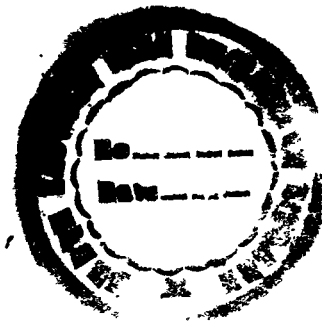


A STUDY
OF
ALLEN GINSBERG AS AN URBAN POET



AN
ABSTRACT
OF THE DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR
AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN ENGLISH

BY
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Chapter I : Introduction: The Milieu.

City poetry originated with the French surrealists and Charles Baudelaire (1821-67) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) were the forerunners of this tradition. Arthur Rimbaud rebelled against ordinary life and craving for release, dreamt of escaping into barbaric splendours or visionary cities. Between 1871-73, he undertook a programme of "disorientation of the senses" in order to try to turn himself into a voyant or seer. Allen Ginsberg is a descendent of Rimbaud and other French city poets, but he has his own distinctiveness as an American poet. Like Rimbaud, he considered himself a poet-prophet, arguing that a vast conspiracy to impose one level of mechanical consciousness on mankind existed, and that psychedelics were one force powerful enough to rupture that conditioning, and that a huge police bureaucracy would aid in the national brainwash and would persecute those spreading illumination. The psychedelic that both of them used for "disorientation of the senses" is 9-12THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), an organic compound soluble in water. Ginsberg defines the marijuana consciousness in an article in Atlantic thus: "The marijuana consciousness is one that, ever so gently, shifts the the centre of attention from habitual shallow, purely verbal guidelines and repetitive secondhand ideological interpretations of experience to more direct, slower, absorbing, occasionally microscopically minute engagement with sensing phenomena" ('The Great Marijuana Hoax- First Manifesto to End the Bringdown', Nov. 1966, p. 104). The sensation is of Time slowdown, and exploration of this new space is an useful area of mind consciousness to be familiar with. According to Ginsberg, marijuana is a metaphysical herb less habituating than tobacco, whose smoke is no more disruptive than Insight. So the connecting link between Rimbaud and Ginsberg is

the decadent sensibility. Paul Bourget in Essais the psychologie Contemporaine (1880) makes as accurate assessment of it and the pessimism afflicting the soul of modern man. "When the human being is extremely civilized", he writes with reference to Baudelaire, "he requires that things shall exist in accordance with the dictates of his own heart, a coincidence made all the rarer by the fact that his heart is curiously refined, thus producing irremediable unhappiness. "Our great capital cities provide us with the spectacle of a humanity annihilated by the 'poison' of thought: "Modern man, as we see him coming and going on the Paris boulevards, carries within his less robust limbs, in the too-expressive features of his face, in the excessive acuity of his gaze, the only too evident signs of thinner blood, diminished muscular energy, and an exaggerated disposition of pathological nervousity." Ginsberg had found an answer in two of William Carlos Williams' (1883-1963) poems. Art "justifies" or "makes up for" defeat in worldly life, to the acknowledgement of an

Unworldly love
that has no hope
of the world
and that
cannot change the world
to its delight.....

(Williams, 'Rain', Collected Poems, New Directions, New York, 1996, p.6)

after desolation,

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky
and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth.
(Williams, 'To Elsie', *ibid.*, pp.271-72)

Urbanisation was responsible for the emergence of the Beat Generation movement in industrial America in the 1950s and 1960s. The Beat poets had met exactly in 1948, and it is in the 1940s that the very concept of urban culture took a major shift with the innovative works of sociologist Robert Redfield. The defining institution of urban culture is the city, and the lifeways, or cultural forms that grow up within cities. To the existing bohemia in Greenwich Village joined the Beats with North Beach (San Francisco) and Venice West (Los Angeles) as new sites of literary production and living. Against the powerful vision of the Unreal City, a metropolis of multivalent possibilities, the Beat poets related themselves quite differently to the challenges of the modern. So the Beat movement was an urban movement with strong roots in the three most important metropolitan cities of America. Redfield conceived of the urban as "invariably impersonal, heterogeneous, secular, and disorganising" and the very conception of cities and urban culture is free from ethnocentrism, with broad cross-cultural and historical validity. The Beat emphasis was on escape from the conventional, puritanical, middle-class (termed 'square') mores, towards visionary enlightenments and artistic improvisation, approached via Zen Buddhism and other echoes of religious confessionals, such as Red Indian and Mexican Peyote cults; and also through drive and accelerations charged by wheels, drugs, sex, drinks, or talk. These traits conform to Redfield's presumption that as individuals move from a folk community to a city, or an entire society moved towards a more urbanised culture, a breakdown in cultural traditions is inevitable. According to him, urbanising individuals and societies would suffer from cultural disorganisation and would have higher incidences of social pathologies like divorce, alcoholism, crime, drug-abuse and loneliness. In all times and all cultures, cities are con-

ceived of as centres of bohemianism, social experimentation, dissent, anomie, crime, and similar conditions- whether for good or for bad - created by social breakdown.

The process of urbanisation in America started in the 1920s, as by that time for the first time in American history, the country's 105 million citizens lived in urban centres. In two ways a new social revolution had begun as a result of urbanisation in America and these two ways also inspired the Beat philosophy of blending literature and living to make it a distinctive "urban" social phenomenon. Firstly, the distinction between art and life started reducing and what was previously played out in fantasy and imagination was now acted in life as well. Anything permitted in art was now permitted in life as well. Secondly, the lifestyle once practiced by a small intellectual minority was now copied by many and dominated the cultural scene. The 1960s were marked by the greatest change in morals and manners since the 1920s. Young people, college students in particular, rebelled against what they viewed as the repressed, conformist society of their parents. They advocated a sexual revolution, aided by the birth-control pill, and later by *Roe v. Wade* (1973), a Supreme Court ruling that legalised abortion. "Recreational" drugs such as marijuana and LSD were increasingly used. Opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam promoted the rise of a New Left, which was anti-capitalist as well as anti-war. A counter-culture sprang up that legitimised radical standards of taste and behaviour in the arts as well as in life. It changed American life. Drug-taking, previously confined largely to ghettos, became part of middle-class life. The sexual revolution reduced government censorship, changed attitudes toward traditional sexual roles, and enabled homosexuals to organise and acknowledge their identities as never before. Unrestrained individualism played havoc with family

values. People began marrying later and having fewer children. The divorce rate accelerated to the point that the number of divorces per year was roughly half the number of marriages. The number of abortions rose, as did the illegitimacy rate. The stable, family-oriented society became a thing of the past. Suburbs grew up around the American cities in the 1950s and 1960s, which were populated by the affluent. The Afro-Americans made their contribution to American urbanity mostly in the field of music.

Ginsberg was a "bristling urban messiah" in this socio-cultural milieu. From his historical reading of 'Howl' at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in the Fall of 1955 till his death in 1997, he was probably the poet who drew the maximum attention from the urban reading public- both academicians as well as ordinary men. Unlike any previous poet he could start a whole urban movement on his own, and uplift himself to the status of being a "Guru" -one who spreads enlightenment. He may have been described as a neurotic or psychotic artist by some, but it was Lionel Trilling who presented him first to the English reading public of the world by modelling the character of Ferdinand R. Tertan in his excellent short novel- Of This Time, Of That Place, on Ginsberg. Even Leslie Fiedler suggests that Ginsberg was really the invention of Trilling. During the 1950s and 1960s, he rose almost to a mythical status-with the backings of the Beats (later Hippies) on one side and the English Department at Columbia on the other. Mingling religious and narcotic kicks to poetry, he changed the face of city poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century, giving it a distinctive American flavour. He has made his presence felt as a major poet of the contemporary poetry scene in the United States.

Chapter II: The Vision

In the late Fifties, the West Coast had become the liveliest spot in American poetry. A radical group movement of young poets started in San Francisco State College in the first half to the Fifties. Its originator and moving spirit was Ruth Witt-Diamant, who began by offering readings by local poets and progressed to importing older poets from the East. Part of the activity of the young group had been inspired by Kenneth Rexroth, whose presence in San Francisco over a long period of time, embodying his force and conviction, created a rallying point of ideas, interests, and informal occasions. Poetry there had become a tangible social force, moving and unifying its auditors, releasing the energies of the audience through spoken, even shouted verse, in a way unique to the region till then. The most remarkable poem of the young group, written in 1955, was 'Howl' by Allen Ginsberg.

'Howl' is an affirmation of individual experience of god, sex, drugs, absurdity, and so on. Part I deals sympathetically with individual cases. Part II describes and rejects the Moloch (Canaanite fire god) of society which confounds and suppresses individual experience and forces the individual to consider himself mad if he does not reject his own deepest senses. Part III is an expression of sympathy and identification with Carl Solomon (the poem is dedicated to him) who was in the madhouse -saying that his rebellion is basically a rebellion against Moloch -and Ginsberg extends his hand in union, which is an affirmative act of mercy and compassion. The criticism of society is that "Society" is merciless. The alternative is private, individual acts of mercy. The poem is clearly and consciously built on a liberation of basic human virtues. The poem offers a constructive human value- basically the enlightenment of mystical experience- without which, as Ginsberg claims, no society

can exist.

It was about 1945 that Ginsberg got interested in supreme reality and wrote long poems about a last voyage looking for supreme reality. In the summer of 1948 Ginsberg was living in East Harlem and in a state of hopelessness, or dead end, a change of phase grew up. He reached a psychic or mental equilibrium of a kind, like having no new vision or supreme reality but nothing but the world in front of him, and of not knowing what to do with that. There was a funny balance of tension in every direction, and while reading William Blake's 'The Sunflower', suddenly he realized that the poem was talking about him:

Ah, Sunflower! weary of time
Who countest the steps of the Sun;
Seeking that sweet golden clime,
Where the traveller's journey is done.

Suddenly, Ginsberg heard a deep earthen voice in his room which he immediately assumed was Blake's voice. Ginsberg realised that he was born for an existence in this "sweet golden clime". This was the first of Ginsberg's many spiritual encounters with Blake and he tried to realise this vision, this consciousness in his poetry. The vision was a sudden awakening into a totally deeper real universe than he had been existing in.

Ginsberg's poetry ranges in tone from ecstatic joy to utter despair. It soars and plunges from one line to the next, and it is confident and paranoid. But it always seeks ways to retain the ability to feel in numbing times, it always insists on a social vision that stresses transcendence and the need for a spirit in the face of a materialistic culture. Bob Dylan, Ginsberg's friend and contemporary musician, has remarked that Ginsberg's poetry was for

him the first sign of a new consciousness, of an awareness of regenerative possibilities in America. Dylan also participated in the Beat affinity for the road, the symbol of an attitude toward experience that braves anything as long as movement is encouraged. The first account of this sensibility can be found in Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro". Mailer announced the appearance of a new man, whom he termed the "hipster", who found an existential model in the danger felt by the black man every time he walks down an American street. Seeking, sometimes psychopathically, the "rebellious imperatives of the self", the hipster rejected the conformity of American life, and spread a "disbelief in the words of men who had too much money and controlled too many things." The hipster sought an apocalyptic answer to the demands of adjustment in the American pattern. He, in a constant attempt to change his nervous system, would always express forbidden impulses and actively violate social taboos. He would release primitive energies before a repressive society;

Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everyday is in
eternity! Everyman's an angel! (Ginsberg, 'Footnote to Howl', 1956)

The seed of the hip flowered in the Sixties, and was especially evident in the transformed values of the American youth, who actively challenged the givens of their society to the point where change was sought almost as an end in itself:

I can't change my own mind.
America when will you end the human war?

I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in right mind.

America when will you be angelic?
 (Ginsberg, 'America', Howl and Other Poems, '56)

The glorification of madness, drug-abuse, criminality, and excess is a defining current of the Best sensibility. The philosopher Harvey Mansfield observed in his essay "The Legacy of the Late-Sixties" the idea that drugs are an aid to "mind expansion" and the central appeal of drugs is that of "infinite power together with infinite desires." Ginsberg held that psychedelics are useful in exploring sense perceptions and exploring different possibilities and modes of consciousness. These explorations are useful, according to him, for composing, sometimes, while under influence. But he also proposed actual meditation to get high. The actual sitting is the stabilising factor, the practical side, because it teaches not only patience but also observation and mind-consciousness and makes a human being more sensitized to internal rumblings. As any revolution must include a larger consciousness, Ginsberg felt that a revolution attracted people and got people on because it began out of the body. Any revolution will have to include all the sentient people, will have to include the Bodhisattva's vows, will have to include a deeper realization of the ultimate nature. In order to make the revolution divine, Ginsberg and the hippies felt that they had got the responsibility to take power over the human universe, so they had their consciousness balanced sufficiently broadly to make decisions which are not going to exterminate human sensitives.

The Columbia Literary History of the United States makes an assessment of Ginsberg as an angry social prophet and his poems as acts of social protest. He linked mystical ecstasy with urban torment. A painful immersion in modern urban life tortures the sufferer

into transcendent vision-it turns defeat into sacred experience. Drugs and madness are sought to dislocate ordinary into visionary consciousness. Ginsberg's prophetic stance implies a private vision, and he seems to deliver a message that never arrives.

Chapter III: Elements of Neo-Romanticism and Transcendence.

The hippie movement is not the avant-garde of a new, but only a recent manifestation of an old, romantic tradition. The hippies had distrust in reason and faith in the transcendent. They had unrepressed passion, fantasy, and a dedication to primitivism, simplicity and the bizarre. America is the fertile soil in which romance springs most luxuriantly with the breaking up of the static and bold adventuring upon new worlds. The hippie has unlocked new worlds in his subconscious with the use of psychedelics, making an attempt to move to the country, to escape "the centre of infection". The antipathy for urban technology and a fear of compromise has been translated into a back-to-nature exodus that in most ways is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century romantic instinct to luxuriate in natural beauty.

Allen Ginsberg's experimentations with drugs and travels to every corner of the globe were attempts to find something in or outside himself that was meaningful. He felt that America's wealth, responsibility, conventions, fear of her enemies destroyed his generation. "The hippies", noted Ginsberg, "are an evolution of the consciousness first explored by the Beat Generation." A revolution with war, starvation, racism, rotten cities, political paranoia, and police brutality are part of the Beat dialogue Ginsberg shares with the hippies. Ginsberg attempted to save America from industrialisation and spoilage of nature's beauty. "What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed upon their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" he asks forlornly of our industrialised society. If one is to survive the "tech-

nological warfare" in the cities, enclaves of people dedicated to the "adoration of living" must be encouraged. He felt that all things were divine because the mind of God was absorbed in them. "By an act of self-abandonment God becomes all beings, yet ... does not cease to be God." The mystical experience obtained by Ginsberg gave him, or so he suggests, a greater insight into the meaning of this life and the immortality of the world.

To understand Ginsberg's transcendentalism one needs to take a broad look at his spiritual odyssey throughout northern India. It is because of his questing spirit that the American poet looked away from old frontiers to discover new frontiers of human experience. Ginsberg's encounter with India was raw, naked, sincere, and utterly frank. He allowed himself to be merged with the "mystery and muddle" of India. He had recorded the travails and traumas of body and soul in many of his poems against the panoramic canvas of India. These poems are prolonged meditations on human misery and sufferings, reminding the reader repeatedly of the medieval Christian ascetics and Buddhist monks. Whether introspecting or observing outwards, Ginsberg was acutely aware of man's predicament as a wayfarer, a passenger in transit, an entity constantly on the move, forever trying to put himself "out there", identifying himself with the agony of suffering mankind, defining himself in relation with others. Ginsberg came to India not merely as an American but as man, "the everyman". His consciousness was universal, he accepted all.

In Ginsberg's fragmented poems with their fragmented syntax, a strong sense of spiritual uncertainty and doubt can be felt. They reveal traumas of a divided consciousness striving towards a new wholeness. India for him was like Walden Pond or Wordsworth's Lake District, a physical territory which stirred in him the deepest emotions, satisfied his

innermost cravings, and provided a locus for the spontaneous activity of his soul. His Indian experiences were spiritual exercises that lead to a slow but a gradual expansion of his consciousness. Though his poems are replete with many macabre details, in many ways they show a consciousness behind them which is universal, and suggest a sense of community for poets, mystics, yogis, and wanderers. In his detachment Ginsberg achieved a truly yogic stance; his consciousness took even the most deformed of objects as objects of love, truth and beauty. Beggars, madmen, lunatics, people with maimed and mutilated bodies, all moving symbols of suffering humanity, were always on his mind. Whether he describes a cheap restaurant in Calcutta or a railway platform or a journey by train, Ginsberg displays extraordinary capacity for precision and detail. In the fragments of consciousness in Ginsberg's poems, we see the totality of the poet's vision, can hear the voice of suffering humanity.

Chapter IV: Poetic Technique & Themes.

Ginsberg wrote to Mark Van Doren while still a student at Columbia University: "I want to be a saint, a real saint while I am still young, for there is much work to do." Ginsberg was no longer young and the road from the Six Gallery in San Francisco where he first read 'Howl' to the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute in Boulder was a long and winding one. Certainly one of the key influences on young Ginsberg was William Carlos Williams who counselled the young poet to avoid hazy romantic themes written in conventional lyric format and to concentrate instead on the concrete realities of everyday life expressed in a flexible poetic style. The overwhelming theme of the volume Empty Mirror (1961) is a pervasive sense of alienation expressed as either a uniquely per-

sonal problem or as a universally existent angst rather than as a reaction to a specific cultural context. The accumulation of perceptions in a poem like "The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour" creates a brooding, ominous atmosphere:

Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain
and the wind on top of trees in the
street comes through almost harshly.

Empty Mirror, for the most, is despondent, dejected in tone, laced with isolation and paranoid vanity of youth. The political and the sexual are cast as religious preoccupations in Ginsberg's poetry. But it is not the political and sexual freedom that lead to release, to salvation: with Ginsberg the higher consciousness seems to come first; and he is the mediator, the intercessor between wisdom and reader-chosen, anointed, apostolic. John Tytell in his book Naked Angels: The Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation argued for the significance of a 1949 poem in this volume, 'In society', which is a kind of prefiguring of what was to come in the latter phase of Ginsberg's poetry:

I walked into the cocktail party
room and found three or four queers
talking together in queertalk.
I tried to be friendly but heard
myself talking to one in hipster talk.

In Ginsberg's first major work, Howl and Other Poems (1956) the theme of alienation recurs, but the emphasis had shifted away from the personal preoccupations of the poet to the much larger theme of the nature of contemporary American society. Williams' influence had been replaced by Whitman's, the "I" of Ginsberg's poetry now had become a Whitmanesque collective "I", and the poet had become the spokesman for the disaffiliated

members of an entire generation. Ginsberg had now developed the conception of poetry as a mass art; poetry was conceived of as a communal event, and Ginsberg concentrated his energies on developing techniques particularly appropriate for oral delivery.

Ginsberg's political vision was an apocalyptic one, and the outside world on which he projects his imaginings had steadily become less concrete and real. Drugs was a political stance in Ginsberg's poetry. In 'Consulting I Ching Pot Listening to the Fugs Sing Blake', it is "Death", not spring that is "acomming in":

One must see the Great Man
 Fear not it brings blessings
 No harm
 from the invisible world
 Perseverance
 Realms beyond
 Stoned
 in the deserted city
 which lies below consciousness.

The prophetic temperament in Ginsberg's poetry was dominant throughout all the phases of his poetry. By prophecy Ginsberg's did not mean prediction but truth-telling. "What prophecy actually is is not that the bomb will fall in 1942. It is that you know and feel something which somebody knows and feels in a hundred years," he said in an interview. The prophet, then, is a man personally accessible to anyone, and at any time, because he is- has taken care to be- a person.

I am trying to come to the point.
 I refuse to give up my obsession.
 America stop pushing I know what I'm doing....
 My mind is made up there's going to be trouble....
 America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?

It occurs to me that I am America ...
('America', Howl and Other Poems, 1956)

Ginsberg was not concerned with the poem as an art. He was after "the poem discovered in the mind and it is the process of writing it out on the page as notes, transcriptions." Ginsberg said, "the mind must be trained, i.e., freed- to deal with itself as it actually is and not to impose on itself an arbitrary preconceived pattern." That is why Ginsberg dated all his pieces. His poems are not to stand apart or aside from him, they are not to cohere without him. In his introduction to Empty Mirror, William Carlos Williams observed, "a new sort of line, measured by the passage of time without áccent.... it must be prose among whose words the terror of their truth has been discovered"- when Ginsberg recorded here the failure of his vision, he did so in the accents of ecstasy, in the realization that a man is great who takes defeat as an opportunity and victory as an ordeal.

Chapter V: Conclusion.

Ginsberg breathed his last on April 5, 1997, in Lower Manhattan. He died the death of a poet, ringing up friends from his deathbed, who in return showered tributes on him and mourned his loss. Many even found it hard to believe that the man who started the Beat Generation, which later became the hippie movement, is finally no more. The headline on the front page of the New York Times for april 6, 1997 proclaimed: "Allen Ginsberg, Master Poet of Beat Generation, dies at 70." On May 1998, 2,500 disciples and curious citizens thronged the Cathedral of St. John The Divine to hear a dozen singers, poets, and chanters in a programme honouring Allen Ginsberg.

Allen Ginsberg had widespread influence from the 1950s to 1970s as a leader of the



Beats. He was their eloquent bard, and in 1984, when the popularity of the unorthodox movement was waning, the publication of his Collected Poems 1947-80 gave a renewed vigour to his reputation. Even among academic critics and their readership, he was regarded as an outstanding American poet, sought in America and throughout the world for readings, interviews, press releases on controversial issues, television conferences, and verse contribution to journals. Only a small group of conservative critics have continued to denounce his work and lifestyle as subversive of decency, normality, and sound values, especially in the effect upon youth. This study on the poetry of Allen Ginsberg proposes to classify him as an urban poet and so his poetic creed has been linked with that of Arthur Rimbaud through the connecting link that both the poets had subscribed to "disorientation of the senses". This trait is common to urbanising individuals with artistic vein. Ginsberg used city-scape as the backdrop in all his poems, and the thoughts and ideas that went into his poetic creation have their roots in the urban socio-cultural atmosphere of his time, as America was rapidly getting industrialised and most of the American population lived in urban areas. The Beat phenomenon was a by-product of American urbanity, and it provided in the 1950s a preview of the cultural, intellectual, and moral disasters that would fully flower in the late 1960s. The adolescent longing for liberation from conventional manners and intellectual standards; the sexuality and disruptive absorption in drugs; the undercurrent of criminality, the irrationalism, the naive political radicalism and anti-Americanism; the adulation of rock music as a kind of spiritual weapon; the Romantic elevation of art as an alternative to rather than as an illustration of normal reality; the infatuation with Eastern religion; in all this and more Beats set the norms of

urban culture in America. Ginsberg's poetry exhaustively dealt with all the above issues and he became a sort of mythical figure among the Beats.

The performance of ritual was one of the earliest forms of urban culture. The cultural forms of ritual cities centred on the cult centres, temple complexes, or royal courts that dominated their physical space and defined their urban role. After World War II, suburbanisation as an urban residential pattern became an important cultural form of cities. With it emerged a new lifestyle of consumption to negate problems of capital overproduction. Ginsberg's emerged in America not just as a poet, but also as a cult figure. From Buddhism and Hinduism he learnt to chant in a distinctive way so that the readings of his poetry were performed in a ritualistic manner. Urbanisation requires social experimentation, and by promoting life of the spirit with its stress on transcendence, Ginsberg made his presence felt with his distinctive urban themes. He ridiculed every aspect of middle-class, bourgeois life, and his career as a poet and spiritual guru dependent crucially on his talent as a tireless social critic. Though he proposed a creed of individuality, he also advocated communal living for the hippies. His themes took up Zen Buddhism and Hinduism, which point towards the broad cross-cultural validity of his poems. By proposing a poetry that was composed of diction and syntax of ordinary speech, Ginsberg prepared a mode of poetry that was identical with the living language spoken mostly by the people living in the industrial urban areas of American cities or the suburbia. From the urban Afro-Americans, he borrowed the blues form and fused it into his poetry to make his poetry popular among ordinary people. Ginsberg was not an academic poet but was a popular poet. He has humbly confessed that for the lack of imagination, technique or talent, he couldnot do anything

more than capture in fragments the peculiarities of his own thoughts.

Ginsberg had firmly believed that the Indian and the Western converge in their origin. The psychedelic aspect in his poetry came from his belief that "everything we see when awake is death, and when asleep dream." In other words, this is the Buddhist maya, which means that all apparent sensory feelings, thoughts and impressions are illusory. This is the basic Indian understanding in the fourth century that the apparent physical universe is only apparent and really is a dream- like structure in which we are trapped, because we are attached to the real world. This romanticism and psychedelia resulted from Ginsberg's disgust for the contemporary materialistic American life and society. He had found it perilous, and needed to escape from it. In the process he found solace in Indian spirituality, which he incorporated in his poetry. So Ginsberg's poetry is not American nationalist poetry. His poetry knows no social, political, or cultural boundary. It is multi-national, cross-cultural, heterogenous, and hence urban. He is an urban poet because he created and introduced new ideas, cosmologies, and social practices in his poetry and made an effort to introduce them in society. He is an urban poet because his poetry is innovative, it challenged old methods, questioned established traditions.

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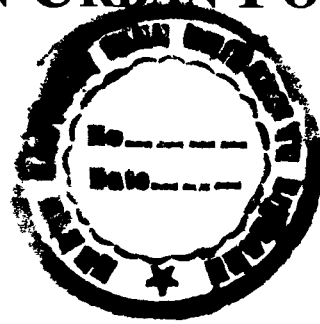
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OF
ALLEN GINSBERG AS AN URBAN POET



A
DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR
AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
IN ENGLISH

BY
DEBASHISH BORA

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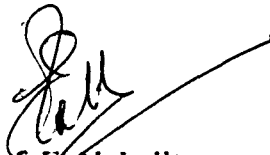
This is being submitted to the North-Eastern Hill University for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English



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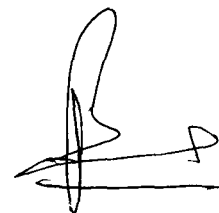
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Shillong

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION - THE MILIEU

" The official acropolis exceeds the most colossal conceptions of modern barbarity."
 (Arthur Rimbaud, 'Cities' , The Illuminations, 1873-75)

City Poetry originated with the French Surrealist: Charles Baudelaire (1821- 67) and Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91) are the forerunners of this tradition of poetry. This study intends to examine in depth the poetry of Allen Ginsberg (1926-97) whose chief inspiration is Rimbaud. Rebellng against ordinary life and craving for release, Rimbaud dreamt of escaping into barbaric splendours or visionary cities. Even though he had rejected bourgeois society living and writting about an out and out non-conformist life, Rimbaud was never satisfied. Between 1871-73, he undertook a programme of "disorientation of the sense" in order to try to turn himself into a voyant or seer. This resulted in his most original work - two collection of prose poems - Les Illuminations - which explored the visionary possibilities of this experiment, and Une saison en enfer - which recorded its moral and psychological failure. Attemting a sort of flight into the future, he was to proclaim his allegiance to the most spectacular aspects of modernity, such as the new face of the industrial city,or machinery.Pushing poetry to its furthest limits, he had dethroned life and put art ion its place, despite the risk to his physical,nervous,and mental health.

Allen Ginsberg is inspired by Rimbaud and other City poets of the nineteenth century. Like Rimbaud he considered himself a poet- prophet, arguing that vast consspiracy to impose one level of machanical consciousness on mankind existed,and that a huge police bureaucracy would aid in the national brainwash and would persecute those spreading illumination. Ginsberg declares this in an essay "Poetry, Violence and Trembling Lambs". The psychedelic that both of them had used for "disorientation of the senses" is 9- 12THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), an organic compound soluble in water. The French poet had used it in the form of hashish, whereas Ginsberg used it in the form of grass. Both substances are made from marijuana. Ginsberg defines the marijuana consciousness in an article in Atlantic

thus, "The marijuana consciousness is one that, ever so gently, shifts the centre of attention from habitual shallow, purely verbal guidelines and repetitive secondhand ideological interpretations of experience to more direct, slower, absorbing, occasionally microscopically minute engagement with sensing phenomena.¹ The sensation is of Time slowdown, and exploration of this space is an useful area of mind consciousness to be familiar with. According to Ginsberg, marijuana is a metaphysical herb less habituating than tobacco, whose smoke is no more disruptive than Insight.

So the connecting link between Rimbaud and Ginsberg is the decadent sensibility. Paul Bourget in Essais de psychologie Contemporaine (1880) makes an accurate assessment of it and the pessimism afflicting the soul of modern man. "When the human being is extremely civilized", he writes with reference to Baudelaire, "he requires that things shall exist in accordance with the dictates of his own heart, a coincidence made all the rarer by the fact that his heart is curiously refined, thus producing irremediable unhappiness" (Essais, p.4). Our great capital cities provide us with the spectacle of a humanity annihilated by 'poison' of thought: "Modern man, as we see him coming and going on the Paris boulevards, carries within his less robust limbs, in the too expressive features of his face, in the excessive acuity of his gaze, the only too evident signs of thinner blood, diminished muscular energy, and an exaggerated disposition of pathological nervousity" (p. 152). In Edel (1878), a novel in verse, Bourget evokes the spiritual fate of modern poets:

Searching for a new ideal, finding the strange,
Imagining that man forever sleeps, forever eats,
Upon the brink of vice, or worse,
Of madness.

Ginsberg acknowledges more than a century later that in two of William Carlos Williams's (1893-1963) poems he had found an answer. Art "justifies" or "make up for" defeat in

worldly life, to the acknowledgement of an

Unworldly love
that has no hope
of the world
and that
cannot change the world
to its delight---

(Williams, 'Rain', Collected Poems, New
Directions, New York, 1966, p.6)

after desolation,

as if the earth under our feet
were
an excrement of some sky
and we degraded prisoners
destined
to hunger until we eat filth.

(Williams, 'To Elsie' *ibid.*, pp.271-2)

Having traced the connecting link between the European surrealists and Ginsberg, one needs to examine why and how urbanisation was responsible for the emergence of the Beat Generation movement in industrial America in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Beat poets had met exactly in 1948, though they started publishing their works much later; and it was in the 1940s that the very concept of urban culture took a major shift with the innovative works of sociologist Robert Redfield. The discussion on the Beat movement is relevant here as Allen Ginsberg is mainly known as the most prominent Beat poet, for it is as a Beat poet that he started his poetic career. The defining institution of urban culture is the city, and the lifeways, or cultural forms that grow up within cities. Much before the Beat movement had taken shape, New York witnessed the emergence of Green-

wich Village, and for almost a century now the name has been a virtual synonym for poetry readings, Beat happenings, *literati*, the doings of the avant-garde. To the existing bohemia in Greenwich Village joined the Beats with North Beach (San Francisco) and Venice West (Los Angeles) as new sites of literary production and living. Against the powerful vision of the Unreal City, a metropolis of multivalent possibilities, the poets related themselves quite differently to the challenges of the modern. So the Beat movement can be presumed as an urban movement with strong roots in the three most important metropolitan cities of America.

Redfield conceived of the "urban" as "invariably impersonal, heterogeneous, secular, and disorganising," and the very conception of the cities and urban culture is free from ethnocentrism, with broad cross-cultural and historical validity.² The Beat emphasis was on escape from the conventional, puritanical, middle-class (termed 'square') mores, towards visionary enlightenments and artistic improvisation, approached via Zen Buddhism and other echoes of religious confessionals, such as Red Indian and Mexican Peyote cults; and also through drives and accelerations charged by wheels, drugs, sex, drinks or talk. These traits of the Beat movement conform to Redfield's presumption that as individuals move from a folk community to a city, or as an entire society moved towards a more urbanised culture, a breakdown in cultural traditions is inevitable. According to him, urbanising individuals and societies would suffer from cultural disorganisation and would have higher incidences of social pathologies like divorce, alcoholism, crime, drug-abuse, and loneliness. Notwithstanding Redfield's observation, in all times and all cultures, cities are conceived of as centres of bohemianism, social experimentation, dissent, anomie, crime, and similar conditions -whether for good or for bad - created by social breakdown.

Examining further the concept of urban culture, the following sociological observations are applicable in consideration of the Beat movement as an urban movement. Paul Wheatley in The Pivot of the Four Quarters (1971) has taken the earliest form of urban culture to be

a ceremonial or cult culture that organised or dominated the surrounding rural region for its sacred practices and authority. Beginning in the 1970s, David Harvey in Social Justice and the City, (1973), Manuel Castells in The Urban Question, (1977), and other scholars influenced by Marxism caused a major shift in the concept of urban cultural roles. This new scholarship viewed the city as a terminus for cultural roles emanating from a wider culture or even the world system. Harvey, for example, linked major changes in American urban lifeways to the urban culture of advanced capitalism: for him, the growth of suburbia developed out of capitalism's promotion of new patterns of consumption in the interest of profit. Castells saw the city as an arena for social conflicts ultimately emanating from the class divisions within capitalist society.

The process of urbanisation started in America in the 1920s. By 1920s, for the first time in American history, the country's 105 million citizen lived in urban centres. Sara Blair in "Modernism and the Politics of Culture" points out that the effects of a new economic and social culture, monopoly capitalism, and of new technologies of leisure and entertainment, like radio, movies, and sound recording, were being felt with an unstable mixture of enthusiasm and trepidation. If the American metropolis brought the "shock of the new" to bear on individuals with unprecedented power, it also served as a site for the eruption of anxieties about the social, psychic and spiritual effects of modernity and modernisation.³ Throughout the era of modernism into the era of postmodernism, the city symbolised the challenges of confronting not only the new, but also the culturally other. Cultural dislocation contributed to the avant-garde, bohemian and high literary performance. Daniel Bell in The Cultural Contributions of Capitalism (1974) cites two ways in which a new social revolution begins as a result of urbanisation in America. These two ways also affected the Beat philosophy of blending literature and living to make it a distinctive "urban" social phenomenon. Firstly, the autonomy of culture, achieved in art, now begins to pass over the arena of life. The

postmodern culture demands that what was previously played out in fantasy and imagination, now must be acted in life as well. There is no distinction between art and life. Secondly, the lifestyle once practised by a small intellectual minority is now copied by many and dominates the cultural scene.⁴ In America, the 1960s was marked by the greatest change in morals and manners since the 1920s. Young people, college students in particular, rebelled against what they viewed as the repressed, conformist society of their parents. They advocated a sexual revolution, aided by the birth-control pill and later by *Roe v. Wade* (1973), a Supreme Court ruling that legalised abortion. "Recreational" drugs such as marijuana and L.S.D. were increasingly used. Opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam promoted the rise of a New Left, which was anti-capitalist as well as antiwar. A "counterculture" sprang up that legitimised radical standards of taste and behaviour in the arts as well as life. Feminism was reborn and joined the ranks of radical causes. Except for feminism, most organised expression of the counterculture did not survive the Sixties. Nevertheless, they changed American life. Drug-taking- previously confined largely to ghettos - became part of middle-class life. The sexual revolution reduced government censorship, changed attitudes toward traditional sexual roles, and enabled homosexuals to organise and acknowledge their identities as never before. Unrestrained individualism played havoc with family values. People began marrying later and having fewer children. The divorce rate accelerated to the point that the number of divorces per year was roughly half the number of marriages. The number of abortions rose, as did the illegitimacy rate. Thus the stable, family-oriented society of the 1950s became a thing of the past. Suburbs grew up around the cities in the 1950s and 1960s, which were populated by the affluent.

The influence of the blacks in urban American culture cannot be neglected. They actively participated in the process of urbanising themselves, as they started migrating from the Southern agricultural areas to the industrial cities of the north. Their contribution to

American urbanity was felt especially in the field of music, as the 1950s demonstrated most dramatically through the triumph of rock 'n' roll, an adolescents' idiom derived from the self-made urban blues of the North American black ghettos. As Eric Hobsbawm points out in The Age of Extremes 1914- 1991 (1995) the recording industry which made its fortune from rock music did not create it let alone plan it, but took over from the amateurs and small street corner operators who discovered it.⁵ Blues are the secular folk music of the American blacks. The real blues were the alcoholic street musicians, who sing the ultimate blues of people and they do not even have an instrument but just stand in the doorway and sing.

In his poetry Ginsberg relates urban blues to the basic tenet of Buddhism that existence is *dukkha*, or suffering. He adopts the blues form in his poetic composition, or at least in some of them, and one of his volumes of poems is titled First Blues (1975) dedicated to Minstrel Guruji Bob Dylan, and released also as a music cassette in 1981. Using the blues wholly or partially, he has released three other sets of CDs and music cassettes of his poems: Howls, Raps and Roars (1993); Hydrogen Jukebox, with Philip Glass (Opera) (1981); and Holy Soul Jelly Roll - Poem and Songs (1994). This necessitates a little discussion on the blues as a musical form. From its obscure origin among American blacks in the early 20th century, the blues simple but excessive forms had become in the 1960s one of the most important influences on the development of popular music in the United States. As a musical style the blues are characterised by expressive pitch inflections (blues notes), a three line textual stanza in the form of AAB, and a 12-measure form. Typically, the first two and a half measures of each line are devoted to singing, the last measure and a half consists of an "instrumental" break that repeats, answers or complements the vocal line. Although instrumental accompaniment is almost universal in the blues, the blues are essentially vocal. Blues songs are lyrical rather than narrative; the singer expresses his feelings rather than tells a story. The emotion expressed is generally one of sadness and melancholy, often due to

problems in love. To express this musically, blues performers use vocal techniques such as melisma and syncopation and instrumental techniques such as "choking" to create a whining voice like sound. The Great Depression and the World Wars caused the geographical dispersal of the blues as millions of blacks left the South for the cities of the North. The blues became adapted to a more sophisticated urban environment. Lyrics took up urban themes, and the real blues ensemble developed as the sole bluesman was joined by a pianist or a harmonica player and then a rhythm section consisting of bass and drums. The electric guitar and amplified harmonica created a driving sound of great rhythmic and emotional intensity. Among the cities in which the blues initially took root were Atlanta, Memphis, and St. Louis. John Lee Hooker settled in Detroit, and on the West Coast, Aaron "T-Bone" Walker developed a style later adapted by Riley "B.B.." King. It was Chicago, however, that played the greatest role in the development of urban blues.

Music and Ginsberg's poetry are inseparable. In "Metamorphoses of Personal prosody" (1969) he wrote, "(The poetic voice) now returned to song and song forms we may yet anticipate inspired creators like Shiva Krishna Chaityana, Mirabai, and Ramakrishna who not only composed verse in ecstatic fits, but raised their arms and danced in time to manifest divine presence. Mantra-repetition, a form of prayer in which a short magic formula containing various god names is chanted hypnotically, has entered Western consciousness and a new Mantra-rock is formulated in the Byrds & Beatles." Further in the essay we learn that Ginsberg himself was a musician of sorts. "Not being a musician from childhood my own *japa* and *kirtan* is home-made but not without influence on verbal composition practice. Introduction of the tape-recorder also changes in possibilities of composition via improvisation. 'Wichita Vortex Sutra', a short fragment of longer trans-American voyage poetry, is therefore composed directly on tape by voice, and then transcribed to page : page arrangements rotates the thought-stops, breath stops, runs of inspiration, changes of mind, startings and stopping of the car" (Sept. 10, 1966).⁶

An interesting fact to note is that a new youth culture developed during this time, inspired by rock stars and celluloid stars. As rock stars (Buddy Holly, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix) and the celluloid star James Dean fell victim to a lifestyle designed for early death, the new autonomy of youth as a separate social stratum was symbolised by a phenomena which probably had no parallel since the romantic era of the early nineteenth century: the hero whose life and youth ended together. The youth demanded recognition as soon as puberty had begun and maximum heights were reached, though lacking experience of adult life and still engaged in physical and intellectual growth. The novelty of the new youth culture was three-fold. First, 'youth' was seen not as a preparatory stage for adulthood, but in some sense, as the final stage of full human development. It seemed life clearly went downhill after the age of thirty. This applied both to the capitalist world and the communist world. Second, youth represented a concentrated mass of purchasing power, partly because each new generation of adults had been socialised as a part of a self-conscious youth culture and bore the marks of this experience. The third peculiarity of this new youth culture in urban societies was its astonishing internationalism. Blue jeans and rock music became marks of the modern youth, which reflected the overwhelming cultural hegemony of the U.S.A. in popular youth culture and lifestyle worldwide. The role of the world network of universities, whose capacity for rapid international communication became obvious in the 1960s, was vital in the emergence of the new youth culture.

It is in this socio-economic-cultural milieu that the Beat movement emerged among the youths of urban America. The Beat writers were active in the 1950s, centred around William Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and later Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky. The word 'beat' was first used in a new way by Jack Kerouac, and recorded in 1952 in an article by John Clellon Holmes in *The New York Times*. Roughly speaking, the Beats are a criticism of American complacency under the Ike-Nixon regime,

an expression of new forms of poetry and prose and an exploration of the consciousness, and through dissention and bohemianism produced a distinctive style of literature and living based on disaffiliation, poverty, anarchic individualism, and communal living. As Penguin Companion to Literature (Vol 3) defines it, "A relaxation of 'square' (puritan, middle-class, respectable) attitudes towards sex, drugs, religion, and art became the opposing uniformity of 'beat' (later fused into 'hip')." ⁷ The word 'beat' has a range of meaning including depressed (to the point of wild escape from conventional living); exhausted; holy in poverty and beatific in joy; and mystic illumination (with literary illumination back to Whitman, Blake, and jazz associations with Lester Young and Charlie Parker), and to catching the note of spontaneous living (with reference to Zen Buddhism, Indian peyote cults, Tantrism, and visionary experience). In literature the key works are Ginsberg's poem 'Howl' (1955), Kerouac's novel On the Road (1957), Gary Snyder's poem 'Riprap' (1959), Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Pictures from the Gone World (1955), as well as other works published from his City Light Bookshop in San Francisco, Gregory Corso's poem 'Gasolin' (1958), and William Burroughs' Junkie (1953), and The Naked Lunch (1959). But there were a number of other significant figures, both in New York and in San Francisco, publishing in a number of beat magazines. Hangers-on developed into 'beatniks', a generally derogatory term, apparently coined by a frightened bourgeoisie and its sensation seeking press. The Oxford Companion to English Literature (1999) observes that, "The experimental forms, metaphysical contents, and provocative anti-intellectual, anti-hierarchical spirit of the (Beat) movement spread across America and beyond the English speaking world, to be picked up by second generation and third generation writers Yevusnerco, Voznesensky, Boh Dylan, the Beatles, Woolf Briarmann, evolving a 'counter-culture' which had a wide-spread and in many ways a lasting impact." ⁸ The reverberations of Beat poetry in Britain are Underground Poetry and Jazz Poetry.

Allen Ginsberg, the most prominent Beat poet was born in Paterson, New Jersey, and was son of the poet and teacher Louis Ginsberg. His mother was a Russian immigrant active on the Left, about whom he laments in one of his finest poems, 'Kaddish', in which he emotionally bridges the political gaps between the crucial American generations of the Thirties and Fifties. After school in Paterson, study at Columbia University, he worked at various jobs - cafe dishwasher, seaman, welder, night porter, and book reviewer for *Newsweek*. Meanwhile, he studied and absorbed the particular inspirations for his poetry, Blake and Whitman, and experimented with the state of consciousness with psychedelics. Whitman was a constant reference for Ginsberg, as one finds in 'A Supermarket in California' (1956):

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among meals in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.
Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways,
home to our silent cottage?

Ginsberg exploded into the literary scene with Howl and Other Poems (1956) as a major poet, and with Kerouac and Burroughs, as the centre of the Beat Generation group. He consolidated his poetic art with Kaddish and Other Poems (1960); Empty Mirror: Early Poems (1961), is a collection of poems which are mainly preparations for his central achievement; Reality Sandwiches (1963); Angkor Wat (1968); Planet News (1968); Airplane Dreams (1969); The Gates of Wrath: Rhymed Poems (1972); The Fall of America: Poems of These States (1973); Iron Horse (1973); First Blues (1975); Mind Breaths: Poems 1971-76 (1978); Plutonian Ode: Poem 1977-80 (1984); White Shroud: Poems 1980- 85 (1986); and, Cosmopolitan Greetings: Poems 1986- 92 (1994). 'Howl', the poem which brought him into limelight, is a lament for the sickness of urban America and for poets, artist and

intellectuals in the Ike-Nixon era, written in long-breathed lines and highly wrought language developed from Blake, Whitman, Melville, William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane.

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving
hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro street at dawn looking for an
angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for ancient heavenly connection to the starry
dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the su-
pernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities
contemplating jazz

Gatherings in the 1950s at the San Remo Bar, Lower East Side, New York, are referred to; as well as the jazz that late bop Charlie Parker played in Bowery Jam sessions. There are many more lines beginning "who ...", some short, some long, and all itemizing one or another way in which "the best minds of my generation" have suffered and failed. As the title 'Howl' suggests, the contents and emotions of the poem are too great and chaotic to be in regular metre or stanza; and had Ginsberg tried for a greater regularity of metre and form the power of his poem would have been lost.⁹ Ginsberg's characteristic poems are either short, intensely personal lyrics, or long rhapsodic celebrations of ecstasy, the search for the godhead, and the expansion of consciousness. His visionary ability to invite the reader to an exchange of honesty and tenderness is valuable and extra-ordinary, both in his poetry and in his life generally. He also developed a method for a long discursive, socially conscious critical poems, partly based on transcription of verbal recording into a taperecorder of ideas, images, and responses while travelling. A good example is 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' (1966, Planet News) and Ginsberg's own words on the poem's composition has been quoted earlier. From being a Beat Generation poet Ginsberg responded to the America of his time to become an intensely political poet, an "urban" poet, a man active throughout the world

promoting the free life, attacking authoritarianism in Czechoslovakia, Russia, and America alike. Helen Vendler, reviewing his last volume of poems, Cosmopolitan Greetings, (1994) rightly comments, "Ginsberg is responsible for loosening the breath of American poetry at mid-century Most of all, he has demonstrated that there is nothing in American social and erotic reality which cannot find a place there ... His powerful mixture of Blake, Whitman, Pound, and Williams, to which he added his own volatile, grotesque, and tender humour, has assured him a memorable place in modern poetry."

Since the European surrealists, no literary group has been as conscious of the political situation (of America as well as the rest of the world) as the members of the Beat Generation. During the vacuum of silence that enbalmmed the early 1950s, the Beats stridently proclaimed a humanistic ideology and dramatized the beginnings of a new lifestyle, only to be greeted by scorn in official circles and the distortions of sensationalism in the media. Nevertheless, the romantic ideals and unconventional attitudes of the Beat writers informed the generation of the 1960s with a vision of what was most perilous about American life. John Tytell in the American Scholar, (1973) points out, "Rejecting the glut of postwar materialism and an obsessive national conformism, the Beats proposed a creed of individuality and a commitment to the life of the spirit with a passion that recalls the struggles of the American Transcendentalists - Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman."¹⁰ In "The White Negro"-the first philosophical manifesto of the Beat movement - Norman Mailer suggested that America was suffering from a collective failure of nerve, and that only a new breed, the hipster, was prepared to forge a new nervous system. Allen Ginsberg called it the Syndrome of Shutdown, the move toward a closed society where all decisions would be secret; and a paralysis would be caused by the use of technological devices that would invade privacy. An internal freeze gripped America in the Fifties, an irrational hatred that created intense fear and repression. Since any repression feeds on oppression as its neces-



sary rationalization, the red witch hunts, the censorship of artists and filmmakers, the regimentation of the average man began with unparalleled momentum and design. The contamination caused by this psychic and moral rigidity has been discussed by Allen Ginsberg in his Paris Review interview:

"The Cold War is the imposition of a vast mental barrier on everybody, a vast anti- natural psyche. A hardening, a shutting off of the perceptions of desire and tenderness which everybody knows ... (creating) a self-consciousness which is a substitute for commitment with the outside. This consciousness pushed back into the self and thinking of how it will hold its face and eyes and hands in order to make a mask to hide the flow that is going on. Which it is aware of, which everybody's aware of really. So let's say shyness. Fear. Fear of total feeling, really, total being is what it is."¹¹

Though America has traditionally been associated with the experience of a sense of hopefulness, the Fifties were times of extraordinary insecurity, of profound powerlessness as far as individual efforts were concerned, when personal responsibility was being abdicated in favour of corporate largeness, when the catchwords were co-ordination and adjustment. The nuclear blasts in Japan had created new sources of terror, and the ideology of technology became paramount. Science was seen as being capable of totally dominating man and his environment. And the prospects of total annihilation through nuclear explosion, of mass conditioning through the media, only increased the awesome respect for scientific powers in the Fifties. The Beats expressed hypersensitive concern for these conditions.

Gary Snyder in "Earth House Hold" (1968) provides interesting observations on the Beat Generation's impact on American public life. He says that in the 1960s, the number of people who use marijuana regularly and have experienced L.S.D. was staggering. The impact of all this on the cultural and imaginative life of the nation - even the politics was

enormous. He further says that as for several centuries now Western Man had been ponderously preparing himself for a new look at the inner world and the spiritual realms, this surfacing of the Great Subculture was timely. The subculture of illumination has been a powerful undercurrent in all higher civilizations. In the West it manifested as Gnostics, and in India the various threads converged to produce Tantrism.¹²

All poets dealing with urban themes have varying degrees of intimacy and alienation in their attitudes towards the phenomenon of urban-industrialisation. The city either figures full-face in its physically concrete lineaments, or a reminisced backdrop, an imperceptible semblance, or a hallucinated vision. Snap-shot images that help one perceive the city's power, evil, or oppressiveness are too frequent; those of its mellowed grandeur, or benign solicitude, are too sparing in City poetry. Following are a few extracts from some of Allen Ginsberg's poems, and one can find that they are abundant in urban elements:

I am going down to Puerto Rico
 I am going down on midnite plane
 I am going down on Vomit Express
 I am going down on the suitcase pain.
 ('Vomit Express', First Blues, New York, Full Court, 1975, ll 1-4)

Gonna San Diego - Announce the end of the War
 Gonna San Diego - ain't gonna murder no more
 Tell them politicians stop acting like a whore.
 ('Going to San Diego', First Blues, New York, Full Court, 1975, ll 10-12)

Come to San Diego - Show you're a peaceful man
 Old Mr. Nixon better bow down to Uncle Sam
 All the citizen best elect the Lamb. (ibid. ll 23-25)

I live in an apartment, sink leaks thru the walls
 Lower Eastside full of bedbugs, Junkies in the halls
 House been broken into, Tibetan Tankas stole
 Speed freaks took my statues, and made my love a fool.
 ('New York Blues', First Blues, New York, Full Court, 1975, ll 2-5)

Black magic pushes dope
 Sexy chicks in cars
 America loses hope
 & smokes and drinks in bars.
 ('Put Down Yr.Cigarret rag', *ibid.*, ll 35-38)

Otherwise like Mick Jagger go out on stage
 wearing curtains of blue
 And fly around the world with great big
 diamonds and pearls made of glue.
 ('Blue Gossip', *ibid.*, ll 27-30)

Some of Ginsberg's early poems read like translations of Rimbaud. Here is a sampler:

I feel as if I am at a dead
 end and I am finished
 All spiritual facts I realize
 are true but I never escape
 the feeling of being closed in
 and the sordidness of self,
 the futility of all that I
 have seen and done and said.
 May be if I continued things
 would please me more but now
 I have no hope and I am tired.
 ('Prologue', Empty Mirror, New York, Totem Press, 1961)

These are few examples of Ginsberg's conformity to the kind of City poetry written by the nineteenth-century European surrealists as well as his originality as a City poet in the latter half of the twentieth century in urban America.

It is difficult to understand Ginsberg's poetry without a proper understanding of Zen Buddhism and its advent into America life and thought. In the latter half of the twentieth century Zen Buddhism was invariably linked with the Beats and Hippies of San Francisco. Buddhism is the wisdom teaching of Gautama, the Buddha, who lived and taught from 563 to 483 B.C. and whose philosophy or "religion" was spread by Emperor Asoka's mission-

aries in the middle of the third century B.C. from China in the east to Alexandria, Egypt, in the west. Its followers claim for Zen that it is the highest contribution of the Oriental mind; that it is a distillation of the wisdom of the Vedas and Upanishads of India; that its truths are of immortal antiquity. It has an outer teaching for the intellectually curious, and it has unplumbed depth for those who are willing to live the life. The word "Zen" comes from the Sankrit, *dhyana*, usually translated "meditation", but an inclusive term for all the stages of the process, from simple mental concentration to contemplation and finally to "entering the stillness", or "crossing to the other shore". In China, where the higher teachings of Buddhism found a spiritual welcome, *dhyana* became *cha'na-na* or *tsena* and in Japan the term was further contracted to *sa-zen* or *sen*. Literally, *sa-zen* is "sitting in meditation" in what is loosely called the lotus posture, in which the sole of each foot is upturned on the opposite thigh. What one discovers in the silence, as he enters into each of the higher stages of consciousness, cannot be easily explained in intellectual categories. One would have to enter those stages of bliss for himself. Only what one finds out the lower levels can be formulated and shared in words. Bodhidharma, in about 520 A.D., crossed the Himalayas and brought with him to China a spiritual science leading to *prajna*, enlightenment, illumination, spiritual freedom, the Japanese *satori* - the goal of all Zen Buddhism. He abhorred system, insisting that life is imprisoned by systems, that systems rob life of its spontaneity. His teachings can be summarised in these propositions:

a) The science of meditation has been transmitted outside of the orthodox scriptures (Reliance or slavish reliance on the efficacy of Rites and Ceremonies is one of the Buddha's Ten Fetters).

b) Living truth is not dependent on words and letters; it must be discovered and verified by each individual man, otherwise it is only words of another.

c) Direct pointing to the unique principle within man, the experience of these things

must be your own; the Buddha can point the way, but you must make the effort, you must rely on yourself (Dharmapada, v.276). (It is small wonder that Zen Buddhism has found spiritual kinship with American Transcendentalism and its emphasis on self-reliance)

d) Seeing into one's own nature and the possibility of attaining Buddhahood. Everyman has a Buddha in him - the Divine in him - the only difference between the ignorant man and the enlightened man is that one is aware of it, the other is not.

The metaphysics of Zen has its foundation on *sunyata*, translated as "emptiness". The goal of Zen Buddhism is *satori*, enlightenment, the entrance into a transcendental consciousness. *Satori* cannot be described in terms of our normal everyday experience and whoever has experienced it is left without adequate expression. So it is with the higher experience of Zen. It is first a life rooted in the commandments, measurably lived, and after that mediation, enlightenment. But Beat Zen or Hippie Zen grasps only a limited aspect of Zen Buddhism and makes much display of their nirvanic trips and general eccentricities, and it is obvious that they do not have their feet on the ground and do not know what the foundation of things is.¹³

Ginsberg made use of Sanskrit prosody in his poetry where the basic patterns of psychological reaction are built into language, into the alphabet, and then making combinations of the alphabet the human voice plays like an organ, to get different effects (ch. 10. Sloka 35, *Bhagawat-Gita*, Radhakrishna edition, p.225).

The influence of the peyote is prominent in all Beat poetry, which is a part of American Indian culture. Peyote is a type of Mexican cactus. Mescat-drug (mescaline) made from this causes hallucination. As Gary Snyder in "Earth House Holds", (1968) points out, it is obligatory for every member of the Red Indian society to get out of the human nexus, and 'out of his head' at least once in his life. He returns from his solitary vision quest with a secret name, a protective animal spirit, a secret song. It is his 'power'. The culture honours

the man who has visited other realms. Peyote is the best known herbal aid used by Indian cultures to assist in the quest. The stuff was easily available in San Francisco by the late 1940s and was used by the Beats and the Hippies.

In addition, Ginsberg considered the black blues as a major art form with intellectual distinction in urban America. The "New Consciousness" which Ginsberg talks of- in his poetry, his literary conversations - is a concept he derived from his reading of three important authors: Rimbaud, who Ginsberg was reading in 1948; Artaud's Voyage au Pays des Tarahumaras, which appeared in Transition magazine in the 40s; and Huxley's Doors of Preception. He defines the term in Composed on the Tongue: Literary Conversations 1967-77 (1980) thus

"... to think in non-political terms, apolitical terms, the first necessity was to get to person, from public to person. Which meant finding out different modalities of consciousness, different modalities of sexuality, different approaches to basic identity, examination of the nature of consciousness itself, finally-on a very serious level, meaning not only psychoanalysis and drugs but also meditation and ascetic experience, isolation and solitary experience, and *shabda yoga* and jazz and sexual exploration. And recovery of natural tongue, of speech forms that are real rather than literary forms, and recovery of movement and song and dance, in those days ('50s and 60s) catalysed primarily by rhythm and blues, the precursor of rock 'n' roll."¹⁴

Understanding of the term "New Consciousness" is crucial to an understanding of his poetry.

Ginsberg uses myth to convey his effort to exceed the limits of rational consciousness of reality. In his poetry, myth depicts an expansion of consciousness into the realm of dreams and vision in which ordinary events and places take on a magical and mystical quality.¹⁵

So Ginsberg puts it in 'Kaddish':

We're all alive at once then
 even me and Gene & Naomi in one mythological consinesque room
 screaming at each other in the Forever-
 (Kaddish and Other Poems 1958- 60,4th ed., San Francisco, 1965)

Both classical and Christian myth express the many roles in which the poet defines his own consciousness. In 'The Reply', he sees himself as "Old One-eye of Dreams in which I do not wake but die-" and in "Lysergic Acid", he can imagine himself as divine:

I allen Ginsberg a separate consciou^usnéss
 I who want to be God
 I who want to hear the infinite minutest vibration of eternal harmony

So, according to Lillian Feder, Ginsberg interprets myth as a comment on accepted standards of rational perception.

Ginsberg is obsessive with the novelty of sensation, illuminated moments, and the visual apocalypse, in the age of internal combustion engine, urban decay. Disestablishmentarianism, collapsing social and international order, and the apocalyptic bomb. The whole of the Beat Generation, in the words of Gregory Corso in 'Gasolin' (1958), are writers "Screaming: Apocalypse! Apocalypse!" According to M.H. Abrams, "They are heirs ... of the *fin de siecle* writers who in rebellion against the horror and boredom of an earlier age of the modern world, sought for something new by following Rimbaud's prescription for calculated disordering of all the senses through direct assault upon the moral and nervous system." The establishment climax of all of Ginsberg's visions and mystical illuminations is the revelation,

to the regenerate eye, of the new heaven and earth. Commenting on Beat poetry in general and Ginsberg's poetry in particular, M.H.Abrams further says, "... (the) black apocalypse is a form of grotesque vision of an ultimate violence which destroys not to renew but simply to annihilate a world which is regarded as an affront of being, revealing behind its distingering fabric not a new heaven and earth but *le Ne'ant*, nothing at all."¹⁶

"Ginsberg is bristling urban messiah"¹⁷ is how "The Columbia Literary History of the United States finally assesses Ginsberg. From his historical reading of 'Howl' at the Six Gallery in San Francisco in the fall of 1955 till his death in 1997, he was probably the poet who drew the maximum attention from the urban reading public- both the academicians as well as the ordinary men. Unlike any other previous poet he could start a whole "urban" movement on his own, and uplift himself to the status of being a "Guru"- one who spreads enlightenment. He may have been described as a neurotic or a psychotic artist by some, but it was Lionel Trilling who presented him first to the English reading public of the world, by modelling the character of Ferdinand R. Tertan in his excellent short novel- Of This Time- Of That Place, on Ginsberg. Even Leslie Fiedler suggests that Ginsberg is really the invention of Trilling. During the 1950s and 1960s, he rose to almost a mythical status- with the backings of the Beats and the Hippies on one side and the English Department at Columbia on the other. Mingling religious and narcotic kicks to poetry, he has changed the face of City poetry in the latter half of the twentieth century, giving it a distinctive American flavour. He could not be or would never be a T. S. Eliot, but he has made his presence felt as a major poet in the pluralistic scene of contemporary poetry in the United States.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE VISION

In the late Fifties, the West Coast became the liveliest spot in America in poetry. A radical group movement of young poets started in San Francisco. Part of this activity was due to the establishment of the Poetry Centre at San Francisco State College in the first half of the Fifties. Its originator and moving spirit was Ruth Witt-Diamant, who began by offering readings by local poets and progressed to importing older poets from the East. Part of the activity of the young group had been inspired by Kenneth Rexroth, whose presence in San Francisco over a long period of time, embodying his force and conviction, created a rallying point of ideas, interests and informal occasions. In the Bay region there were several poetry readings each week. They could be called at the drop of a hat. A card might read "Celebrated Good Time Poetry Night. Either you go home bugged or completely enlightened. Allen Ginsberg blowing hot; Gary Snyder blowing cool; ... Rexroth on the big bass brum. Small collection for wine and postcards ... abandon, noise, strange pictures on walls, oriental music, lurid poetry. Extremely serious. Town Hall theatre. One and only final appearance of this apocalypse. Admission free." Hundreds from about 16 to 30 could show up and engage in an authentic, free-wheeling celebration of poetry, an analogue of which was jazz thirty years ago. The audience participated, shouting and stamping, interrupting and applauding. Poetry there had become a tangible social force, moving and unifying its auditors, releasing the energies of the audience through spoken, even shouted verse, in a way unique to that region till then. The most remarkable poem of the group, written in 1955 was 'Howl' by Allen Ginsberg.

'Howl' is an affirmation of individual experience of god, sex, drugs, absurdity and so on. Part I deals sympathetically with individual cases. Part II describes and rejects the Moloch (Canaanite fire god) of society which confounds and suppresses individual experience and forces the individual to consider himself mad if he does not reject his own deepest senses. Part III is an expression of sympathy and identification with Carl Solomon (the

In that state of hopelessness, or dead end, a change of phase grew up. He reached a psychic or mental equilibrium of a kind, like having no New Vision or Supreme Reality and nothing but the world in front of him, and of not knowing what to do with that. There was a funny balance of tension in every direction. On one occasion, with a Blake book over his lap, his eyes were idling over the page of 'The Sunflower', and it suddenly appeared- the poem he had read a lot of time before, overfamiliar to the point where it did not make any particular meaning except some sweet things about flowers- and suddenly he realized that the poem was talking about him:

Ah, Sunflower! weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the Sun;
Seeking that sweet golden clime,
Where the traveller's journey is done.

Ginsberg began understanding the poem while looking at it, and suddenly, simultaneously with understanding it, heard a very deep earthen voice in the room, which he immediately assumed, without thinking twice, was Blake's voice. It was not any voice that he knew, and was like a voice of "rock in a poem". With his eyes on the page, simultaneously the auditory hallucination, the apparitional voice in the room woke him further deep in his understanding of the poem, because the voice was so completely tender and beautifully "ancient". It was like the voice of the Ancient of Days. But the peculiar quality of the voice was something unforgettable for him because it was like God having a human voice, with all the infinite tenderness, "anciency" and "mortal gravity" of a living creator speaking to his son.

Where the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale Virgin shrouded in snow
Arise from their graves, and aspire
Where my Sun-Flower wishes to go.

It seemed to Ginsberg that there was a place to go, a sweet golden clime. And simultaneous to the voice he also felt an emotion, risen from his soul in response to the voice, and sudden "visual" realisation of the same awesome phenomena. That is to say, looking out at the window, through the window at the sky, suddenly it seemed that he saw into the depths of the universe, by looking simply into the "ancient" sky. The sky suddenly seemed to him very *ancient*. And this was the very ancient place that Blake was talking about, the sweet golden clime, and Ginsberg suddenly realized that this existence was it. He felt that this was the moment he was born for. This initiation, this vision, or this consciousness, of being alive unto himself, alive himself unto the Creator, as the son of the Creator- who loved him, or one who responded to his desires.

Ginsberg's first thought was that this was what he was born for, and his second thought- never to forget, never to deny the voice. He promised never to get lost mentally wandering in other spirit worlds, or American or job worlds, or advertising worlds or war worlds or earth worlds. The spirit of the universe was what he was born to realize. The hand of god is present in every animate object on earth- it is like the solidification of great deal of intelligence and love and care. Existence itself was god. Ginsberg claimed that he was seeing a visionary thing and that he felt a lightness in the body. He claimed that he felt *light*, and a sense of cosmic consciousness, vibrations, understanding, awe, and wonder and surprise. It was a sudden awakening into a totally deeper real universe than he had been existing in.¹

The same 'petite sensation recurred several minutes later, with the same voice, while Ginsberg was reading another of Blake's poems, 'The Sick Rose'. This time, according to him, it was a slightly different "sense- depth- mystic" impression. He felt that the sick rose was himself, or self, or the living body, sick because the mind, which is the worm "that flies in the night, in the howling storm". The "invisible" worm is a long standing symbol of death, which enters the body and is destroying it. It is death, the natural process of death, some

kind of mystical being of its own trying to come in and devour the body, the rose. Ginsberg noticed that Blake's drawing for it is complicated, it is a big drooping rose, drooping because it is dying, and there is a worm in it, and the worm is wrapped around a little spirit that is trying to get out of the mouth of the rose. Ginsberg experienced. 'The Sick Rose', with the voice of Blake reading it, as something that applied to the whole universe. He felt as if he was hearing the doom of the whole universe, and at the same time felt the inevitable beauty of the doom. He found it very beautiful and very awesome. But a little of it was slightly scary, having to do with the knowledge of death- his death and the death of being itself, and Ginsberg felt a great pain. So, like a prophecy, not only in human terms but a prophecy as if Blake had penetrated the very secret core of the *entire* universe and had come forth with some little magic formula statement in rhyme and rhythm that, if properly heard in the innermost ear, would deliver one beyond the universe.

The other poem of Blake that brought this on to Ginsberg on the same day was 'The Little Girl Lost', where there was a repeated refrain,

Do father, mother, weep,
 Where can Lyca sleep?
 How can Lyca sleep
 If her mother weep?
 If her heart does ache
 Then let Lyca wake;
 If my mother sleep,
 Lyca shall not weep.

Ginsberg was hypnotised and he suddenly realised the Lyca was him, or Lyca was the self. Lyca wakes to an awareness of existence in the entire universe, the total awareness of the complete universe. In other words, a breakthrough from ordinary habitual "quotidian" consciousness into consciousness that was really seeing all heaven in a flower. It was "eter-

nity in a flower... heaven in a grain of sand". By heaven Ginsberg implies an imprint or concretization of a living form, the work of an intelligent hand, which had the intelligence moulded into it. Heaven can be present in any living or non-living thing made with spiritual labour.

After this vision Ginsberg's thought-process had quadrupled, and he was able to read almost any text and see all sorts of divine significance in it. Wordsworth's "sense sublime" of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting sun, the living air, and the heart of man- is an experience, according to Ginsberg, characteristic of all high poetry. That was the way Ginsberg began seeing poetry as communication of the particular experience, not just any experience but the *é*xperience narrated here in these pages.

Having described in detail the experience and vision of Ginsberg which catalysed him as a poet, making him see that his role would be to widen the area of consciousness, to open the doors of perception, to continue to transmit message through time that could reach the enlightened and receptive, one needs to examine his most famous poem 'Howl' to find out how the poem embodies the vision that Ginsberg experienced, and also trace in the elements of urbanity in it. The use of the word "hysterical" in the opening line is a key to the tone of the poem. The judicious use of the word makes the verse overtly sympathetic. In the second line the reference is to Herbert Huncke who used to cruise Harlem and Times Square area at irregular hours in the late Forties scoring junk. "Starry dynamo" and "machinery of night" ('Howl', Part I, Line3) are derived from Dylan Thomas's mixture of nature and machinery in "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower/Drives my green age..." The "contemplating jazz" reference is made to the jazz of late bop Charlie Parker who played in Bowery loft jam sessions in those few years. Ginsberg along with Anton Rosenberg and other contemporaries gathered often in Sam Remo bar while living in Lower East Side, New York in the early 1950s. Part of Manhattan's subway system, the Third

Avenue elevated railway was familiarly called "EI" and was demolished in the mid-1950s. In line 8, the reference is to Carl Solomon who burnt money while upset about evils of materialism. "Post-war cynical scholars" refer to some of Lionel Trilling's students, perhaps an inkling of literary "cold-warrior" Norman Podhoretz. The "scholars of war" are scientists at work at Columbia. During 1944-48; Columbia scientists helped split atoms for military power in secrecy. Subsequent military-industrial funding increasingly dominated university research, and thus two decades later rebellious student strikes had as primary grievance -the trusteeships of the university interlocked with Vietnam War-related corporations. The cold war influence darkened the complexion of scientific studies and humanistic attitudes. Columbia President D.D. Eisenhower himself had warned against such military industrial complexity in his farewell address as U.S. Chief Executive. However, two decades after 1968 student activism, secret military- industrial operations reached cosmic proportions. The landscape of the poem is out and out urban. In line 10, the verse evolves into "Paradise Alley", a cold-water-flat courtyard at 501 East 11th Street, NE corner of Avenue A, Lower East Side, New York, bricked up in the '70s and demolished after fire in 1985. Various artists lived in cheap hotels in the area, St. Mark's place, their small rooms suffused with the smell of turpentine. The other apartment is 419 West 115th Street # 51, frequented in 1945-46 by the poet, William Burroughs, John Vollmer (later Joan Burroughs) and Jack Kerouac, among others. Use of Benzedrine inhalers was common, introduced by friends of Herbert Huncke visiting regularly. The "teahead joyride" in line 13 refers to the drive Neal Cassady and Jack Kerouac took through Brooklyn to hear some early morning jazz in late '40s. "Tree vibrations" refer to poet's first peyote experience.

Ginsberg's casual college job was mopping floors at various Manhattan cafeterias including Bickford's 42nd Street. Fugazzi's Sixth Avenue Greenwich Village bar was early 1950s alternative to the noisier San Remo nearby. "Fugazzi" phrasing was added to accom-

modate "jukebox"; cafeterias had no jukeboxes till that time. Some of the apocalyptic or end-of-the-world vibrations were noticed by the "subterraneans" in the roaring of the jukebox, thus "hydrogen (bomb) jukebox". "Nowhere Zen New Jersies of amnesia" (l 20) is a composite image of a few post-college "career failures" characteristic of the 1950s, including the poet's own two-year sojourn in Paterson during 1950-51, on leaving Columbia Psychiatric Institute. "Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah"(l 24) focussed on matter close to the poet's reading, juxtaposing hermetic sublime with "Americanist esoterica" for the sake of sound and provincial sense. Overt intension of this mystical name-dropping was to connect younger readers, Whitman's children already familiar with Poe and Bop, to older Gnostic tradition. "Sainly motorcyclists" refer to Marlon Brando's film The Wild One (1954). The reference to "visionary Indian angels" is made to American old ways which included "vision quest" as mark of maturation, of resolution of life crisis. Some among the postwar generation of white Americans also initiated themselves to this tradition (l 25). Then in line 26, the Blake illumination is referred to. A specialized Columbia College fad at that time was "Narcotic ... haze of capitalism", as the tobacco industry spent billions of dollars in cigarettes a year, as per a report of the Federal Trade Commision. In lines 69-70, reference is made to Carl Solomon and those the poet left behind at the Psychiatric Institute in 1949. Dolmens mark a vanished civilization, as Stonehenge or Greystone or Rockland monoliths. At the time of writing the poem, the poet's mother dwelled in her last months at Pilgrim State Hospital at Brentwood, New York, which housed over 25,000 patients, the largest such mental hospital in the world. Description of the wards and halls is drawn from Greystone State Hospital, near Morristown, New Jersey, which the poet frequented in adolescence to visit Naomi Ginsberg. New York's Rockland State Hospital's name was substituted for rhythmic euphony. The poem was occasioned by unexpected news of Carl Solomon's recent removal to Pilgrim State. "The

Nostalgic ... German Jazz" is Brecht-Weill opera arias "O Show Me the way to the Next Whisky Bar" and "Benares Song", which echoed loud late nights repeatedly in Cannastra's West 21st Street Manhattan in 1949. In line 65, the reference to "Accusing the radio hypnotism" is to Naomi Ginsberg who was convinced in 1943 that doctors had planted "three big sticks" down her back during insulin and electric shock treatment as antennae to receive radio broadcasts from the ceiling- voices sent by President Roosevelt that alternately praised her as a "great woman" or mocked her as a "radical" and "bad girl". After shock treatment at Rodez asylum, Antonin Artaud (b. 1895) accused in 1943 in his "Van Gogh" text his doctors and modern society itself of materialist hypnotism. His idea was that electroshock drives the spirit down, from its flight to liberty from God, back into the mortal body, which he calls a pile of shit. Artaud, in 'Van Gogh- The Man Suicided by Society', provides a definition of a lunatic, which seems to have influenced Ginsberg:

And what is a genuine lunatic?

He is a man who prefers to go mad, in the social sense of the world, rather than forfeit a certain higher idea of human honour.

.....
For a lunatic is a man that society does not wish to Hear but wants to prevent from uttering certain unbearable truth.

.....
That is why there was a collective spell cast on Baudelaire, Edgar Allen Poe, Gerald de Nerval, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Holderlin and Coleridge.

Stanza 73 of 'Howl', Part I concerns itself with aesthetic technique: the mechanism of surrealist or ideogrammatic method, the juxtaposition of disparate images to create a gap of understanding which the mind fills in with a flash of recognition of the unstated relationship. In line 54, Ginsberg remembers an anecdote, friend Walter Adams visited poet Louis Simpson's high-floored apartment near Columbia in 1946:

L. S. : Do you have a watch?
 W. A. : Yes.
 L. S. : Can I have it?
 W. A. : Here.
 L. S. : (throwing the watch out of window): We don't need
 time, we're already in eternity.

In 'Howl' Part II, Moloch, or Molech, is the Canaanite fire god, whose worship was marked by parents' burning their children as propitiatory sacrifice. "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Moloch" (Leviticus 18:21). Post-war U.S.A. reinstitution of peacetime draft is referred to as "Boys sobbing in armies". In line 81, "Buildings are judgements" refers to William Blake's spectre of the "Jehovic hyper-rationalistic judgemental lawgiver" Urizen, creator of spiritual disorder and political chaos. His abstract calipers limit the infinite universe to his egoic horizon, a projection of unmindful selfhood, the result of aggressively naive mental measurements which substitute hypocrite or modish generalization for experience of event, and oppress physical body, feeling and imagination. "Skyscrapers ... endless jehovahs" refer to cinema images for robot megalopolis centrum, Fritz Lang's Metropolis, Berlin, 1932. "Cannibal dynamo" (183) is the opening industrial-heartbeat soundtrack of Fritz Lang's terrific film, Metropolis (1931), also his Last Will of Dr. Mabuse (1933). "Thousand blind windows" in the next line is to the appearance of upper stories of Sir Francis Drake Hotel, corner Powell & Pine Streets, San Francisco, which image directly inspired this section of the poem. "Specter of genius" makes use of William Blake's use of the word "spectre" as disordered shadow states of mind, body, heart or imagination, when mutually unbalanced, dominated by, or dominating one by the others. "Whose name is the Mind" is the crux of the poem, and this verse seems to objectify a recognition uncovered in the act of composition. Towards the end of this part of the poem there is a reference to Rimbaud's poem 'Morning' in 'Heaven exists and is everywhere':

When shall we go beyond the mountains and the shores,
 to greet the birth of new toil,
 of new wisdom,
 the flight of tyrants, of demons, the end of superstitions,
 to adore- the first to adore!
 -Christmas on the earth. A Season in Hell, (1945)

Part III of 'Howl' emphasizes the private mythology between Ginsberg and Carl Solomon. The publication of 'Howl' made their image notorious on a quasi-national scale. Solomon is a respectable figure in a small circle of sophisticated poetry readers in the Bay Area in the mid-1950s. A large part of Solomon's social identity was that he became a poetic metaphor for Ginsberg. Solomon first encountered Ginsberg in a psychiatric hospital in Manhattan, where Ginsberg was a fellow patient. Ginsberg was intrigued by Solomon's collection of Paris acquired books, among which were Artaud, Genet, Michaux, Miller, Lautreamont, and Isou's Nouvelle Poesie et une Nouvelle Musique. Both of them discussed all of these things by way of laying the groundwork for Ginsberg's eventual publication for 'Howl' in 1956. Ginsberg had described their association as "karmic frienship".

Part IV (Footnote) of 'Howl' starts with references to Blake and T.S. Eliot. "Everyday is eternity" can be traced to;

Hold enternity in the palm of your hand
 And eternity in an hour.
 (Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence')

Only through time time is conquered.
 (Eliot: 'Burnt Norton')

"The typewriter is holy" because Part I of 'Howl's original draft was typewritten. As Pythagoras said, "When the mode of the music changes the walls of the city shake", so

Ginsberg formulated the phrase "Bop apocalypse". "Vast lamb of the middleclass" (l 122) refers to the Dharma slogan "Regard each sentient being as a future Buddha." The word "Charity" is taken from Rimbaud: "Charity is that key- This inspiration proves that I have dreamed." (A Season in Hell). "Ours! bodies! suffering! magnanimity!" refers to Boddhidharma's Four Noble Truths including Eightfold Bodhisattva path, beginning with the First Noble Truth of suffering, which expounds the later implication of this verse. The poem ends with a reference to Dharma which is equivalent of "extra brilliant intelligence" and is found in the notion of Bodhicitta, "seed of enlightenment" or "essence of awakesness" in ordinary mind.²

So in 'Howl' the goal of complete self-revelation, or "nakedness" as Ginsberg puts it, based on a fusion of bohemianism, psycho-analytic probing, and Dadaist fantasy. The self is dragged through the slime of degradation to the sublime of exaltation. The Beat focal point in the poem is the self, but it represents only a beginning, an involvement to be transcended. The movement is from an intense assertion of personal identity to a merger with larger forces in the universe. Ginsberg believes that consciousness is infinite and that modern man is taught to suppress much of his potential awareness. So he attempts in the poem to exorcise the guilt, shame and fear that he sees as barriers to self-realization and total being. Ginsberg's work, generally, is an outgrowth of the tradition begun by Coleridge: to search for the source of dream, to release the unconscious in its pure state (avoiding literary simulation), to free the restraints on imagination and seek (as Blake did) for the potency and power of the visionary impulse. As Gary Snyder has argued in his essay "Why Tribe", to follow the grain of natural being "it is necessary to look exhaustively into the negative and demonic powers of the Unconscious, and by recognising these powers - symbolically acting them out-one releases himself from these forces." This statement points to the shamanistic implications of Beat literature. 'Howl' is an attempt to exorcise through release. It

naturalistically records the suffering and magnanimity of a hipster avant-grade, a group refusing to accept standard American values as permanent. The experience in 'Howl', certainly in the opening part of the poem, are hysterically excessive and frantically active. As John Tytell points out, "It is the sheer momentum of nightmare that unifies these accounts of jumping off bridges, of slashing wrists, of ecstatic copulations, of purgatorial subway rides and longer journeys, a momentum rendered by the propelling, torrential quality of Ginsberg's long line, a cumulative rhythm, dependent on parallelism and the repetition of initial sounds."³

Ginsberg's poetry ranges in tone from ecstatic joy utter despair. It soars and plunges from one line to the next, and it is confident and paranoid. But it always seeks ways to retain the ability to feel in numbing times, it always insists on a social vision that stresses transcendence and the need for a spirit in the face of a materialistic culture. Bob Dylan has remarked that Ginsberg's poetry was for him the first sign of a new consciousness, of an awareness of regenerative possibilities in America. Dylan also participated in the Beat affinity for the road, the symbol of an attitude towards experience that braves anything as long as movement is encouraged.

He rode on railroad cars
 He woke at dawn, in the white light of a new universe.
 (Ginsberg 'Patna-Benares Express', Planet News, 1963, City Light, SF)

The first account of this sensibility is found in Norman Mailer's essay "The White Negro". Mailer announced the appearance of a new man, whom he termed the "hipster", who found an existential model in the danger felt by the black man every time he walked down an American street. Seeking, sometimes psychopathically, the "rebellious imperatives of the Self", the hipster rejected the conformity to American life, and spread a "disbelief in the

words of men who had too much money and controlled too many things." The hipster sought an apocalyptic answer to the demands of adjustment in the American pattern. The hipster, in a constant attempt to change his nervous system, would always express forbidden impulses and actively violate social taboos. He would release primitive energies before a repressive society:

Everthing is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere's holy! everyday is in
eternity! Everyman's an angel!
(Ginsberg, 'Footnote to 'Howl', 1956)

Responding to a "burning consciousness of the present", the hipster stressed the energy of movement and magnified Hemingway's concentrated formula of "grace under pressure" to confront a state of perpetual crisis. Mailer's essay, besides defining the code hero of the Beat movement, was prophetic. He claimed that the hip consciousness would spread in proportion and as a result of the new forces caused by hip values, the complacent conformity of the Fifties would be shattered by a time of violence, confusion and rebellion. The seeds of hip flowered in the Sixties, and were especially evident in the transformed values of American youth; who actively challenged the givens of their society to the point where change was sought almost as an end in itself:

I can't stand my own mind.
America when will you end the human war?
.....
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
(Ginsberg, 'America', 1956)

In the explication of 'Howl', it was evident that city figures full-face in its physically concrete lineaments. In all his poetry, the reader always confronts the city.

All day I walk in the wilderness over white carpets of City, We
 are redeeming ourself, I am born,
 The Messiah woke in the Universe, I announce the New Nation,
 in every mind, take power over the dead creation,
 I am naked in New York, a star breaks thru the blue shell of the
 sky out the window.

(Ginsberg, 'Television was a Baby Crawling Toward that Deathchamber',
Planet News, 1961)

The city acts as a unifying image against conflicting visions of the contemporary scene.
 It holds together disparate visions of reality. Fragments of city-life are perceived through
 images of schizoid city-scape.

I guess he got sick of having to get up and get
 scared of being shot down
 Also probably he got sick of
 being a methidrine clown;
 Also he wanted to go back explore
 Macdougall Street New York town.
 (Ginsberg, 'Blue Gossip', First Blues, 1972)

The figure of the City is sometimes invoked to aid dismemberment or disjunction of
 reality as perceived by the poet. The City remains the most outstanding figure that directs
 or influences the poetic consciousness of Ginsberg. The City in his mind creates a poetic
 vision:

Busride along waterfront down Yessler under street bridge
 to the old red Wobby Hall-
 One Big Union, posters of the Great Mandala of Labor,
 bleareyed dusty cardplayers dreaming behind the counter ...
 'but these young fellers can't see ahead and we nothing to offer'-

 The cities rot from the center, the suburbs fall apart a slow

(*'Cosmopolitan Greetings'*, *Cosmopolitan Greetings*, New York, 1995)

The glorification of madness, drugs abuse, criminality, and excess is a defining current of the Beat sensibility. William Burrough's biographer Barry Miles tells us that all the Beats "shared a passionate desire to 'widen the area of consciousness'" and cites their insatiable appetite for drugs as one evidence of this desire. In 1966, Ginsberg even testified before the Congress about the 'mind expanding' potential of psychedelics. In fact, as the philosopher Harvey Mansfield observed in his essay "The Legacy of the Late-Sixties" the idea that drugs are an aid to "mind expansion" is "an illusion so pathetic that one can hardly credit that it was once held." The central appeal of drugs, as Mansfield noted, is that of "infinite power together with infinite desire". It is not an accident that a celebration of drugs went hand in hand with the sexual revolution and the tremendous upsurge in juvenile political radicalism. Here is Timothy Leary describing Ginsberg's reaction to a dose psilocybin in 1960.

Allen, completely naked except for his glasses, waved a finger in the air. "I'm the messiah," he proclaimed. "I've come down to preach love to the world. We're going to walk through the streets and teach people to stop hating... We'll call Kerouac on Long Island, and Kennedy and Khrushchev and Bill Burrough in Paris and Norman Mailer We'll get them all hooked up in a big cosmic electronic love talk. War is just a hang-up."⁴

"And then," Leary noted in a memoir, "We started planning the psychedelic revolution."

... only the crude skull figurement's
gaunt insensible glare is left,
with its broken plumes of sensation
and indecipherable headdresses of intellect
scattered in the madness of oblivion
to holes and notes of elemental stone,
blind faiths of animal transcendency
over the holy ruin of the world
dissolving into the sunless wall of a blackened room
on a time rude pyramid rebuilt
in the black flat night of Yucatan

where I come with my own mad mind to study
 alien hieroglyphs of Eternity.
 ('Siesta in Xbalba', Reality Sandwiches, Los Angeles, 1954)

Ginsberg found that psychedelics were useful in exploring perceptions, sense perception, and exploring different possibilities and modes of consciousness. These explorations are useful, according to him, for composing, sometimes, while under influence. But there were people who renounced the use of psychedelics as too disorienting and too strong. So Ginsberg also proposed actual meditation to get high, to regain consciousness. Drugs can be supplemented with meditation, or meditation can be augmented with drugs, but it is meditation which is the backbone of both political and consciousness exploration activity and it is a necessary ritual stabilizing influence factor, the practical side, because it teaches not only patience but also observation and mind consciousness and makes a human being more sensitized to internal rumblings. Any revolution must include a larger consciousness. Ginsberg also felt that a revolution attracted people and got people on because it began out of the body. And because of the ecological crisis, any revolution that will save the planet will have to include all sentient people, will have to include the Bodhisattva's vows, will have to include deeper realization of the ultimate nature. In order to make the revolution divine, the hippies felt that they had got the responsibility to take power over the human universe, so they had their consciousness balanced sufficiently broadly to make decisions which are not going to exterminate human sensitives.

According to The Columbia Literary History of the United States, Ginsberg is an angry social prophet, his poem an act of social protest. He linked mystical ecstasy with urban torment. A painful immersion in modern urban life tortures the sufferer into transcendent vision - it turns defeat into sacred experience.⁵ Drugs, madness, extreme experience are sought to dislocate ordinary into visionary consciousness. Poetry was chiefly oral for

Ginsberg. His sonorous, sweet, deep, vibrant, patient baritone seemed to emerge from some inexhaustible energy source. Paul Portuges tells us that Ginsberg's visionary experiences were "prophetic illuminative seizure."⁶ Ginsberg conforms to Herbert N Schneider's definition of a prophet as one who forces people to "look at their culture and see a myththey can no longer believe in, for it is a living lie" (Sacred Discontent: The Bible in Western Tradition, University of California Press, 1976). His prophetic stance implies a private vision, an insistence on self-righteousness, and the corruption of his society, passionate language, social radicalism, stylistic obscurity and incoherence, and "obsession fine or frenzied" as "with every technique of language he can muster, the prophet delivers a message that never arrives"⁷.

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CHAPTER THREE

**ELEMENTS OF NEO-ROMANTICISM
AND TRANSCENDENCE**

The hippie movement is a recent manifestation of an old, romantic tradition. The hippies had a distrust of reason and a faith in the transcendent. They had unrepressed passion, fantasy, and a dedication to primitivism, simplicity, and the bizarre. Even when America was scarcely thought of, in Europe's most fertile minds it was already perceived of as a land of romance. Stories of strange, picturesque, and incredible wonders beyond the Atlantic where eternal youth could be found gave the seventeenth century European *literati* its first dream like impression of the New World. For Coleridge, Xanadu was the symbol of this land beyond the sea, the preternatural world of 'Kubla Khan' :

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river ran,
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

For Shakespeare the New World became the "uninhabited and savage island" in The Tempest. For Sir Thomas More Utopia represented the ideal commonwealth somewhere in the vast ocean where Utopians enjoy "life ordered according to nature" America is the fertile soil in which romance springs most luxuriantly with the breaking up of the static and bold adventuring upon new worlds. Just as the hippie has unlocked new worlds in his subconscious with the use of acid, the early settler was freed of "civilization restraints": and was in the throes of nature by his entry into the New World. Before the machine had invaded America the settler was being challenged to define his new nationality and freedom. This challenge elicited a peculiarly American romantic response. The American romanticism was a way of glorifying the present. It observed a reverential regard for nature which exalted the American landscape and American individualism. In the same way, though not coincidentally, the hippie frantically made attempts to move to the country,

to escape, as he puts it, "the centre of infection." Timothy Leary, in expressing his concern over urban technology has suggested that all industry be placed underground and "the surface of the planet be radically reforested in order to regain the sublime of nature. The antipathy for the machine age and a fear of compromise has been translated into a back-to-nature exodus that in most ways is reminiscent of the nineteenth-century romantic instinct to luxuriate in natural beauty.

On another intellectual level the Transcendentalist gave a spirit, perhaps a divinity, to American romanticism in the mid-nineteenth century. Transcendentalism's defense of man's independence was designed to free the spiritual power presumably inherent in all men. A belief in the soul's power challenged the imposition of machine, outside authority, and conformity. Culture, for transcendentalists, was not in man's calling or station but in the self. And to fulfil his destiny all man had to do was discover the inner voice of God secretly vouchsafed in his soul. Man started to question the authority of others. He felt that if each examined his egocentric, mystical soul the source of self-confidence could be found. This belief in the soul was sheer romanticism. It was a kingdom of the Divine, the incommunicable, and the illusory. Those that did not surrender to this attitude of mind were considered the infidels. "If you cannot divine it, you would not understand what I say," noted Emerson. From those realist that could not "divine it" the Transcendentalist turned away and sought refuge in their own hermitage. Their criticism was directed not at those unable to recognise the "meaning of life" but to those who sold out to Yankee materialism: "The farmer who was a tool to his tools," those merchants "yearning for satisfaction, yet ever balked of it from temporal things" Emerson decried the predominant "material interest" of this "great, intelligent, sensual, avaricious America." He admonishes against that "mischievous tendency" in man which transferred "his thought from the life to ends, to quit his agency and rest in his acts: the tools run away with the workman, the human with

the divine."

In some respect the hippie is most akin to the Transcendentalists. He too rejects the "insidious character" of middle-class affluence. The hippie influenced by large doses of Catcher in the Rye and The Prophet with the romanticism and self-contentment of smoking pot rejects that "chrome-plated, fat-dripping, split-level" economically abundant society called America. In a desire to be in harmony with nature, to find the power of love, and to be an autonomous individual he has "turned off" middle-class affluence and "dropped out" of respectable and presumably middle-class society. He has become the revolutionary cadre by example, not by action, of a "new" anti-materialist American community. Not only has the hippie rejected the Protestant ethic but he has embraced the ascetic condition of the Buddhist monk. In order to "do your thing", notes one flower child in the Village Voice, you cannot be controlled by your possessions.

Don't be a consumer! Smash the
market economy! Smash property!
There's no property, man, the only
property we got is in our heads!
What do you need property for,
anyway? What do you need money for?
Give it away! ('The New Left at Bay', July 6, 1967)

A rejection of the values of American wealth is reminiscent of Thoreau's decision to experiment in "essential living". Since the hippie cannot find sylvan woods in East Village, he has found a substitute in his own backyard: marijuana. Just as some Transcendentalists criticised society by leaving it, hippies used drugs as a form of withdrawal and criticism. Taking drugs is an act of criticism 'whether you mean it to be or not', proclaims one acid-head. Surely a drug culture superimposes its values on job, pursuit of the dollar, property, marriage, family, class, status, power, and especially success. It is one way to find one's

own Walden pond without budging from one's communal bedroom. But even though the hippie have middle-class society, they are undoubtedly a product of it. As the runaway children from suburbia these teenagers have the wealth to be free of their parents' aspirations for them. They can allegedly find a meaning to their lives by shutting out the "rat race" and being immune to the "sell-out". Should they be unable to find this meaning, Mom and Dad are usually eager to bring them back to "three squares", spending money. Most of the Transcendentalists also "dropped-in" before "dropping-out".

Romantics of both centuries despite their conventional upbringing rationalize their need to set the emotion free when they point to the inspiration in the irrational and the unknown. The hippie argues that experimentation with all ranges of experience provides him with insights about the temporal and spiritual domains. Despite his apparent faith in the claim "God is dead" he has found, or at least he believes he has found, a new spiritual dimension. Through the use of L.S. D. he alleges a greater proximity to the after life. By living an abstemious life he identifies with Christ-like purity. Through meditation (in the hippie vernacular - natural trip) he tries to find spiritual enlightenment. In Zen and Hindu beliefs he thinks he has found a more comfortable faith. And in prayer through "mantras" he hopes to exorcise the evil spirits which afflict society. In fact he is the monk of multi-media; a contemporary priest or medicine man with rigid standards and conformist appearance which usually includes rosary beads, pageboy hairdo, El Greco beard and Italian blanket. Similar to the religious ethos of Transcendentalism, the hippie is searching for a personal awareness of the soul. "You devote your consciousness and energy in taking care of things right in your own experience," one hippie suggests. Intropection, a Catholic goal and a Unitarian obsession, is a primary hippie value. At a show devoted to hippie culture, one of the cult remarked : "It's not what you wear or how you talk that makes you beautiful, it's what's inside." This was the neo-romantic declaration of the hippies.¹ Another hippie argued that

it was not drugs within a man, it was what's within a man that made a man, it was what's within a man that made a man. In all cases the hippie concurred with a belief in "turning onto yourself." As the hippies noted : "Be anything you want"; "I have a duty as a human being to experience"; and "Don't live your life according to your neighbors, your boss ...". These expressions of rugged individualism couch a youthful desire to be free of conventional restrictions. But they also manifest a willingness to "be themselves", to be free of institutional loyalties and societal conformity.

For most hippies the one man that invites respect is Allen Ginsberg. He is considered more than a man, more than a poet. He is, said hippie Ed Sanders, "like a father should've been." His appearance at a reading, at a rally for his latest cause, or at a public hearing is a happening. Ginsberg is usually not listened to or read by the hippies; he is admired because he is Ginsberg: the rebel, the mystic, the pot-smoking anti-social who told the Establishment to "stuff it." Other beats of his generation do not have his staying power. Jack Kerouac has sold out to Hollywood, and William Burroughs has been on one extended trip with only occasional moments of sobriety when he writes for Esquire.

Allen Ginsberg became America's conscience at a very early age. His experimentation with drugs and travel to every corner of the globe were attempts to find something in or outside himself that was meaningful. His country could not provide that meaning. "America I've given you all and now I'm nothing," he lamented. The hope he could foresee, the dreams to be conquered were all sinister lies. At every opportunity he has disinterred the bugaboos of liberal self-righteousness:

America free Tom Mooney
 America free the Spanish Loyalists
 America Sacco & Vanzetti must not die
 America I am the Scottsboro boys.
 (America', Howl and Other Poems, 1956)

Historically, Ginsberg is a product of the liberals' creation. His disenchantment with American life stems from his belief that post-New Deal affluence did not do enough. America's wealth, responsibility, conventions, fear of her enemies destroyed his generation. There is only one alternative to the living hell he calls America: rejection. And this to a great extent is the essence of his poetry. This is the message he passed on the hippies. "The hippies," noted Ginsberg, "are an evolution of the new consciousness first explored by the Beat Generation."² A revolution with war, starvation, racism, rotten cities, political paranoia, and police brutality are part of the Beat dialogue Ginsberg shares with the romantics of the Sixties. They, in turn, give him hope that human consciousness surface in the reaffirmation of a friendly, loving East Village community. It was this hope that was reflected in his 1959 poem, 'I Beg You Come Back & Be Cheerful.'

I'll grow a beard and carry lovely bombs,
 I'll destroy the world, slip in between the cracks of death
 And change the Universe- Ha!
 I have the secret, I carry
 Subversive salami in
 my ragged briefcase
 'Garlic, Poverty, a will to heaven,'
 A strange dream in my meat.

Ginsberg attempted to save America from industrialization and spoilage of nature's beauty. "What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?" he asks forlornly of our industrialized society. If one is to survive "the technological warfare" in the cities, enclaves of people dedicated to the "adoration of living" must be encouraged. In this sense Ginsberg has adopted Walt Whitman's postulate that man should submit to Nature.

The submission to the cosmos has led Ginsberg down the same path explored by Whitman a century before. Although Whitman intuitively understood Indian teleology, Ginsberg trav-

elled to the East to find his revelation. There, under the tutelage of a swami, his belief in the variegated forms of God was affirmed.

It's mad!
 God is One!
 Is X.
 (Fearfully Waiting Answer, Reality Sandwiches, 1963)

At the top of the world in Nepal a light burst through and Ginsberg alleges his personal illumination once again. Now he had the reasons for his faith; all things were divine because the mind of God was absorbed in them. "By an act of self-abandonment God becomes all beings, yet ... does not cease to be God."

Let the straight flower despeak its purpose in strightness-
 to seek the light
 Let the crooked flower bespeak its purpose in crookedness-
 to seek the light.
 Let the crookedness and straightness despeak the light.
 Let Puget Sound be a blast.
 I reed on your like a cockroach on a crumb-this
 cockroach is holy.
 (Psaalm III; Reality Sandwiches, 1963)

The mystical experience obtained by Ginsberg gave him, or so he suggests, a greater insight into the meaning of this and the immortality of the world. In a verse reminiscent of Whitman, Ginsberg wrote:

Happiness exists, I feel it.
 I cried for my soul, I cried for the world's soul.
 The world has a beautiful soul.
 God appearing to be seen and cried over.
 Overflowing heart of Paterson.

Ginsberg and Whitman share more than poetic insights. In a protest against society, Ginsberg, as his predecessor, had grown a shockingly full beard, had left his hair unattended, had seemingly neglected his wardrobe, and had cultivated a sloppy, unorganised appearance in his person and in his flat. In addition, his friends had noted, despite loyalties from the sales of Howl, that he preferred the simple and unaffected life of the East Village hippie. Like Whitman, he revels in shocking his audience with obscene language, and he had consciously tried to be as anti-social and "far-out" as possible. Ginsberg promoted his image as the poet-prophet of the generation of the Sixties, and his likeness to Whitman was by no means coincidental.

To understand Ginsberg's transcendentalism one needs to take a broad look at his spiritual odyssey throughout northern India, this is beautifully recorded in his prose volume, Indian Journals. The book renders in vivid and minute detail the wandering of a consciousness in search of wisdom and spiritual solace. It is the "lonely handwork of self keeping record of self-consciousness, the old yoga of poesy." Though largely unnoticed in Ginsberg studies, the journals provide interesting insights not only in Ginsberg's evolution as a poet but also into cross-cultural contacts. They reveal the impact that life in India has made on one of the influential poets of twentieth century America. Behind the book one can see the questing spirit of the American poet who looks away from old frontiers to discover new expression of the stirrings of mind and body, of physical anguish and spiritual yearning, informs the entire book. It is an important document in cross-cultural contacts and the encounters between India and America.

It is true that India with its ancient civilization and culture has always fascinated the American mind. But whereas India was largely an imaginative construct for the nineteenth century Transcendentalists, Ginsberg's encounter with India is raw, naked, sincere, and utterly frank. Ginsberg quotes his profound wisdom in simplicity which remained us for the

need for self-control ('Your own heart is the Guru'); for mastery of self through poetry ('Poetry is also a *Sadhana*'); for detachment ('If you see anything horrible don't cling to it, if you see anything beautiful don't cling to it'). This wisdom is codified in informal *sutras*, and is offered by Ginsberg as a testimony to the validity of his encounter with India. Allen Ginsberg's India is not the tourists' India. He offers a dialogue of the self against the background of India. 'I am wondering in India, it's like a new earth' (p.6). India is the wonderland 'where man knows he is in a dream.'

Ginsberg has recorded the travails and traumas of body and soul in many of his poems against the panoramic canvas of India. These poems are prolonged meditations on human misery and suffering, reminding the reader repeatedly of the medieval Christian ascetics and Buddhist monks; "all I've seen in my life go by, swift as a mosquito with climactic buzzings of aestheticism and self-congratulatory rhapsody and morphia, inactions and musings, futher more' (*Indian Journals*, p.9). Whether introspecting or observing outward, Ginsberg is acutely aware of man's predicament as a way-farer, a passenger in transit, an entity constantly on the move, forever trying to put himself "out there", identifying himself with the agony of suffering mankind, defining himself in relation with others. Ginsberg came to India not merely as an American but as man, 'the everyman.' His consciousness is universal, he accepts all. ³

In Ginsberg's fragmented poems with their fragmented syntax, a strong sense of spiritual uncertainty and doubt can be felt. They reveal traumas of a divided consciousness striving towards a new wholeness. Now ecstatic, now despondent, the poet goes through the entire range of human emotions and feelings in an effort to arrive at an understanding of his own self. While attempting induced spirituality, he even started doubting the efficacy of hallucinogen pills. In India, the poet in him struggles to come in terms with the complexity of human existence. He seeks to discover his spiritual centre. India is like Walden Pond or

Wordsworth's Lake Districts, a physical territory which stirs in him the deepest emotions, satisfies his innermost cravings and provides a locus for the spontaneous activity of his soul. He reflects on his various experiences on India as spiritual exercises that lead to a slow but gradual expansion of his consciousness. Whether in dream or in reverie or in wakefulness, the poet is eternally engaged in a dialogue with himself regarding the nature and destiny of human existence.

Ginsberg seemed to be influenced by the Indian cremation ceremonies where the preacher appeared with a skull in his hand to remind the mourners of the inevitability of death and of the need to prepare oneself for it. The description of a cremation taking place with the chants of 'Hari Bol' had enough in it to remind one of death and mortality. In his poems, he dwells on the scenes of violence, brutality, death and disease in all their distinguishing details, but does so in a manner that has been traditionally associated with ascetics or the Shamans. In fact, the hallucinatory experiences of the poet are mostly in dreams, bringing him closer to the shaman figure. They also suggest how his prophetic zeal unconsciously produced symptoms of a psychic crisis, usually associated with a shaman yet to be initiated into the mystery of existence. While much of his poems reveal the archetypal spiritual urges of the poet, they also evoke instant aversion and disgust in the reader. Though his poems are replete with many macabre details, in many ways they show a consciousness behind them which is universal, not compartmentalized and have a sense of universal community. Ginsberg always suggested a sense of community for poets, mystics, yogis, and wanderers.

In his detachment Ginsberg achieves a truly Yogic stance, a consciousness totally free from categories, a consciousness which takes even the most deformed of objects as objects of love, truth and beauty. Beggars, madmen, lunatics, people with maimed and mutilated bodies, all moving symbols of suffering humanity, are always on his mind. The deformed, the deprived, and the dispossessed are objects nearest to his heart, so much so, that he even

declares himself a 'Revolt of Sudras'(untouchables) poet. As a matter of fact, Ginsberg cared for the downtrodden and uncared for people in India, people who live and die on the footpaths. One of the characters in his poems is Kali Ma, the mentally deranged goddess who keeps haunting the poet's imagination. All these remind us of 'the still sad music of humanity.' Whether he describes a cheap restaurant in Calcutta or a railway platform or a journey by train, Ginsberg displays extraordinary capacity for precision and detail. Consequently, whatever he writes comes as a moving image of life in India. His poetry records in graphic details the movement of a soul in search of love, peace, harmony and truth. In its fragments of consciousness we can see the totality of the poet's vision, can hear the voice of suffering humanity. The vulgar, the filthy, and the ugly acquire an interesting halo about it when seen through the eyes of the poet. Ginsberg makes us see an India which many of us have always seen but never noticed.

Here are a few examples of India's influence on Ginsberg's poetry:

Om Ah Hum A La La Ho Sophia, Soham Tara Ma, Om Phat Svaha
 Padmasambhava Marpa Mila's Gampopa Karmapa
 Trungpayel Namastaji Brahma, ave atque vale Eros, Jupiter,
 Zeus, Apollo, Surya, Indra
 Bom Bom! Shivaye! Ram Nam Satyahey! Om Ganapatti, Om
 Saraswati Hrih Swaha, Ardinarishvara Radha Harekrishna
 faretheewell forevermore!
 None left standing! No tears left for eyes, no eues for weeping, no mouth for
 singing, no song for the hearer, no more words for any mind.
 ("What would You Do If You Lost It? Feb 1. 1973, Mind Breaths)

Still night. The old clock ticks,
 half past two. A ringing of crickets
 awake in the ceiling. The gate is locked
 on the street outside-sleepers, mustaches,
 nakedness, but no desire. A few mosquitos
 waken the itch, the fan turns slowly-
 a car thunders along the black asphalt,

a bull snorts, something is expected-
 Time sits solid in the four yellow walls.
 No one is here, emptiness filled with train
 Whistles and dog barks, answered a block away.
 Pushkin sits on the bookshelf, Shakespeare's
 complete works as well as Blake's unread-
 O spirit of Poetry, no use calling on you
 babbling in this emptiness furnished with beds
 under the bright oval mirror-perfect
 night for sleepers to dissolve in tranquil
 blackness, and rest there eight hours
 -waking to stained fingers, bitter mouth
 and lung gripped by cigarette hunger,
 what to do with this big toe, this arm
 this eye in the starving skeleton-filled
 sore horse tram-heated Calcutta in
 Eternity-sweating and teeth rotted away-
 Rilke at least could dream about lovers,
 the old breast excitement and trembling belly,
 is that it? And the vast starry space-
 If the brain changes matter breathes
 fearfully back on man - But now
 the great crash of buildings and planets
 breaks through the wall of language and drowns
 me under its Ganges heaviness forever.
 No escape but through Bangkok and New York death.
 it ever could be, the screams of pain in the kidney
 make it sick of itself, a wavy dream
 dying to finish its all too famous misery
 - Leave immortality for another to suffer like a fool,
 not to get stuck in the corner of the universe
 sticking morphine in the arm and eating meat.
 ('Last Night in Calcutta', Planet News, 1963)

As one can notice, Ginsberg's use of language in many ways represented a fulfilment of the romantic credo as formulated in the Preface to the Lyrical Ballads in which Coleridge and Wordsworth promised to use the language of ordinary man. Ginsberg has addressed this question with great clarity in his interview in Paris Review :

...What happens if you make a distinction between what you tell your friends and what you tell your Muse? The problem is to break down the distinction: When you approach the Muse to talk as frankly as you would talk with yourself or with your friends. So I began finding, in conversations with Burroughs and Kerouac and Gregory Corso, in conversation with people whom I knew well, whose soul I respected, that the things we are telling each other for real were different from what was already in literature. And that was Kerouac's great discovery in On the Road. The kind of things that he and Neal Cassady were talking about, he finally discovered were *the* subject matter for what he wanted to write down. That meant, at that minute, a complete revision of what literature was supposed to be, in *his* mind, and actually in the minds of the people that first read the book..... In other words, there's no distinction, there should be no distinction between what we write down, and what we really know to begin with. As we know it every day, with each other. And the hypocrisy of literature has been - you know like there's supposed to be a formal literature, which is supposed to be different from... in subject, in diction and even in organisation, from our quotidian inspired lives.⁴

So Ginsberg shared the essential quest initiated by the American Transcendentalists-the reverence for nature and a sense of the self that is tempered by a mysticism of Eastern origin; the infusion of the personal in educational reform; the attempt at communal living that flourished until the start of the Civil War; the suspicion of institutional responses to social problems that began in Emerson's thoughts. Ginsberg, deconditioned his defeats and the shocks of romantic experience, began to raise such possibilities again in an era of ominous malaise. He has vigorously sustained his attacks on the Moloch of industry, on regimentation of the bureaucratic state, and by eliminating the separation between the artist's work and his life. By this he has made himself a living symbol and his poetry an act of special action.

The middle-class mourns its offspring; unable to comprehend their children's rejection of security, of material comfort and competitive careerism, the gulf between the genera-

tions developed almost to the point of warfare against the young. Ginsberg had admonished not to call these young people hippies, but seekers - those who believe in the possibility of change. Whether it is achieved in the immediate present is probably less important than the idea of consciousness: the seed planted by Ginsberg's poetry is an awareness of what is significant in life. The quality of urban American life has been profoundly affected by his poetry. The most significant aspect of Ginsberg's achievement was his attempt to create a popular art form which deals concretely with the cultural and political life of his time. Though his early poetry was often obscurely private-introspective verse which deals for the most part with his personal dilemmas and mystical aspirations - yet the general development of Ginsberg's poetry is clearly in the direction of concretely realistic, socially-oriented verse. He does not, however, follow a direct path from introspective to public poetry. Rather, throughout his career, one can discern the pull of two opposite tendencies - on the one hand, the Whitmanesque desire to come to terms with the complex cultural and political life of twentieth century America, and on the other hand, the impulse to retreat into an inner world of metaphysical speculation and mystical yearning. Ginsberg's view that the flower-children of the Sixties were the harbringers of a new golden age, however, had its own limitations. Nonetheless, he was perhaps the most genuinely popular poet of the 1960s.

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CHAPTER FOUR

POETIC TECHNIQUE AND THEMES

Resist much, obey little :- *Walt Whitman*

The Revolution has been accomplished: noble has been changed to *no bull* :- *William Carlos Williams*.

Prophet, seers, vatis, Redeemer, witness, Man of America, angel in comical form, Buddha-eye - Allen Ginsberg plotted at an early age his high drama of self definition. He wrote to Mark Van Doren while still a student at Columbia University: "I want to be a saint, a real saint while I am still young, for there is much work to do." This mission to find and seize the holy spirit took Ginsberg on his legendary journey, by car, boat, and plane, from desolate railroad yards of the Wild West to soothing enclaves in stricken India, and included detours into drugs, radical politics. Ginsberg was no longer young and the road from the Six Gallery in San Francisco where he first read 'Howl' to the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, was a long and winding one. Certainly one of the key influences of young Ginsberg was William Carlos Williams who counselled the young poet to avoid hazy romantic themes written in conventional lyric format and to concentrate instead on the concrete realities of everyday life expressed in a flexible poetic style. The overwhelming theme of the volume Empty Mirror (1961) is a pervasive sense of alienation expressed as either a uniquely personal problem or as a universally existent angst rather than as a reaction to a specified cultural context.¹ Critics find it hard to see Ginsberg's resemblance to Williams, even with the short, terse lines, and Williams' generosity with the introduction. There is none of Williams' observant detail, his delight with things as themselves. The accumulation of perceptions in a poem like 'The Bricklayer's Lunch Hour' creates a brooding, ominous atmosphere:

Meanwhile it is darkening as if to rain
and the wind on top of trees in the
street comes through almost harshly.

Empty Mirror, for the most, is despondent, dejected in tone, laced with isolation and paranoid vanity of youth.; Ginsberg's aesthetic, his cosmology, is inspired by a sort of gnostic All Souls. In the fervent search for mystical connections, Blake becomes a kinsman of the Zen masters, and *Song of Myself* is elevated to a sacred text. The political and the sexual are cast as religious pre-occupations in Ginsberg poetry. But it is not the political or sexual freedom that lead to release, to salvation: with Ginsberg the higher consciousness seems to come first; and he is the mediator, the intercessor, between wisdom and the reader-chosen, anointed, apostolic.

John Tylell in his book Naked Angels: the Lives and Literature of the Beat Generation argued for the significance of a 1949 poem in this volume. 'Paterson.' According to Tylell, later positions of Ginsberg were suggested by lines such as "What do I want with these rooms prepared with visions of money?" The uneasy nerve of 'In Society' is another kind of prefiguring:

I walked into the cocktail party
room and found three or four queers
talking together in queertalk.
I tried to be friendly but heard
myself talking to one in hipster talk

.....

I ate a sandwich of human flesh,
I noticed, while chewing on it,
it also included a dirty asshole.

.....

"Why you narcissistic bitch; How
can you decide when you don't even
know me, "I continued in a violent
and messianic voice, inspired at
last, dominating the whole room.

The calm, transcription-like tone of the dream is disturbed first by the shoving for-

ward of the unpleasant "dirty asshole", and in second stanza by the aggressive posture, by confronting the person who took an instant dislike to him. The poem has its tension in the abrupt movement from the submissive to the active. The last lines are revealing, and this will to domination, to shut down all opposition, was given full dominion in the angelic ravings of 'Howl'. In 'Howl' it is as if there was no room for doubt or reflection or complication, no room for anything that might taint or slacken the prophetic vehemence. Hence the famous defiant lines such as:

who let themselves be ***** ** *** *** by saintly motorcyclist,
 and screamed with joy,

 who balled in the morning in the evening in rosegardens and
 the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their
 semen freely to whomever come who may

In Ginsberg's first major work, Howl and Other Poems (1956) the theme of alienation recurs, but the emphasis has shifted from the personal preoccupations of the poet to the much larger theme of the nature of contemporary American society. Williams' influence has been replaced by Whitman's, the "I" of Ginsberg poetry now has become a Whitmanesque collective "I", and the poet has become the spokesman for the disaffiliated members of an entire generation. Ginsberg has now developed the conception of poetry as a mass art; poetry was conceived of as a communal event, and Ginsberg concentrated his energies on developing techniques particularly appropriate for oral delivery. The requirements of dramatic reading certainly provided one of the main shaping impulses in 'Howl'. It must be said that Ginsberg has profited more from his identification with Whitman than Whitman has. Yet "A Supermarket in California" is a genuine tribute to Whitman and there is no questioning the sincerity of Ginsberg's appreciation of the "dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher." The poem, an homage, has charming improbability and flow of surprises:

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked
down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking
at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon
fruits supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at
night! Aisles full of husband! Wives in the avocades, babies in the tomatoes!
-and you, Garnic Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

This is tender and funny, especially with Lorca going down the watermelons. The supermarket itself is proper, the supermarket and neon being popular symbols of what Whitman's America has come to. All that fruit is a traditional erotic device, particularly 'peaches' and what is implied by its juxtaposition with "penumbras". The clause "and followed in my imagination by the store detective" together with "and never passing the cashier" are part of another feeling simultaneously at work in the poem. The lines speak something else Whitman's homeland has become as well as the official hostility to his "enumerations." But the fear and discomfort in the lines belong to Ginsberg, not Whitman. The density of the poem, as well as in all of Ginsberg's best work, comes from the compression of images. Its mood is carried by unexplained shifts of tense and place. Beginning in the present, it slides quickly into the past. The third stanza in the poem begins with an ambiguous future:

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour.
Which way does your beard point tonight?
(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel
absurd.)

The jarring return to the present keeps the reader wondering if Ginsberg means he has returned from the supermarket, in keeping with the first line, or if he means that he feels absurd in dreaming of the odyssey, bringing in the process the immediacy of composition. The future is taken up again: "Will we walk all night through solitary streets?" Ginsberg

provides the definite future in "we'll both be lonely" and the reader knows he has eclipsed Whitman as the subject though the poem ends with a question to Whitman, whom Ginsberg envisions ferried to the "smoking banks" of Lethe.

"Love Poem On Theme By Whitman" never moves the reader beyond voyeurism to the point where he participates, in the role of gatherer of experience". Unlike Whitman's "I" which is free-ranging and all-embracing Ginsberg's "I" is entirely personal, concentrated on the door closed against him:

I'll go into the bedroom silently and lie down between the bridegroom
and the bride,
those bodies fallen from heaven stretched out waiting naked and restless,
arms resting over their eyes in the darkness,
bury my face in their shoulders and breasts, breathing their skin.

In the last line of the poem the poet's waking is in a darkened house

where the inhabitants roam unsatisfied in the night,
nude ghost seeking each other out in the silence.,

and that is far from Withman's "I am satisfied."

Gisberg's political vision is an apocalyptic one, and the outside world on which he projects his imaginings has steadily become less coherent and real. Drugs is a political stance in Ginsberg poetry. Some of his voyages are circular and banal, as in 'Mescaline':

what universe do I enter
death death death death death the cat's at rest
are we ever free of - rotting Ginsberg.

In 'Consulting I Ching Smoking Pot Listening to the Fugs Sing Blake', it is "Death", not

spring that is "acommin in":

One must see the Great Man
 Fear not it brings blessings
 No harm
 from the invisible world
 Perseverance
 Realms beyond
 Stoned
 in the deserted city
 which lies below consciousness.

Ginsberg is often ironic on the contemporary situation :

Wanger rides again! Hark
 Ye, Minister of Power and
 ye Premiers of vast China
 and ye Dalai Lamas of
 Tibet
 Hark ye balding soldiers.

'Kaddish' is an elegy most suited to Ginsberg's turn of mind, to his sense of loss, of incomprehensible vastness. Unlike the traditional anthem, death is very much in Ginsberg's hymn. His mother, Naomi, is the central subject of the poem and for once Ginsberg has met his match: her torment, as he recalls it, is so great that he cannot compete with his subject, his usual tendency, to push her out of view, even in the digressions. There is anguish and humility in the poem, and ideas that are annoying or awkward in other poems are acceptable here, because the mourning, the reckoning tone permits much - everything measured, subdued, true:

There, rest. No more suffering for you. I know where you've gone, it's good.

No more flowers in the summer fields of New York, no joy now,
 no more fears of Louis,
 and no more of his sweetness and glasses, his high school decades,
 debts, loves, frightened telephone calls, conceptions beds,
 relatives, hands-

It is a condensed account of his mother's madness, a portrait of a family as well as their
 time:

But then went half mad - Hitler in her room, she saw
 his mustache in the sink - afraid of Dr. Issac now, suspecting
 that he was in the Newark plot - went up to Bronx to live
 near Eleanor's Rheumatic Heart -

The range of feelings is extraordinary, from the wry and absurd to despair:

Blessed be you Naomi in tears! Blessed be you Naomi in fears!
 Blessed Blessed Blessed in sickness!
 Blessed be you Naomi in Hospitals! Blessed be you Naomi in
 solitude!

In this elegy everything is remembered in a waterfall of episodes, images that approaches
 the actuality of the mind stirred.

O mother
 what have I left out
 O mother
 what have I forgotten.

Nothing, and for once Ginsberg's habitual call to the unknown is totally prepared for:

Lord Lord great Eye that stares on All and moves in a black
 Cloud
 caw caw strange cry of Beings flung up into sky over the

wavering trees.

'Kaddish' represents the culmination of Ginsberg's Fifties public period and has been considered by many to be his greatest achievement. This monumental poem is a particularly successful blend of the public and the private, as the personal tragedy of Naomi Ginsberg is consistently and penetratingly related to the social tragedies of her time.²

Ginsberg's intense involvement in the creation of 'Kaddish' left him emotionally drained, and he began to retreat from the social-political orientation of the 'Howl' - 'Kaddish' period. He began to immerse himself in Eastern religions and became heavily involved in consciousness expansion through psychedelics. The prophetic temperament of his poetry was dominant throughout all the phases of his poetry. By prophecy, of course, Ginsberg does not mean prediction but truth-telling. "What prophecy, actually is is not that the bomb will fall in 1942. It's that you know and feel something which something which somebody knows and feels in a hundred years," he said in an interview. The prophet, then, is a man personally accessible to anyone, and at any time, because he is - has taken care to be - a person:

I am trying to come to the point.
 I refuse to give up my obsession.
 America stop pushing I know what I'm doing ...
 My mind is made up there's going to be trouble ...
 America how can I write a holy litany in your silly mood?
 It occurs to me that I am America ...
 ('America', 'Howl' and Other Poems, 1956)

The prophetic voice makes what Ginsberg calls "a complete statement of Person," and to raise that voice is simply to acknowledge a person as a sacramental reality. "The only poetic tradition," Ginsberg declared in his Paris Review interview, "is the voice out of the burning bush." And in the Columbia Review, he said much the same thing: "My thought, though skeptic, still is sacramental. "There is a consent in all Ginsberg's poems, in the

silliest scraps, the gravest platitudes- not only to expose, but to exhaust the person, to submit the body to the soul regardless of consequences, expecting the worst. "I am flesh and blood, but my mind is the focus of much lightening," Ginsberg says in 'Psalm I' from the collection of early poems, Empty Mirror, and the apposition of two things, fitful body and focussed thunderbolt, affords an explosive entry into the prophetic arena. The poem, for Ginsberg is a place where occasions are exhausted, where opportunities are used up. He puts this situation, the fate of prophecy as self-consumption on a series of reports from the Artificial Paradise, which include 'Aether', 'Mescaline', 'Lysergic Acid', "to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose." Ginsberg exclaims in a burst of startled self-discovery: "We're what's left over from perfection!" - perfection representing some process working itself out on the far, inaccessible side of prophecy. Ginsberg's poems are like bulletins which follow Baudelaire and Rimbaud - the great addicts who remind us that the term 'prophecy' denotes no more or no less than "a partisan of personal form of speech, a diction-into the sediments of disintoxication."³ As William Burroughs has said, Ginsberg's poems are scarcely anything but withdrawal symptoms, the grueling extrication of self from surrounding. Ginsberg views the visionary hope with a certain alienated reserve, declaring in 'Laughing Gas' -

any prophecy might have been right
it's all a great exception.

The prophecy must be confirmed as exceptional, made good in all its liberal exorbitance by the poet's person, by his body in fact, or by his body in person:

I dream nightly of an embarkation
captains, captains
what jazz beyond jazz
in future blue saloons

what love in the cafes of God?

His poetry was at times a virtually scapegoat exposure of the body:

yes, yes, that's what
I wanted
I always wanted
to return
to the body where I was born.

"I think", Ginsberg told the Paris Review interviewer, "if I were lying in my bed dying with my body pained, I would just give up, I mean, you know, because I don't think I could exist outside my body. "The need was not, then - by drugs, by art, by sex, "a few Traditions/ mystical, manly" - to transcend the faith all the while, but rather to keep faith with it. "looking for evidences of humanity or secret thought or just actual truthfulness," to "get us to read a postcard from eternity sent by human hand."

Ginsberg is not concerned with the poem as an art. He is after "the poem discovered in the mind and in the process of writing it out on the page as notes, transcriptions". When Ginsberg says "the mind must be trained, i.e., freed - to deal with itself as it actually is and not to impose on itself an arbitrary preconceived patterns, "one is in the same universe of risk. The writing of Allen Ginsberg - journals, scratchings, "scribbled secret notebooks and wild typewritten pages ... impossible syntax of apocalypse, my own crude night imaginings, my crude soul notes taken down in moments of isolation, dreams, piercing of nocturnal thought and primitive illuminations" - are the physical reality of the poet in a figure which has no need for the mediation of metaphor or the myth of form. It is Action Poetry:

after all, what is there to say?
wait for a moment when
the poem itself
is my way of speaking out, not

declaiming or celebrating, yet
but telling the truth.

That is why Ginsberg dates all his pieces, "time's remnants and qualities for me to use - my words / pileup, my texts, my manuscripts, my loves." They are not to stand apart or aside from him, they are not to cohere without him. In his introduction to Empty Mirror. William Carlos Williams observed, "a new sort line, measured by the passage of time without accent ... it must be prose among whose words the terror of their truth has been discovered" - when Ginsberg records the failure of his "vision," he does so in the accents of ecstasy, in the realization that a man is great or may be great who takes great as an opportunity and victory as an ordeal:

It was to have a structure, it
was going to tell a story;
it was to be a mass of images
moving on a page with
a hollow voice at the centre;
it was to have told of time
and Eternity; to have begun
in the rainfall's hood and moon,
and ended under the street light
of the world's bare physical
appearance; begun among vultures
in the mountains of Mexico,
travelled through all America
and ended in garbage on River Street ...

The characteristic Ginsberg product when he is travelling at any point of the world is the transit poem ('Over Kansas', 'Return of the States', 'Wichita Vortex Sutra') in which "new sentences spring forth out of the scene to describe spontaneous forms of time;" the poet has discovered that a temporary shift in space is "God's only way of building the rickety structure of Time" and that is all there is to it: the rest is raw talent, self-delusion and

incantation. The clue to the ultimate change which Ginsberg expects, the transformations which will strike all his annotated prophecies -turn them into poetry.

It seems prophetic books will attain the existence they seek only after the poet leaves off. Now that he has left us it is time to make an assessment whether his fears were true or not. "Die", Ginsberg says on the title page of Kaddish, "Die if thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek." "Sometimes I feel in command when I'm writing, when I'm in the heat of some truthful tears, yes," Allen Ginsberg has said, and when asked whether by "command" he meant a sense of the whole poem rather than parts, he replied, quite rightly by his lights, or by his darkness, "No - a sense of being self-prophetic master of universe."

Ginsberg used his voice and his body a lot more thickly and they were a lot more involved while reading. It was as if he was reciting a *mantra*, which is akin to singing. He felt that it can break the shyness and the barrier of fear of expression. Poetry, for him, became less intellectual or verbal and more of a physiological thing. Using his full breath, his effort was to make poetry approach chant and an expression of the whole body- "single body, single mind." Ginsberg's technique is innovative and Bob Dylan's style of singing is similar -he puts his whole lung in one vowel: "How does it FEEL", or as in one of his older blues: "HOME, I'm going HOME". Because Dylan wants to mean something very definite emotionally, rather than tentative, he puts the whole body into his singing. Ginsberg is indebted to Sanskrit prosody for creating the desired effect in his recitation of poetry. Here, the basic patterns of physiological reactions are built into the language and into the alphabet, and the making combination of the alphabets he could play like an organ, to get different effects. From *Bhagawatgita* he learnt the *Gayatri* metre:

Aum, Bhur, Bhuvah Suaha
Tat, Savitur, Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi,
Dhiyo Yo Nah Pracodayat.

As one can observe, the *mantra* is not symmetrical, it is not repeated, but it seems to cover like a whole long free line and be complete. The meaning of it is something like this: Hail to the first light, that begins all other lights, which is the Female Principle, also, *Gayatri, Devasye*. Ginsberg felt that a study of Sanskrit prosody could take one deeper into what Rimbaud's alchemy of the word and colour of the vowels had been hinting at for more than over the last century. Besides, Ginsberg was also influenced by the technique of William Carlos Williams. In an interview in Partisan Review, he has described what he picked up from Williams in these words: "You listen to speech to hear rhythms and attempt to isolate the archetypal rhythms of actual speech and then remodel them in the poems. That is the whole basis. He further says, "the influence was that originality of taking the material from your own existence rather than taking on hand-me-down poetic materials, speech units, rhythmic units and trying to adapt your life to them - you articulate your rhythm, your own rhythm in the practice of America poetry in open form. Some of Ginsberg's poetry is little better than doggerel.⁴ 'Hūm Bom!' is typical:

Whom bomb?
 We bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 We bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 We bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 We bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 We bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 You bomb them!
 Whom bomb?
 You bomb them!

And so on, this runs for two pages.

Ginsberg, in a conversation on May Day, 1990, revealed that in his early adolescence he

as an ideal audience for the major poems and tales of Edgar Allen Poe, enjoying "tremendous pleasure or mind-expansion." He described the taste of real "paranoia" derived from "mind-expansion, psychedelic text" of 'The Tale-Tale Heart'. In an interview of 1994, contemplating the decline of communism, he declared Poe's works to have done more "to subvert Marxist authoritarian rule along with "blue jeans, rock-'n'-roll, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, some Kerouac, et al, "than all the "costly military hoopla" of the nation. Later he argued that the "vulgar or blunderbuss" propaganda of the Left is minor, compared to the potent effect of Poe, whose sense of "world paranoia, world nausea" through his tales make him the "first psychedelic poet." Poe as the "least political" and most "Ivory Tower, ... beauty for the sake of beauty, isolated, unpolitical poet, "has a universally influenced people's consciousness and sense of individuality. Ginsberg asserts that by creating "artwork, like Poe, ... you can ease the pain of living" for those who want to survive. This basis for devotion to artistic creation makes it clear that the worthwhile or great writer is likely to be an isolated individual, an outcast, objectively viewing and exposing the flaws and vices of a society needing his blunt or subtle but artistically effective exposes. In an early interview of 1996, he favours including as influence "a little Poe on account of the crankiness in it, and the spiritual isolation." Two months before his death, in February 1997. Ginsberg remarks: "Everything leads to Poe. You can trace all literary art (by which Ginsberg probably means modern/postmodern literary art) to Poe's influence- Burroughs, Baudelaire, Genet, Dylan - it all leads back to Poe."⁵ Ginsberg has two uncollected Poe-inspired poems to his credit. The first, and the longest, achieved publication in an undergraduate student monthly, the Columbia Jester Review of May 1944, 'A Night in the Village (Greenwich Village) with Edgar Allen Ginsberg'. Here are two extracts from the poem:

We drank a river of delight,
Where pleasure's flame was kindled bright;

Memory came and memory flew,
 Dreams were lost and born anew.

and,

I looked up horrified to see
 Eternity glaring down at me!
 I looked about in wild alarm-
 Death met my glance - he raised his arm:
 Futility, mirrored everyplace,
 Dwelled in every person's face.

Another larger venture of Poe-linked poetry, serialised in his journal for the first month of 1945 as "first poems of genius", resulted in a twelve - page set of rhymed couplets called 'The Last Voyage.' It derived from part of Baudelaire's Fleurs du Mal, Rimbaud's Le Bateau Ivre (The Drunken Boat), and Poe's 'Descent into the Maelstrom', "being a confusing narrative of the struggle to survive and to present a newly awakened sense of reality to the reader."

Ginsberg's experimentations with the open form in poetry was largely influenced by Charles Olson's Manifesto "Projective Verse" (1950). Along with his group of Beat poets, the other groups of poets practising this form in poetry in America are: the confessionals, the Black Mountain, deep image, and New York poets. Ginsberg's metre is resolutely anti-*imabic*, his line grouping stubbornly anti-stanzaic, his diction aggressively colloquial and American, his voice public. The association with Blake, and particularly Whitman, which is by no means casual, should underline the fact that the literary affiliation of Ginsberg is manifestly romantic, but there is a strain of psychedelia in it which is influenced by the poetry of Rimbaud and Poe. Ginsberg's visions should be understood in the religious rather than poetic sense. Ginsberg's was responsible, as a critic has pointed out, for the "re-emergence of the 'I' at the centre of the poem, and the re-appearance of Walt Whitman as a considerable force in American poetry." It is because of his charisma that the Beat did not remain a

localized social phenomena special to the Haight- Ashbury district of San Francisco, but it spread in almost every important city of the world.

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CHAPTER FIVE

EPITAPH : CONCLUSION

I see you young again
 teeth stained with betel and *bhang*
 Nostrils tense with the smoke of Manhattan
 ankles taut in a *yogic asana*, prickly with desire.
 You who sang America are flush now with death
 your poems - bits of your spine and skull -
 Ablaze in black water drawing you on.
 Allen Ginsberg your flesh is indigo
 The colour of Krishna's face, Mira's bitter grace,
 Into hard water you leap, drawing me on
 I hear you call: "Govinda, aaou, aou!"¹

Ginsberg breathed his last on April 5, 1997, in Lower Manhattan. He died the death of a poet, ringing up his friends from his deathbed, who in return showered tributes on him and mourned his loss. Many even found it hard to believe that the man who started the Beat Generation, which later became the hippie movement, is finally no more. A new avalanche of tributes and encomia came with his death. On May 1998, 2,500 disciples and curious citizens thronged the Cathedral of St. John The Divine to hear a dozen singers, poets, and chanters in a programme honouring Allen Ginsberg. The headline on the front page of *The New York Times* for April 6, 1997 proclaimed "Allen Ginsberg, Master Poet of Beat Generation, Dies at 70."

Allen Ginsberg had widespread influence from the 1950s to 1970s as a leader of the Beats. He was their eloquent bard, especially through Howl & Other Poems (1956) and Kaddish & Other Poems (1961). In 1984, when the popularity of the unorthodox movement was waning, the publication of his Collected Poems 1947-80, a densely printed, mammoth volume, containing notes and indices gave a renewed vigour to his reputation. Even among academic critics and their readership, he was regarded as an outstanding American poet, sought in America and throughout the world for readings, recording, interviews, press release on controversial issues, television conferences, and verse contributions to journals. Even formerly lukewarm or hostile commentators found creditable features in his

unconventional, vividly uninhabited poems about social, political, and sexual conduct and action. Only a small group of conservative critics have continued to denounce his work and lifestyle as subversive of decency, normality, and sound values, especially in the effect upon youth. By contrast, a large Festschrift of 1986 provided a gathering of accolades from prominent writers, including Kenneth Koch, Kurt Vonnegut, Yevtushenko, Kay Boyle, John Hollander, and dozens more. The observations of two respected critics are noteworthy for *balanced and analytical judgements of the chief merits of his work along with the accepted major sources*. Helen Vendler, in her book *The Music of What Happens*, writes: "An original voice in American poetry, helping to change public consciousness His verbal wit has a keen edge of social truth ... satire and vision together in a way poetically new ... our common hopeless predicament alternately farcical and touching Always a spontaneous and prolific writer ... thought-forms passing naturally through ordinary mind as always motif and method ... a voice ... populist in tone but recondite with allusion ... always relishing the appearance of the world ... (combining) perception, passion, and humour, ... American social and erotic reality." Second, Joel Conarroe, in *Eight American Poets* judges him as "uneven, but clearly ... in the front rank of American artists, "and deserving of praise for his teaching, his generosity, his opposition to all censorship, and support to individual freedom. Helen Vendler notes the influences on Ginsberg as Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, William Blake. As for Ginsberg's sources, Conarroe says, "Aside from Burroughs, Kerouac, Cassady, he was moved by Blake's mystical vision, Whitman's incantatory rhythms and brotherhood of man and William Carlos Williams who favoured American idiomatic speech".

The present study on the poetry of Allen Ginsberg proposes to classify him as an "urban" poet and so his poetic creed has been linked with that of the European surrealists in the very beginning of the study. The connection between Ginsberg and Rimbaud is that both

the poets had subscribed to "disorientation of the senses." This trait is common to urbanising individuals with an artistic vein, and both Rimbaud and Ginsberg fall in this category. Ginsberg used cityscape as the backdrop for all his poems, and so the thoughts and ideas that went into his poetic creation have their roots in the urban social atmosphere of his time, as America was rapidly getting industrialised and most of the American population lived in urban areas. The Beat phenomenon is a by-product of American urbanity, and it provided in the 1950s a preview of the cultural, intellectual, and moral disasters that would fully flower in the late 1960s. All the characteristics of the Beat phenomenon were traits of urban culture as well, confined mainly to the adolescents and the "spiritually underprivileged." The ideas of the Beats, their sensibility, contained all the characteristics we think of as defining the cultural revolution of the Sixties and the Seventies. The adolescent longing for liberation from conventional manners and intellectual standards; the sexuality and the disruptive absorption in drugs; the undercurrent of criminality, the irrationalism, the naive political radicalism and anti-Americanism; the adulation of rock music as a kind of spiritual weapon; the Romantic elevation of art as an alternative to rather than as an illumination of normal reality; the infatuation with Eastern religions; in all this and more the Beats provided a glimpse of what urban culture was all about in America. A prime cause in the agenda of the Beats was the sexual revolution, and the introduction of the birth control pill certainly did a great deal to further their cause. The message of the Beats gained mass appeal with their reaction to the Vietnam War. Ginsberg propagated all the causes of the Beats in the poetry, and for them he became a sort of mythical figure. Following Rimbaud's prescription of the "disorientation of the senses", he used mescaline and marijuana and claimed to have achieved a state in which time seems to stand still when the top of the head is filled with all heaven, and everything seems easy to do, better, stronger, and longer.

The performance of ritual was the earliest forms of urban culture. Ritual was the major

cultural role of the earliest cities and through the enactment of ritual in the urban locale, rural regions were bound together by ties of common belief and cultural performance. The cultural forms of ritual cities centred on the cult centres, temple complexes, or royal courts that dominated their physical space and defined their urban role. The ritual city spatially embodied the role of the sacred and ceremonial in defining the urban culture. After World War II, suburbanisation as an urban residential pattern became an important cultural form of cities. With it emerged a new lifestyle of consumption to negate problems of capital overproduction. Ginsberg emerged in America not just as a poet, but also as a cult figure. In the urban centres of America and later all over the world, he was a source of spiritual enlightenment for the hippies of his time. He ridiculed every aspect of middle-class, bourgeois life, and his career as a poet and spiritual guru depended crucially on his talent as a tireless social critic. Urbanization requires social experimentation, and by promoting the life of the spirit with its stress on transcendence Ginsberg made his presence felt with his distinctive urban themes. Though he proposed a creed of individuality, he also advocated communal living for the hippies. His themes took up Zen Buddhism and Hinduism, which point towards the broad cross-cultural validity of his poems. Following a tradition that went from Walt Whitman to William Carlos Williams, and proposing a poetry that was composed of the diction and syntax of ordinary speech, measuring the verse line by breath stop, including syllabic count or cadences or vernacular or idiomatic measure, rather than a metronomic measure, Ginsberg prepared a mode of poetry that was identical with the living language, spoken mostly by the people living in the industrial urban areas of American cities, or the suburbia. This is probably Ginsberg's greatest experimentation as well as achievement as an urban poet. From the urban American blacks, he borrowed the blues form and fused it in his poetry to make his poetry popular among laymen, who would have preferred music otherwise. And from Buddhism and Hinduism he learnt to chant in a dis-

tinctive manner so that his public readings of poetry are performed in a ritualistic manner. His readers and audiences sees things in him that are like things in them, which made him really a popular poet. Ginsberg was not an academic poet but was a popular poet. He has humbly confessed that for lack of imagination, technique or talent, he could not do anything more than capture in fragments the peculiarities of his own thoughts. But he was smart enough to stick to reality and to work from nature which made a virtue of his defects.

Ginsberg's visionary experience came in 1948 in which "Blake's gnostic psychedelic inner glow came on", which he fused with the Indian transcendental scene for the themes of his poems. This resulted in the emergence of the American individualistic transcendentalist tradition among the hippies in the 1960s which was influential in the anti-war revolutionary movement. Ginsberg had firmly believed that the "Indian and the Western converge in their origin."² The psychedelic aspect in his poetry came from his belief that "everything we see when awake is death, and when asleep, dream." In other words, this is the Buddhist *maya*. Which means that all apparent sensory feelings, thoughts and impressions are illusory. This is the basic Indian understanding in the fourth century that the apparent physical universe is only apparent, and really is a dream-like structure in which we are trapped, because we are attached to the real world. Ginsberg's poetry conformed partially to the tradition of Blake, Shelley, Coleridge, and Emerson for its romanticism of dream- insight, and to the poetry of Rimbaud, Artaud, and Poe for its psychedelia.³ This romanticism and psychedelia resulted from Ginsberg's disgust for its contemporary materialistic America life and society. He had found it perilous, and needed to escape from it. In the process he could find solace in Indian spirituality, which he incorporated into his poetry. Ginsberg's poetry is not American nationalist poetry. His poetry knows no social, cultural, or political boundary. It is multi-national, cross-cultural, heterogeneous, and hence, "urban". All the urban themes found place in his poetry - bohemianism, drug-addiction, alcoholism, loneliness, crime,

anomie, dissent, any many more, which are, for good or for bad, created by social breakdown in all urban societies. He is an urban poet because he created and introduced new ideas, cosmologies, and social practices into his poetry and made an effort to introduce them in the contemporary society. He is an urban poet because his poetry challenged old methods, questioned established traditions and was innovative. In conclusion, I quote from a sonnet for Allen Ginsberg by one of his friends, Hayden Carruth :

Allen- what- do- they- call- you
 mindpetal, spectre, strangest Jew, cityboy

 so that ragged solitude be warm, this pasture right for being-
 right, right, and just, some cognizance, humanly anything but heatr gape,
 void of misplacement-
 this wind's connection come growling now low in the hills like the
 cityvoice, many- toned, horns and angers, terrors, far echoes,
 proceedings, prowlings this way in lethean twistings, whispers
 among firs and spuces
 or like the smoke on the long wind, like pieces of the rimss of circles
 come rippling up this long inlet-
 yours dominantly there now, gingerly your tender cupbearings, self- song,
 not strange tome
 soft breathings hard against fact, sudden, like ben webster once, and
 valid, magnanimous-
 o poet, ragged heartsinger, stranger and friend of mine!⁴

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