

## The East-West Perspectives: A Dream in Hawaii

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**A Dream in Hawaii** is full of incidents of East vs. West encounters we have many such instances to prove. Swami Yoganand spoke several times, but his final word was really conclusive: "The need for thrill and more thrill, a much - abused word, leads to criminality. Step by step, deep down into the abyss. Rape for its own sake; at least on reported case every nine minutes. The climbing wave of sadistic assault on children. The list of sex crimes is long and bitter."<sup>1</sup>

Love-Making in dream and naked woman basking in the sun were two very significant incidents in the life of Swami Yogananda. Once when he was seated in lotus - posture on the beach, a young woman too sat by his side in the same posture. Swami Yogananda enquired about her identity: he saw that her lotus position was right. He had thought that "Here on this lone beach he would be free from the pressures of the past fortnight- some of them had grown out of his own subconscious desire for self-projection-and he would not try to make an honest analysis of his passage to America."<sup>2</sup> The woman relinquished her louts pose, uncrossing her bare legs with their glisten of suntan lotion. Her intent eyes as they studied him were long and narrow. She said, "There's no escape from one's wheel of destiny. Even a guru must accept the fruit of his karma."<sup>3</sup> Frieda, the woman, was a liberated being and she had enjoyed sex with yoga as an excuse. The woman and her husband, Henry, were on their annual two - week holiday in the island. Six days of paradise had been behind before Swami Yogananda appeared on the scene. "How strange that it was Frieda's Karma to make Swami Yogananda see, feel, know the core of beauty in the 'sickness' which had to be set right, as he believe."<sup>4</sup> She took liberty in speaking openly "Men need to be liberated the same way as women. We must all be equally free to achieve our sexual self - discovery. That's what the current moral revolution amounts to, briefly stated." She affirmed that Swami Yoganand's visit too was hardly purposeless. She was intent on broadening his knowledge of American society. "The death of worn - out sanctities - Marriage reduced to a convenient contract. For the young and unmarried, dating and mating were the same. Virginity became a sin when you were over sixteen. Virgin girls and virgin boys beyond their teens were all too rare anyhow."<sup>5</sup>

The woman was insistent on her questions, and Swami Yogananda was compelled to answer. "We have no wish to improve our quality of life. Change is our concern. We disavow the old mores in our search for self - validation. You think we are simply destructive? No. As we proceed, we'll begin to rebuild."<sup>6</sup> Frieda was tireless in her effort to throw Swami Yogananda into a state of shock. But she only drew from him a dim smile which she could not interpret. Until one day, he broke his stubborn silence. He was grateful for what he had learnt from her. One day there was a rapid knock on the outer door, and it started to swing open even before he had answered. The person who slipped in was Frieda. She went to

his bedside, hurried hands pulling off her muumuu. "Under the red - and - gold muumuu dropping to her feet she was naked except for a half-slip."<sup>7</sup> She gained a new loveliness with her "heaven's ambrosia". "She lay quiet a minute, as if dazed, then propped herself up on an elbow."<sup>8</sup> Out of the bed, she took four slow steps towards him, and sat down on a sofa facing him. She stared at him in disbelief. For a while she sat motionless. "Then she pulled up her legs and crossed them under her the grotesque irony - in padmasana."<sup>9</sup>

Swami Yoganand's eyes, revolted yet fascinated, were fastened on her enveloping thatch of pubic hair, and it was almost a minute before he could look away. Then his anger returned and gazing at him she broke into a challenging laugh. She made a very apt and cryptic remark: "You're no virgin boy's."<sup>10</sup> Swami Yogananda affirms his life despite of the defeat of his principles, culture, antiquity, and Indian ness. The Swami had proved the hypocrisy of his class.

What happened between Swami Yogananda and Frieda was in fact a natural necessity, but the woman took the chance to test Swami Yogananda's morality and proved a wide gulf between his verbal and practical ethical values. "Swami Yogananda's face flooded over with intense pain. He was speechless for a moment."<sup>11</sup> The pain in Swami Yogananda's face dug deeper lines. Silent, he saw Frieda rise from the sofa and stagger to the bedside. She picked up her red - and - gold muumuu from the door and slipped it on. Walking to the door she turned her head as if she had something to say. The words remained unspoken. In a moment she was gone. "Swami Yogananda sat in thought, Kundalini - he spoke the word under the breath. All through the history of civilizations every spiritual system had attracted to it an aura of corruption, an enveloping vapor which threatened to suffocate the system itself."<sup>12</sup> He visualized this corruption in every great channel of thought and practice. Buddhism, Christianity, and Hinduism are not untouched by this sort of sexual relationship even among those who are expected to be abstinent and forbearing: "It had happened in a big way to Buddhism. It had happened to Christianity. Kundalini, the so - called Serpent Power of hath a-yoga, could have more appeal for Americans than the abstract thoughts of Vedanta."<sup>13</sup> Swami Yogananda concluded that such acts of sexual diversion were beyond the power of man to control under any system of thought. To call it corruption would amount to misunderstand the power of affirmation related either to spirituality or to worldliness. Swami Yogananda was beset with three basic questions: "Would he have the scene, without offering the least challenge? Would he take the corruption as inevitable? Could he?"<sup>14</sup>

Now Swami Yogananda would not be associated with Transcendental Meditation and Krishna Consciousness. "He was totally averse to the personality cult. To see his portrait worshipped- he would feel sickened. The ideological differences also were basic. The world Center would be

standing well apart from those two movements and grow evolved according to its own lights.”<sup>15</sup> In his opinion western society was impelled by its self induced venom called progress. Implied in the progress was science destroying as much as it created. Implied equally was the loss of humanness. it was hard to evade the question. Is this the death march of Western life? The spiritual nature in Western man – is it lost for all time? Yoganda had Come to the belief that “youths in America feel the reality of this easy menace for more than their elders who still live in the easy assurance of the past ages. Youth’s sense of belonging is lost in the mud of the generation gap so that they stand lonely needing a testament which holds the promise of a new security.”<sup>16</sup> Speaking to Jennifer, Vincent Swift says; Swami Yogananda wants to Easternize us to a certain extent; in fairness, he should be ready to Westernise himself to the same extent.”<sup>17</sup> But he forgot one thing: Swami Yogananda wanted to affirm life in relation to spirituality (Eastern Values) as well as to worldliness (Western Values). This worldliness drew him to Frieda to assert life in relation to her life: “When she (Frieda) was gone, there was none else to take her place. In the past two weeks he had gone back many times to their final moments together and he felt grateful for illumination she had given him: and he acted on her account because of the futilities in which she was enmeshed.”<sup>18</sup>

Swami Yogananda and Vincent Swift represent two values; as such, one prefers spiritual ways of affirmation to the world ones, once and the other prefers worldly ways of affirmation to the spiritual ones. Atop the mountain from which they were about to descend, Vincent Swift said: “Please leave the worldly affairs to me. They needn’t bother you. This much I should say: we already have enough grants to cover the down payment. What’s important is for you to advise us on the building program.”<sup>19</sup> Vincent Swift thought trees around the Meditation Center unnecessary, but Swami Yogananda was in favour of more and more trees. He told Swift to have a look at the early days of Christianity: “The invincible spirit that grew amid extreme simplicity.”<sup>20</sup> However, Vincent Swift insisted upon the next stage of development: “At a certain point, Establishment has to take over. It’s a social need. It’s the precondition of fast growth.”<sup>21</sup> Swami Yogananda gave the example of Mahatma Gandhi who spent the last two decades of his life, his most fruitful years, in a village mud hut. That mud hut became a place of pilgrimage for people from all the continents. Vincent Swift conclusively said, any attempt to Easternize all our Western concept will be futile. We who seek success must accept certain limitations. Or else we shall find ourselves beating our wings in the void.”<sup>22</sup> He however accepted that Swami Yogananda’s tremendous impersonal impact on the alienated intellectuals had been eagerly awaited: they would stand ready to accept all that the Swami represented. The two scholars - Swami Yogananda and Vincent Swift vie with each other for affirming their respective vision of life. The former wants to found the Center on spiritual values and sanctions, whereas the latter insists on that foundation which governs the life of an institution.

Devjani decided to go to Hawaii from Harvard. She would be listening to the voice she knew so well. She could still recapture its smooth flow with admiration and pleasure. “He had imposed his personality on a sophisticated American audience, and that was no surprise.”<sup>23</sup> But she would keep her distance from him. She would hate to say, “I was one of your

students, Swamiji, at Varansai. I am Devjani,”<sup>24</sup> She thought that Swami Yogananda might say, “I remember you Devjani. What can I do for you?”<sup>25</sup> She phoned from Hale Kuaehine: “This is Devjani. You cannot possibly remember me, Swami ji.”<sup>26</sup> Swami Yogananda waited for her arrival. Over a span of time since he was reborn, a part of him had yearned for what could have been if only Devjani had wanted it that way. Swami Yogananda reminisced as he sat waiting in the lobby, eyes towards the entrance door. “He had destroyed that part of him; his will had prevailed and the longings had ceased. His misgivings when Stalla suggested a visit to Hawaii were a moment’s absurdity. Devjani was gone out of his personal life.”<sup>27</sup> but he could accept her only as one among a thousand others. He could not forget when he arrived in Honolulu, Devjani had gone away. Now he was beset with questions: Is she married? To whom is she married? Why did she exchange the warmth of home life for two years in a foreign country? “Domestic bliss could not be replaced by whatever she could gain here. Unless she was intent on academic promotion and an American Ph.D. would help.”<sup>28</sup> Swami Yogananda felt that he had fulfilled her demand - it was indeed a demand of course, in that process, he had fulfilled himself. With Her extraordinary insight she had seen his inmost being. That and his outer being had merged. The clash of identities that had troubled him in an uncertain year was now just memory. In his Yogananda image he was complete.

Entering the lobby Devjani saw Swami Yogananda rise to his feet. In his ascetic’s garb he was as she had imagined. “A Yogi in India was called the illumined One - appropriately. Drawing close, her face rapt, she joined her hands in Salutation.”<sup>29</sup> Swami Yogananda also gave intent look. “This was not the new woman he was expecting to see. The familiar grace of her face was unaltered by the years of growing into maturity”<sup>30</sup> Her big black eyes still retained the wonderment which used to be his source of fascination and trouble too. She had kept at bay both time and America. He touched her head, giving benediction. It felt strange to touch her head with the hair done as always before in one thick braid. In the next moment she rose to her feet, saying that she had come to see Swami Yogananda. On the edge of recalling their past association, she stopped. Swami Yogananda asked her to go out - they will sit on the sand. Dubious, she glanced at her watch. Swami Yogananda, being poor in his sense of time, reassured her, “You only have to tell me when it’s about six-thirty.”<sup>31</sup> Swami Yogananda, Devjani by his side, spoke: “While waiting for you, I wondered how you could leave home and come to Hawaii.”<sup>32</sup> He glanced at her hair. No streak of vermilion. He concluded: “To have remained unmarried all these years-there was only one reason he could see. The strong hunger for a spiritual life, defeating all others feelings and needs. Even though denied the guidance she had wanted and deserved, she had been steadfast, true to herself. The richness that **Sadhana** had fortified.”<sup>33</sup> Devjani was curious to know Swami Yogananda’s progress in Hawaii.

After some moments of silence, Swami Yogananda spoke: “There is a deepening spiritual quest in America. The signs are clear. Christianity changes, but too slowly, grudgingly.”<sup>34</sup> Devjani enquired if Swami Yogananda would establish an ashram in Hawaii; and he at once gave her the brochure Stella had given him. Walking back to the hotel, he said, “You are here at a propitious time, Devjani. This is my chance... I shall give you **Diksha**.”<sup>35</sup> She felt no excitement, no throb of joy. There had been a time when she could have

asked for no greater bliss in her life. However, they agreed to meet again and discuss things of mutual interest. It may be added that Swami Yogananda had come to the West with one plain purpose: to present Universal Religion in its Vedantic concept; but Vincent Swift had no less plain aim to set up an institute offering practical help to reduce inner tensions. Such tensions could be softened only by Indian know-how wisdom. "By this time Yogananda must have shed a little of the Ancient India in him and absorbed a little of Modern America. That was the only way to harmonize diverse cultures. Some fraction of one value system replaced by another, world culture could have no reality unless based on the, broadest spectrum of interchange."<sup>36</sup> It may be added that Swami Yogananda's affirmation of life in relation to worldliness has roots Devjani; and in relation to spirituality it is the mission with which he has come to America. Swami Yogananda remains Neeloy Mukherjee; as such, his aim or purpose is divided: he does not know way should go to affirm his life in a more creative manner.

Devjani's father written her about his current work. The Indian economy was hit hard power shortage, and fuel resources in the country were severely strained. "Nuclear power seemed the only answer. But the questions of safety was involves; uncontrolled radioactivity could bring disaster."<sup>37</sup> Her father and his research team had been deeply engaged in involving safety measures and he felt that they were close of success. Devjani's thoughts returned to the time in Varanasi when Neeloy having found his new identity announced his decision to leave the worldly life. She could still recall the thrill she had felt. "But when he was gone, Varanasi becomes unbearable. The futility from which she had found escape for almost two years came whirling back, and in the classroom, where instructor stood at the desk, she felt suffocated."<sup>38</sup> At the end of this time, emptiness returned. There was no news of Neeloy. He was obviously in complete seclusion. Despair alternated with hope: "He must still be in the process of being reborn: wandering; one day, at his journey's end, he would give himself a new name. At that point, would he in the manner of many others on the spiritual path undergo his own funeral? The new born yogi performed the funeral rites of his own dead self. But ritual of that kind was not nor for the rationalist, not for Neeloy, Devjani felt."<sup>39</sup> Swami Yogananda's surprise message came in the sprawling hand: "My blessings to you, Devjani."<sup>40</sup> But she was not sure if the signature, Swami Yogananda, was Neeloy's therefore; she longed to trace every footprint of Neeloy in his passage towards Swami Yogananda. "Overnight, Varanasi become as illusion. **Sadhana** was the reality. She was at the end of her long search."<sup>41</sup>

## Reference

1. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-57-58
2. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-94
3. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-102
4. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-104
5. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-105-106
6. A Dream in Hawaii, pp-119

In Varanasi, Devjani remained aloof until she came to Sujata who had been widowed at eighteen, only a few months after her marriage. She came from a wealthy family and could have lived in luxury. But hardly two years were gone when she was seized with restlessness. "She nursed the and tried to bring a little colour into their withered lives."<sup>42</sup> One day, when Devjani paid her usual to Sujata's house, she found the inmates in deep mourning. Sujata was gone. She had gone away with Nameless. She had left a note for Devjani: "They were going away, and did not know where. What kind of companionship would it mean? That also they did not know."<sup>43</sup> The letter had a prayer for the completeness of their life. Devjani thought and thought, but she could not conclude. She acquired new interests. Wanting to go abroad, she applied to the East-West center for a scholarship. It was months later that Devjani sent Swami Yogananda a brief message - no better than a gesture of formality. Seated on a couch in Jefferson lounge, Devjani felt a sudden pressure of hands on her shoulders: standing behind her was Stella. But she was greatly surprised to see that faces were beaming at her and arms were raised in greeting. Interculturation at the East - West Centre was expressed above all other things in terms of living and that know Swami Yogananda in India, Devjani?"<sup>44</sup> She disclosed everything about him from Neeloy Mukherjee to Swami Yogananda. And about his association with the Centre, she said, "Yogananda can create; he cannot construct. Some people can do both, but no Yogananda."<sup>45</sup> She also knew it well that Sawmi Yogananda was gone out of her life. "That fact would be affirmed with her **Diksha** proving a hollow ritual."<sup>46</sup> However, she badly needed Swami Yogananda or a reborn Neeloy able to refashion her life," She felt that America was remaking her, and she could be saved by her old teacher.

In **A Dream in Hawaii**, Bhattacharya returns to the theme of East - West encounter, this time in Hawaii, 'no better meeting ground of East and West.' The encounter is abortive, because while the East with all its spirituality has not yet completely mastered the flesh, the West continues to remain commercialized and confused. Swami Yogananda, who discovers in the end that he has not still risen above his love for Devjani represents the East; and the two Americans - Dr. Swift, the organizational man, who want to use Yogananda as a tool in founding a flourishing spiritual centre, and Dr. Gregson, the champion of the permissive society - are intended to reveal two facets of modern American culture. It is certainly heartening to find Bhattacharya resisting the temptation to accept a readymade solution at the end, thought the Americans in the novel appear to be uniformly 'flat' characters.