To contradict myself is my way. To never allow you to settle anywhere is my way. To go on goading you on and on, is my way [...] If I go on saying very consistent things you will stop listening to me - because there is no need.”<sup>315</sup> Thus, in order to understand the Osho archives, it is essential to explore the plethora of documents and experiences of seekers as well as study the way Osho crafted his own contradictory persona. In other words, the challenge is presented in not just solving the riddle of a persona he crafted for himself, but also, in interpreting multiple stories across transnational networks that emerged in the process. As I

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<sup>313</sup> Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001), xiii

<sup>314</sup> Pierre Ewald, “Introduction” in *Osho Source Book* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 2014), <https://oshosourcebook.com/introduction/>

<sup>315</sup> Osho, “Just to be able to dance” in *The Beloved, Vol.1* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1976), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/spontaneity-past-future-72f00c22-b7d?p=1f40b0d77a41aaca9da13cd70bd8f619>

came close to one story, I felt further removed from another or found another one to follow. In the process of writing and research, I was reminded of Osho's warning to 'scholars', and yet I attempted to make sense of this entire world of followers, texts, readers, seekers and transnational networks. This creates a unique challenge and structures the archive in a different way.

How does one deal with the impossibility generated by the vast material on Osho? How does one gather, integrate, articulate and write about it? The multiplicity of the archives extends beyond any physical location or person. In fact, each person I interacted with to gather information, was an archive in themselves. They had their own collections of Osho books, audios, journals, letters, memorabilia, documents from the commune and their personal journals from that time. Each story was unique and at the same time constantly multiplying. What made each person want to preserve or write about their *unique personal experience* with Osho? Why was each discourse, darshan<sup>316</sup>, lecture, camp, and the many interactions with Osho preserved?

I asked these questions to Swami Sanjay, who told me he had "spent his life being in a relationship with Osho's words". He added,

You have to understand that what he was saying constituted totally new ideas about life [...] everybody has aspirations [...] whatever we do, by earning money we are trying to actualize this (these aspirations). He showed you that in reality you are searching for something else. He put it on the table that you want to be unbounded and expanded; your religions and ideologies are golden chains. We know that as well, even an old village woman knows that these are chains [...] but Osho took you by hand and told you this.

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<sup>316</sup> Darshans were gatherings held throughout Osho's lifetime, where seekers could ask questions, meet him and take *sannyas* (discipleship). These were important spaces for both meeting Osho and seeing him. I would also define them as an encounter and an opportunity to get counsel. Osho explains in a talk "Darshan means the 'capacity to see'. When you come to see me, it is called darshan." See Osho, "Trust is a Touchstone" in *The Divine Melody* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1977), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/be-yourself-nonsense-habits-3f14dc2e-e50?p=cd6ff0583e6fcfb811c35be7d106346c>

There is a strong belief among seekers and followers that Osho was saying ‘something entirely new’ and had the ability to guide people. This resonated deeply with many; it shook them up. I suggest that this remains the driving force behind the whole endeavor of archiving and preserving his talks. Followers feel a sense of responsibility and passion in making the ideas of Osho available to the world. Another devotee said “Before I die, I want to publish my diaries that I wrote in meticulously and daily, while I lived in the various communes. That is my only desire.”

Further, Osho himself seemed to have an inherent knowledge about the importance of preserving his words. Many followers indicated to me that somehow he ‘already knew’ that this would be important for the future. One such example is in reference to his first books, which were published in the early 1960s.<sup>317</sup> These was a collection of letters which he wrote to three important women in his life. He had asked these women to preserve the letters, as he ‘knew’ they would take the shape of a book in future. This knowledge of the future importance of his words was accompanied by his ability to ‘predict’ the desires, aspirations and well-being of his followers as well. The various instructions, suggestions and guidance he provided to his followers, in groups or individually, are seen as containing important insights for everyone at large. Hence, his talks assumed a universal appeal and needed to be preserved because *anyone* could make use of them. An example of this can be found in the many collected volumes of his talks given to small groups or individuals, where all the names and locations have been erased. While in the earlier phases of their documentation, the names and locations had been recorded, now these volumes only consist of sections of his talks, with no mention of individuals.

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<sup>317</sup> Several compilations of letters written to friends were published in this period, such as in the book *Prem ki jheel mein anugraha ke phool*. See Osho, *Prem ki jheel mein anurag ke phool* (Lucknow: Divyansh Publications, 2012)

Followers also talked about the ways in which importance was placed on the perfection and presentation of the documents and books produced at the communes and ashram<sup>318</sup>. The idea of presentation and perfection spilled over to all aspects of life at the ashram. Aesthetics was central to the philosophy of Osho; life had to be enjoyed in all its forms and beauty. Followers talked about the rituals (such as darshan), the emphasis on cleanliness, the kind of clothing to be worn, and the creative energies, which needed to be released. The best example of how perfection and presentation were central to the preservation of the words is found in the 'darshan diaries'. These diaries are beautifully produced books containing details of the evening gatherings or darshans held in Pune (where the ashram was located). The process of producing these darshan diaries was meticulous, well organized and involved an entire team. One person took detailed notes and another recorded the proceedings on a tape recorder. Someone else was in charge of making sketches and taking photographs. Finally, another person typed up the notes, all through the night, and then edited them. The team consisted of writers, designers and photographers, ranging from those who only had amateur ambitions of performing these tasks to those who were professionals. Consequently, it was also a space in which many explored their creative capacities.

Sixty-three darshan diaries were produced from 1975-1981. One diary consisted of the darshans held daily over a period of one month. Osho wanted the tape recordings of the darshans to be erased, as they were meant for advising the particular individual only. However, the diaries have continued to be published, now, as abovementioned, with no names or details of the members present in the setting. They are considered to be one of the most valuable texts by followers. As

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<sup>318</sup> The first commune or ashram was set up in Pune in 1974.

one of my interlocutors said, she only reads these and nothing else, because they bring back many personal memories.

This mode of archiving was, in fact, a *technique of self-transformation* itself. In its very conception it was aimed at being relevant universally as a means to facilitate change in others in the future. It was also a space that relied on the creative capacities of many people, acting as one through which followers in the commune could express their creative energies. Another important aspect of the darshan diaries is their deeply personal and intimate nature. They are documentations of the struggles, dilemmas, breakdowns, and joys of the followers who lived in the Pune commune. What does it mean to have access to such intimate documents? These stories of self-experimentation are documents for facilitating the processes of self-transformation for the readers. These are rich documents providing insights on an entire community of people - therapists, analysts, artists and intellectuals - who engaged in a community driven process of self-transformation. Accordingly, I suggest that such an archive further acts as a *pedagogical tool*. It is meant to assist in the processes of self-transformation, thus contributing to a certain knowledge of the 'self'. And finally, it was to be part of a larger, even global project, of the creation of the 'new man'.

The documents in this archive consist of accounts relating to personal experiences with meditation. These include experimentation with new modes of slowing down the mind, releasing pent up energies, breaking the monotony by dancing and whirling as well as speaking in gibberish, among many others. Therefore, I suggest that this is a structurally different kind of archive, one that acts as a pedagogical tool to facilitate processes of self-transformation. For me, it has the following characteristics. First, this is a performative archive<sup>319</sup>; it enacts certain ideas

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<sup>319</sup> I have discussed the concept of the performative archive at length in the Introduction chapter. I draw on Eivind Rosaak's formulations on the performative archive. See Eivind Rosaak "The Performative Archive: New

or goals imagined by Osho and his community. Second, I suggest that such an archive cannot merely be read, for it must be *experienced*. This means that the act of reading is always to be translated into action and cannot be a purely intellectual activity. Hence, the realm of practice is central to this archive. The archive is *singular*; each individual emerges through it as a specter. Third, the seekers appearing in these archives haunt the reader, making it possible for him/her to relate to them and ultimately transform himself/herself. Fourth, in this archive, *multiple voices* and perspectives are present at all times. All the perspectives together create the setting and process of transformation. The archives are also multiple in their form, constituted by *different media* - audio, video, text, writing and finally, meditation. Hence, I argue that such an archive produces different experiences of viewing, reading and practicing. Fifth, such an archive is *resistant* to interpretation, coherence and a chronological or linear narrative; it is contradictory and chaotic<sup>320</sup>. As will be seen later in the chapter, chaos is a significant feature of Osho's thought.

In the next few pages, I will explore this structurally different Osho Archive by looking closely at some scenes from the darshan diaries and photo-biographical book: *The Sound of the Running Water*<sup>321</sup>

Scene I:

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Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Theory, Art and New Media Practices" in *Technovisuality: Cultural Re-enchantment and the Experience of Technology* eds. Helen Grace and Wong Kin Yuen (New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 113-131

<sup>320</sup> Rosaak argues that performative archives resist principles of chronology and maintain an ambiguous or playful relationship with it.

<sup>321</sup> This book was published in 1980 and focuses on the years between 1974 and 1978. See *The Sound of Running Water: A Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work 1974-1978*, was published in 1980, by the Rajneesh Foundation. See Osho, *The Sound of Running Water: A Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work 1974-1978* (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1980)

A sannyasin is in the massage group and feels that still, after the groups he has done here, he has much anger and hate inside. As Bhagwan<sup>322</sup> replies, I have the image I often get when he is particularly garrulous and about to embark on some brilliant exposition. It's as though answering a question is like tucking into some magnificently tantalizing meal: you can almost see him rubbing his hands together in anticipation and his eyes lightening up with relish!

Sannyasin: Yes, and hate [...] I hate everything—the people and everything.

Bhagwan: Very good- something is happening! There are people to whom even hate doesn't happen. You are alive! If hate is happening, soon love will be coming. Just let me see your energy- raise your hands. Who will help?

Bhagwan spies the goddess of love and calls her up.

Bhagwan: Diya, come here. Close your eyes, mm? now try your love on him [...] These are the three states [...] People can be very cold, then nothing comes: no hate, no love- they are just frozen. That's how you are- frozen deep down, very frozen. There is some reason why you are frozen: you must have controlled yourself too much [...] you have never allowed yourself any foolish thing. And the only way to not allow oneself is to become just like an ice block, then you are in control. And the society also likes such people, who are ice blocks, because they are predictable, not dangerous [...] They never go to the extremes: they are never hot so extremes are not possible [...] First you will pass through anger, violence, aggression, and the same energy turns into compassion.

Bhagwan suggests that he do individual primal therapy and turns to Pragya [...]

Bhagwan: And Pragya, go deeply. He has a great potentiality because he is a land which has not been used for any crop [...] (to sannyasin) Do primal, mm? Nothing to be worried about- I am here! You are going to melt!<sup>323</sup>

This scene demonstrates an example of an interaction that would take place between Osho (Bhagwan) and a seeker or an individual engaged in practices of self-transformation. The encounter is recorded by another seeker, who was given the responsibility of taking extensive notes during the session and also, making her own brief observations. What stands out in this account is the way in which Osho involves others from the community. He assigns each person a role. In this model of self-transformation, even though Osho is in charge and provides a solution

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<sup>322</sup> Followers started referring to Osho as bhagwan, when he began initiating them into 'neo-sannyas' or a revolutionary idea of sannyas (as opposed to the life of renunciation and denial in Hinduism) in 1970. In the common and colloquial usage of the term, bhagwan means god. According to Osho, this term means the 'blessed one' or someone who has 'arrived or come home'; it has nothing to do with God. ( See Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually incorrect mystic*, 142) This is also the literal meaning of the term, derived from Sanskrit to mean possessor of splendor or the blessed one.

<sup>323</sup> Osho, *Far Beyond the Stars: A Darshan Diary, July 1977* (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1980)

to the problem, others are also involved in the process. Individual therapists are entrusted with working with others and observe the processes. A discourse on energies - hot/cold, anger/love - emerges in this particular 'darshan'. While hot states or states of being angry are encouraged by Osho, cold or frozen states are comparable to being dead. Love and compassion are the states that are desired by all. In order to gain love, it is important to go through hate and anger. The *same energy* of anger and hate *turns into* love and compassion. This dissolves the binaries between love and hate and relies on expending the energies of hate in order to achieve the states of love. I suggest that through the spaces of the darshan, his ideas on meditation took shape. The space also emerges as a place to encounter each other and get counsel, and where the individual becomes visible. Today, as the readers and seekers read such an account, they relate to these encounters individually. Moreover, the collection of various darshan encounters in a single diary, also provides for many opportunities to relate to concerns and experiments of various individuals.

## Scene II

The Tao group came to darshan this evening. The group leader said: I don't think it's therapy anymore – not as I understand therapy – but it seems fine. I don't know what it is. It's more like a house with friends coming and going, and I feel very much like just one of the people.

Bhagwan: The less you know, the better – because then more freedom is possible. Once you know what is going on, the mind starts creating structures, boundaries, disciplines. Once you know exactly what you are doing, everything is predetermined and the freedom is lost, the spontaneity is not there [.....] It is good that you don't feel it is therapy; it isn't. In fact the very word therapy is condemnatory. The moment you say therapy, you have taken the other as a patient, ill – that is the condemnation. Nobody is really ill. In fact the society is ill, individuals are victims [...] So these groups are not therapies because those who participate are not patients [...] Secondly: the leader is not a leader. At the most he is a facilitator; at the most a midwife. The child is going to be born even without a midwife. At the most the midwife can make the process a little easier and more comfortable.

The group leader continues: This brings up the conflict that I have with you, you see. I don't know if I need you [...]I think I do, but then I hear you say these things, and I think that you're teaching me that I don't need you

Bhagwan: I am teaching you that you don't need me – but for this much you need me. And this is the whole effort – to make you free [...]

Another participant says: I was feeling very good after the camp, and I thought I was getting along fine, but now it seems I've got all sorts of energy blocks and suppressions, and all sorts of terrible things [...] It was not so much that I felt it, but I was given to feel this by the group. I just didn't feel part of the group at all [...] I just couldn't come in contact with anything inside me.<sup>324</sup>

Similar accounts of individuals taking part in different 'therapies' at the commune can be found in the diaries. In the accounts, one finds discussions of the group processes, doubts that came up in the minds of individuals and challenges faced by them as well as the role of the group leaders. Such a document of the group processes provides a rich account of multiple individuals' experiences. I suggest that these discussions on the role of groups were also a way to reflect about the commune and the experiments. They document the challenges, fears, doubts and failures, which act as points of reflection and catalysts for change. They are productive axes for reflection, producing possibilities of self-transformation. As one reads these accounts, the transformative potential of being with others and in groups is brought to mind. That is, these accounts shed light on how experience of everyday life while interacting with others impact people's dispositions. Challenges and doubts play an important role within the development of practices of self-transformation. They pertain to reflections on the experiments that were conducted in these communes to establish different meditation practices. Readers and seekers can also relate to these processes of experimentation.

*The Sound of the Running Water* is famously known among the followers as the "magnum opus of all Osho books". A semi-biographical photo book, it is now out of print and considered a collector's item, one able to serve as important piece of documentation on the experiments at the

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<sup>324</sup> Osho, *Above All Don't Wobble: A Darshan Diary, January- February 1976* (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1976)

Osho commune in Pune.<sup>325</sup> The introduction to it describes it as a “musical score” or a “flowing river”. It states that, “These years [...] are symbolized by the slow gathering of the clouds, the monsoon rains and the countless streams pouring down from the mountains towards the powerful current of a great river meeting the ocean.” The book goes on to describe both the life of Osho (his early years and his work) and the life of the ashram. There is a conscious attempt at the melding of the two - Osho and the ashram - as a flowing river, thus creating a mythological affect.

This is emphasized by the distinctions made between history and truth or history and fact in the book. Fact is defined as “truth looked at with unawareness”.<sup>326</sup> Using the example of the Buddha, the editors of the book state that “if you look at him unconsciously, he is just a fact, a historical fact [...] but if you look [...] with great awareness [...] then the fact is no more there, there is truth.”<sup>327</sup> This distinction between fact and truth, is based primarily on awareness or being conscious. Osho had also clarified this distinction in several discourses. He said, “Ordinary history takes care of the facts - what actually happens in the world of matter, the incidents. It does not take care about the truth, because truth does not happen in the world of matter, it happens in consciousness.”<sup>328</sup> This emphasis on the act of *truly* seeing by having a certain special experience, is the crux of the way the book is to be read and experienced as well. Hence, the true writing of history must focus on the “inner happenings”<sup>329</sup> or the happenings in the consciousness and such a history I claim, can be seen as a history of self-transformation itself.

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<sup>325</sup> The Sound of Running Water: A Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work 1974-1978, was published in 1980, by the Rajneesh Foundation. See Osho, *The Sound of Running Water: A Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work 1974-1978* (Poona: Rajneesh Foundation, 1980)

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., Introduction

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, Preface

<sup>329</sup> Ibid

Further, the editors of the book *The Sound of Running Water* state “ [...] this book is a story, a legend, a myth [...] Each episode must be experienced as a complex interweaving of truth and fact and, hopefully, it can be a bridge between the unknown reality of the Master and the reality in which we live.”<sup>330</sup> This emphasis on the distinctiveness of the myth is also explained by Pierre Evald a follower and writer on Osho. He argues,

Where history and historians take care of the facts – the incidents that actually happen in the world of matter – they do not take care of the *purana*, the mythology and truth – that which happens in human consciousness – and thus cannot be understood in a Western concept of time and space. These inner expansions of consciousness are not at all concerned whether the body is present or not, so accordingly for Osho, truth is equivalent to the understanding of man’s inner developments. And we’ll have to bear in mind also that the non-linear Hindu concept of history has a metaphysical significance as profane time must be abolished and replaced by the realm of the timeless. In this way Indian thought also differs from our conventional segmented linear thought as it proceeds in a spiral form with return and repetition.<sup>331</sup>

I argue that by drawing on the distinction between *Itihas* and *Purana*<sup>332</sup> the book attempted to create the narrative of Osho, the ashram and the community as a myth, a mysterious interweaving of stories transcending ideas of time and space. This is a narrative that resists and distinguishes itself from the ‘modern’ ways of history writing. In the book, we find diagrammatic representations of the various movements and patterns that emerge in this history. The authors end with a note to the reader on how to read these diagrammatic representations. They claim that

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<sup>330</sup> Osho, *The Sound of Running Water: A Photo-Biography of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and His Work 1974-1978*, Introduction

<sup>331</sup> Pierre Evald, *Osho Source Book*, Introduction

<sup>332</sup> Scholars, such as Velcheru Narayan Rao, Shulman and Subramanyam, have argued that India had multiple traditions of historical writing that did not fit into the colonial and modern historical writing. The two most prominent among these were itihasa and purana. While itihasa means ‘thus it was’ and could encompass a range of stories, often told for entertainment or to convey a moral message, the puranas are a more amorphous category. They could consist stories of cosmic cycles, of creation of the universe, genealogies of sages and Kings etc. (See Kumkum Chatterjee “The Persianization of *Itihasa*: Performance Narratives and Mughal Political Cultures in Eighteenth Century Bengal”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 67, No. 2 (2008): 513-543

these are only to serve as a visual aid and provide analogies for the period, so should not be taken too seriously.

Further refuting the idea of linear narratives and referring to the illogical, non-serious and mysterious ways of Osho, Evald writes that

it has been argued that when exploring the work of Osho, any sense of historical sequence and linear form is only partly possible. Partly we say, because his enlightenment in 1953 heralds a break in consciousness, from where a new beginning defies the chronological narrating of events which had been possible before that moment. So those familiar with Osho's methods and techniques will know by heart the limitations of hard factual evidence, and also they will know the dimensions he was continuously adding to his message by opening up for another world of mythology beyond our habitual concept of time and space. Many events are indeed of an esoteric nature and this author will by no means pretend he understands all the happenings he has witnessed.<sup>333</sup>

At several points, Osho claimed that writing his history (or the commune's) would not be possible, because it would be merely a collection of facts. Mocking scholars, philosophers or "logicians", he said that they would only attempt to "systemize" everything and not be close to the "source" anymore.<sup>334</sup> This would produce dead knowledge as opposed to that which was alive, close to the source.<sup>335</sup> In imagining what would be the true history, Osho said that, "ordinary history" only looks at what happens in the realm of "matter" rather than what happens in the realm of consciousness. "Future history", according to Osho, "will concern itself with what happened inside Gautam Buddha when he became enlightened [...] it was a phenomenon of consciousness and 'not of the body' [...] this [will be] a story of inner happenings."<sup>336</sup>

Therefore, the challenge for the Osho archives is to preserve the story of inner happenings. I suggest that this occurs by an ongoing reproduction and recycling of narratives and stories

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<sup>333</sup> Pierre Evald, *Osho Source Book*, 10

<sup>334</sup> The Source refers to Osho himself

<sup>335</sup> Pierre Evald, *Osho Source Book*, Introduction

<sup>336</sup> Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, xviii

through multiple media forms. In moving between these various media, the followers attempt to come closer to the story of inner happenings.

Swami Rajiv, an editor of an Osho magazine, explained this process of recording and preserving to me. He said that there had been a constant shift in recording based on the new technologies available. Swami Rajiv said,

[the books] are constantly being worked on for the last 40-50 years and constantly being redesigned. The books are not dead, and this is more like an oral tradition. As new technologies keep coming, revisions have to be made to the books. Now the books are most *accurate* (emphasis added). When the team was small in the earlier days, there were a lot of errors, sometimes whole paragraphs were missing. A few people were working out of their good will, aside from having regular jobs. The earlier discourses were in loops, and they were difficult to work with. Now, there is a process of remastering, background noise is cut out, books are rechecked and tapes are rechecked. Also, until about 25 years back, it was all hand typed and couldn't be stored digitally. Now, it is all digital and there is only change in the format of the storing. In the earlier days, Osho himself would check the manuscripts and make corrections, but it hard to say whether he added anything or how much of a role the editor played.

His comments demonstrate the process of moving between different forms of media. When Osho was alive, the focus was on audio recordings, their transcriptions and distribution. The latest technologies were used to do so. Followers also simultaneously produced books and edited volumes. In recent times, a whole universe of digital and online books, meditations and videos has been opened up. Keeping Rai's media assemblage approach in mind, it is essential to recognize the multiple affects and potentialities that the different media allow for. In Rai's words media assemblages are "continuous and contagious multiplicities".<sup>337</sup> Rai explains that the notion of contagion indicates a form of excess and uncontrollability. It operates with a certain force or pull, which draws in the seekers. This produces different forms of media and generates multiple affects. In other words, the practices of meditation or reading of texts not only change with the

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<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 8

creation of different digital archives, for they also produce a certain kind of seeker or practitioner, who in turn renews the life of the figure,

There are two other crucial points raised by Swami Rajiv. First, he indicated that the introduction of newer technologies has allowed for more accuracy. This is significant, as it means that technologies can bring followers closer to the ‘source’, rather than move away from it. In other words, the different media technologies allow the followers to feel closer to the figure of Osho. Second, he refers to the production of books as a kind of oral tradition, which is not alien to the aesthetic, literary and spiritual lineages in India. Any of these lineages are impossible to conceive of without the central role of orality.<sup>338</sup> By referring to the writing and compiling of books on Osho as part of an oral tradition, Swami Rajiv places him and his followers as constituting an oral tradition as well. Such an archive is a living archive with documents which are always evolving or in Swami Rajiv’s own words, Osho’s books are “not dead”.

I further argue that this oral tradition is produced within a thriving milieu of followers and readers. The roles of the entire community consisting of the editors, those who transcribed, heard the recordings and the writers are all significant. These are the *interpreters* who created the figure of Osho. I use this term in the sense that Walter Ong uses it, as one “in between his or her interlocutor and the non interpreted phenomena [...] (such as) a verbal utterance. Ultimately, meaning is not assigned but negotiated”.<sup>339</sup> Ong explains that the term interpreter reinforces an inbetween-ness by a certain doubling of the idea. First, he argues that the oral word is a unique event, essentially a “call” or a “cry” to another person or an imagined set of persons. He explains that, “Because it is a call, a cry, addressed to another person or, the equivalent, an imagined

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<sup>338</sup> See A.K.Ramanujan, “Who Needs Folklore? The Relevance of Oral Traditions in South Asian Studies” in *South Asia Occasional Paper Series, No.1* University of Hawaii (1990)

<sup>339</sup> Walter Ong, “Before Textuality: Orality and Interpretation”, *Oral Tradition*, 3/3 (1988):267

person or persons, the oral word is essentially explanation or interpretation or hermeneutics, a clarification by one person of something that to his or her interlocutor or interlocutors is otherwise not evident.”<sup>340</sup> Secondly, the act of interpretation is also a negotiation between two parties. In the context of Osho, the interpreters engage in a process of negotiation - of guessing, speculating, experiencing the words, thinking and mulling over - to create his words. As the interpreters move between one form of media to another, such as between the audio tapes to transcription and then finally, in the shape of a book, they make estimates and have to choose between words in order to form their interpretations. While the emphasis remains on producing the most authentic word of Osho and each new form of technology seeks to better the previous one, the first oral word of Osho in itself was always also an interpretation. It was aimed at providing an explanation to the listeners, who would then reconstitute it.

In this section, I have argued that the figure of Osho is produced within a particular set of archives, which are performative and multiple in nature. These archives cannot fully be accessed because of their proliferating nature. Through documents, such as the darshan diaries, I have demonstrated that these archives are to be experienced, presenting multiple voices and highlighting singular experiences. In essence, the archives are produced as pedagogical tools that facilitate self-transformation. By looking closely at the book *Sound of the running water* I have shown how such documents in the archives resist chronology and the notion of history writing. Instead, they create their own genre of history writing, one based in the tradition of the puranas or mythical conceptions of history. Such approaches to archiving place emphasis on preserving the inner stories of self-transformation and community experimentations. Finally, I have argued that, the archives are structured by the multiple media, these play an important role in bringing

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

the followers closer to Osho. The new technological modes create avenues for accessing Osho in different ways. It is also important to study the ways in which the multiple media structure the archive itself. They affect the experiences of the seekers when they interact with the archive and create multiple potentialities for further transmission and circulation. I have also demonstrated how the documents in the archives are produced within an oral tradition, where there is an ongoing production of books by the various interpreters. This is an active process, thereby creating a living archive. The interpreters play a significant role in producing Osho's words by negotiating, speculating and estimating.

### **Esalen of the East<sup>341</sup>: Psychoanalysts/Seekers**

You will be surprised. I have got all sorts of people here. From different professions people have come, but the most sannyasins have come from the profession of psychology, psychoanalysis. I have got hundreds of psychotherapists as my sannyasins. This is very significant. Not so many doctors have come, not so many engineers have come, not so many bankers have come, not so many politicians have come. The greatest number from any single profession is that of psychotherapists<sup>342</sup>

Osho had thousands of followers in his lifetime who came from all over the world. They came from all walks of life, but as the quote demonstrates many of his followers were professionals from the field of psychology. This raises some fascinating questions about the interconnections between the world of psychology and Osho. I focus on transnational encounters between the anti-psychiatry movement<sup>343</sup>, popular psychoanalytic therapies of the 1960s and 70s as well as

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<sup>341</sup> The Osho commune in Pune in the 1970s was widely considered the eastern counterpart of the Esalen Institute of California. The institute was established in 1962 and was at the center of the Human Potential Movement, which had its roots in humanistic psychology.

<sup>342</sup> Osho, "A Rich Man is Very Poor" in *Learning Happiness* (Zurich: Osho International Foundation, 1976), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/religion-significance-organizations-96da731c-6c1?p=0ff5942862ca34b04af873dc64018520>

<sup>343</sup> This movement challenged mainstream psychiatry. R. D. Laing was one of the proponents of this movement, who supposedly had mystical orientations and was influenced by existential philosophy. For more on him see Zbigniew Kotowicz, *R.D. Laing and the Paths of Anti-Psychiatry* (New York: Routledge, 1997)

the experimentation within the Osho commune in ‘Poona one’. This refers to the first Osho commune set up in Pune (called Poona at that time) in the year 1975. Osho moved there with some of his Indian followers and wanted to set up a space that could welcome many visitors and would evolve into the Osho Multiversity in later years. It would be a university teaching various therapies and techniques of self-transformation.<sup>344</sup> A follower and writer on Osho describes

Poona one as a

chaotic, primitive, deeply intimate community, constantly in flux; Osho’s work was lively, spiritual and often esoteric and experimental. Residents floated in loose orange robes from canteen to bedroom, from morning discourse to assigned work, eating from a Spartan menu (breakfast was a slice of bread and a banana), sometimes sick from maladies epidemic to India, saturated with this mystic energy that kept us both buoyant and ecstatic and occasionally desperate at the same time.<sup>345</sup>

This phase in the life of the Osho community has been heavily criticized due to cases of violence and hostility that emerged from the experimentations<sup>346</sup>. While acknowledging this, my intention in exploring this phase is to trace the history of the therapies and experiments in the context of transnational encounters. By doing so, I also seek to gain understanding of the history of this experimentation and its limitations. I also explore the experiments’ interconnections with the field of psychology, and the rise of the counterculture seekers during this period.<sup>347</sup> These stories

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<sup>344</sup> The Osho Multiuniversity was started in the late 1980s. It had ten faculties and was supposed to be the largest school of transformation in the world. The earlier name for the Osho Multiuniversity was Rajneesh International Meditation University, which was set up in 1979. For more on this see, Vasant Joshi, *The Luminous Rebel: Life Story of a Maverick Mystic* (New Delhi: Wisdom Tree Publishers, 2010)

<sup>345</sup> Savita Brandt, *Encounters With An Inexplicable Man: Stories of Osho as Told by His People* (Pune: Dancing Buddhas Publications), 17

<sup>346</sup> There are many accounts focusing on the violence that occurred in the therapy groups. See Hugh Mile, *Bhagwan: The God that Failed* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1986)

<sup>347</sup> Mark Leichy has provided a rich account on the crisis felt by an entire generation of the counterculture seekers. In the 60s, in the context of the Vietnam War and the US civil rights movement, a growing number of youth moved away from the “soul crushing consumerism” and “conformist religion” to a search within “eastern religions”. The youth counterculture split between those seeking personal transformation and those working for political transformation. There were “drop out” hippies and the “kickass” hippies. It was the particularly demoralizing and violent years of the late 1960s that led to masses of western youth looking towards the East. See Mark Leichy, *Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017),167-171

of encounter present us with important insights into the histories of self-transformation. Moreover, they provide an understanding of how the meditation practices and various therapies emerged. I argue that these practices came about as *a result* of these transnational encounters and the unique milieu. That is, ideas and practices emerged from collaborations between individuals coming from different parts of the world with expertise in many disciplines. Many seekers were looking for answers to limitations or frustrations that emerged in their lives and work. In this section, I examine a few therapies that were conducted at Poona one and the milieu within which they took shape. I argue that these therapeutic inventions were a result of collaborations and experiments that were also a consequence of logics of auto-orientalism<sup>348</sup> and an ethic of relating to the Other (Osho and India). These logics were strategically used by Osho himself in order to reach more followers and to formulate meditation practices on the idea of inherent differences between the East and west. In other words, he used the distinction between the East and west in matters of spirituality, as an important principle in making claims about who should participate in what kind of therapeutic practice. As a follower states,

[Osho] realized that the inner stillness he had spent years trying to induce in his Indian devotees by getting them into sit silently and breathe into their bellies was only going to be attained by these Westerners...if they first indulged in whole-body movement. There was just too much going on in their heads- too much knowledge, ambition, and stress, he said, for them to be able to find a peaceful inner state in the ancient ways. Heavy physical agitation was needed to shake up the emotional blocks and wounds, to expel the madness of compulsive thinking.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> William Mazzarella coins this term to understand the practices of advertising in the context of globalization in India in the 1990s. He argues that, auto-orientalism is the strategic assertion of cultural identity in order to gain and fulfill certain aspirational states. I have discussed this idea in the Introduction chapter. For more see William Mazzarella, *Shoveling Smoke: Advertising and Globalization in Contemporary India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003)

<sup>349</sup> Brandt, *Encounters With An Inexplicable Man: Stories of Osho as Told by His People*, 4

The seekers willingly participated in the performance of these tropes and actively engaged in experiments, which were aimed at the melding of eastern and western psychologies. Osho was clear that the ultimate goal was to create a new man who would be free from the conditioning of both the East and the West. While the East may have had some advantages in terms of spiritual growth and conditioning, ultimately, neither the East nor West were good enough.

### *The Third Psychology*

Osho experimented with different modes of self-transformation all his life. At a young age, he started conducting experiments with sleep habits, meditations, isolation and engaging with others through provocation or debate. His attack against forms of morality, religion and state politics was rooted in a rebellious disposition, which he was known for having throughout his life.

Whether it was playing pranks on religious priests as a child or his scathing critique of Gandhi in later years, he wanted to break away from societal norms and expectations. Some of his most controversial views were on Hinduism and Gandhian politics.<sup>350</sup> These initial phases of experimentation provided the basis for a much longer engagement in the later periods of life and led to the formation of a community of followers who were attracted by these discourses and actions.

New meditations and therapies emerged within the collaborations between therapists, seekers, and followers. These practices challenged the ways in which some of the most popular ‘western’ therapies were conceptualized at that time. Osho often referred to the work of therapists and psychologists, such R. D. Laing, Gurdjieff, Arthur Janov and Wilhelm Reich, amongst others. He considered them to be contributing in important ways to western psychology. For instance, Osho

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<sup>350</sup> Osho claimed that Gandhi was biased towards Hinduism and did not know anything about meditation. He also disliked Gandhi’s emphasis on austerity and thought that such ideas would keep India poor. Osho’s main critique of Hinduism was its hypocrisy, claiming that Hindus believed in one thing, but did another.

had a lot of respect for Reich and Laing and considered them to be among the most “sensitive men of the west”.<sup>351</sup> He considered Reich’s book *Listen, Little Man* to be a masterpiece and it reminded him of book such as *Sermon On the Mount*, *Tao Te Ching*, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and *The Prophet*”<sup>352</sup> Osho considered Laing to have started a new kind of psychology, which gives primacy to the ideas of the mystics. Arthur Janov was known for his work *The Primal Scream: The Cure for Neurosis* (1970). While Osho thought primal scream therapy as being of use and “significant to human growth”, he considered it to be limited and “amateurish”, like other theories in the West.<sup>353</sup> Hence, even though he considered the work of these thinkers to be important, he believed that: “Western psychology is an effort to understand the roots of your old patterns, but it does not help anybody to get rid of them. You become more understanding, you become more sober, you become more normal; [...] but every problem remains the same - it simply goes dormant.”<sup>354</sup> According to Osho, new practices were needed which would go beyond these limitations of western psychology. In particular, this would be achieved through a melding of western therapies and eastern spirituality. He claimed, “therapy can be a good beginning, but it is not the end.”<sup>355</sup> He argued that there had been two kinds of psychologies prevalent. Western psychology is pathological, the Eastern form is healthy. Osho believed that

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<sup>351</sup> Osho, “Chaotic Meditation” in *Meditation: The Art of Ecstasy* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1970), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/repression-wilhelm-reich-r.d.-laing-da451e15-787?p=539b4f72c8f2600f3f2c30acbc06af2a>

<sup>352</sup> Osho, *The Books I have Loved* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1984), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/books-i-have-loved-2e948b64-acb?p=1a806a3264e6dd26cc523e72fc10edfd>

<sup>353</sup> Osho, “Yes is the heartbeat of Life” in *Sermons in Stones* (Zurich:OSHO International Foundation, 1986), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/release-therapy-janov-d1bc8d96-2e8?p=e4a8458a50a38b960dc9a5ff5c536bc6>

<sup>354</sup> Osho, “Awareness leads you beyond the mind” in *The New Dawn* (Zurich:OSHO International Foundation, 1987), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/sigmund-freud-the-mind-understanding-e4cb069d-381?p=70cf55c4181a114062eb6212ea5f6fe1>

<sup>355</sup>Osho, “Each moment is insecure” in *Beyond Psychology* (Zurich:OSHO International Foundation, 1986), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/spirituality-analysis-therapy-cee0e5d5-a3e?p=772584c9ee672bbfdf2f08cae6518f62>

there is a third type of psychology that needed to be invented, that of the Buddhas, which “will give you the perfect penetration into the whole of human consciousness.”<sup>356</sup>

To fulfill these aims, a commune, commonly known as the Esalen of the East, was set up. The therapies and practices there were not simply a reproduction or imitation of those at the Esalen Institute of the West, for they involved the development of a new movement. When asked about the difference between the Esalen in the West and Osho’s commune, he replied,

what was happening in Poona was existential and experiential work. In Esalen there was nothing like meditation, and meditation has been my central teaching. Nothing else is needed. One simply has to come to a space within oneself where there is no thought, no feeling, but utter silence, and that comes through a very simple method: by watching your thought process. You ask me: Is that true that you have declared your therapists to be the best in the world? And what makes the difference between them and the famous therapists of the Esalen Institute? Yes, my therapists are the best in the world, for the simple reason that other therapists are only therapists, they are not meditators. My therapists are meditators too.<sup>357</sup>

Further, I argue that the commune, especially Poona one, was an experiment in communal imaginings of the therapies. The therapists and seekers together worked towards a transformation of the self, the community and ultimately society as a whole.

During fieldwork, I met Saritaji, a trained psychoanalyst and a former student of R. D. Laing, in Pune. She is now an author of multiple books on Osho and his followers. When she first heard of him, she was already an established psychoanalyst with her own practice in London. She heard of Osho through one of her close women friends. She and her friends were strong feminists and

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<sup>356</sup> “Therapy and the Psychology of Buddhas” Osho World Biography, accessed on March 24, 2020, <http://www.oshoworld.com/biography/innercontent.asp?FileName=biography7/07-21-therapy.txt>

<sup>357</sup> Ibid

writers, taking an active part in the growing women's movement at that time. Saritaji was already involved with the widespread encounter groups<sup>358</sup> in the 1970s. She told me,

I was in London and was experimenting with these groups. My best friend was a novelist and decided to go to India and came back wearing orange and this was a staggering thing to happen in those days! It was a remarkable device<sup>359</sup>! She gave me a book of Osho and I began to read [...] it wasn't instant love [...] I just felt wow this guy speaks something that I know and have never been able to articulate - there were other things which I had no clue about. I came from a Freudian tradition of psychoanalysis and so when he talked about ego, I had no idea what he was talking about. Because it resonated so much with me, I felt I had to find out; it was something new. But I didn't have an immediate reaction, like many other people had [...] In fact R D Laing, my teacher, had become a guru for many as well, but not for me and so I decided to go to Pune.

Saritaji was very clear that she did not instantly fall in love with Osho, but rather, took time to accept him. She came to realize that she, in fact, wanted to live *in a community* of people with a master. She said "I had a major insight in the enlightenment intensive group on what was holding me back and I realized I wanted to live in a community with a master, which could take me on my quest. At that point, I saw this as a psychological quest but in fact it was probably a spiritual quest and I could take it to go as far as I could go." Saritaji's account highlighted that she wanted to be part of a community and even though she gave up her job as a therapist to come to the commune, there was certainly a continuity in the way she imagined her 'quest' in relation to her work as a therapist. However, this quest was not a psychological one, but instead, spiritual.

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<sup>358</sup> The encounter groups were popularized in the 1960s and emerged out of humanistic psychology. The American Psychologist, Carl Rogers, was the founder of this method. Within it, individuals gathered in a group under the guidance of a leader or therapist and worked together in order to come to realizations about their own selves.

<sup>359</sup> I explain this idea further later in the chapter. Osho had borrowed the notion from Gurdjieff. These were mostly methods of shocking, physically shaking a person or putting them through certain tests. Osho says multiple times in his discourses that everything he did was a device; even his talking is a device. He says, "My speaking to you is a device - so that you can just be here - your mind is engaged, listening to me, and something invisible can go on, transpiring between me and your hearts." (Osho, "Wake up and You are it" in *Beyond Psychology*,). Within this understanding of device, Saritaji was suggesting that seeing people wear these orange robes was a shocking and discomfoting sight in London at that time. The term device is also related to the Mahayana term upāya, sometimes translated as "skillfull means" or "method" but which in the hands of realized Buddhas and enlightened Bodhisattvas could become very tricky.

Osho asserted that, for therapy to really work, it had to be a spiritual transformation and this could happen only through meditation. Therapy alone would always be limited. However, the limitations to self-transformation or growth were not only attributed to those entailed in therapy, because some would still have to work harder at them than others.

Maneesha James, now a meditation facilitator and founder of the ‘Osho Sammasati’, writes “Osho is not just a super-therapist. He encourages most Westerners to go through groups, to work on the body, the mind, and the emotions - but this is just a primary step, a kind of weeding, before the seeds of meditation can take root.”<sup>360</sup>

Osho wanted only ‘westerners’ to take part in the therapy groups, claiming that ‘Indians’ did not need to take part in them. According to the followers there could be two possible reasons for this: first, that westerners are “too much in their heads” and need to be emptied of their thoughts and second, that Indians might get “scandalized” or scared by what went on in the groups. As suggested earlier, such a distinction can be seen as a strategic move on Osho’s part, in order to appease all his followers and reproduce the logics of eastern and western distinctions. However, the therapy groups as a model were only the preparing grounds for the ultimate form of self-transformation, that is, meditation. He claimed that, “Therapy is a superficial thing. It can help to clean the ground, but just to have a clean ground is not to have a garden. You will need something more. Therapy is negative; it simply takes away the weeds from the ground, removes the stones from the ground, and prepares the soil for the garden. But there its work ends.”<sup>361</sup>

Therapy and meditation were supposed to complement each other. The therapy groups began in August 1975 and by the end of 1977, there were 50 groups. In the 1970s, the Osho Ashram in

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<sup>360</sup> Maneesha James, *Bhagwan: The Buddha for the Future* (Pune: OSHO Media International, 2018), location 929, Kindle

<sup>361</sup> “Therapy and the Psychology of Buddhas” Osho World Biography

Pune became the largest centre of for therapeutic ‘growth groups’ and part of the Human Potential Movement<sup>362</sup>. Therapists mostly came from the Esalen Institute in California<sup>363</sup> and were asked to experiment and practice their therapies. In darshan, Osho assigned groups, instructed group leaders and met with participants.

The first therapies to be introduced were the Primal Scream Therapy, encounter groups, Enlightenment Intensive, Rolfing, Vipassana, Tao and Tathata, amongst others. Osho claimed that the reason behind the emphasis on these growth groups was because no other ashram in India had them. According to him, the ashrams in India did not have any understanding of the modern mind - which was highly repressed. Hence, they still thought that the meditations given by Patanjali or Buddha would do. For Osho, “before you can do vipassana or zazen you will have to go through groups like encounter and primal therapy and gestalt. They will destroy, they will take the poison out of your system. Then, you will again be a primitive - innocent, childlike. Then vipassana can work, otherwise not.”<sup>364</sup> These growth groups were understood by Osho as not just being different from the methods of the Buddha or Patanjali, for they were also variant to those at Esalen.

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<sup>362</sup> The Human Potential movement has its roots within humanistic psychology beginning with Maslow’s writings. The movement became prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, under the backdrop of rapid technological changes, end of WWII and fears of the Cold War. The central questions of the movement were: How can individuals maintain a sense of agency in an increasingly mechanized and technologized world? How can individuals find meaning in their lives and what are the values on which meaning can be based? See Jessica Grogan, *Encountering America: Humanistic Psychology, Sixties Culture and the Shaping of the Modern Self* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2013).

<sup>363</sup> The Esalen institute in California was founded by Michael Murphy and Richard Price in 1962. They were central to the Human Potential movement and had a deep interest in ‘eastern philosophies’. They had studied under Alan Watts and were immersed in Aurobindo’s philosophy as well. Richard Price also spent time with Osho. See Grogan’s book for more information.

<sup>364</sup> Osho, “Perfection is a dirty word” in *The Revolution* (Zurich:OSHO International Foundation, 1978), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/vipassana-zazen-gestalt-61da4a54-f04?p=82090bdd4f0f89978bb381a164343125>

### *The Group Process*

During darshan, Osho advised the group leaders on how they should lead the groups and also responded to the queries of the seekers. He told the group leaders that their role was to be performed not as a duty, but rather, out of love and in a way that was not serious, but playful and sincere. The role of the group leader was not to lead, but rather, to facilitate the group. Each group was to have a unique and individual quality. Further, he advised therapists to come up with their own original techniques, rather than depending on those developed by others. A technique must be discovered; not borrowed. As he explained,

that's why it happens that when somebody invents, discovers a technique, in the hands of that man the technique has a magic. For example, Gestalt therapy: it was a magical thing in the hands of Fritz Perls. The magic comes from the discovery, because the man and his technique are not two things. He has grown up with the method. The method is almost like blood and bones. It is part of him; the method is not separate.<sup>365</sup>

The 'group' was seen as just a starting point for further exploration and as a space to relate to one another. Often participants experienced 'highs' in the group and after it ended, there were 'lows'. To this, Osho suggested that the point was to relive these highs all the time. The fact that one felt the highs also meant that it was something to be cherished, for not everyone would have experienced these. He also added that,

The growth group is needed because you have a tremendous need to relate, to love, to communicate. In the West, the basic problem is how to communicate, how to relate. Many Westerners are here. When they come to me in darshan their problems are a hundred per cent relationship problems - how to relate. Not even a single Indian has come who has said, 'How to relate?' That is not a problem at all. He (Indian) says, 'How to be silent? How to be into one's own being?'<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid

This ‘problem of relating to others’ seems to have become the primary reason behind the existence of the group therapies and ultimately, the commune. Osho’s claim that Indians are inherently good at living with others, whereas westerners struggle with it, is another example of how he used the distinction between the east and west repeatedly to assert his claims. Moreover, he also makes it clear that Indians suffer from another problem, which is that of being silent and being alone. Therefore, they both need to overcome their barriers and then a new man can be born.

One of the most popular groups for newcomers was the ‘Enlightenment Intensive’<sup>367</sup>. This group was based on the question “Who Am I?”, as given by Ramana Maharshi. Ma Satya Bharti (Jill Franklin) writes,

The Enlightenment Intensive was a highly structured three day group where people were to sit opposite partners and alternately respond to the question ‘Who am I?’ or listen noncommittally to the response of their partner. The exercise went on for seventeen hours a day with brief, periodic breaks during which group participants went on short walks, did some sort of physical labour, danced, ate or listened to excerpts from Bhagwan’s discourses. During these brief intervals, one was to retain the question ‘Who am I?’ [and] go on feeling constantly who was one.<sup>368</sup>

While this was a popular therapy group in the West, in Pune it had a special character. It was supposed to be a sort of ‘diagnostic test’ before going into meditation. Individuals were supposed face their fears or ‘realize their sickness’.<sup>369</sup> The quiet exchanges often turned into cathartic outpourings. According to Osho, this intensive was to bring out the real nature of the individual.

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<sup>367</sup> Charles and Ava Berner are said to be the founders of the ‘Enlightenment Intensive’, in 1968, in California. It is also of particular interest for this project, because of the obvious link to Ramana Maharshi. While Ramana never came up with a ‘model’ or set of practices for meditation, the fact that his dictum of ‘Who am I?’ was picked up and made into an ‘intensive’ shows the ways in which discourses of self- transformation are mobilized for different purposes. In essence, in this dissertation, the aim is to point to exactly these moments of transition, exchange and transformations.

<sup>368</sup> Ma Satya Bharti, *Drunk on the Divine* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 65

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*,

He said that we are like ‘patchwork quilts’ made up of bits picked up from here and there. We take from our parents, friends, and teachers, imitate them and become who we are. But a ‘deep cleansing’ is needed to drop all these imitations and to begin living with one’s true nature. These groups were the ‘preparation’ grounds or the seeds, which would then flower through the next stage: meditation.<sup>370</sup>

Most popular and most controversial among the therapy groups were encounter groups, Leela groups and Tantra groups. These were all based on letting go of desires, egos, fears, jealousies and taboos. The encounter group, as defined by Ma Satya Bharti, is “A group to experience one’s emotions directly - through relating, fighting, loving, expressing - in any situation that arises spontaneously. Participants are encouraged to let go of their inhibitions and move totally into whatever is happening to them in the here and now.”<sup>371</sup> The Leela group was defined as “Participants are put into situations where they are forced to see their ‘trips’, the mind games that they play, until they come to realize that their ‘trips’ - their beliefs and fears - are their own inventions. Then the whole of life is seen as a play of energy, a *leela*”<sup>372</sup>

While a lot more can be said about the growth groups and their context within the human potential movement of this period, I want to concentrate closely on a few aspects. I conclude that these groups were experiments in communal living and relating to one another. They involved introducing new ideas to the field of psychology and creating new practices or techniques of therapy. These groups also became a way of distinguishing the East and the West or Indians and Westerners. However, both were equally unsuited for achieving states of enlightenment. Through these group therapies, Osho also played the central role as guru/ ‘super-therapist,’ questioning

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<sup>370</sup> Brandt, *Encounters With An Inexplicable Man: Stories of Osho as Told by His People*

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, 216

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, 217-18

the ways in which psychology was being practiced by therapists in the West. In the process, therapists were asked to initiate groups and participate in an ongoing dialogue on how the groups were progressing. Both the participants and group leaders met with Osho regularly and discussed every aspect of the group processes. These discussions ranged from the challenges faced, the validity of certain methods, methods of instruction, the development of new techniques to clarifications of ideas and doubts. This process of collaboration and experimentation was central to the sustainability of the commune, with the therapists and seekers actively engaging in it.

### **Technologies of Meditation: Dynamic Meditation**

Just as the science and technology that has transformed our outer lives has been largely a Western phenomenon, so the East has provided the main source of the science that can transform our inner lives.<sup>373</sup>

In this book, you will read of calming the mind, of learning how this invaluable bio-computer can be your greatest friend. And how to find the ‘off’ button.<sup>374</sup>

Almost all accounts of encounter with Osho begin with experiences of dynamic meditation. Swami Rajiv talked to me about how, at the age of 14, he read a book on the techniques proposed by Osho. In a long interview, where we chatted about his first experience of meeting Osho and his life in the commune, he remembered his first experience of reading Osho’s extremely popular *Meditations: The First and Last Freedom*: “I got hold of that book and read it all night. In the morning, I went to the Delhi meditation centre and tried to practice it. I found it very very hard.”

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<sup>373</sup> Osho, *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004),x

<sup>374</sup> Referring to the book *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*. This is one of the most popular books of Osho today.

Swami Rajiv described his first encounter with Osho. He was only 14 years old and had traveled alone a long distance from Delhi to Pune to see him after reading his work. His older brother, who had also visited the ashram several times, had scared him by saying that Osho does not meet those who don't practice the meditation and would immediately know that he hadn't been practicing. According to Swami Rajiv, "exactly this happened". Before going for the meeting with Osho, he practiced the different stages of the meditation for a minute each, instead of 10 minutes each. Osho saw him and asked, "will you keep doing it in the way you did it, or will you do it the way I have shown?" This experience changed him, with Osho asking him to practice the meditation daily for three months and to start over, if he missed a single day. He completed this practice over the course of three years.

In another account of practicing dynamic meditation, a follower describes the experience,

Doing dynamic meditation changed my life [...]The first stage is chaotic breathing to a background of taped music, and the second stage is cathartic, to release suppressed emotions [...] It was a few days into the meditation that I was surprised one day, when in the cathartic stage, I witnessed myself as a tall Amazon female standing on a hill, and a scream erupted out of me so loud, so primordial, that it filled the whole universe [...] But I was detached and separate as though I was watching and hearing the scream coming from someone else.<sup>375</sup>

There several accounts of dynamic meditation being recalled as a life changing experience. It is set up in five stages. The first, is that of 'chaotic breathing' for ten minutes, where the emphasis is on non-rhythmic breathing. Osho warns against using any systematic or yogic breathing. The point is to inhale and exhale with force, so as to 'disturb one's whole being'. He says "[...] every cell of the body is disturbed, every cell of the mind is disturbed. You are trying to disturb the whole set pattern that has been developed in you!" The second stage is that of expression for ten minutes. That is, once the whole body pattern has been disturbed, comes the stage to 'go wild';

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<sup>375</sup> Ma Prem Shunyo, *My Diamond Days with Osho* (Delhi: Full Circle, 1999), 8

both the body and the mind need to express. Any form of expression is allowed: screaming, laughing, crying, jumping etc. This step can take time for many to get used to. He says, “For this second step to happen totally, takes time. But within three weeks you will be able to express what is within you spontaneously. Then, you will feel that something is leaving you and you are being unburdened.” Only once this step has been completed and done well, can one flow into the third stage, where now, only the meaningless sound- hoo- is to be repeated.<sup>376</sup> This sound when repeated hits the sex center. He explains, “There are different sounds, and every sound reaches a different layer within. If you say om, the sound that has been traditionally used, it goes to the heart. If you say om, the sound never goes below the heart; but if you say hoo, the sound reaches below the navel and hits the sex center.”<sup>377</sup> The fourth stage, evolved over a few years and exists in the current format of the meditation. In this stage, one must stop moving entirely. The idea is to freeze, even coughing is not allowed. He says, “Don’t arrange the body in any way. A cough, a movement – anything will dissipate the energy flow and the effort will be lost. Be a witness to everything that is happening to you”. The fifth stage is meant to be a celebration and expression of gratitude. As the music plays, one has to move, dance and celebrate.<sup>378</sup>

Many people I met at meditation retreats had adopted dynamic meditation as an integral part of their lives. Most had practiced it individually in their homes after having read *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*. Within the setting of the retreats, the early morning dynamic meditations became intense and physically demanding, making it difficult to keep up with on a daily basis. The fact that dynamic meditation was extremely ‘active’ meant that it required

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<sup>376</sup> During my research, it came up in several conversations that, in the early versions of dynamic meditation, the third stage was to say ‘*main hoon*’ (translated as- I am). This seems to have been drawn from Ramana Maharshi’s question ‘Who am I?’ For ten minutes the practitioner had to keep asking the question who am I and the breathing would also change accordingly.

<sup>377</sup> Osho, *The Eternal Quest* (Pune: OSHO Media International, 2011), 24-25

<sup>378</sup> Osho, *Meditation: The First and Last Freedom*, 68

complete physical involvement. It could often feel physically exhausting and participants joked about how it was such a great form of morning exercise. Some days they expressed how they felt a great sense of clarity and optimism, while others felt disappointed, because of there being no real change. My own experiences with the meditation evolved over the course of research. In the beginning, I went in with a skeptical mind and could not participate or get involved at all. However, with time I was able to practice it satisfactorily. I started both responding to the instructions of the meditation as well as feeling the benefits of it. My own experience with it helped me to recognize that the alien and bizarre quality of the technique needs to be understood within the context and philosophy behind its emergence. Perhaps it was a shock and discomfort similar to those who had seen dynamic meditation for the first time when it was first introduced. Vasant Joshi, a biographer of Osho, describes this reaction as, “The Indian press expressed its shock at watching the participants scream, shout and take off their clothes. The whole scene appeared incomprehensible”.<sup>379</sup>

Hugh Urban, in his book on Osho, has suggested that the dynamic meditation is a “tremendous physical workout”<sup>380</sup>, which contributed to the discourse around health consciousness in the West. He goes on to claim that, “This is also surely part of its appeal to health-conscious Americans and Europeans, who not only tend to lack the attention span for seated meditation but also want to use their leisure time for physical conditioning rather than navel gazing.”<sup>381</sup>

However, I disagree with this interpretation. I would argue that dynamic meditation was the result of several experiments, which emerged from collaborations within the Osho community. To reduce it to just a question of health and a form of physical exercise would be to overlook the

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<sup>379</sup> Joshi, *The Luminous Rebel: Story of Maverick Mystic*, 103

<sup>380</sup> Hugh Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 62

<sup>381</sup> *Ibid.*

history of experimentation and collaboration from which the meditation was born. Further, it also does not take into account the broader philosophical discourses of Osho that shaped the mediation. In other words, dynamic meditation presented a microcosm of the various ideas of Osho's philosophy at work. Within this, the body was imagined as a vital and crucial vehicle to move and expel energies; it must break the ingrained patterns of life by performing vigorous movements. Music and sound could aid this process of catharsis to finally induce a silence. The repetitive and daily practice of this is understood as being necessary as we accumulate burdens every day. I contend that in this meditation, the body itself is transformed into an object, which can be manipulated by the seekers. As Osho said, the idea was to find the 'off' button of mind/body. Hence, dynamic meditation was a technology that allowed for mediation between the individuals' bodies and environments as well as within their own bodies.

According to Vasant Joshi, dynamic meditation was introduced first in April 1970. He says, "Having conducted 'relax' meditation for many years, Osho found that technique did not really suit modern people. He explains 'I was working for ten years continuously on Lao Tzuan methods, so I was teaching direct relaxation. It was simple for me so I thought it would be simple for everyone. Then, by and by, I became aware that it is impossible...I would say 'relax' to people. They would appear to understand the meaning of the word, but they could not relax. Then, I had to devise new methods for meditation which first created tension and more tension. The technique created such tension that you would go mad. And then I would say 'relax'.'" <sup>382</sup> Osho, thus, developed a complex *technology of meditation*, which changed and evolved over the years, giving rise to new ideas of the body and mind. Dynamic meditation evolved from a process of dialogue with the community of followers, with music and movement being central to

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<sup>382</sup> Vasant Joshi, *The Luminous Rebel: Story of Maverick Mystic*, 103

it. The language of meditation as ‘technique’<sup>383</sup> is present throughout Osho’s discourse itself.

Osho talks about how in the beginning meditations are to act as ‘techniques’; however, they will not be needed as slowly one becomes more aware. He says, “So, in the beginning techniques are meditations; in the end you will laugh, techniques are not meditation.” Therefore, the ultimate goal of this meditation was to induce a silence and initiate a process of self-transformation, finally giving rise to a new man. The meditation was a necessary step, but it was not the final one.

Osho suggested that the needs of modern man were different from those known by the Buddha or Patanjali and hence, a new form of meditation was needed. That is, modern man was based on certain new conceptions of the mind and body. He claimed that Buddhist methods<sup>384</sup> were suited for the mind that “Buddha was encountering [...] Now that mind no longer exists and those methods have become useless. A new mind has come into being.”<sup>385</sup> According to Osho, while the older mind was based on faith, the modern one is based on doubt. These new methods had to be ‘psychological’ rather than religious.<sup>386</sup> In a heavily psychologized understanding of modern man, Osho announced that she/he is schizophrenic and neurotic. Secondly, meditation according to him, was to be ‘just a turning inwards’. This meant that it was not concerned with transforming a person’s character or morality. This notion of meditation did not privilege any

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<sup>383</sup> Osho, “Choicelessness: Cut the Root of the Mind” in *Tantra: The Supreme Understanding* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1975), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/choiceless-awareness-the-moment-choice-444a9b26-cd7?p=795b87b504e1e47b13a9cd10933aebc6>

<sup>384</sup> Osho critiqued Buddhist and Yogic methods as well as more popular meditations of that time, such as Transcendental Meditation. According to him, each of these methods had their limitations in terms of ‘disciplining’ the body, which led to repression. These meditations only created habits and patterns, failing to reach the roots of man to bring out repression.

<sup>385</sup> Osho, *The Eternal Quest*, 22

<sup>386</sup> It is important to note that, while Osho made this distinction, he was also interested in a certain reinvention of religion, especially through the institution of neo-sannyas. This, he explains, is in opposition to the ‘old sannyas’ of Hinduism, which was rigid and defined, where one left the roles of society and entered the life of a renunciation.

kind of character transformation, but rather, it was to be a leap, a risk, an awakening. The emphasis was only on turning inwards.

Further, Osho repeatedly used the term ‘neurotic’ to refer to the modern man, which needed to be cured. He saw neurosis not as an individual condition, but rather as one of the whole of humanity itself. For Osho, there were two reasons for this condition. First, that man is the only animal who needs constant nurture and support after being born. Second, that man is the only animal who is cultured and expected to go through training and conditioning. As a result of these realities, man is never allowed to be just ‘himself’. Such a man leads a life of repression creating a division in the man and finally making him schizophrenic. There is a deep split, and many individuals are created within the same person. Further, feeling and thinking become separated and this is the basis of neurosis. A child is born a feeling being, but then he begins to think and feelings are suppressed. He forgets his real face and creates a false one.<sup>387</sup> Consequently, dynamic meditation is needed to mitigate this neurotic and schizophrenic condition.

In numerous dialogues between Osho and his community, each and every aspect of dynamic meditation was scrutinized. These dialogues were not just a necessary tool in the foundation of the meditation, for they also produced a new discourse around the mind and body, which further sustained the meditation. Here is an example of such a dialogue, from a series of discussions held between the late 60s and early 70s. The questioner asks, “If your method is purely psychotherapeutic, then why is there an emphasis on dress, why does everyone wear orange?”

He responded

Because it *is* psychotherapeutic. Because of that. Your mind influences your dress, your mind influences your body [...] The mind is concerned with very ordinary things: food, dress, everything. It changes as these external things change, so I give you a different

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<sup>387</sup> Osho, “The Spirituality of the Tantric Sex Act” in *The Book of Secrets* (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1998)

dress [...] Try this: a very ordinary thing. Put on a clown's costume and go to the market and feel how different you will feel to yourself.<sup>388</sup>

In this dialogue, Osho defines the mind as being concerned with ordinary things, which gets easily affected by external things. Hence, the dress code must be rigidly maintained while practicing dynamic meditation, even today, with the retreat centers continuing to adhere strictly to this.

In another exchange, the questioner asks

In the meditation experiments you have been conducting, what are the physical and psychic differences brought about by sitting or standing for the experiment?" Osho responds "It makes a great difference [...] deep within every condition of the body is connected with a particular state of mind that corresponds with it. If we tell a man to remain awake when he is lying down it will be difficult [...] actually the tradition of sitting for meditation was specifically meant to suppress all the resulting movements of the body."<sup>389</sup>

Hence, the advantages and disadvantages of certain bodily dispositions are central to the making of the meditation. In fact, the bodily movements correspond with the different mental states generated. In yet another exchange, the question of tiredness while performing the meditation comes up, where Osho responds "You will discover for the first time that the part that did the movement, was sick. The part of your body that is doing a lot of movement is proof that this part is suffering from some sort of tension. Whatever pressures we suppress in our minds, there are associated parts parallel to them in our bodies."<sup>390</sup>

These exchanges emphasize that the body is malleable and stores emotions, which then need to be released. Our actions and the way we move facilitate the release of these emotions. These are

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<sup>388</sup> Osho, *The Eternal Quest*, Chapter 3

<sup>389</sup> Osho, *In Search of the Miraculous Vol.2*, 166, accessed on March 24, 2020,

[https://www.oshorajneesh.com/download/oshobooks/Meditation/In\\_Search\\_of\\_the\\_Miraculous\\_Volume\\_2.pdf](https://www.oshorajneesh.com/download/oshobooks/Meditation/In_Search_of_the_Miraculous_Volume_2.pdf)

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid*

ideas that can also be found within particular traditions of psychoanalytic thought and the theorizing of emotions during this period. I suggest that Osho's discourses are very much in conversation with these trends. Scholars in the field of psychology, namely Nichols and Efran, discuss how emotions were seen as being capable of moving around the body and settling at certain places, or 'swelling up'. The language of emotions was a language of hydraulics and these ideas became increasingly popular in the 1960s and 70s.<sup>391</sup>

The crux of dynamic meditation was chaos and catharsis. For Osho, catharsis was an essential component of dynamic meditation. According to him, the 'older methods' of meditation were only repressive. He says, "The religious traditions - Jewish, Christian Islam and now even Hindu - have all been suppressive. We have layers and layers of suppressions, and unless they are released, thrown out, exhaled, nothing can be done as far as the inner journey is concerned. So my method works with catharsis [...] Particularly in the East they (repressions) have never before existed. The mind was not so repressed; we accepted things as they are. But now, the whole world lives under a Christian shadow. Everything natural has become condemned. The body, sex – all these things are condemned. We are in an inner conflict."<sup>392</sup> Dynamic meditation was intended to be a method of catharsis, by bringing the chaos out of one's system. This is also the explanation given behind the chaotic breathing during the first stage of the meditation; it could not be systematic or any kind of 'yogic' breathing.

I suggest that dynamic meditation as a 'cathartic act' was as a unique therapeutic event. Each session of meditation can be understood as an event, shaking up and bringing out the repressions and traumas faced by an individual. This therapeutic event can be understood as a process of

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<sup>391</sup> M.P.Nichols and J.S.Efran, "Catharsis in psychotherapy: A new perspective", *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 22(1), (1985): 46-58

<sup>392</sup> Osho, *The Eternal quest*, 22

‘cleansing’ emotions stored up in the body and as a singular happening, where a different set of dynamics come into play each time. Through dynamic meditation a transformative space is created that is necessarily ‘drastic’ as it brings out many of the unexpected emotions and energies from the body. This was a unique invention of Osho’s community. Within this therapeutic event the possibilities and potentialities generated are limited. I argue that the practitioners of dynamic meditation are able to experience themselves and their bodies in varied ways, by allowing themselves to enter into different states. These states may have been previously unknown to them and could come up unexpectedly. It is precisely because of these possibilities of the unknown generated during dynamic mediation that it becomes a unique opportunity to engage in self-transformation.

Music was considered as a central component of the meditation, which was distinctly recorded under the instruction of Osho. The music was supposed to be ‘chaotic’ to bring out the chaos in every individual. The chaotic music and chaotic dance would help the energies to flow and facilitate expression.<sup>393</sup> Osho had claimed that music was the only requirement of the meditation, and nothing else. He added that “The method can be taught even through a tape recorder, a cassette. Not even a man is needed, just a cassette can be played and people can meditate accordingly. Of course, the cassette will not be able to answer all your questions, but in fact there is no need to answer any questions. If you continue to meditate, those questions disappear themselves.”<sup>394</sup> Therefore, within this technology of meditation there is a relationship between the bodies of individuals and the music on the one hand and between the bodies with their own selves, on the other. Meditation gets redefined as a form of productive mediation between

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<sup>393</sup> Osho even comments on how ‘rock music’ or jazz helps in bringing out chaos, in particular, a repressed sexuality. Rock music, he says, is particularly popular in the West because of Christianity and its notions on sexuality. (Osho, *The Book of Secrets*, 28)

<sup>394</sup> “Medicine heals the body, meditation heals the soul” in *The Last Testament, Vol. 3*

individuals and their own bodies, minds and environments (consisting of music), which generate a range of affects geared towards a process of self-transformation and catharsis. As one practices the meditation, all questions are answered.

The distinctions between the East and West, used to define aspects of therapy groups, were also the basis for the formulation of dynamic meditation. Osho explained that, “in the East people are forced to be part of community too much and want to run away from it, which is why they have to go to the Himalayas. But in the West, people have [...] always been lonely and produced individualized methods of therapy. Dynamic meditation is a synthesis of both the individual and group methods.”<sup>395</sup> Dynamic meditation was, thus, another step towards the creation of the new man, who would transcend the conditionings of both the East and West. In a response to a question about the *rajas* (energetic) and *tamas* (lethargy, inertia) temperaments of individuals, according to Ayurveda, Osho defined the East as being incapable of having ‘mad’ people because of its *tamas*, whereas the West is full of madness because there is too much *rajas*. Therefore, dynamic meditation is meant for every kind of individual as it will balance out the different energies. So he claimed, “My methods of meditation have been developed out of an absolute necessity. I want the distinction between the West and East to be dissolved.”<sup>396</sup>

In this section, I have argued that a technology of meditation emerged through a discourse around the body, its capabilities and skills. I made the following claims. First, this technology was a product of the unique milieu of collaboration and experimentation where a range of therapeutic ideas and efforts were at work. Within these transnational encounters, dynamic meditation emerged as the most popular or rather a ‘best practice’, which was guaranteed to have certain effects. While many other meditations developed in this milieu, dynamic meditation

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<sup>395</sup> Joshi, *The Luminous Rebel: Story of a Maverick Mystic*, 131

<sup>396</sup> Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect Mystic*, 201

represents an aggregation of many of the ideas, people and movements at work during that time. Second, the technology of dynamic meditation was produced as a force or a set of techniques mediating between the bodies and environments as well as within the bodies themselves. That is, the body became a tool through which new possibilities could be imagined. A range of possibilities, both known and unknown, were expressed through the body, which initiated a process of self-transformation. The technology of dynamic meditation created a therapeutic event by which the body and mind could be maneuvered and manipulated to produce a range of states. Third, it was a unique technology which symbolized and was the summation of Osho's ideas on dissolving the distinction between East and West. It was a technology that could produce a new man. Fourth, the technology of dynamic meditation could proliferate into several other forms of meditations and many could be used to give rise to newer forms. Ultimately, dynamic meditation was an extremely successful technology, which created a large following for Osho. It has been rather effective in creating models for meditation practices, especially in India today. I suspect that some of the other popular meditation models in India have incorporated some elements of 'release' and 'rest' from dynamic meditation.

### **Devices and the Figure of Osho**

In this section, I suggest that by using 'devices', Osho crafted his own appeal and created a community of followers. These devices were tricks, ploys or methods located within a range of objects, persons, and acts to facilitate processes of self-transformation, which were necessarily shocking and challenging in nature. The figure of Osho rested on these devices and the discourses generated by them, which sustained the logics of self-transformation in the communes.

In April 2018, the documentary series *Wild Wild Country* was released on Netflix. The popularity of the show was unparalleled and created a sensation. Just from informal conversations I had with friends and colleagues, I found that people had been truly impacted by the series. Some reached out to Ma Sheela, as portrayed in the series, others had started their own mini research projects on Osho, and there had been many reviews of the show published. Some titles of the reviews expressed shock and disbelief, such as: *On Netflix: a Wild story of Guns, Sex and a Guru* (New York Times), *Wild Wild Country: Is Subject of Netflix doc really a sex-cult* (Rolling Stone), *Wild Wild Country and the delusion of finding yourself*, *Wild Wild Country: Netflix series doesn't include this Horrific murder from the 1990s* etc. While I watched the series feeling baffled, overwhelmed and shocked to some extent myself, I did not know what this sudden release and popularity of the show would mean for my own experiences of having conducted research on Osho. Then, as I finished watching the show, I had a 'realization' and I knew what the followers of Osho I had met over the course of a year would have to say about the show: "It's just another device". I had heard this sentence from almost every person I met during my research. Osho, in fact, has always been mocked or accused of various things, such as: as being the 'sex guru' or the guru who owned 92 Rolls Royces, conducted sex orgies, instituted HIV blood tests in the Pune Ashram, made blatant fun of politicians, was addicted to drugs and Coca Cola as well as exploiting women in the ashram. The list could go on. Even before starting my own research on Osho as an academic, I had in fact grown up with these stories. My mother had been horrified to find a 'maroon robe' in my bag, which I carried for fieldwork, for she knew what it meant.

Saritaji, who spent her entire life with Osho, responded to my questions on the show and finally said,

Look at *Wild Wild Country* - it's a device to make you look at your attachments! We as those who have been close to him (Osho) want to protect his image, but he doesn't want to do that. He is more concerned with what it does for *us*: how can *I* access my deepest energies as a meditator? I realized this after the film, that he trashed himself, sacrificed himself [...] and *his* reputation to give us a kick in the butt to get us out of our stuck ways [...] The thing about *Wild Wild Country* is that - nobody can make up their mind. They see the series; some can't stand the Rajneeshees, but every day they change their mind and this is exactly the dilemma he was excited about: get people engaged, searching and in put them in dilemmas.

These were fascinating observations and did not seem inconsistent with Osho's provocative style of teaching and being in the world.

Saritaji went on to talk about the other kinds of devices used by Osho, which she claimed were used in every part of life and living in the communes. She said, "meditations are a device to move people's energies, assigning different jobs to people and making them work together was also a device and finally, bringing people together to build a commune was another." According to Saritaji, by the late 1960s Osho had a vision for creating a situation where people would have to work very hard and confront their egos. This would be his ultimate device. He would keep moving people around from one job to another, breaking down any attachments they developed. She said, "I was moved around in ten different jobs! And this was the case for others too." Osho and his followers believed that he 'knew' the desires, aspirations, weaknesses of each person in the commune. Hence, he was able to push them in the directions they wanted to go and make them confront their fears. As Saritaji expressed to me, when she first came to Pune she secretly wanted to be a writer and soon, without having to express this desire, she was put in charge of the darshan diaries team.

These remarks made by her are worth interrogating. Why was the term "device" used? What was the objective behind using it? The term has two meanings according to the Oxford Dictionaries: A thing made or adapted for a particular purpose, especially a piece of mechanical or electronic

equipment or a *measuring device*. Second: A plan, method, or trick with a particular aim. I suggest that both these meanings of the term are relevant in the context of Osho. I argue that the technology of meditation, and the commune operated through a series of tricks, methods and plans. Those living in the commune were aware of the devices used by Osho in order to shake them up and make them “meditators”.

The followers believed that Osho was always aware of a larger a vision and planned these devices. The shock tactics, provocative behavior and a rebellious spirit had been well known aspects of Osho, drawing many of his followers towards him. His appeal was constructed by his radical speeches against Gandhi and Hinduism in the 1960s, the attacks on politicians in the 1970s and the scandal of Oregon in the 1980s. These were all devices used strategically by him not only to create his appeal, but also, to support the claim that an awakening was possible only by shaking up the established ideas and norms. Osho claimed that the master has to come up with devices to “make you remember yourself [...] if it does not happen, he creates another device. The real master is nothing but a very creative artist about devices.”<sup>397</sup> Georg Feuerstein, a scholar of religion, contends that Osho was part of the “crazy wisdom tradition”, which emphasized the use of ‘shock techniques’. He puts Osho in a longer lineage of Bauls, Gurdijeff, Alister Crowley and others. He states, “(for Osho) in order to become whole, the spiritual seeker must pass through his or her own personal hell... This is a frightening and potentially dangerous event, because it brings the seeker close to the threshold of insanity. But to live dangerously was Rajneesh’s definition of a samnyasin [...] Rajneesh’s explanations indicate a full-fledged crazy-

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<sup>397</sup> Osho, “Something deeper than the mind” in *The Sword and the Lotus* (Zurich: OSHO International Foundation, 1986), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/depth-device-knack-abfbdaf1-717?p=8b2b939f1f7b9823acbbf2fe614a8fb8>

wisdom approach.”<sup>398</sup> Thus, Osho can be placed within the context of other masters or teachers who also used similar tactics for the purposes of facilitating self-transformation.

Osho was drawing his inspiration from the usage of devices most directly of the mystic George Gurdjieff.<sup>399</sup> While Gurdjieff’s own life and philosophy was extremely controversial and is probably material for a whole other dissertation, Osho’s indebtedness to him was no secret. He announced several times that, “George Gurdjieff is one of the most significant masters of his age. He is unique in many ways—nobody has said things in the contemporary world the way Gurdjieff has said them [...] apparently absurd but in reality giving great indications towards the liberation of human consciousness.”<sup>400</sup> In another discourse, Osho explains the work of Gurdjieff as that of shaking up individuals to the extent that that the ground beneath their feet falls away. He says,

What was Gurdjieff trying to do? He was shocking you to the very roots; he was trying to take away all your consolations and foolish theories, which go on helping you to postpone work upon yourself. Now, to tell people, ‘You don’t have any souls, you are just vegetables, just a cabbage or maybe a cauliflower’— a cauliflower is a cabbage with a college education - ‘but nothing more than that.’ He was really a master par excellence [...] He was giving you such a shock that you had to think over the whole situation: are you going to remain a cabbage? He was creating a situation around you in which you would have to seek and search for the soul, because who wants to die?<sup>401</sup>

According to Osho, this was just a device and used the Gurdjieffian understanding of these. As

Saritaji explains,

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<sup>398</sup> Georg Feuerstein, *Holy Madness: The Shock Tactics and Radical Teachings of Crazy-Wise Adepts, Holy Fools, and Rascal Gurus* (London: Arkana Penguin Books, 1990), 68

<sup>399</sup> According to Feuerstein, Gurdjieff was a “rascal guru”, who remained enigmatic all through his life due to his penchant for “confabulation and contradiction.” See Feuerstein, 54

<sup>400</sup> Osho, *You Are in Prison and You Think You Are Free* (Zurich: Osho Foundation International, 2012), 1

<sup>401</sup> Osho, “Drink to the Full and Dance”, *The Dhammapada: The Way of the Buddha, Vol. 2* (OSHO International Foundation, 1979), <https://www.osho.com/osho-online-library/osho-talks/gurdjieff-soul-immortality-a06e3495-443?p=6731182c9164ef08b4b87d8643d6db98>

Osho used many of Gurdjieff's techniques. Gurdjieff was also practical and had many tricks and never cared for what people thought. He used devices in a similar way [...] He realized that if you get people to move their energies, they will have more energy, and if you take it away from them, the shock can take you to a higher level - it's a joke - you are faced with an empty space. Gurdjieff created something and pulled it down, but what happened individually for us - we got involved in one thing, had a job and then suddenly you would have to go and dig the mud - it was a very powerful experience.

Osho actively engaged in crafting his own appeal by drawing inspiration from Gurdjieff. In another discourse, he claimed that once a woman upon meeting Gurdjieff could not make up her mind whether he was 'good' or 'bad' or whether he was a devil or saint. Gurdjieff would create such an impression deliberately. He explains, "Alan Watts has written about Gurdjieff and has called him a rascal saint – because sometimes he would behave like a rascal, but it was all acting and was done knowingly to avoid all those who would take unnecessary time and energy. It was done to send back those who could only work when they were certain. Only those would be allowed who could work even when they were not certain about the master, but who were certain about themselves."<sup>402</sup> Finally, Osho declared that surrendering to someone like Gurdjieff (and by corollary to himself) would lead to true enlightenment, whereas doing so to someone like Ramana Mahrashi, while it may come easily, would not lead to any change in a person. Gurdjieff and Osho both create obstacles to this surrender, allowing for a transformation to take place.<sup>403</sup>

To them, confronting fears and challenging oneself were essential for any kind of self-transformation to take place. Devices were ultimately pedagogical tools, which allowed the

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<sup>402</sup> Osho, *Vedanta: The Ultimate Truth* (UK: Osho Purnima Center for Meditation, 2010), 134

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

seekers and followers to engage with their own selves and to form an attachment with the figure of Osho.

Finally, I suggest that devices were an essential component of Osho's idea of self-transformation as well as creating his own appeal. That is, they were manifested in all aspects of his life and ranged from provocative (including crass humor, sarcasm, attack) discourses, displays of wealth (particularly in the later part of his life) to the various meditations. To end this section, I am reminded of Saritaji's wise comment on the show *Wild Wild Country*, as she chuckled and said, "See, the series is still making you all talk about Osho even 28 years after his death. Just what he wanted, so that no one can ever say, if they were truly seeking, that they had not heard of Osho and didn't know where to look."

### **The Acharya Rajneesh in Hindi: The Role of Audio Tapes**

In the early part of his career, Osho was called Acharya meaning 'master' or a "person who says only that which he lives, one whose actions and thoughts are in absolute harmony."<sup>404</sup> In this section, I explore the development of some of Osho's ideas and their context in the early part of his career in India. I suggest that his early discourses recorded on audio tapes can give us some new insights into his life and followers in India. While audio tapes are not what reaches the masses today, and most seekers read his discourses compiled in the form of books or watch videos of talks, I spent some time listening to those I found at a small store in Pune. As I listened to them, I could remember the excitement of listening to Osho's voice, as expressed by his

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<sup>404</sup> Osho, *Autobiography of a Spiritually Incorrect mystic*, 142

followers. These audio tapes became the basis for multiple reproductions into books and edited volumes.

However, this raised a few questions in my mind: Why did Osho continue to speak, giving daily discourses (except for a brief period of silence or *mouna*) throughout his life? Why did he never write a single book himself? The answer to these questions can be found in the strong emphasis on the oral tradition promoted by Osho himself. He claimed that, “There is some beauty when something is transferred orally. It is alive, one thing - the master is behind it. It is not a dead word, the word has soul, wings. The experience of the master supports it, the master is a witness to it. It is not just speculation, not only a philosophy, but something existential, experienced, lived [...] with an oral tradition the book always remains alive.”<sup>405</sup> Therefore, according to Osho, the master plays a significant role in providing guidance and the words make sense, *because they are based on lived experience*. This emphasis on lived experience, which gives the talks a quality of being alive, is the fundamental reason regarding why they continue to draw in the seekers. The books which contain these talks also remain alive for this reason and continue to be crafted by the followers.

The investment and interest in recording Osho’s speeches was immense even from the early days of his career. He emerged first as an ‘orator’ or ‘debater’ conducting debates in Hindi, often with religious leaders. These were perhaps the most radical years of his career, when he spoke against many institutions, such as the government and politicians. I argue that while this radical charge of Osho continued throughout his career and appealed to many of his followers, he is remembered today for other reasons. He is not just remembered as a radical speaker, but also, as

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<sup>405</sup> Osho, “The secret of the magic of life” in *The Secret of Secrets: The Secrets of the Golden Flower* (Oxford: Watkins Publishing Limited, 2014)

master, who provided invaluable meditation techniques and perhaps more importantly, as an intellectual interlocutor. Osho is read by many – the masses and the elite - to understand other important thinkers and their philosophies. Some of the most popular of these are his talks on Krishna, Kabir, Mahavira and Tantra. These have become available to the masses, who may want to understand these thinkers in an accessible way. Osho, as an intellectual, was able to synthesize, interpret as well as give a ‘modern’ reading of various scriptures, texts and figures. As a follower writes, “Osho was a truly contemporary master. Much of his works had origins in Eastern traditions, but he took things to an entirely new 20<sup>th</sup> century-level [...] For the new type of open-minded seeker, this was deeply appealing [...] This unusual new use of contemporary language and style inevitably pricked up the ears of these newcomers.”<sup>406</sup> This notion of contemporariness is significant for an understanding of Osho’s appeal. His discourses range from commentaries on ancient scriptures to a broader understanding of the challenges faced by modern man. It is precisely for this reason that he is often suggested as being ‘essential reading’ for a seeker. He continues to be a popularly read figure and his books are sold at every bookstore in all locations, especially in railway stations.

In the context of post-independence India, when Osho started speaking, the time was ripe for new intellectual and political imaginations. People were examining the directions India could take, evaluating the actions and movements during and after independence and thinking critically about the formation of the new nation-state. Osho emerged as an important voice, becoming popular with books, such as *Kranti beej* (Seeds of revolution) published in 1965. The book is rumored to have been so popular that it is said that the second prime minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, had been reading it right before his death in 1966. The talks of this period were

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<sup>406</sup> Brandt, *Encounters With An Inexplicable Man: Stories of Osho as Told by His*, 2-3

in Hindi and Osho stopped giving discourses in the language a few years after moving to Pune, in 1974. His Hindi talks have a certain poetic and provocative flavor that is hard to miss. In fact, many western followers talked about how they would just sit for hours listening to him speak in hindi, without following a single word. A follower writes,

To sit and listen to a talk in an unknown language for two hours sitting on a marble floor, seems a bit daft. But Chuang Tzu auditorium, with its extremely high roof supported by pillars and open on all sides to a garden, so lush and exotic, was a very special place. Osho's voice while speaking in Hindi is the most beautiful music I have ever heard. I never missed a hindi discourse; I even preferred them to English.<sup>407</sup>

There are a few insights that emerge from these early Hindi discourses. First, many of the talks had been given at schools and colleges. They are provocative, for he wanted to instill a rebellious spirit in the youth through these. He often mocked the college authorities for asking him to “not provoke the girls too much” or “not talk about issues which are not suitable for the youth.” He would announce that the whole point of his speech is to unsettle the teachers and make sure that the students asked them questions. He also made fun of ‘Indians’ for having been slaves of their non-questioning attitudes and performing “*atma ki ghulami*” or “slavery of the soul”. He insisted that they only had blind faith. He also talked of a great spiritual crisis or ‘*adhyatmik sankat*’, which made everyone unhappy, irrespective of their place in life. These attitudes and language of provocation had been the earliest appeal of Osho. Secondly, while it has been argued by scholar Hugh Urban as well as many of the members of Osho commune, that his speaking against Gandhi had been a reason for his popularity and what made his voice distinctive, I disagree with this claim. While it is true that he critiqued the Gandhian methods of austerity and denial, he was also drawing from the same universe of thought as Gandhi, that is, a turn towards the self. Gandhi had made the idea of self-transformation central to the question of politics and freedom

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<sup>407</sup> Ma Prem Shunyo, *My Diamond days with Osho*, 16

of India. I argue that Osho was building on the Gandhian rhetoric of the act of turning inwards in order to achieve any change in the world outside. By talking of *adhyatmik kranti* or a spiritual revolution, he was taking forward the idea that Gandhi had made extremely familiar to the masses. But for Osho, such a turning inwards had to be accompanied by a complete overthrowing of old ideas, and a confrontation of all the fears that one experiences. Therefore, a new man would have to be born. To achieve these goals, Osho started conducting large scale meditation camps during the 1970s and building a community of young followers around him. Third, Osho was also interested in building a community that would bring people together in establishing his vision of a new society. He wanted to create a *samuh* (a group or a circle of friends) rather than a *sangathan* (an organization or a centralized force), and he warned against the formation of an organization which would create hierarchies, laws and politics. Instead, he wanted to establish a circle of friends, who would work with awareness and have full freedom to express themselves. He did not want to institute any laws in this space and most importantly, he claimed that there should be no devotion to any leader, but rather, only the message would be important.

In the early part of his life, Osho's discourses attracted audiences from all walks of life and from different parts of the world. While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore how his discourses changed over the course of his lifetime, by looking at these early ones, we can get a glimpse of what continues to make him popular today. The early discourses continue to resonate with the followers as they focus on 'lived experience' and are translated into books which are 'alive' and proliferating. As Walter Ong has argued, "There is no way to remove utterance from discourse. Writing and/or print only delays the discourse, which the reader resumes [.....] The reader may feel called on to study assiduously in order to create, as far as possible, the original

world in which the text was put down so as to resume the discourse, so far as possible, from the point at which it was broken off.”<sup>408</sup> Hence, the readers of Osho continue to recreate his words and worlds.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that the *figure* of Osho emerged from within an assemblage of multiple archives, the technology of meditation and devices. The *discourses of self-transformation* took shape within dialogues on the body and mind and experimentation, giving rise to therapy groups and the technology of meditation (dynamic meditation). Various devices crafted by Osho, also acted as tools for self-transformation. Further, these discourses were formed as a result of *transnational encounters*. Osho strategically articulated differences between the East and West, aiming to dissolve their difference by facilitating the formation of a new man. These encounters enabled the emergence of new ideas and led to the formation of communes, where seekers and followers experimented with living and working together.

In the first section of the chapter, I argued that the Osho archives have produced a challenge for the scholar due to their multiplicity. The archives are multiple in nature covering different forms of media and hence, are continuing to proliferate. Moreover, they are also multiple due to the richness of the perspectives and voices that they bring. Seekers must experience these archives as they relate to the singular stories of individuals represented through them. Ultimately, the Osho archives are performative, whereby they act as performative tools aimed at transforming the seekers.

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<sup>408</sup> Ong, “Before Textuality: Orality and Interpretation”, 265

In the second section, by closely examining the ‘Poona one’ phase of the Osho community, where I argued that many collaborations and experimentations in this period produced new ideas on psychology and therapy. Osho aimed at collapsing the dichotomies of the East and West, with the community together coming up with multiple therapies and group processes.

In the third section, I proposed that the intense periods of collaboration and experimentation led to the creation of a new technology of meditation. Through this, seekers entered into unique therapeutic events by which they could form different relationships to their bodies and minds. Music was central to this process of discovery. The technology emerged by putting together several techniques of breathing, movement, dress code and conduct, which were made possible by ongoing dialogue and discussion within the community itself.

In the fourth section, I argued that devices are tricks, ploys and methods used by Osho in many aspects of his life both to craft his appeal as a scandalous and provocative figure as well as push seekers into facing their fears and removing their attachments. The usage of such devices puts Osho in the “crazy wisdom tradition”, as argued by Feuerstein. Osho was primarily drawing on Gurdjieff in his usage of the word device.

In the last section of the chapter, I highlighted some of Osho’s early speeches in Hindi, the context they developed in and the role played by audio tapes. In particular, I argued that these discourses had a rebellious and revolutionary character. Osho considered orality to be an important aspect of his teachings and the books that emerged out of this oral tradition were also considered to be alive. Readers of the books today continue to make sense of these in the context of their orality.

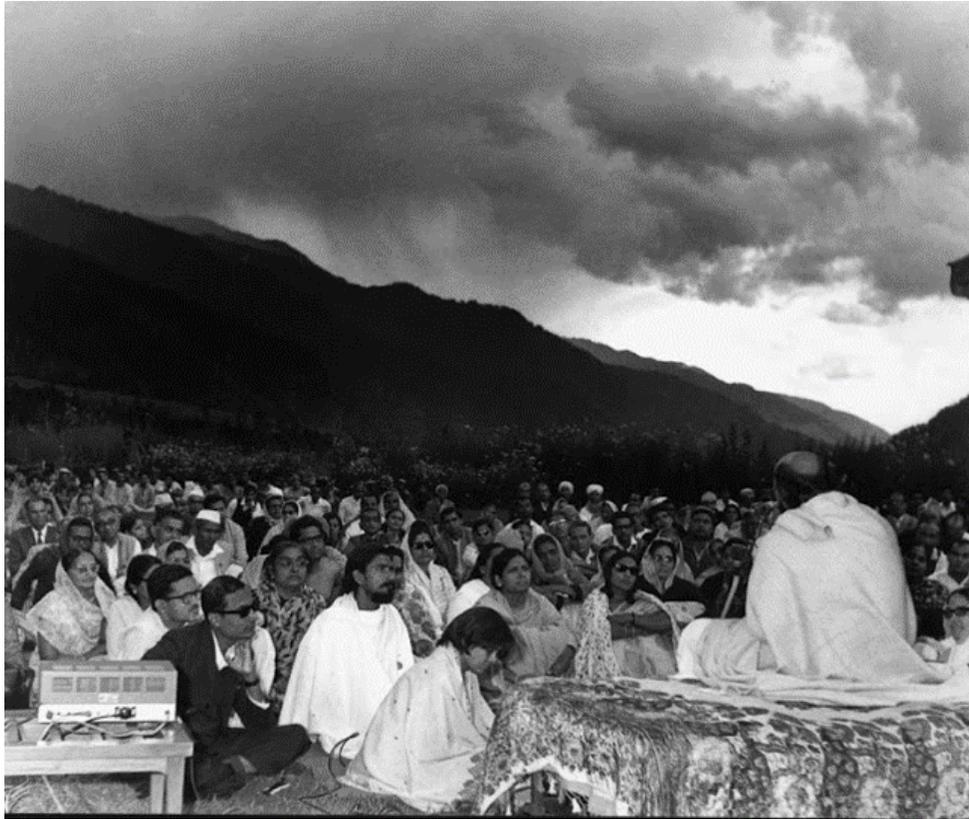


Figure 4.2 Osho meditation camp in Manali (1970).  
Source: oshonews.com



Figure 4.3 First Anniversary of coming to Poona.

Source: *The Sound of Running Water*, 1980



Figure 4.4 Darshan scene  
Source: *Far Beyond the Stars: A Darshan Diary 1977*



Figure 4.5 'Meditation Through Sound' experiment  
Source: *The Sound of Running Water 1980*

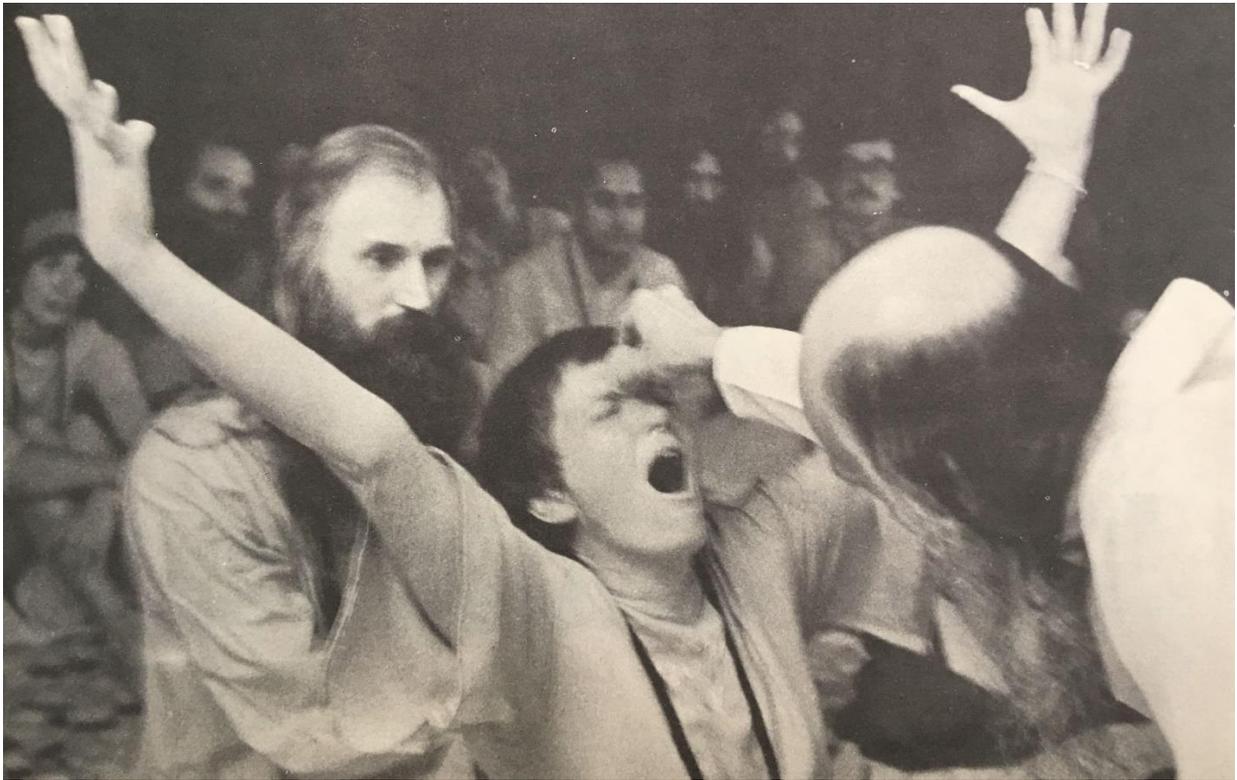


Figure 4.6 Darshan scene. Osho presents a small box of memorabilia as the participant leaves the next day

Source: *Far Beyond the Stars: A Darshan Diary 1977*

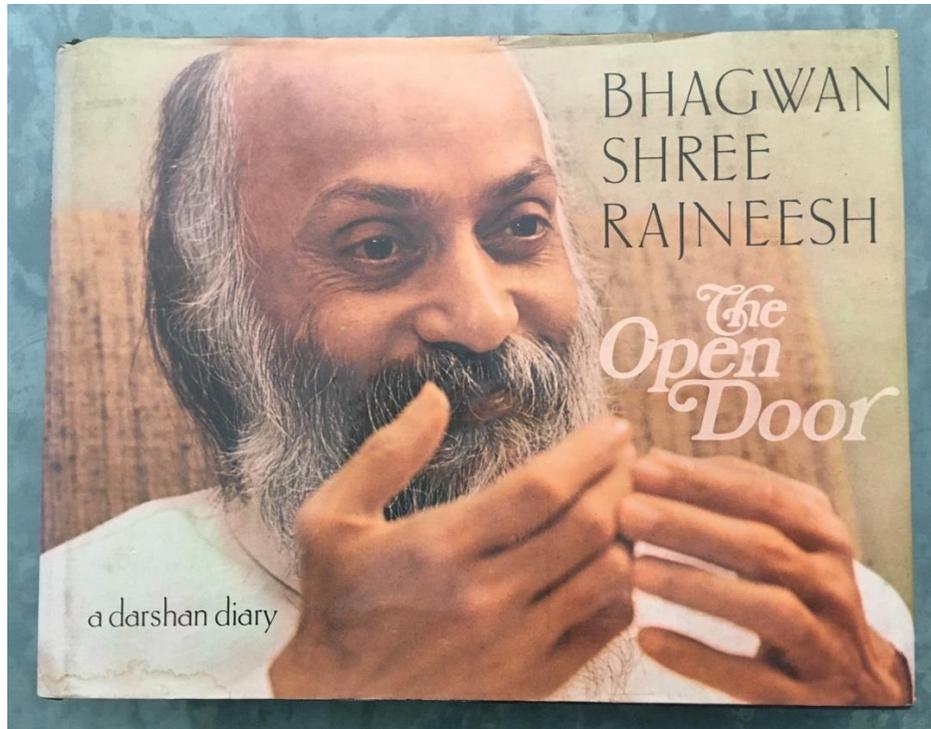


Figure 4.7 *The Open Door*, Darshan diary book cover (1980).  
Source: private archive

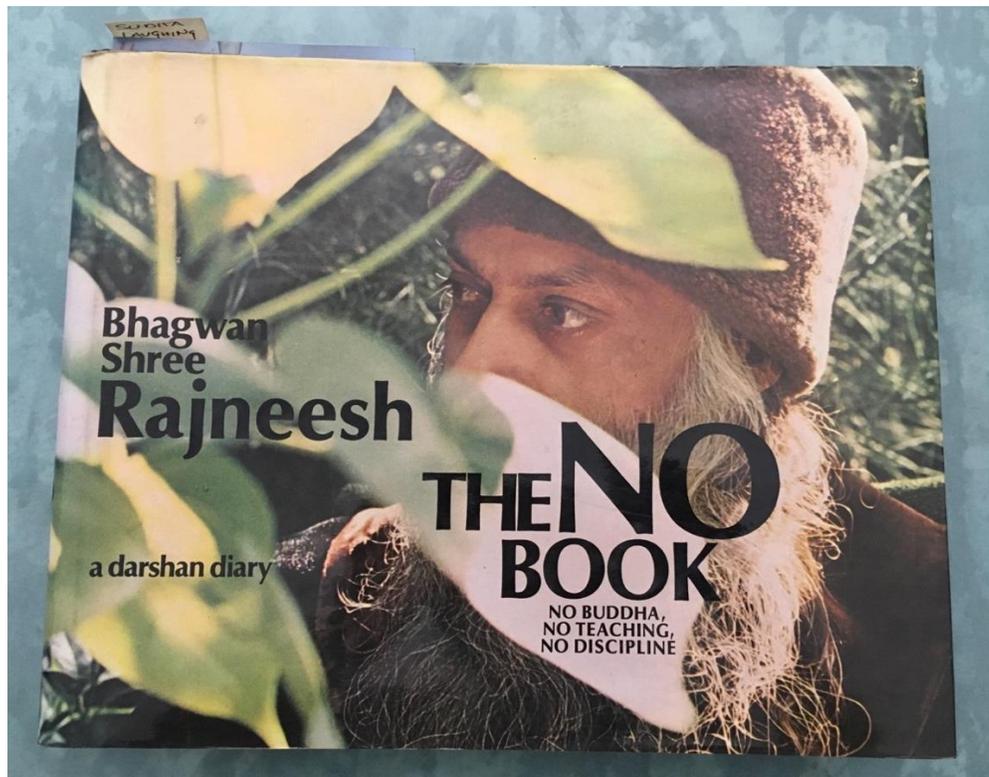


Figure 4.8 *The No Book*, Darshan diary book cover (1981)  
Source: private archive



Figure 4.9 Osho International Meditation Resort post card  
Source: Author's collection

## Conclusion

I began this dissertation with a proposition for a new mode of analysis to understand the guru, a method that would account for the *processes* through which the guru is made. By interrogating these processes, a major shift occurs in our understanding of gurus and the worlds they generate. The guru no longer has a singular point of origin and appears in dispersed forms through multiple sites and events. I have argued throughout this dissertation for the use of the term *figure* in order to highlight the various discourses, practices and circulations in the making of the guru. The term figure denotes, multiplicity of form, fluidity, fashioning and remaking. This theory emphasizes both the force entailed in these processes in generating ongoing affects and collaborations as well as the collective and the individual efforts that seekers participate in creating and renewing the life of the figure. By presenting the three figures in this dissertation, my aim has not been to establish parity or similarity between them. Rather, I have demonstrated how the theory of the figure has unfolded distinctly in each of these cases. I have sought to show how the theory of the figure can be applied as a mode of analysis in different contexts.

Within this dissertation, I have argued that the theory of the figure rests on two other axes: *Discourses of Self-Transformation* and *Transnational Encounters*. These axes constitute the *assemblage* within which the figure takes shape. Further, I have called for a media assemblage approach to understand the figure. Media (broadly defined as signifying mediating matter or objects) in the form of texts, photographs, speeches and meditations are central to the making of these figures. The media assemblage approach allows us to understand the figures and the different relationalities within which they are produced in a way that problematizes the notion of linearity and instead, views them as contagious and ongoing multiplicities. Different forms of

media are continually evolving and, in the process, shaping and reshaping both the figure and the communities of seekers.

Each of the three figures draw from a range of religious and philosophical ideas to formulate their own discourses of self-transformation. I have argued that certain epistemic conditions allow for the formation of the self as a site of transformation. Within these conditions, the self becomes an active site for experimentation and appears as being open to the ‘other’. A range of practices, methods and tools emerge that facilitate such experimentation. I have demonstrated that these range from practicing photography, to listening to speeches or engaging in dialogue and participating in meditations. The methods allow for endless possibilities and creativity among the seekers for an ongoing engagement. Discourses of self-transformation are shaped within the context of transnational encounters via collaborations and dialogues across nations, languages, and philosophies. Ashrams, communes and schools became transnational centers for experimentation and produced shared visions for transforming the self and society, new forms of knowledge and practices, and communities of belonging.

Theorizing the figure in this particular way has certain methodological implications, which necessitate new ways of analyzing *archives* and *biographies*. I have argued throughout this dissertation that the archives I engaged with were multiple and performative by nature, being structured by multiple media and voices. These archives acted primarily as pedagogical tools and were to be experienced. Accordingly, this dissertation has imagined means of writing a biography with a decentered subject, where an individual life is produced from within the entanglements of media, practices of reading, writing and remembering. Such a biography is not chronologically arranged, but rather, is an ongoing evolution.

In each of the chapters of this dissertation I have demonstrated how the theory of the figure can be applied and how each of its axes emerges in this unfolding. In chapter 1, I introduced the three figures in their historical contexts, by situating them within certain religious and philosophical traditions. I also argued that these figures actively engaged with these traditions and formulated their own ideas, often breaking with established intellectual modes. Ramana's articulation of the question of 'who am I?' emerged from an engagement with Advaita, while Krishnamurti's association with the Theosophical Society influenced his ideas and the relationships he built throughout his life, and Osho's ideas evolved from a range of ideas, such as Tantra and western psychology. In this chapter, I also introduced some of the media forms and methods for their analysis, which can provide an understanding of the discourses of self-transformation as envisioned by the figures and lived by the seekers. I demonstrated how photography played a central role in the creation of both a practice of self-transformation and the figure of Ramana. In the case of Krishnamurti, his speech and rhetoric play an important role in creating his appeal and shed light on how these led to the formation of a community of followers. Finally, I contended that Osho's dynamic meditation can be understood as a form of technology. By doing so, it is possible to account for the mediated nature of his practice and its reproducibility.

In chapter 2, I traced how the figure of Ramana is produced within the practices of photography, the act of writing, and the method of self-enquiry (who am I?). I also argued that his Advaitic thinking was new in many ways due to the emphasis on the simple method of self-enquiry and the practice of silence. The method of self-enquiry could be practiced by anyone irrespective of where they came from. By providing a close reading of a few photographs and tracing the context of their emergence, I demonstrated how a practice of Advaitic photography emerged. This was a practice of self-transformation, which united the photographer, camera and Ramana.

The act of writing and devotion to him through writing was another practice of self-transformation that emerged in the ashram. Finally, the ashram and the community of seekers and devotees, were shaped by the idea of embracing or being open to the ‘other’. That is, the ashram emerged as a space of transnational encounter, which welcomed western seekers from its very inception. Moreover, the ashram also remains a home to many animals and is formed under the guidance and omnipresence of the Arunachala mountain.

In chapter 3, I examined how the figure of Krishnamurti is produced externally through dialogic modes of pedagogy and within through what I termed a sonic imagination. By closely examining his speech and the act of listening, I argued that listeners must practice a non-intellectual listening in order to truly listen and be transformed by his speech. This practice of listening produced a state of sonic imagination in which there is an opening created for further enquiry and self-transformation. By analyzing sections from some popular biographies, I argued that they are crucial pedagogical tools as well. Through the biographies, readers engage with both the biographer and Krishnamurti and, in turn, enter into dialogue with their own selves. I also explored the different aspects of his pedagogy, such as the critique of the notion of guru, engagement with western scientists and the setting up of schools for children, both in India and California. Krishnamurti’s ideas, thus, took shape in the context of transnational encounters and collaborations.

In chapter 4, I explored how the figure of Osho emerged from the multiple and dispersed archives, the technologies of meditation and a discourse on ‘devices’. The Osho archives are multiple in their structure, constituted by different forms of media and are also multiple in their content containing many individual voices and stories. I also argued that these archives problematize the notion of history and linear time and are to be experienced by the seekers.

Seekers relate to the archives through the narratives of individuals that appear in them. I traced the making of various therapies developed within a dialectic of nominally western and eastern psychology to be resolved in the creation of a third psychology, dissolving the differences between them. I suggested that these therapies emerged in the context of transnational encounters and experiments between psychoanalysts and seekers who lived together in a commune. Further I argued that these encounters led to the creation of a technology of meditation, by which seekers manipulate their own bodies and minds, thus forming new relationships with their own selves. This technology of meditation emerged from many years of dialogue and experimentation. Osho also used many 'devices' throughout his life, which acted as pedagogical tools as well as mechanisms for the creation of his appeal among seekers. I further contended that there is a strong relationship between orality and the circulation of Osho's books today. In sum, his books need to be understood as being part of an oral tradition, generating insights into the relationship between his oral speeches, the books and the readers.

### **Future Research**

This dissertation opens up many possibilities for future research. First, the theory of the figure along with the media assemblage approach, could be applied to multiple contexts beyond guru studies. It is particularly applicable to studies of individuals in both historical and contemporary contexts from many fields, such as literature and the arts. The approach could provide insights into not just how the individual developed in their work and ideas, but also, how they are remembered and most importantly, what ideas and actions they have made possible.

Second, this dissertation has also foregrounded the question of the pedagogy of self-transformation. My aim has been to unpack *how* seekers learn, remember and relate to practices. In achieving this, the dissertation has provided some unique insights into seekers' relationships with different forms of media and their affects. By paying attention to media forms, their role in structuring transformative experiences and vice versa, it is possible to learn about effective pedagogy take shape. Examining the relationship of pedagogy and media can deliver insights into the ways in which the popular meditation practices in India and elsewhere have become embedded within lived experience. As I have demonstrated in this dissertation, the question of pedagogy is not removed from the discourses (dialogues, collaborations, discussions) within which they are produced. Paying close attention to these discourses sheds light on why certain practices get reproduced in favor of others.

Third, this dissertation has opened up several potential directions for research on transnational and countercultural network of ideas and practices located at the intersections of the sciences of the mind, psychology, religion and meditation. For example, several neo-vedanta teachers have arisen in the last few decades, who have invented their own philosophies, often claiming Ramana as their teacher. Given the fluidity of the philosophies created by these teachers, studies on these figures would benefit greatly from interdisciplinary perspectives. Another area of research could be to study the interconnections between the countercultural movements of the 1960s, the Human Potential movement and their role in the creation of many meditation practices. Tracing this history would be valuable, in that it would help in explaining the popular meditation practices of today. As has been argued in this dissertation, the making of practices and figures, is not to be seen as stagnant and as something of the past, but rather, as constituting phenomena that continue to shape our worlds today.

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