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## **The Concept of Indian Modernity in Anita Desai's *Journey to Ithaca***

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The monolithic notion of modernity became problematic by the end of the two world wars and with the advent of post colonialism, postmodernism and post structuralism. The concept of modernity had to be revised as colonial imperialism gave way to globalization. With the increase in the number of free nations, pluralism was introduced into modernity. Amidst the multiple, global, indigenous and alternative modernities, India developed a unique variety of modernity characterized by the diversity of its mosaic culture. It is the essence of Indian spirituality which enables even the most deprived to endure poverty and it is the modernity which provides the prospect of improvement. Anita Desai, in her ninth novel *Journey to Ithaca*, presents an effective mixture of the Indian modernity, as diversified as the Indian culture itself. By combining the best in the east and the west, the Indian version of modernity becomes easily palpable to all.

### **The Concept of Modernity—An Introduction**

Modernity can be loosely described as a post traditional and post medieval movement from feudalism or agrarianism towards industrialization, capitalism, rationalism, globalization, nationalism, mass democracy and their constituent institutions. As such, it denoted a renunciation of the past and a re-interpretation of historical origin from Aristotelian idealism to Machiavellian realism, from the hegemony of Christianity to the secularization of nation-states and from the geocentric to the heliocentric concept of the solar system. Obsessed by a 'visual culture' that demanded evidence, the term modernity, very soon, engaged itself with an enhanced movement of people, goods, capital and information on a global basis; an increase in the metropolis circuits and social standardization conducive of a mobile economy; and an increased specialization resulting in the interdependence of the various segments of the society.

The concept of western modernity is often considered synonymous with 'eurocentricism', a term evolved during the decolonization period of the early twentieth century. The progressively mechanized character of the European culture was contrasted with the traditional hunting, farming and herding societies in Africa, Asia, Australia, America and the later Pacific, which were being newly conquered and colonized by the Europeans. The history of Europe, as a result, was presented as a universal paradigm to be followed by the rest of the world. Other cultures were identified as having reached a stage through which Europe itself had already passed—primitive hunting and gathering, agriculture, early civilization, feudalism, industrialization and the modern liberal capitalism. Only Europe was supposed to have achieved the last stage of development. In fact, Shahid Alam remarks,

In no other major civilization do self regard, self congratulation and denigration of the Other run as deep, nor have these tendencies infected as many aspects of their thinking, laws and policy, as they have in Western Europe and its overseas extensions (n. pag.).

Since 'modern' means 'now', the cultures associated with modernity got identified with the newest, latest and the most dominant, as opposed to the 'traditional' cultures that mutely accepted 'handed down' things which they slowly modified, all the while having been faithful to the inherited ideas and customs. A modern world view implicitly assumed the superiority of the latest and the newest as liberating and expansive, and scorned the old-fashioned as restrictive and oppressive. In all their encounters with the non-Western world, the imperial West rationalized the colonization process as the deserved fate of not being modern, thus inhibiting the natural development of many ancient cultures like India, China and the Middle East. It forced these cultures to reject their time-tested values of harmony and adopt the new barbarism of domination, militarism and racism to survive.

### **The New Modernities**

The monolithic notion of modernity became problematic by the end of the two world wars and with the advent of post colonialism, postmodernism and post structuralism. With the increase in the number of free nations, pluralism was introduced into modernity. The concept of modernity had to be revised as colonial imperialism gave way to globalization. As a result of the technological boom of the mid twentieth century, television became the primary news source, the importance of manufacturing decreased in Western Europe and the United States, whereas international trade increased in volumes.

At the same time, the youth revolted violently to the policies and perspectives of the previous generations through protests and rebellions. Opposition to the Algerian War and the Vietnam War and to laws encouraging racial segregation and female discrimination, restricted access to divorce, increased use of marijuana and hallucinogens, the emergence of pop cultural styles of music and drama and the increasing power of personal and digital means of mass communication were some of the visible changes in the broader cultural context of the 1950s.

In view of the global economic prosperity, digital revolution and the comparative analysis of the post colonial societies, Shmuel Eisenstadt introduced the concept of 'multiple modernities'. Modernity as a 'plural condition' is the central concept of this sociological approach and perspective, which broadens the definition of modernity from an essentially Western European culture to a culturally relativistic definition, namely, "modernity is not westernization, and its key processes and dynamics can be found in all societies" (Delanty 2007). Eisenstadt's concept of multiple modernities describes the Western project of modernity as a village growing into a complex city with many non Western neighbours. Unlike the theoreticians like Marx, Weber and Durkheim who believed that all industrial societies would one day converge and the European model would become universal, Eisenstadt characterized the new theoretical outlook as: "The idea of multiple modernities presumes that the best way to understand the contemporary world is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs" (2).

Mike Featherstone et al point out the rise of 'global modernities' with the emergence of trans-national mediascapes, ethnoscapas and technoscapas and other international social, cultural and political institutions. that are superseding the national ones. On a macro level, the global increasingly informs the regional, thus deconstructing the ideas like nation state and national sovereignty. They further argue that national differences and antagonisms between peoples are vanishing these days, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto (125).

On the basis of his fieldwork research on land claims in Northern Africa, the sociologist Steven Robins argues that the so called beneficiaries of development tend to deploy hybrid and highly selective situational responses to development interventions. He identifies these hybrid responses as 'indigenous modernities', where development packages are resisted, embraced, reshaped or accommodated depending on the specific content and context. Robins suggests that such indigenous responses to development are neither wholly endorsing nor radically rejecting modernity, because even when resisting and subverting development ideas and practices, people do not generally do so on the basis of either radical populist politics or in defense of pristine and local cultural traditions. In other words, many post colonial nations are negotiating between concepts of indigenous tradition and European modernity and this contestation has led to the formation of the indigenous version of modernity (265-286).

In his article 'Alternative Modernities: Globalization and the Post Colonial', Bill Ashcroft argues that 'alternative modernities' emerge out of a relation to other modernities, both western and eastern. He also adds that the most characteristic alternative modernities are the hybridized ones that adapt, appropriate and transform the global cultural forms to their local needs, beliefs and conditions. He continues to point out that India "has proven to be one of the most energetic transformers of imperial technologies" (n. pag.).

Being exogenous, outward looking and inquisitive, Indian society has an enormous circulation of its own ideas and influences. It has a long history of heterogeneity, argumentative reasoning and democratic interchange, which reveal a more complicated route to democracy than purely Western inheritance. Ashcroft cites the example of the Ambassador Car to explain the principles of adaptation and transformation of the Indian modernity. Right from 1957, the Hindustan motor company has been manufacturing the Ambassador car based on the 1954 Morris Oxford model. The Ambassador, with a rugged body, an easily accessible motor, cheap spare parts, easily maintained, represents the very principle of an alternative modernity—the appropriation of a technology and its transformation to adapt to local conditions.

The antiquity and adaptability of Indian civilization, and the nature of its engagement of the transnation with globalization, is suggested in its writing in which two magnetic poles seem to organize the landscape of identity: the pole of memory which perpetuates cultural tradition, and the pole of possibility which represents an Indian identity whose overriding characteristic is one of mobility and transnationality (Mishra 422). Alternative modernities are a phenomenon in which socio-political theories of modernity find a harmonious conjunction with post colonial cultural analysis. But the critical path of discovery opened up in this conjunction is the further revelation of the degree to which

western modernity has been transformed by the creative adaptation of the formerly colonized world.

### **Features of the Indian Modernity**

Ralph Buultjens, the leading political scientist, identifies five major characteristics of Indian modernity in his article 'Understanding Modern India' (1981). First, Indian modernity is characterized by its diversity. India is a land of poverty and plenty, the powerful and the weak, ancient and modern, climatically dramatic in its contrasts. Although predominantly Hindu, the entire world's major religions are represented in India. As a result of religious, caste and ethnic differences, India possesses a mosaic culture. Such diversity is a source of divisiveness in a nation where particular loyalties have a deep meaning, both spiritually and physically.

Secondly, the depth of Indian culture can be contrasted with the comparative newness of the political nation-state of India. The philosophical and cultural development of India goes back to the days of Aryan civilization, and all the major religions have had their indelible imprint on the Indian social scenario, so that, even the poorest illiterate can narrate stories of myth and history, a consciousness of a great civilizational heritage which is unusually widespread.

The third major feature is the presence of minorities—religious, linguistic, tribal and neo-aboriginal, whose conditions influence both the domestic and foreign policy. About 80 per cent of the nation's population comprises Hindus and a 12 per cent of Muslims. Despite being the majority religion, Hinduism itself is an amalgam of pluralistic beliefs and forms, often containing conflicting elements.

The dichotomy between the cities and villages of India is another feature of the nation's modernity. Only 20 per cent of the Indian population lives in the cities, while the rest belong to the villages. The living conditions of these two are poles apart. The urban India is the India of modern industry, national politics and foreign policy, government planning, the national media, the seat of the major universities, business, the armed forces, science and technology. Possessing international standards, the Indian cities are cosmopolitan in character. On the other hand, rural India is the India of age-old patterns and traditions, where life flows without much change. The future of India depends upon the effective interaction of these two worlds. Their effective interaction leads to such advantages as expansion of education, reduction of illiteracy, extension of the average lifespan, the introduction of some basic health care and the sustenance of a democratic political system. At the same time, their failure at proper connection brings about such disasters as population explosion and unemployment.

Finally, Buultjens discovered that in the cities and the villages, poverty, spirituality and modernity mix and coexist. It is the essence of Indian spirituality which enables even the most deprived to endure poverty and it is the modernity which provides the prospect of improvement. It is this spirit, a composite of many small individual visions and inspirations, which characterizes modern India.

### ***Journey to Ithaca***

*Journey to Ithaca* (1995), the ninth novel of Anita Desai, presents the theme of quest—of Matteo in search of the mystery of India, of Sophie in search of the true identity of the Mother, and of Laila in search of the blue god Krishna. Whatever be their diverse goals



and routes, their spatially and temporally separate journeys converge upon each person's discovery of his/her own self. As such, the novel reveals the dichotomy that a search for the other brings man face to face with his own self. One cannot access the world without knowledge of the self. In other words, knowledge of the self is the ultimate knowledge one can attain. Such a spiritual culture has become a part of India's tradition and modernity, philosophy and way of life, theory and praxis.

The separate paths of the three major characters, Matteo, Sophie and Laila, also lead to the concept of Indian modernity, which is inseparable from tradition and spirituality. Hence, any search of the spiritual would take the individual to the Indian traditions which are in turn embedded in the Indian modernity. A nation of rich and ancient culture, India can never separate itself from its roots, with the result that Indian modernity is a contested space of Indian tradition and spirituality, originating with the Aryan civilization.

Like all works of literature based on quest and journey, *Journey to Ithaca* also lays its emphasis on the search rather than the destination. It is the journey or means that matters, not the end; for the end itself could be different from what we had expected. The attainment of self at the end of the tunnel might be a serendipitous discovery; yet all knowledge, all exposure and experience are meant for the improvement of the self.

India in the novel is seen through the eyes of the three foreigners—Matteo of Italy, Sophie of Germany and Laila of Egypt. Themselves never having been a part of the Indian culture, they have their personal prejudices and perspectives regarding India. They have come with the preconceived notions as to where to look for and what to see, which means they don't see what they don't want to see. The foreign pilgrims would like to view India as an ancient land of sages and beggars, as a fit Other to their own homeland, namely, Europe. Oriented towards viewing the Orient as the Other prevents them from seeing it differently. With their partial vision, they see only the traditional aspects of the Indian culture, while Desai has laid bare the aspects of Indian modernity before the discerning eyes of the Indian reader.

Anita Desai presents two time spans in the novel—the twenties and the seventies of the twentieth century—to mark the arrival of Laila (the Mother) and that of Matteo and Sophie respectively. The pilgrimage of Matteo and Sophie form the real time of the novel, while that of Laila is reconstructed through Sophie's research, and therefore, further removed from the novel's time.

### **Indian Modernity of the Seventies and the Eighties**

Having grown up as a hyper sensitive boy, Matteo had always thwarted his caregivers' efforts to "educate" him and then absorb him into the then Italian culture, which was predominantly masculine. He detested all symbols of male prowess like football, geometry and algebra. Everything "rational" and intellectual baffled Matteo, who found solace in the natural beauty of his Italian villa and its countryside.

Motivated by his English home-tutor Fabian, he developed fanciful notions of the East, especially that of India, right from his adolescence. It was Fabian who introduced Matteo to the romantic English poetry of Blake and Shelley, and instilled in him a love of the Orient through the novels of Herman Hesse. Artistically inclined, Matteo since then yearned to go to the East in search of the solutions to his life's problems. His opportunity came in 1975, when, after his marriage to Sophie, the daughter and heir of the rich

German banker, the couple migrated to India. On his journey, Matteo took with him Hesse's novel *Journey to the East*, instead of the maps and tourist guides taken by the usual European tourists.

During the early days of their stay in India, the couple was as curious and skeptical of the Indian life and culture as any other European tourist. It was Pierre Eduard, one of their early mentors, who strove to "open" their eyes to Indian spirituality:

'Elephants, maharajas—my God, you two, is that what India is to you?' Pierre Eduard rolled his eyes. 'When will people from the West free themselves from Hollywood? Can you think of nothing that is not concrete, material, an entertainment?' (40)

Here, Eduard was mocking at the Western modernity as concrete, material and entertaining. In contrast, he upheld India as a possible alternative to the West with its spirituality and ancient culture. He further narrated the miraculous tale of the yogi who laid in the beach sand with his head buried underneath it, for full forty minutes and advised them, "it is the spiritual experience for which you must search in India, nothing less" (41).

After Pierre Eduard, the couple was to meet Mr. Pandey, a spiritual tourist guide, who took them to several saints and yogis and finally to an ashram. During all these visits, India is described as far from being modern, a land of tricksters and imposters, ugly, hot, noisy, "intrusive and clamorous" (43). Influenced by Mr. Pandey, Matteo started showing signs of belief in Indian spirituality. Thus Mr. Pandey becomes the symbol of the new Indian who sells his culture's ancient spiritual heritage to the European tourists.

Whatever be the beliefs of Matteo, Sophie who was introduced as a journalist, could see through the saintliness of the Indian culture. It was she who sensitively perceived the caste and gender differences among the pilgrims. Hence she was very much disturbed and disappointed throughout Matteo's spiritual journey and his subsequent search of a guru, for the gurus they had met until then were so greedy that many of them expected costly gifts from their disciples. Yet, it was Sophie who got lost in the "aromatic haze of marijuana; it clung to her and became her clothing. It penetrated her and became her being" (66).

As a digression, Desai also depicts the hippie culture of the seventies. Hippies were the generation of pleasure-seekers who "burrowed into" the sands of Goan beach "like puppies, and slept" (66). They became the examples of the loose, anarchical life of the Wild West and were as such pointed out by the traditional Indian as the symbols of licence and lawlessness, as "dregs of Western society" (73). They refused to venture beyond the hippie villages, where during the day they milled around the open markets, and during the night they gathered in the bars to drink cheap feni till they fell asleep. In the beginning, they narrated with awe and admiration the fantastic tales of Indian spirituality; though later they switched to more spectacular tales of the diseases caught by them in the course of their pilgrimages.

Matteo too, for a while, had a level head to differentiate between true and fake spirituality. In his exposure to the many saints and yogis, Matteo learnt that in India freaks were hailed as saints, while in Italy, freaks (like Matteo himself) were scorned as mere freaks. This was the impression he had when he visited the yogi who had not slept for twenty five years:

Without returning his look, the yogi stretched out his hand to point at the notes and coins scattered on the deer skin by the others who had been to see him. When he did so, Matteo noticed the glint of a gold watch strap on his wrist. Twisting his lips, he turned away: why did the yogi who did not need sleep need a watch to tell him the time? (74)

In short, many of the practitioners of Indian spirituality were as material and physical as the practitioners of Western modernity. This idea is further brought home in the descriptions of the many ashrams where the couple resided. Most of the ashrams had massive “concrete structures behind a high iron gate and walls topped with barbed wire in the heart of the city” (84). Such ashrams, to Sophie, are not different from some of the convents and boarding schools in the west, which emphasize severe discipline. At the same time, she was disgusted at the filth and squalor that filled those ashrams as well as the double standards practised by the swamis to the foreign pupils. She recognized that the foreigners were looked down upon as pariahs or outcasts by the caste Hindu inmates of the ashram:

Meals were served to the foreigners not in the dining hall with the Indian disciples but on the verandas outside and they were served on leaf plates that could be thrown away after a meal and were not reused; in other words, there was no chance of the Hindu disciples being polluted. (87)

Sophie realized that the ashramites were people who despised them even as they exploited them. Her alienation increased further with the news of her pregnancy. Even though celibacy was not strictly followed in the ashram, both Matteo and Sophie were ostracized as ‘animals’ that polluted the sanctity of the ashram. Together with this play of favourites, the scandals that came out about the ashram made them decide to move to the ashram headed by the Mother, at the foot of the hills, where they permitted families to stay.

### **The Ashram at the Foot of the Hills**

To the young couple who suffered a number of trials and tribulations at various Indian ashrams, the Mother’s ashram at the foot of the Himalayan hills proved a possible paradise on earth. The ashram headed by the Mother alias Laila was run on a perfect mix of the Eastern and Western spirituality. Unlike the dirty exploitative ashrams on the plains, this one thrived on “extreme neatness and cleanliness” (108). The apparently happy and cheerful inmates, the rich and prosperous garden and orchard and the altogether idyllic atmosphere of the ashram evoked in Matteo nostalgic memories of his childhood home on the lake.

In her evening discourse addressed to her disciples, the Mother claimed that the purpose of their lives was the attainment of Bliss and Joy in the presence of the Master. She upheld the deep ecological view of the native Indian that believed in the omnipresence of the Divine Force. As such her belief was pantheistic and suprarreligious. She boldly declared, “...we do not listen to the black scolding voices of religion here. Religion makes one ashamed, makes one guilty, makes one fearful” (110). The Mother was successful in establishing such a perfect blend between the cultures of the East and the West that Matteo had “an experience of unity, the unity of the spiritual with the physical, the dark with the light, the human with the natural” (111).



The Mother advised her disciples to consciously experience with utmost vitality even the minutest activities and emotions of their daily life, thereby feeling the presence of the Divine Power in their lives. Unlike the masculine Western cultures that asked to hide one's emotions, the Mother wanted her devotees to have the courage to own their own negative feelings as well as the presence of Evil in this world. She also realized the importance of hard work and saw to it that her devotees were assigned with enough and more hard labour, as she realized that the abundance of time was a major cause of the degradation of the youth. Finally, she wanted her disciples to stop unnecessary struggling and resisting, but accept all experience and be conscious of everything to the fullest. Matteo was immediately taken in by the Mother's discourse, who then decided that the mission of his life was to live close to the Mother and "to retain those impressions" (120) in the best possible way.

The Mother maintained the virtues of self reliance and cleanliness within the premises of the ashram and wanted everyone to strictly abide by them. Initially, Matteo was assigned the job of composing her letters. Matteo, who looked forward to it, as a post where he could get glimpses of the Mother's spiritual life, was thoroughly disappointed to learn that the ashram correspondence mainly dealt with mundane matters like clearing of garbage from the ashram grounds, the sale of a bumper crop of guavas that the ashram inmates could not harvest or devour by themselves, the building of more cattle sheds and the distribution of the surplus milk in the town.

Sophie, however, was not impressed by the Mother and regarded the latter as "a monster spider who had spun this web to catch these silly flies" (144). At night, she told Matteo, "she may be your mother but I have one who is quite enough for me, I don't need this one" (144). Soon a tug of war started between Sophie and the Mother, the two powerful women, to claim their rights over Matteo and eventually, Sophie set out to investigate the past life of the Mother and thus break her spell over Matteo and the rest of the world.

### **Indian Modernity of the Twenties**

Sophie entertained simultaneous feelings of hatred and fascination for the Mother. Due to this ambivalence, she set out to unearth the intriguing history of Laila's evolution as the Mother. From bits and pieces collected from here and there, Sophie reconstructed the story of the Mother like a jigsaw puzzle. Sophie's forensic investigation of the Mother's *purvashrama* took her on a world tour, "back in time, although not her own time now but the Mother's" (182). Following the heels of Laila the globe-trotter, Sophie went to Alexandria where the former grew up, to Cairo where she was acquainted with Islam, to Paris where she encountered Christianity, learnt eurhythmic exercises and found 'India' in the Indological Bookstore, to Venice and New York where she danced with an Indian troupe and back to India where Laila transformed herself to the Mother, and along with Master Prem Krishna, established their present ashram.

Laila grew up as a wild, frenzied girl in Alexandria, as the only daughter of teachers both holding university degrees, her mother being a French Christian and her father an Egyptian Muslim. Born to two cultures, Laila struggled against all types of constraints, both religious and traditional, and developed a sense of freedom intrinsic to modernity. Despite her family's academic background, she scorned all scholarship, hated reading and was a passionate girl who wanted to get out of her house to learn dancing.

At the American College for Girls in Cairo, where her parents sent her to study, Laila recognized two types of modernity—one of wealthy Westernized girls in dresses and high heeled shoes and the demure and serious students on scholarships who studied Arabic along with English and French. Laila got attracted to the second group because,

...while the smart Westernized girls laid themselves open to observation quite candidly and there was no more to them than met the eye, the modest girls who kept their eyes lowered were the ones who had secrets, who had inner lives that might possibly prove to be intriguing. (190)

In Cairo, Laila was drawn by the intensity of commitment at Koran classes held at the courtyard of the mosque and also by the revolutionary student group that plotted subterranean movements against the British government. She also learnt that the Islamic culture offered no opening to debate or argument: “Here was a book, a subject, a doctrine that did not allow questioning; that was powerful and authoritative in a strange and inexplicable way” (192).

However, in Paris, where she went for higher studies, Laila was treated as a heathen and a savage by her aunt’s family. The Mother who severely imposed the virtues of cleanliness and hygiene upon the ashramites, had quite defiantly violated those at her aunt’s household. As a result, her aunt often snubbed her and attempted to “civilize” her niece of the latter’s barbarity.

It was at Madame Lacan’s bookstore that Laila found some solace, where she browsed Indian books based on temples, Hinduism, wildlife, jungles, travels, philosophy, and moreover, the pictures of the blue god Krishna and the dancing maiden. These books and the prophecy of the Cairean hagdah that she would meet her god in the northern city on water and then move eastwards to found the temple of the Mother Goddess of the world (199) prompted her to join the dance troupe from India, which had a male dancer called Krishna in it. For a time, she adored her dance teacher Krishnaji as a demi god. Only later, did she understand that Krishna the dancer was just a base human who wanted fame and money for himself, and had nothing Supreme or Almighty in him. She had yearned for the harmony of mind and body, of thought and action and of the world and the spirit, which she claimed to have got from her union with her Master.

### **The M(other) and the Modernity**

Very early in life, Laila (the Mother) tells her aunt, “I am a seeker after truth and have given up all orthodox religions,...I find them the repositories of ignorance and suppression” (234). Having born to dual cultures, Laila was alienated from both of these. Everywhere she was shunned as a foreigner, a savage and a Muslim: terms stressing her difference, minority and Otherness. Due to her Otherness, Laila became the representative of the East, as perceived by the West. Hence it was only natural for her to find sanctuary in India, a land of mystery and mysticism, of cultural, religious and ethnic ambiguities as well as possibilities. In such a contested space, she established her ashram, a microcosm within the plural world, built on global and cosmopolitan principles. To her devotes she said,

‘Read nothing. Nothing. You have not come to a university. I am not giving out degrees....close your books. Clear your mind. The way of *jnana*—the way of knowledge—is nothing compared to the way of *bhakti*—the way of love. Here we teach only Love.’ (132)

Unlike the Bihar ashram where Matteo had attended Sanskrit classes, here he had only back-breaking toil: “He had neither the time nor the strength to meditate any more, or to read, or even to think or reflect; his mind seemed stuffed and cluttered with the most minute details of the ashram’s organization and functioning” (135). Quite different from the Bihar ashram’s faceless, nameless inmates, the Mother’s ashram comprises characters having names like Kripa (mercy), Diya (light), Prema (love) and so on. In the words of Suman Jana, “it (Mother’s ashram) is a community of bliss, of selfless love and joy” (85). The Mother realized that the foreigners who migrated to India were the children of a generation of surfeit, who found emptiness in material pleasures and who sought in India the meaning of their existence. She also knew that an abundance of time was the basic cause of most of their problems. In the ashram, while the Indian devotees were mostly aged, the foreigners were young and many had families living in the cottages. So they were given back-breaking work to keep them from further distractions.

The Mother justified this by upholding the principle of ‘nishkama karma’ or “work without desiring the fruit from that work” (142) and the Western ideal of perseverance. Another method of management was to exhort her devotees to work hard for the sake of the Master, so that his life and work might be continued (136). She established that such hard work was the *sadhna* of a devotee; in other words, it was beneficial to their own lives. Apart from work, she incorporated into her philosophy the ideals of self reliance, cleanliness and personal hygiene. She taught by example as she also toiled along with her disciples. In fact, her vitality and energy were contagious.

The evening discourses of the Mother had such hypnotic effect on her devotees that the Mother could easily be identified as one possessing ‘charismatic authority’, in Max Weber’s sense of the term. Max Weber defines the term ‘charismatic authority’ as “resting on devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (qtd. in Roth and Wittich 215). Such a leadership is based on the personality of the leader so that with the death of the leader, the regime is likely to fall to pieces, if a new charismatic leader does not appear in his place. The same happens in the Mother’s ashram also. When Sophie returns to the ashram after the Mother’s death, she senses abandonment and loss everywhere:

...everything is left hanging loosely, no longer held together and cared for. There are flowers in the bed still, but wilted, unwatered, and fruit on the trees, but unpicked, left to rot. Many of the cottages seem to be deserted: there is no washing hanging around them, no children playing. (346)

The only hope is in Matteo who has gone to receive enlightenment. The final comparison of Matteo to Jesus suggests that he might have received enlightenment and with Sophie established a new cult, secular and eco friendly, like the Master and the Mother.

## Conclusion

*Journey to Ithaca* is a germinal book that offers infinite possibilities like India, the destination of the pilgrimage of the three major characters of the novel. While Matteo and Sophie represent migration of the 60s and the 70s, Laila represents that of the 20s, suggesting that India had always drawn people who were willing to ponder and wander. Such an India also offers possibilities of alternative lifestyles which combine the best in both the East and the West, thus making the Indian version of modernity palpable to all.

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