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ALLEN GINSBERG IN INDIA: LIFE AND NARRATIVE

Abstract

This article deals with Allen Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* and later poems and argues that Ginsberg domesticates Indian gods and goddesses to castigate American capitalism. After bringing American poetry out into the streets, Ginsberg takes refuge in Indian cultural heritage, and contemporizes its religious myths "to return to America to confront the nation at war". In his life-writing against capitalism and bombs, he embraces the victims of capitalism and against imperial poetics, he patronizes the colonized psyche. In short, highlighting Ginsberg's India chapter, this article suggests that the anti-capitalist poetics not only inherits the discipline of Buddhist and Hindu mythical beliefs, it also projects that the anti-establishment discourse liberates Ginsberg's poetry.

Keywords: Allen Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, religion, myth, capitalism

Introduction

How may one sing the song against capitalism and schizophrenia taking refuge in a different culture? How may one project the multi-fold subjugation of the self, be it cultural, historical or political? How may one resist the ever-lasting refusal of poets by the capitalist world and thereby bring life back from oblivion to light? This article reads Allen Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* and later poems and argues that Ginsberg domesticates Indian gods and goddesses to castigate American capitalism. After bringing American poetry to come out into the streets, Ginsberg takes refuge in Indian cultural heritage, and contemporizes its religious myths "to return to America to confront the nation at war"¹.

In his life-writing against capitalism and militarism, Ginsberg embraces the victims of capitalism and against imperial poetics, he patronizes the colonized psyche. In

¹ A. Ginsberg, *Selected Poems: 1947-1995*, England 1996, p. xvii.

Ginsberg's life-narrative, life and art are one. Ginsberg dares madness, he comes out with a nonconformist poem; he rebels, he invents a new literary form; he castigates America's capitalist ideology, he creates a splendid musical note; and by taking LSD and marijuana he hallucinates, he re-invents cultural landscapes and civilizations. Rebellion is hence a metaphor for life and art; living in the periphery of society and thereby creating an alternative composition are its healing techniques; and the composition becomes so central to the proposed free-life that there is hardly any distinction between life and art. Apparently the symbolic proximity of life and art establishes a newer end to composite life which transforms artistic neurosis into creative energy. Ginsberg's India chapter is the foundation to such a transgressive energy that he took to life and art till the end. From the publication of the *Indian Journals* (1970) till his last lectures at Naropa on Buddhism, Ginsberg's life-narrative takes a transgressive turn in terms of content and form. Reading Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* and later poems, this article suggests that the projected anti-capitalist poetics not only inherits the discipline of Buddhist and Hindu mythical beliefs, it also suggests that the anti-establishment discourse developed by Ginsberg liberates his poems.

Life between two worlds: West and East

Allen Ginsberg's association with India was formally established in the 1960s when he spent over a year travelling different parts of the country². From the 1970s through the 1990s, he projected Indian themes and experiences in his volumes of work, and travelled in and about the country three times. When he started publishing in the 1950s, the popular poets were Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost³. The elite read Robert Lowell and Richard Wilbur. He started the Beat movement in San Francisco with Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs and Neal Cassady⁴. They were gay artists circulating a counter-culture in and around San Francisco. Ginsberg took his inspiration from Dada, a European movement of the early 1900s, and that borrowing internationalized American literature to a significant extent. But his poetic roots were as much in the first gay poet of America, Walt Whitman, as in Spain's gay poetry of García Lorca castigating America in his *A Poet in New York* (1929)⁵ and of the 1930s gay New York poet Hart Crane's *Brooklyn Bridge*. But Ginsberg also uses the French Impressionist Paul Cézanne's technique of foreshortening in *Howl and Other Poems* (1956) as Cézanne does in his

² For an extensive discussion on Ginsberg's letters and memoirs written in India, see D. Baker's *A Blue Hand: The Beats in India*, New York 2008.

³ J. Breslin, *From Modern to Contemporary: American Poetry, 1945-1965*, Chicago 1984.

⁴ See J. Tytell, *Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation*, New York 1976; A. R. Lee, *The Beat Generation writers*, London 1996.

⁵ F. G. Lorca, *Poet in New York*, New York 1988.

depiction of Mont St. Victoire, the mountain in the landscape appearing extremely close to the viewer's face rather than in a perspective at a distance. In his poetry of madness he anticipates Ammons, Berryman, Sexton (the Confessionals), which was a revelation in his life. It is now established that Ginsberg made American poetry come out into the streets critiquing America's capitalism and militarism in general⁶.

In February 1962, Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky arrived in Bombay, India. While Ginsberg searched for a perfect spiritual teacher, he also made contribution to modern Indian poetry. Both the issues run parallel and the effect is visible in his later works and speeches. In a dream-vision in 1975, for instance, Ginsberg sang to musical accompaniment: "I cant find anyone to show me what to do / I cant find anyone / It's maken me so blue [sic]"⁷. It is only a perfect teacher who could lead America develop a "conscious mercy"; a world of understanding will come out "if we all sat down and decided not to be great"⁸. The rebellion continues in poetry but there is a quiet acceptance of the possibility of global understanding. And this understanding will come not from demilitarizing America but from the wisdom of a Guru:

I can't find anyone to show me what to do
I cant find anyone
 It's maken me so blue
O I cant find anyone that knows me
 Good as you
Yeah I cant find anyone,
 only you Guru [sic]⁹

A few significant phenomena develop during this period. Once Ginsberg initiates the search for a perfect teacher, the writing follows a pattern. Often the poems begin with a clear statement, a line like "And the Communists have nothing to offer"¹⁰ as in *Kral Majales*, then unexpectedly an oppositional idea appears, a mythological figure is placed in surprise, the instincts in turn pour in – it is as if a wild beast is implanted into a human habitat, fanatics appear and suddenly there is an acceptance of the gloomy world:

... the beautiful engineers are all dead, the secret technicians conspire for
 their own glamour
in the Future, in the Future, but now drink vodka and lament the Security
 forces,
and the Capitalists drink gin and whiskey on airplanes but let Indian brown

⁶ See J. Karmar, *Allen Ginsberg in America*, New York 1969; B. Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography*, New York 1989.

⁷ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals: Note Books Diary Blank Pages Writings*, New Delhi 1970, p. 283.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 285.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, *Kral Majales*, p. 147.

millions starve
and when Communist and Capitalist assholes tangle the Just man is arrested or robbed or had his head cut off...¹¹

That Ginsberg writes this poem on a jet seat allows him to understand how much he is subsumed by industrial civilization. Hence, understanding Ginsberg, without sidelining the contradictions and rebellions inherent in his life-work, is in fact an exceedingly difficult task. His had been a peripheral and erratic reputation. Defamed, haunted and disillusioned, Ginsberg reached India having just one dollar in his pockets, a fact which he neither completely rejected nor accepted in totality¹². Meetings took place with great sages who took marijuana as a religious element to their lives. Acquaintances developed with drug addicts. There remained an everlasting “yes” to hashish and other drugs. Ginsberg lived by the *ghats* of Benares, witnessed Hindu death rituals, and saw the body burning into ashes. Religion is always a rescue for his hungry soul. Poverty and hunger chase him as do ill health and state surveillance. “Self conscious, I have nowhere to go. Maybe might as well leave it at that, continue to travel and die as I am when I die”, records Ginsberg on March 25, 1962¹³. Life has no meaning and multiple gods and goddesses grant him amateur thought: “Avaloketesvara, Kuan Yin, Jaweh, Saints, Saddhus, Rishis, benevolent ones, Compassionate Superconscious ones, etc, what can you do for me now? What’s to be done with my life which has lost its idea?”¹⁴.

Between the idea of “going there to look for a teacher”¹⁵ and to come back to America to “confront the nation at war”¹⁶, Ginsberg’s activities are worth listing. He translated the poetry of anonymous rickshaw pullers in Benares, and in Calcutta he influenced Jibanananda Das’s poetry which he translated freely. During such a crucial time Ginsberg’s *Indian Journals* records the transcendence of the hungry body and soul in India, the colonized land, about whose suffering he understood much. Prior to his visit, he had read the *Bhagvad Gita*, the essence of Hindu spiritual life, Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s *Table Talk*, portions of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the grand epics of India, and the list grew when he started the trip. Among them were the *Jataka tales* and sections from the *Upanishads*. These are familiar texts from India, most of which were translated by Richard Burton, Christopher Isherwood and others. Notwithstanding the fashionable slander of Ginsberg’s anti-religiosity, his cultural journey had been so far that of a city-dweller whose battle-cry had been American

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² S. Ganguly, *Allen Ginsberg in India: An Interview*, “Ariel: A Review of International Literature” 1993, no. 4, p. 21.

¹³ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁵ S. Ganguly, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁶ A. Ginsberg, *Selected Poems*, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

capitalism that “destroyed the best minds of the generation”¹⁷ and Ginsberg was its spokesperson. The City Lights edition of *Howl and Other Poems* was meant for the city dweller who would take the designed book in the back pocket of a pair of jeans and sing the saga of cultural and intellectual destruction. The epigraph not only indicated the poetic mentor Walt Whitman’s radical *Song of Myself* – “Unscrew the locks from the doors! Unscrew the doors themselves from their jambs!” – it also indicated that the modern song was already sung by Whitman and the new generation had received its new “master”. It also freely borrowed Ezra Pound’s neurosis that sang through the pages. Times till then had never been easy for Ginsberg. *Howl and Other Poems*, soon after its publication, was subsequently seized by the US customs and the San Francisco police. Dubbed “obscene”, it also became the subject of a court trial. America, for the new generation of city life, had received its new singer who sang Lucifer’s *non serviam*, and like his intellectual gay counterparts Isherwood and Carpenter, an eastward journey for peace of mind became inevitable.

His Highness the Dalai Lama shows him the path. The answer is in the illusive life Ginsberg takes to living. The Lama asked him: “If you take LSD can you see what’s in that Briefcase?” meaning though he has a battle to fight Ginsberg has renounced it and has taken refuge in the essence of capitalist life¹⁸. Guilt and shame continue on the backdrop of non-vegetarianism, homosexuality and child-love. Jazz would continue, so would LSD. Poetic compositions would flourish, so would frequent quarrels with Peter Orlovsky, his partner. This chapter of Ginsberg would continue till his last breath. The learning and memorabilia he would carry to Naropa where he lectured on Buddhism at the end of his life, wrote quiet lyrics to the Buddha, and Elizabethan love songs to his young lovers. Divinity is the only answer; writing, its soul.

In India, by then, Rabindranath Tagore had received a permanent status as a poet and singer, and such was the situation that other poets could hardly establish themselves. This visit of Ginsberg became a phase of transition – both for Ginsberg’s writing and Indian English poets – a transition in form, transition in theme; the personal became the radical and the radical came to the academia to be accommodated with the spirit of the time. Nissim Ezekiel is one of those generations of poets who were located in Bombay, along with Adil Jussawalla, and were shaping the future of Indian poetry. At Ezekiel’s residence, in Bombay, Ginsberg, true to the spirit of his rebellion, spoke:

Indian English poetry was often imitative, derivative, and literary, born of an idiom “too polite and genteel”, impossible as a vehicle of creative expression because there could never be an Indian English “like there is an American Negro English”¹⁹.

¹⁷ A. Ginsberg, *Howl and Other Poems*, San Francisco 1959, p. 9.

¹⁸ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁹ C. Kulshrestha, *English Verse in India: Some Obstinate Questions*, [in:] *Contemporary Indian English Verse: an Evaluation*, ed. C. Kulshrestha. New Delhi: 1980, p. 9.

The direct impact of Ginsberg on Indian poets and poetry is not difficult to be traced. Anthologists and critics of the subsequent decades took Ginsberg's remark as a serious offense, defended Indian English poets, and tried hard to project what "Indianness" and "modernism" were there in Indian English poetry²⁰. They did not forget to divide Indian poets by British "periods" and "-isms" as well, which Ginsberg in a roundabout way was opposing for artistic freedom. They traced the influence of Eliot and Pound, and other British poets on Indian English poets and tried hard to show the Western "-isms" in Indian English poetry. Makarand Paranjape's anthology *Indian Poetry in English* (1993)²¹, for instance, classified Indian poets in this light to a great extent. Moreover, most anthologists of Indian English poetry of the decades tried hard to show what "modern" Indian poetry in English was like. The spirit of the time demanded critics and anthologists to form canons of Indian English poetry not only for its individuality but also to be acknowledged in world literature²². Ginsberg's plea to poets and critics to foster a unique creativity of resistance to mainstreaming of literature by the Anglophone discourse remained at the centre of such artistic expressions. Consequently, what Ginsberg offered India, against an imitative artistic life, is lost in oblivion, and Indian poetry suffered from a relative lack of originality in themes and contents. Ginsberg, however, used his cultural experience of India in his works and found a reason to use the cultural learning, a path Forster, Carpenter and Isherwood had initiated.

Domesticating Indian mythology

Ginsberg presents India as a place for refuge and righteous teachers for guidance. The political mayhem that tarnishes the image of America can only be saved in a world away from militarism. There is probably nothing more suffocating than the life of a poet in a capitalist society where freedom of speech is put on trial. Hence, India, a place with its glorious civilization unique to any land with its peace-loving people, who practiced religious tolerance, becomes the Promised Land for Ginsberg. In a 1993 interview, Ginsberg proposed the real intention behind his third trip to India, the first two being extremely rich:

By 1961, I was more interested in going beyond the traditional expatriate role or voyage, of wandering out in the East, particularly India, the most rich and

²⁰ See P. Lal, ed. *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and a Credo*, Calcutta 1971; A. K. Mehrotra, ed. *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets*, New Delhi 1992.

²¹ M. Paranjape, ed. *Indian Poetry in English*, Madras 1993.

²² A. K. Rath, *Language Debate and Canonizing Indian English Poetry*, "The Challenge" 2013, no. 2.

exquisite and aesthetically attractive culture. And also least expensive....There were rare people, famous rare people who did that..."²³.

The infamous snake-charmers of India bothered him, but the image which Ginsberg carried throughout has a definite purpose – like Isherwood and Carpenter – to “going there to look for a teacher”²⁴. There were other reasons behind the trips as well. Reading Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, Ginsberg had anticipated the end of American capitalism and the end of Empire in the East, of which the latter took a long time to come²⁵. So the liberation movement that he initiated drew him to the East and with the guidance of a perfect teacher would Ginsberg create poetic compositions to free America of its militarism.

In writing, driven by a passionate form of rebellion, Indian gods and goddesses are domesticated to help sing the saga of liberation. There is a shift from the site of rebellion to the form of rebellion as well. The impermanent status of the American West²⁶ – the chaos of Western science, Aristotelian mind – drive him to the East. Bits and pieces of memory from this cultural encounter form the heart of his later thought. Apparently, Ginsberg equates the political massacre of America with that of the destructive goddess Kali who fights demons against the atrocities inflicted upon them. On the backdrop, Ginsberg’s mother driven by madness would not be able to give him the real comfort and would be destructive in approach. All his life Ginsberg carried that suffocation, envisioned Kali as the destructive mother, who would destroy American supremacy and re-create a universe for the imbecile:

Kali’s insatiable blood thirst caused by eating
 too many Armies (Asura whose blood
 drops formed innumerable Asuras)
 Killed him with a spear & drank drips of blood.
 Black, half naked. Claws. Tusks. Garland
 of skulls, red tongue & mouth
 dripping blood
 Siva = Destruction devouring time = white
 Kali triumphs over white time – “abysmal
 void”
 Dance madness. Stepping on Shiva she comes
 down again –
 theres nothing left to dance on
 Kali as Statue of Liberty starts moving with ten arms [sic]²⁷ .

²³ S. Ganguly, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 24.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals, op. cit.*, p. 22.

The metaphorical proximity of Kali and the Statue of Liberty continues further. Kali is terrible-faced, fearful, awful, yet benevolent. The *dhyana mantra* of the Goddess, as is composed, glorifies a potentially terrifying goddess, who dwells in the cremation ground surrounded by jackals; she is naked and though she betrays the love for the extreme, she is worshipped as the mother-figure as she is ever merciful. So also remain the modern references of Kali with her demonic or *birupa* figure and Ginsberg projects her as the divine mother – symbolizing both creation and destruction – to its extremity. The religious symbols – chiefly of Kali with her multiple destructive images and also of Siva – have been used to rationalize human sacrifice, sacrifice of capitalist thought and re-creation of the capitalist world. The Statue of Liberty is consequently invoked to take the form of Kali, the goddess, who would be destructive, but her destruction would bring back life from the periphery.

Drugs bring him to a gifted illusion. The *Bhagvad Gita's visva rupa* – the Hindu representation of creation and destruction – is not only metaphysical and transcendental, it also brings him a vision which is not otherwise possible in reality: “Why am I afraid to go back to that Creation? Afraid it is a 3-D delusion I’ll enter & never get out of”²⁸ and soon after he writes: “To be afraid to enter [that delusion] is a terrible fate. The echo of being afraid to be born, to leave Naomi’s womb, even – a sort of hit of pre-natal memory”²⁹. Not being able to be protected by the parent-figure is death for the poet. Symbolically, not being able to achieve the envisioned liberation of the self and the soul is death anyway. This terrible state of understanding human misery is a dialogical synthesis which Freudian psychology has failed to understand. It is religion and its mystical tradition that allow Ginsberg to escape madness: “In the same as being afraid to leave the womb of life & go forth into the State of Death. All the religious songs counsel acquiescence”³⁰.

In Ginsberg, as is hallucination, dream is a metaphor. Music transcends the sick soul, empathizing it, and once the metaphors transgress themselves as metonyms, a new desire of fulfillment can be perceived. This is true in life and art, and Ginsberg’s entire journey – non-conformism in *Howl*, fears of LSD hallucination, boy-love, quarrelsome lovers, meditation and lectures on the Buddha – makes sense. His life-writing is as serious as the blades of capitalism and life-narrative is as weird as India’s mystic life after colonial modernization. He wrote:

I walk alone several miles in night along ox-meat market street till I go thru
fairylane gate to the Rashbehari Rich Section with modern Apartments on the
Seaside – a beautiful front street rich waterfront like vaster Chicago – I wonder

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 28.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

what city I'm in, I'm deliriously happy, it's my promised land (I'm writing this in the promised land)³¹.

Such is the vision of the dark singer. And again “the wonderland where Man knows he's in a dream”³². In dream and writing comes Kali, showing the destruction of atom bomb. If destruction has to come, it has to come in the way Hindu philosophy preaches the end of the world – a reconstruction has to have its beginning. Consequently, Kali becomes a central figure in Ginsberg's advocating of anti-nuclear activities in the American West. Kali the destructive force is also the benevolent mother; her earthly appearance with skulls and freshly cut human heads also inspires awe as she is the caring-mother. Similar should be the face of the Statue of Liberty: “A huge bottomless throat and a great roar of machinery chewing on these Hydrogen bombs like bubble gums & bursting all over its mouth as big as the Lincoln Memorial”³³. Ginsberg had his own concepts of sin and heaven. Sex is a metaphor. Love is its true communication. What is “heaven” he questions at multiple places and multiple times. Every time he asks the question, he receives a different answer. He records them. It is chiefly then a place beyond shit and desire³⁴, which his poetic composition would aspire to achieve. But failing, here constructed as positive, he would soon realize that it is desire that brings sorrow to him, an echo of Buddhist tradition that he would embrace. “Not to be afraid of anybody or anything anymore” is so the characteristic of Hell. What is it that Ginsberg fears most? Why is the writing so raw, meaning why is it so explicit and rebellious? Endless is thus the suffering, of human, beasts and angels. “An ogre goes with every rose / A bee sting guards the honey / Immortality must disclose / Endless death”³⁵. The soul is the poem. There is no salvation in and from the materialist universe except at the feet of the Buddha, who is eternally peaceful:

O What an ocean! whoever seeks
The land of illumination:
That is to say, the lifeboat leaks,
Hunger is the ration,
Thirst is the First and only water;
There is no Salvation,
Eternity gets shorter & shorter
To finish its Creation!³⁶

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 6.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 29.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 30.

This is “ruined Ginsberg” singing the heart-felt cry as hunger and illness continue and life’s uncertainty is still bothering him. Where is the political? Where is the state of Being? Even in dream and hallucination Ginsberg rebels. It is the perpetual motion of the mind that presents the state of Being. With much contemplation thus *Indian Journals* gradually develops where the noteless raga is the rebellious node; its less aesthetic tone is the tone of the industrial society. To survive on the run is also an aesthetic creation in India, which Ginsberg, despised and haunted, would present. Hence against capitalism and bomb, he embraces the victim of capitalism – the rickshaw pullers and the proletariats. Against the imperial West, he embraces the colonized nation – India – the worst affected of western supremacy and consequently he creates a new genre of writing – a collage of everyday speech, poems, notes and blank pages.

Between mythology and capitalism

As Ginsberg embraces the victims of capitalism and embraces life in the periphery as his own state of being, he develops a life based on mythology and accepts its complete substances. He lived a ghetto life in America and witnessed a street-life in Benares; he dish-washed for a living and understood the life of lepers and beggars surviving in a colonized society. Kali comes back, this time not as a mythological figure to destroy America with its multiple images, but as a human figure to live a ghetto-life. In *Describe: the rain on Dasaswamedh Ghat* Ginsberg, the narrator of the poem, rents a cheap house in the holy city of Benares, and observes the everyday activity of the common people. The poem, like a painting, where everything happens at the same time, provides a detailed image of multiple human characters. Kali Ma is presented as a blind woman who is on her way finding a place, to urinate finally “to piss on a broom”; the broom is accidentally left by the stone cutters who “last night were shaking the street with Boom”³⁷. Both the progressive modern humans and the colonized poor negotiate the space and have a share of their own. The blind man who rents the road at night as a habitat is shaken as several trucks unload stones, and his sex-life is destroyed. The open habitat of the poor is further shared by animals who rent it for different purposes: the cows and the dogs living a street life, the donkeys and the camels taking the burden of human movements, the elephants serving marriage processions with drummers, tourists and bathing devotees crowding the place, and lepers on their begging movements – all representing modern life come to be displayed in Ginsberg’s poetic sketches. Then comes Ginsberg, as he witnessed poverty in America, to sketch the life of the suburban Indian poor. Not that the violent reality of each individual does not bother the poet:

³⁷ A. Ginsberg, *Selected Poems*, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

the leper...
 emerge dragging his buttocks on the gray rainy ground by the glove-
 bandaged stumps of hands,
 one foot chopped off below knee, round stump-knob wrapped with black
 rubber
 pushing a tin can shiny size of his head with left hand (from which only a
 thumb emerged from leprous swathings)³⁸

The poet spends his time in a ghetto to understand the effect of forgotten colonialism. A cultural renaissance is envisioned, for freedom of mind. The powerful gods and goddesses have turned humans and possess no power. Kali Ma, representing a blind woman now, presents the life of an imbecile and vanishes; a dog barks at a mad man with dirty and wild hair:

...who rag round his midriff & water pot in hand
 stopped in midstreet turned round & gazed up at the balconies, windows,
 shops and city stagery filled with glum activity
 Shrugged & said *Jai Shankar!* To the imaginary audience and Me's
 While a white robed Baul Singer carrying his one stringed dried pumpkin
 Guitar
 Sat down near the cigarette stand and surveyed his new scene, just arrived
 in the Holy City of Benares³⁹.

The ghetto life represented here directly corresponds to Ginsberg's sexual life as well. There were other gay counterparts such as Edward Carpenter, E. M. Forster and Christopher Isherwood whom Ginsberg read, and understood that the refuge of the homosexual self is only in Hinduism and Buddhism which tolerate homosexuality in their scriptures and sculptures. A personal autonomy away from the capitalist world, a sexual fulfillment in the colonized land and ghetto-living among the sub-urban poor where there remained enough liberty to attain a sense of freedom of the self that in turn would provide serious autonomy to literary creation. During such a crucial time, daring an autobiography of resistance is a difficult task here. It is as narcissistic as Narcissus himself. Recording it chronicles a scripted life especially when one is not sure of a future tomorrow. Years of travelling would mean losing all contacts whatsoever, be it relatives, friends, lovers – all unfaithful to Father Time:

Am I even here to myself? I daren't write it all down, it's too shameful & boring now & I haven't the energy to make a great passional autobiography of it all – for who's all that autobiography for if it doesn't deliver heaven or reasonable equivalent? Anyway, who is that autobiography for? Young kids after the

³⁸ *Ibidem.*

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

movies? I guess I have nothing to contribute to general edification by this vague haphazard slow motion death⁴⁰.

Ginsberg's *Indian Journals* is a significant departure from all other works, viz., *Howl and Other Poems*, *Kaddish and Related Poems*, and other scattered prose pieces. It is a queer collage of notebook, diary, blank pages, writings, tracts, stanzas and poems. Sometimes it is chronological and at other times it breaks the narrative thread to such a great extent that the structure of writing – composition, paragraphs, poems, sentences along with time and history – get upside-down. However, there is method in the writing and it directly borrows from William Carlos Williams who had, with great fascination, acknowledged Ginsberg's rebellion in the foreword to *Howl*. Williams' influence in this phase of literary creation is directly related to composition, which Ginsberg practiced in life and directly took to his journal. Like his other rebellions, his rebellion with form too became significant. Like his other rebellions in life, a composition also has to rebel for its independent structure:

There's no reason why ever line must begin at the left hand margin. A silly habit, as if all the thoughts in the brain were lined up like a conscript army. No, thought flows freely thru the page space. Begin new ideas at margin and score their development, exfoliation, on the page organically, showing the shape of the thought, one association on depending indented on another, with space-jumps to indicate gaps and relationships between Thoughts, broken syntax to indicate hesitancies & interruptions, – GRAPHING the movement of the mind on the page, as you would graph a sentence grammatically to show the relation between subject verb & object in primary school – the arrangement of lines on the page spread out to be a rhythmic scoring of the accelerations, pauses & trailings-off of thoughts in their verbal forms as mouth-speech⁴¹.

William Carlos Williams is the progenitor here. Writing becomes an ethic, an obsession, that changes life. For Baudelaire, in the *Voyages*, the motto is "To the depths of the unknown to find the new"⁴². For Ginsberg, it is through drugs, tantra and Zen meditation⁴³. If the pain of life is in life itself, healing comes from immersion into life, nature, people, tradition and things. Whitman lived in those regions, so did William Blake. The surrealists followed this supra-natural life. They are believers and materialists at once; poets are slaves of both body and mind. Between dream and life, Ginsberg seeks his path. He raised himself to the state of "universal communion" where subject and object, body and mind, absorb one another in writing. In Ginsberg there is no distinction between the object of thought and literary composition.

⁴⁰ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 40-41.

⁴² P. Emmanuel, *Baudelaire: The Paradox of Redemptive Satanism*, Alabama 1967, p. 48.

⁴³ A. Ginsberg, *Indian Journals*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

Though capitalism and bloodshed are major themes that have made Ginsberg a world-wide spokesperson, gradually it is an internal battle of body-mind-soul that keeps him engaged. What is the searching question? What is the answer? Ginsberg in India realizes that every answer is internal yet individualistic: “The question I asked was, ‘What is the answer’ and I realized as I went on my knees in lightness & carelessness it was better to ask ‘What is the Great Question that troubles me?’” And further, “I been *demanding* in mental war, and the point of the dream was that the light was outside demands but related to mercy-bliss-tenderness-peace-calm-‘spiritual’”⁴⁴. The answer for Ginsberg is in Zen. Zen is the idea of not committing suicide, not going insane, it is to fight suicide and insanity. As a Zen saying has it “Those who speak, know not; those who know, speak not”. The body is being spoken about, the *Journal* ends, but only to indicate a state of the soul.

Conclusion

In *Notes for Howl and Other Poems*, Ginsberg wrote, “Fate tells big lies, & the gay Creator dances on his own body in Eternity”⁴⁵. The new concept of literature, proposed by Ginsberg in India, breaks America’s bourgeois and puritan culture. It becomes prophetic and esoteric. The poet’s performative body becomes an antenna for piercing the unconscious, the unseen. A re-invention in love is hence necessary for the artist-singer in the neurotic world. The artist’s rebirth from neuroticism into health and life is what Ginsberg learns in India. Initially, all the needs of the poet are anti-social, to be loved for himself so that ultimately he can love everybody as a god. The quest is both mystical and psychological, to go out of society to return to it forever. Ginsberg creates art so that America can imitate it. The greatest metafiction is the fiction of our lives. But it is only Time that gives a story a sequence and a meaning. Ginsberg’s India chapter is a prose-poem, a poem and prose, jazz, confession, mythology, diary, and a prognosis of a life. It is both fiction and metafiction that he carried to his later composition and living.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ A. Ginsberg, *Notes for Howl and Other Poems*, [in:] *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*, ed. P. Hoover, New York 2013, p. 879.