

DIFFERENCE IN THE EFFECT OF SWADHYAY DUE TO DIFFERING  
CULTURAL ENVIRONMENTS: A STUDY OF COLLEGE AGE YOUTH IN  
GUJURAT, INDIA AND TEXAS, UNITED STATES

A Senior Honors Thesis

by

RESHMA RAJ BRAHMBHATT

Submitted to the Office of Honors Programs  
& Academic Scholarships  
Texas A & M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the

UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH FELLOWS

April 2004

Major: Anthropology

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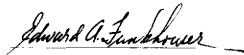
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## ABSTRACT

Difference in the Effect of Swadhyay Due to Differing Cultural  
Environments: A Study of College Age Youth in Gujurat, India  
and Texas, United States. (April 2004)

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This thesis is primarily concerned with the effect of a grassroots spiritual movement on the lives of youth in India and the United States. Swadhyay is a movement that began in India in the 1940s under the leadership of Shri Pandurang Shastri Athavale. The Swadhyay philosophy includes beliefs based in the Vedic tradition. Swadhyay also makes use of unconventional methods of devotion in the form of prayogs or experiments. In addition to explaining the main beliefs of Swadhyay, this thesis also discusses the youth group portion of Swadhyay, Divine Brain Trust (DBT).

My research consists of two sections: field work and scholarly research. I traveled to India for three months in the summer of 2003 to interview and observe with college-age youth. Once I returned to the United States, I complemented my Indian

research with the same types of activities and interviews with Swadhyayee college youth in the United States over the fall and winter of 2003. The compiled data was then analyzed for differences in the youth's perceptions of Swadhyay as well as the nature of the background environments for the two samples. In addition to the fieldwork, I have also consulted literature research on both Swadhyay and the experiences of second generation South Asian youth in America at large. The latter research was done to place my specific findings into larger context.

My analysis showed that there is a difference in the way Swadhyay is perceived by the young Swadhyayees in the two countries. Their background environments (including personal and family information) were also found to be different based on the data I collected. This confirms an association between the two factors, but does not imply a causal relationship.

The comparison of the experiences of the American respondents and second generation South Asians at large shows many common features, including religion as a factor in identity and assimilation.

**DEDICATION**

**For my enormously loving  
and supportive parents and  
Vikas, who serves as a constant  
reminder of the unparalleled  
potential of love, youth, and  
underweight obesity**

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I appreciate all of the youth that helped me with this project, especially those in India who opened up their hearts and lives for me. This research was an unbelievably fulfilling experience because of the cooperation and enthusiasm of my interviewees.

I thank Didi and the late Dadaji for inspiring youth such as myself to work towards a more meaningful life.

I would like to thank my parents for supporting my ideas and making it possible for me to do the research and write this thesis without going insane.

Finally, I would like to thank Charlie for being the best alligator a girl could have.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with answering whether there is a relationship between the cultural environments in India and the United States and the effect of Swadhyay on the lives of Swadhyayee youth in those countries. Foremost, the Swadhyay philosophy must be discussed in detail. The history of Swadhyay, including background on the founder of the movement, will be reviewed. Then, Swadhyay's basic goals and beliefs will be explained along with methods of applying these teachings to one's life. The thesis will then explore the youth group in Swadhyay, Divine Brain Trust (DBT), and the differences in the daily functioning of DBT groups in India and the United States. This is followed by a basic explanation of the research methods used for this project.

The next section of the thesis describes the responses from DBT youth concerning Swadhyay and its effects on their lives. This information is broken up into responses from the Indian youth and responses from the American group. The analysis will aim to discover whether there is a difference between the two groups concerning the effects of Swadhyay on their lives. Following this data, the data relating to the environments in India and the United States will be analyzed based on factors relating personally to the interviewee, as well the family and Swadhyay experiences of that youth. After this analysis, one will be able to determine if there is a relationship

between environment and the effect of Swadhyay upon the lives of youth in India and the United States.

The final section of the thesis is concerned with the experiences of second generation South Asian youth in the United States. Since most of the DBT youth in the United States are second generation youth from India, this comparison will be able to determine whether the experiences of the DBT youth correlate with those of other second generation South Asian youth. This serves to place Swadhyay in a larger context as well as determine whether American DBT youth are distinct from other similar youth

## SWADHYAY: A BRIEF HISTORY

Swadhyay is a Sanskrit word meaning “self study”. It is also a spiritual movement that has made an impact on millions of people around the world. These Swadhyayees not only live their lives according to the Swadhyay philosophy (based on Vedic teachings), but also aim to uplift their fellow man with the main idea that God resides in every being. Examples of Swadhyay in action can be seen in various prayogs or experiments such as Bhav Feri (Devotional Visits) and Vruksh Mandir (Temples of Trees). Swadhyayees around the world look to the guidance of the Late Pandurang Shastri Athavale (fondly called Dadaji or Elder Brother) and his daughter Jayshree Talwalkar (called Aadarniya Didi or Respected Sister) as leaders of the Swadhyay movement. Over the decades, Swadhyay has grown and has been recognized around the world with the most prestigious honors. It continues to be a powerful force in many communities, shaping lives and relationships while teaching tolerance and acceptance.

### *Major Developments*

Though Dadaji is considered by many to be the founder of the Swadhyay movement, it was actually his grandfather and father who laid the foundation for Dadaji’s later work. Dadaji’s grandfather, Laxman Rao, visited “untouchable” villages to teach them spiritual texts and verses. The inhabitants of these villages were seen as outcasts from the society – lower than the lowest caste. Even though Laxman Rao was a Brahmin (the highest ranked caste in India’s caste system), he still remained devoted to

his idea of spreading spirituality and the equality of men by associating himself with the untouchable caste.

Dadaji's father, Rev. Vajjnath Athavale, also had innovative ideas concerning Indian society and religion. After young Dadaji's grade school education, many of his family members wanted him to attend a university and begin a lucrative career. Dadaji's father, however, felt differently:

Rev. Vajjnath Shastriji wanted him to be a true Brahmin who lives for the sake of culture. Therefore, Rev. Vajjnath Shastriji opened a unique center called by the name 'Saraswati Sanskrit Pathshala' and gave education to his son in that school. A thoughtful and principled society would emerge, only when there is a synthesis of Indian cultural heritage & contemporary western thought (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2001).

The pathshala, opened in 1926, was based on the ancient Hindu tradition of tapovans (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:3). Young students were sent to tapovans when they were very young. There they lived and studied under a guru until they were young adults. At this point, they would come back to their homes and reintegrate with mainstream society. These students learned practical knowledge, but also philosophy, religion, psychology, literature, and other knowledge important in life, but not necessarily related to making a living. The students who studied at tapovans learned not merely for the sake of making money and careers, but for the sake of learning itself. Students were exposed to various cultures and languages in the tapovans as well: "In the Tapovan of *Roha* students were given deep training in comparative eastern and western philosophies along with proficiency in English language" (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2001). In addition to bringing back this type of schooling, Rev. Vajjnath Shastriji also began the Swadhyay

movement. However, it was under his son, Dadaji, that the movement truly became a global phenomenon.

Dadaji began giving discourses on the Bhagvad Gita and Vedic texts when he was only twenty-two years old in the year 1942. His father had been giving such discourses for sixteen years, but unfortunately, his voice was beginning to fail. As a result, Dadaji continued the Swadhyay work his father had started (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2001). Since that day, the Swadhyay movement has grown and become stronger.

A milestone in the Swadhyay movement was the opening of the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth in 1958 in Mumbai, India (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992: 18). This university was opened by Dadaji to provide the type of education he received to other youth. Today, the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth has students not only from all of India, but also from other countries, including the United States. At this unique university, students study Vedic religion and texts in depth, as well as other religions and western philosophies. A graduate of the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth is able to appreciate religion and philosophy from the level of a deeply interested and eager scholar rather than that of a mildly interested student. Since most of the students at the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth have already attained their undergraduate degrees from other institutions, they are able to focus on and become deeply immersed in their subject matter rather than worry about getting a career-oriented education. Another aspect of the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth is that the students are “not required to pay for their lodging, boarding, and education. They are not charged any fees, nor [is] any donation taken from them” (Sat Vichar

Darshan 1992:48). Like the ashrams of before, the Vidhyapeeth is solely devoted to imparting knowledge to students without the added baggage of economic worries.

Since 1958, Swadhyay has grown enormously. Today, the Swadhyay movement affects the lives of millions of people living on five continents. Swadhyay has touched these people not only through the message of Dadaji's teachings, but equally through his enigmatic and charismatic personality of Dadaji. Before we consider the philosophical foundations of the Swadhyay movement, we should take some time to examine the achievements of this singular man.

*Dadaji: A Man with a Mission*

From the beginning of his journey as a role model for Swadhyayees, Dadaji has inspired millions with his unique vision. Personally, Dadaji is knowledgeable on a wide range of topics. He gives discourses not only on Vedic and Indian culture, but also on Western traditions as well. These include economic and social theories from around the world:

To understand issues of human dignity and equality across diverse cultures and traditions, Rev. Dadaji has read extensively. This self-education in world cultural and religious history has led him to understand the essential of social dialectics and liberal rationalism, but he has also rejected their materialistic exclusivity. He does not demonize liberalism, Marxism or any other ism. He has a disarming ability to disagree without being disagreeable and to set forth his views without being contentious (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2001).

Dadaji has the gift to explain these complex ideas in a simple way to the millions of common people who listen to his discourses.

Dadaji has also been honored by the international community in many ways. In 1954, Dadaji was invited to participate in the Second World Religions Congress in

Japan. While there, he advocated the view that the Vedic tradition and teachings allowed people to live integrated lives. He looked especially towards the Bhagavad Gita as a guide for men to solve the problems plaguing their lives and society. It was at this Congress that Dadaji began to formulate Swadhyay as it is now: "He proposed an alternative vision, based on self-less love, dignity accorded to all, and co-sharing of community, well and weaving in to a unified approach to life. But he had no answer when he was asked whether there was any village or community in India which lived by these ideals . He took it as a challenge and decided to work out his ideas at home..." (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2001). Although Dadaji had the opportunity to become a professor of philosophy and religion in the United States, a prestigious position, he refused the job in order to stand up to the challenge put forth and make his vision a reality.

Dadaji continued to be honored as he led Swadhyay to become a global phenomenon. After receiving various honors and awards, Dadaji was presented with the Ramon Magsaysay Award in the Philippines in 1996. This award "was conceived to honor 'greatness of spirit shown in service to the people'" (Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation 2004). Considered the Asian Nobel Prize, the Magsaysay award is only awarded to six exceptional individuals every year. The Ramon Magsaysay Award Foundation honored "[Dadaji's] original penetrating vision, a vision of human possibility and achievement, a practical vision to inspire and mobilize millions of people" (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2003a).



In 1997, Dadaji was awarded the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. Today, this award is called the Templeton Prize for Progress towards Research or Discoveries about Spiritual Realities. It is awarded annually by the John Templeton Foundation and is worth £750,000 sterling, making it a larger monetary award than the Nobel Prize. Past recipients of this award include: Mother Theresa, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Charles Colson, and founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Bill Bright (The Templeton Prize 2004). This award, paired with the Magsaysay award, truly signaled Dadaji's and Swadhyay's recognition in the world community.

The Swadhyay philosophy explains that we are all one parivar (family): a brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God. As such, Dadaji had millions of family members. However, he also had a family in the traditional sense. Dadaji is survived by his wife, Mrs. Nirmala Tai, and his daughter, Mrs. Jayshree Talwalkar (Aadarniya Didi). Didi has worked for the Swadhyay movement for over 25 years, and has now become the leader of the movement in place of her father. From the age of 19, Didi gave discussions on the Bhagvad Gita. She has also traveled around the world, participating in various religious conferences and giving lectures on topics concerned with Vedic philosophy and Swadhyay. She was awarded the prestigious Lok Shikshak (Teacher of the People) Award for her contributions to Swadhyay and the community (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2003b). Though Dadaji spent much of his life devoted to the Swadhyay movement, he still was a loving family man who like others, spent time with his family and friends.

Although Dadaji was a man with an exceptional vision and drive, like every person, he was susceptible to illness. Towards the end of his life, Dadaji began to have great health problems. A few years before his death in 2003, Dadaji became incapable of giving his discourses. At this time, his daughter, Didi began to give the discourses on his behalf. Although Dadaji was unable to talk for long periods of time, he still met with Swadhyayees for short discussions. Eventually, however, his health reached a critical stage in which he was unable to walk or talk very much. The last year of his life was spent in this manner. Dadaji was unable to meet with his fellow Swadhyayees due to his health, but Didi began to take over her father's responsibilities. Like Dadaji, she too is married and has a family life that she is involved in. With Dadaji's passing in October 2003, Didi was looked to as the new leader of the Swadhyay movement. Since then, Didi has continued all of Swadhyay's work as well as regular discourses (two to three per week) from the pathshala in Mumbai, just like her father before her had done.

## SWADHYAY: A UNIQUE PHILOSOPHY

### *A basic definition*

The preceding discussion about the history of Swadhyay has not yet explained exactly what Swadhyay is. Unfortunately, this is a very difficult task. Perhaps it is better to define what Swadhyay is *not*. It is not a sect, creed, religion, cult, tradition, or revolution. Swadhyay has neither a political agenda nor a mission for social reformation. It is not a school, temple, nor any other institution. Swadhyay is foremost an attitude of the mind: a goal to truly understand ourselves. The word itself comes the Sanskrit words *sva* (self) and *adhyay* (study); therefore it is the study of the self. Swadhyay is also an “attempt to lead life in the light of God’s wisdom and to be ready to work for Him” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:6). It is a journey to develop and understand one’s self rather than an end goal. For the Swadhyayee, Swadhyay represents a unique way of thinking and living; it is something to be done every minute of his or her life:

“Some people consider Swadhyaya to be the food for life. Just as food is taken daily so also Swadhyaya is to be practiced daily. Even this definition is not adequate; for, food is taken when one is hungry. It is taken periodically. But Swadhyaya is more important than food. Swadhyaya is like oxygen. The comparison of Swadhyaya to oxygen brings to light the comprehensiveness and the necessity of Swadhyaya... The absence of oxygen even for a moment aggravates a man. Swadhyaya is as important and as essential as oxygen” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:6).

Over time, Swadhyay has become a philosophical movement. When millions of people choose to embrace the same ideas, a movement is inevitable. Unlike other movements, this one has resulted in social change only as a side effect. The core of Swadhyay

remains an introspection of the self and a realization of one's relationship to God and to other beings.

There are four basic activities in Swadhyay: meeting, listening, thinking, and abandoning (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:9). The first activity is meeting. All Swadhyayees meet with others of various backgrounds, including other Swadhyayees. The reason for these meetings is to express their divine love for one another. Because this love is based in the idea of an indwelling God (described later in further detail) in each person, the usual barriers of class, caste, economic status, sect, etc. fall away. Each person meets the other as a brother or sister. The second type of activity is listening. In order to understand the Swadhyay philosophy, one must listen to the discourses by Dadaji or Didi on Vedic texts and Western philosophy, and how to implement their teachings into our lives. These words inspire Swadhyayees to participate in the third activity: thinking. Once one has met with others and learned about Vedic texts and other philosophies, the true meaning of Swadhyay comes into play. A Swadhyayee must introspect/study his life based on the experiences he has had from meeting others, and from the teachings from the Vedic texts and other philosophies. He or she should try to understand the motivation behind his actions and become more aware of the state of his ego. The Swadhyayee should provide himself with feedback on how he is living his life and what can be changed for the better. This leads to the final activity. Abandoning means abandoning vices and unhealthy habits. The Swadhyayee wants to rid himself of anything that is an obstacle on his path of development towards God. These activities

are repeated endlessly, and together, allow a person to cleanse their minds and souls of anything that does not bring them closer to God.

*Main concepts and beliefs*

One of the main ideas in the Swadhyay philosophy is to shift the ego from self-centered to God-centered. Our ego is merely our sense of self and every action we undertake is related to our perception of our ego. Usually, we take actions for the well being of ourselves or loved ones. This is by no means wrong, and is an example of the self-centered ego. By shifting our ego to God-centered, we are actually able to merge it with Him. One's goals no longer are selfishly driven, but are those that would result in an outcome pleasing to the Lord. Because of this, the ego is identified with God rather than the self, and therefore is merged with Him. One must believe that the ego not only comes into being because of God, but belongs to Him as well. Therefore, every action undertaken by a Swadhyayee aims to remember God and to live according to His wisdom. Though seemingly difficult, shifting the ego only requires a change in the motivation behind activities rather than a change in the activities themselves. This can be illustrated through the example of eating lunch. A self-centered ego eats lunch to fulfill its own hunger. A God-centered ego eats lunch in order to take care of the body given to it by God. The action remains the same, but the reason behind the action is shifted to remembering God. When this is done, every act can become an act of devotion to God, allowing the common man to live his life without any change while also expressing his gratitude and acceptance of God.

The concept of indwelling God is also essential to the Swadhyay philosophy. Basically, this means that God resides in every being. This powerful idea has many effects. First, there is no feeling of estrangement from the Lord; if He is inside me, how can I be separate from Him? This idea allows one to have increased confidence and courage. If the Creator of the universe resides in me, how can I think that I am alone, powerless, or weak? This confidence is not based on putting others down or any relationship of inferiority/superiority. It is gained merely through the conviction that the Lord resides in me and is always with me. The final effect of the concept of indwelling God is the most important to the Swadhyay philosophy: "When the awareness that 'the Lord who resides in my heart resides in the hearts of others as well' dawns on the mind of a Swadhyayee, his attitude towards others undergoes a radical change. He approaches other persons with the feeling of devotion only" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:7). The social characterizations of class, caste, gender, etc. are replaced by the concept of a "divine Brotherhood under the Fatherhood of God (Patel, Namrata 2003). Because everyone has the same God inside of them, we are all related and of equal value. When one Swadhyayee approaches another, the goal is not to change or reform the other person; Swadhyay is not social work. Rather, it is to get to know the other person and to love and help them as family instead of an outside source. Swadhyayees greet others with love and have no expectations of receiving something in return. A sister does not cook for her brother with the belief that one day he will cook for her; she does so only out of her love for him. When a Swadhyayee does something to help another person, it

is purely out of love and understanding that every being is from the same family and shares the most essential quality, indwelling God.

From the idea of indwelling God stems *asmita*. *Asmita* is three-fold: it means self-confidence, self-respect, and self-resistance. Let us examine each in turn and its relation to indwelling God. As stated before, self-confidence is an important result of believing in an indwelling God. Knowing that the Lord is always with you and has chosen you to be his home gives one complete confidence and assurance. With God, the master of the universe, on your side, failure simply seems unlikely. Even in the event of failure, knowing that God resides inside you allows one to easily try again instead of giving up. The confidence achieved by believing in an indwelling God is lasting because it is not based on a transient event or occurrence. Rather, it is rooted in a powerful and permanent idea. Self-respect is another component of *asmita*. Self-respect is the idea that one is worth something and should take care of one's self. Once again, indwelling God is the idea that allows for this way of thinking. First, the increased self-worth is related to the fact that a great entity, such as the Lord, has chosen to reside in your soul. If God thinks you are worthy enough to reside in, your life and ideas must be worth a lot. The concept of taking care of one's self is similarly related. Just as one would not create a mess in a guest's home, you should not create a mess in the home of the Lord. Because God resides in you, your body becomes His home, or a temple. This notion implies that you should take care of your body and spirit as well as possible. This includes eating well, exercising, dressing well, and avoiding unhealthy lifestyles. Self-respect also implies a respect for others. Just as one realizes that he is of great worth

because God resides in him, one must also realize that God resides in others. This prevents any superiority/inferiority complexes or unfair actions. The final component of *asmīta* is self-resistance. This means cultivating discipline and resisting unhealthy lifestyles and ideas. As discussed above, the idea of indwelling God promotes the resistance of unhealthy choices. Furthermore, it fosters staying steadfast to a goal. When one has the confidence and self-respect needed to achieve a goal, discipline to remain on the particular path of that goal is also present. Knowing that God is with you allows one to remain dedicated to his goals; there is no fear of failure or regret because you are performing your actions with God in mind and on your side. Therefore, distractions will not be able to shift one's focus away from the goal. Together, the confidence, self-worth, and discipline (*asmīta*) needed to achieve any goal is achievable through one idea: indwelling God.

Another important component of the *Swādhyāy* philosophy is *kruti bhakti* (dynamic devotion). Just as one can continue one's daily routine but shift the focus to God-centered, *bhakti* (devotion) can undergo a similar change. Once one sets God in the center of his life, every action can be seen as a form of devotion. Therefore, devotion itself can be as dynamic as the myriad of actions one can take. Devotion to God has always been considered (in the recent Vedic culture) the realm of the temple or prayer. Devotion was always an individual act, usually consisting of prayers, hymns, and offerings to God. It was a serious and somber time, in which one would try to understand his or her relationship with the Lord. Although this was not the meaning of devotion in Vedic texts, it was the norm for most people and remains the norm today.



Swadhyay presents a very different view of devotion. Devotion is seen as a social force; it is something that people should do together. In the same way that family members lead happy lives due to the warmth and affection they receive from one another, devotion should be something that is shared among members of God's family. Therefore, Swadhyayees participate in devotional activities together. Many of these activities are dynamic, including farming, planting trees, fishing, visiting others, and study groups. These daily activities become forms of devotion for many Swadhyayees because they offer their skills to God. The difference is that God is placed in the center of the activities rather than personal motives. This type of dynamic devotion is best explained in the form of the various prayogs (experiments) that Swadhyayees participate in. These prayogs will be discussed later in greater detail.

An effect of Swadhyay is a greater understanding of Vedic philosophy and culture. Although Swadhyayees are from all religions and countries, the basic Swadhyay principles are derived from Vedic texts. When Dadaji or Didi gives discourses, they usually relate to the Bhagvad Gita or other significant Vedic texts. The Vedic religion and philosophy is one of the oldest known to mankind. As a result, there have been many changes to the application of these philosophies in the lives of everyday people. Unfortunately, the result has been that many followers of these philosophies no longer remember the reason behind the elaborate rituals and beliefs. The religion has become immensely ritualistic as Sanskrit is no longer in use. When the original language of the texts becomes obsolete, people have to rely on interpretations that can be false or influenced to support a certain agenda. Knowing this, many people have

become disillusioned about Vedic spirituality and religion, thinking that it is merely comprised of rituals that have no connection to their everyday lives. Swadhyay aims to change that feeling into one of pride for a strong and ancient Vedic tradition. Dadaji was a great Sanskrit scholar and had studied Vedic texts from childhood. He also had the gift of being able to explain such complicated subject matter in a way that is understandable and appealing to the general public. Dadaji always maintained that one should not perform any action or believe in anything unless he is completely and rationally convinced of its truth and goodness. He applied this concept to Vedic texts as well, explaining the reason behind rituals such as fasts, religious days, certain behaviors, and so on. Dadaji presented these rational reasons to his listeners, but did not push anyone to believe them. He believed that each person should evaluate the information and make their own choices as to acceptance of the ideas. As a result, Swadhyayees are no longer jaded about the Vedic tradition and instead enjoy and accept the philosophy from a rational and educated standpoint.

One of the most striking qualities of the Swadhyay pariwar is the principle of non-asking and self-offering. This principle is a backbone of Swadhyay and differentiates the pariwar from most other spiritual movements. First, let us look at the concept of self-offering: "Swadhyay teaches us that the ultimate good of man consists in surrendering his most developed life at the feet of the Lord" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:17). Once one offers his life to God, he can no longer be enslaved by the world. He answers to only one authority: that of the Lord. This independence fosters a release from helplessness and beggary: "[God] loves us and protects us and takes care of us in

every way. He is our true security and there is no need to expect 'alms', help, support, praise, rewards, etc. from anyone else" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:17). God is the only one Swadhyayees look towards to provide for their lives. They leave the fruits of their labor up to the Lord, doing their work with complete faith in God. In doing so, their work becomes worship because the outcome of their efforts is left completely up to God. In essence, God is the only patron of their lives. Because Swadhyayees rely on God to provide whatever He deems appropriate in their lives, they do not ask for money or support from others for any Swadhyay activities. They share the "unshakeable conviction that the entire gamut of Swadhyay activities are inspired, guided and protected by God" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:17). This, in turn, implies that God will provide whatever is necessary, removing the need to ask others for help. The principle of non-asking is what sets Swadhyay apart from other organizations. Swadhyay has millions of followers, but has never asked for a single penny from any Swadhyayee, social institution, or government. When the Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth was opened in 1958, Dadaji was asked how his institution would flourish without asking a single soul for financial help. Dada replied: "I look at my work in two ways. Firstly, if God does not like my work, He will not make it successful. And secondly, if there is no complete self-surrender to His will and purpose on my part, this work will never prosper" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:18). Each Swadhyayee takes expenses out of his or her pocket. Even when they go for Bhav Feri, Swadhyayees accept only water from their hosts. They pack their own lunches and snacks and do not ask for anything from the people they visit. In keeping with the principle of non-asking, Swadhyayees do not want to

create any sense of obligation or patronage between themselves and their fellow brothers and sisters whom they are visiting.

Swadhyayees are able to donate money to the organization if they want to, but they must be regular Swadhyayees (attend Dadaji's discourses every week, go for Bhav Feri, attend special events, etc.) for at least one year. The reason for this is that donors should truly understand and accept the philosophy of Swadhyay; they must understand the main principles, including that of non-asking. Once they have accepted the philosophy, they can make a donation if they want; this donation is seen as an offering of their talent and skills to God. If the Swadhyayee is a farmer, then they may donate crops. If the Swadhyayee has a job in the city, they may donate money. The donation is not seen as such, but rather as God's share of your earnings. Since God is with you at all times and helps you in all that you do, it is only appropriate that one gives a portion of his or her earnings back to God. Only the donor knows how much he donates and that information is kept private. Of course, there is never any pressure for a Swadhyayee to donate money; because it is an offering to God, there is no requirements on how much to donate or when to donate. Only when a person has understood Swadhyay and feels enough gratitude towards God to donate part of their earnings to Him does he make an offering to God. But even with the donations from Swadhyayees around the world, Swadhyay still is an enormous organization with no financial patron. The fact that it not only prospers, but has grown immensely without asking for any financial help from anyone is amazing and rarely seen in the world today. Swadhyay has truly been blessed with God's grace and will hopefully continue to grow and change the lives of others.

### *Advantages of Swadhyay*

There are many advantages from participating in Swadhyay. Much of the earlier discussion has focused on these advantages to both the individual and to the society at large. These can be categorized into four main groups. One of the main effects of Swadhyay is an increase in *asmita*. *Asmita*, the three-fold concept consisting of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-resistance, is increased by the knowledge of indwelling God. Knowing that you have God with you at all times allows one to tackle any problem with supreme confidence and discipline. This knowledge also causes one to cultivate respect for oneself and for others. The second effect is concerned with the removal of social barriers and cementing of a feeling of unity. This is achieved by understanding that the same God that resides in me resides in everyone else as well. Based on this divine relationship, everyone else can be seen as my brother or sister. Such a view removes social barriers such as caste, creed, sect, class, economic status, and political status. Because everyone is a child of God, they are all equal in God's eyes. As a Swadhyayee, one sees all people in that same light of equality, creating a unified mankind. The third type of advantage gained from Swadhyay is that one receives knowledge of true devotion to God: "A Swadhyayee...discards devotion based on wrong views, false faiths, superstitions, and miracles" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:15). Dadaji and Didi correct misconceptions about the Vedic tradition in their discourses. Since there is an emphasis on rational understanding rather than blind faith, Swadhyayees are presented with unbiased information on scriptures and are free to make their own decisions. Often times, this is the first time that many listeners have

understood the reasons behind the rituals they perform on a regular basis. By knowing the underlying reason for a ritual, one not only feels as though the ritual is more effective, but also is able to adapt the ritual to his life without losing the main idea behind it. The final type effect one can receive from Swadhyay is increased energy and inspiration for devotional work. This enhanced zeal is brought on by the change from a self-centered ego to a God-centered ego. Once one realizes that God is the authority in his life, he is all the more motivated to work for Him. The idea of kruti bhakti implies a dynamism and vitality to both life and devotion. By thinking of devotion as a social force, one is able to derive inspiration and energy from fellow Swadhyayees. All of the advantages of Swadhyay are by no means limited to these examples. However, it is possible to categorize them into these four major categories.

## PRAYOGS

Swadhyay's philosophy emphasizes the change from a self-centered ego to a God-centered ego. This change allows one to transform everyday routines into acts of worship. Wanting to implement these ideas into their lives, Swadhyayees looked towards Dadaji and Didi to provide a method to do so. They are presented with different prayogs, or experiments, to undertake. Most of the prayogs are geared towards allowing Swadhyayees to continue their daily activities but to view those activities from the perspective of worship; they are tangible ways to implement the Swadhyay philosophy into their lives.

### *Bhav Feri*

Bhav Feri (devotional visits) is one of the earliest prayogs that Swadhyayees have been participating in. The first instance of Bhav Feri can be traced to 1957. During that time, Dadaji used to meet with some youth for philosophical discussion on the beaches of Mumbai. After all, he too was a young man who enjoyed talking about his interests with his friends. As the meetings became more regular, the men began to realize that there was something missing from their lives. Although they had material success, they were jaded by the lack of idealism in their society. Spirituality and the need for a relationship with God were all but forgotten. In an attempt to pacify these feelings in the urban young men, Dadaji suggested that they visit villagers in an area of Gujarat. The reason for this meeting was to re-establish the bonds of a divine

brotherhood and help the villagers see that every member of society is not as jaded and cynical as it may seem. The young men did so, and met the villagers with no expectation of anything in return. This was the first instance of Bhav Feri, which is now a cornerstone in the Swadhyay movement. The underlying purpose behind Bhav Feri is to “spread the teachings of God and to remind people of their close relationship with Him. [Bhav Feri is done to] awaken the divine qualities latent in every man” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:84). Swadhyayees never go for Bhav Feri alone, but rather go in groups of three or more. They do so because by working in a group, they will become closer to each other.

Swadhyayees perform Bhav Feri to become more intimate with their divine brothers and sisters as well as to educate others on the Swadhyay philosophy. By talking with others about these topics, the Swadhyayee obviously thinks about them as well. By spending his time thinking about God and spreading his message, the Swadhyayee not only shows his devotion to God but is also reminds himself about these things. It is easy to forget such matters when going through the necessary actions of the day (work, school, eating, sleeping, etc.); Bhav Feri provides a time when the Swadhyayee can reach out to others while refocusing himself.

When a Swadhyayee goes for Bhav Feri, he does not have any expectations regarding the type of response he will receive. He only goes to meet his divine brothers and sisters. These trips are undertaken as devotion to God; they are a way to express one's love and gratitude for God by spreading His message and meeting His children. Keeping with their principle of non-asking, Swadhyayees do not ask for nor accept any



food, lodging, money, or gifts during these visits. They pay for all expenses out of their own pockets and accept only water from the people they visit.

From my observation, during these visits the Swadhyayees do not talk only about Swadhyay or related topics. The conversation was very natural and involved common topics such as school, children, weather, and work. Many of the hosts had experience with Swadhyayees coming to visit them for Bhav Feri, so they already had a basic background on Swadhyay's philosophy. In some instances, the hosts wanted to know more about Swadhyay; the Swadhyayees answered the host's questions to the best of their abilities but did not continue to talk about Swadhyay the rest of the meeting. Mostly, the Swadhyayees asked about the host's life: how they were doing, how were their kids, how was their work/school coming along, and so on. From my experience, the visits seemed like any normal conversation between people who have met recently. Towards the end of the visits, which lasted anywhere from thirty minutes to over an hour, the Swadhyayees mentioned the location and times Dadaji or Didi's discourses would be given in the case that the host was more interested in Swadhyay. Bhav Feri is one of the most common activities for Swadhyayees. Most members take some time out of their schedules once a week or biweekly to visit others in the spirit of divine brotherhood.

#### *Vruksh Mandir*

Vruksh Mandir, or temple of trees, is a very different type of prayog from Bhav Feri. The purpose of a Vruksh Mandir is "a manifestation of bhakti – to see God in every tree thus signifying the omnipresence of God" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1996: 1). The

first Vruksh Mandir was planted on July 30, 1979. Like all Vruksh Mandirs, the plot of land on which it was planted is located in an area where “people of at least 10 villages and one town or city are involved in [kruti bhakti]” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1996: 2).

These areas are usually agricultural and most of the residents’ lives are associated with farming or orchards. One of the main concepts in the Swadhyay philosophy is that God resides in all beings. This can be extended to animals and plants as well. By considering trees and plants as temples, Swadhyayees aim to see God in non-conventional ways and become more aware of His presence everywhere. During the planting of Vruksh Mandirs, Swadhyayees consider the seedlings as forms of God. Therefore, as they grow and the Swadhyayees take care of them, they are not merely taking care of trees, but of God as well. Swadhyayees believe that the qualities that distinguish man from animals, such as the ability to think and reflect, and the ability to create culture, are gifts from God. Humans are distinct in being able to work land, and plant trees and plants in order to harvest fruit. By using these gifts in the service of God, one is able to consider one’s actions as a form of devotion to God. Since the area is considered a temple, the land is not considered to belong to anyone but God. The actual purchaser of the land is Devotional Associates of Yogeshwar, Inc., the business name of the Swadhyay movement. Yogeshwar is another name for God, and so the title reiterates the goal of devotion of all Swadhyayees. As the seedlings are planted, the Swadhyayees remember God and ask Him to bless their temple. Naturally, the seedlings need water, food, and general care. The Swadhyayees in the vicinity of the Vruksh Mandir provide this care. Since they are caring for a temple, while the Swadhyayees are working in the

Vruksh Mandir, they are considered priests. Each nearby village or town sends two to three such priests to the Vruksh Mandir every 24-48 hours. While there, these Swadhyayees tend to the plants and trees, considering the efforts they put into their work a form of devotion to God. The Swadhyayees each bring their own food (as part of the principle of non-asking) and eat together during meal times. Spending time together results in a greater intimacy and strengthening of the bonds of divine brotherhood between the priests. The Swadhyayees come from different areas and different social backgrounds; however as priests for the Vruksh Mandir, they are equal. While at the Vruksh Mandir, different castes, creeds, and classes mingle and work with one another without any problems. As Swadhyayees and priests, they realize the divine nature of their relationship with one another and therefore do not look down upon each other. Once their shift is done, other Swadhyayees from their area come to replace them. In doing so, each person in the nearby area has the chance to work as a priest in the temple. Furthermore, the rotations are organized so that no one person or village/town has more time or priests in the temple than other people/areas. There are two reasons for this. One is so that every person has an equal opportunity to express his or her devotion to God by working in His temple. The second reason concerns the fruits of the temple. Many of the trees and plants produce fruits and seeds that can be harvested. Since the land belongs to God, the fruit also belongs to him. Because each person has spent an equal time as a priest in the temple, no one can bear a sense of ownership over the fruit; every person has put in an equal share of work and devotion. This feeling results in a shift of the ego from self-centered to God centered. Since nobody can claim ownership

of the fruit, God must own it. This fruit is considered *apaurusheya laxmi*, or impersonal wealth. It is seen as a blessing from God as well as owned by Him (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992: 97). The fruit gathered from these Vruksh Mandirs is either stored or sold. Any profit made from such sales is redistributed in the villages and towns close to the Vruksh Mandir. These funds are used in times of economic downturn or to help particularly needy families (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:97). Because the fruit is seen as a blessing from God rather than charity, the recipient of such aid does not feel inferior to others.

In the same way that Vruksh Mandirs allow Swadhyayees to use the same agricultural skills they use every day in a form of devotion to God, other prayogs allow Swadhyayees with other skills to achieve the same results. Examples include Yogeshwar Krishi (Divine Farming) and Matsyaghanda (Floating Temples). In a Yogeshwar Krishi, Swadhyayees from nearby areas take equal amounts of time farming a plot of land. Once again, the resulting wealth is considered impersonal and is distributed to needy members of the community. A Matsyaghanda is a fishing boat that is considered a temple. Fishermen rotate working on the temple and like the previous two prayogs, the wealth from the catch is considered impersonal and is used to aid villagers. (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:103). This type of giving is not considered charity and therefore does not make the donor feel superior nor does it make the recipient feel inferior. In both of these prayogs, the Swadhyayees work with others as priests, increasing their divine bond, while using their skills as devotion to God. Like Vruksh Mandirs, members of different social status mix and work together with the common goal of devotion.

Prayogs have enabled Swadhyayees to perform kruti bhakti in an innovative way. Besides devoting themselves to God, the Swadhyayees have also been able to financially provide for those less fortunate in their communities. These effects are the result of actions stemming from the concepts of indwelling God and shifting one's ego from self-centered to God-centered. Prayogs truly are a way of implementing the philosophy of Swadhyay in a tangible way.

## DIVINE BRAIN TRUST

In Swadhyay, there is a special group for youth known as the Divine Brain Trust, or DBT. DBT functions much like a traditional youth group, providing a supportive community for students and young adults. Swadhyayees in DBT meet for study groups, picnics, sports competitions, and other common activities for their age group. Every meeting has the underlying theme of better understanding oneself, one's divine relationship to others, and one's relationship to God. Dadaji has always shown extreme enthusiasm and placed hope in the youth: "Youth means 'a living symbol of an indomitable enthusiasm and will to completely change the era, tie up in knots the whole sky and crush to pieces mighty Himalayas'" (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2003c). He believed that youth have the energy and drive to make a real change in the world. He also admired the questioning nature of youth; since he advocated rational acceptance of ideas, the questioning and curious nature of young people effectively challenges beliefs and traditions before acceptance. Today, there are more than 14,000 in Yuva Kendras (local chapters of DBT) around the world with 300,000 participating youth (Sanskriti Vistarak Sangh 2003c).

### *History*

DBT began in 1971 when a group of young college graduates approached Dadaji with some questions. They were mainly concerned with "the relevance of Vedic ideals to the contemporary society" (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992: 139). They did not understand

how they could integrate traditions and rituals that were seemingly outdated into their modern lives. Unfortunately, much of the problem was that the youth had a very ritualistic sense of the Vedic tradition. Dadaji met with the young people and explained his view of the Vedic tradition and how he believed it *was* possible to live a modern life based on those ideals; that is, Swadhyay. The youth were satisfied with the answers they received and decided to form a group to further discuss these issues with each other and other youth. In this way, DBT was started.

One may wonder what Divine Brain Trust means: “‘Divine Brain Trust’ literally means a trust which protects and defends divine thoughts” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992: 141). DBT youth meet to explore their divine relationship and better understand the Vedic culture and philosophy. Therefore, they exchange “divine” thoughts while meeting with each other: “Whenever these young people get together they discuss various spiritual and cultural issues. These discussions help remove doubts and prejudices from their minds. They cultivate divine friendship with their peers...this gives them joy because they feel that their lives are more meaningful and they are doing divine work” (Sat Vichar Darshan 1992:142). The young people in DBT form a community with the goal of recognizing the divinity in every person and working together to understand how that ideal can be implemented in everyday life.

#### *DBT activities*

DBT is broken down into local chapters, or Yuva Kendras. The members of these kendras are usually from eighteen to thirty years old, although most of the individuals are of college-age. These local groups usually cover a few small villages or

sometimes only one large one. In urban areas, there is usually a Yuva Kendra for different areas of the city or suburbs. In general, if the group becomes too large (approximately more than 30 individuals), it is broken into two or more smaller groups. An exception to this occurs when that particular Yuva Kendra is the only one located in a wide area and there is not a large enough concentration of Swadhyayees to form a new Yuva Kendra. In those cases, or instances in which there are simply too many young people in the immediate area, the males and females form their own versions of Yuva Kendras. The male Yuva Kendras retain the same name, while the female kendras are called Yuvati Kendras. The activities remain the same in both kendras, but the discussion is often geared more to the particular concerns of each group.

The reason for keeping the Yuva Kendras small is to promote discussion among the members. The object of DBT is learn more about others and share view on implementing Vedic traditions into everyday life. By talking to other young people, individuals are able to learn from the experiences of others and receive feedback on their own experiences. The discussion group format of these meetings allows for casual conversation about a variety of both philosophical and ordinary topics. There are sanchalaks (discussion leaders) for every Yuva Kendra, who are volunteers from the group members. Every few months, a new sanchalak is chosen to replace an existing one. This prevents any one person from imposing their ideas on the group and allows every member to feel as though they have contributed to the progress of the group.

Many youth in DBT also participate in Study Circles. Study Circles are meetings in which the youth choose a book or article to read and discuss. This book does not have



to be about Swadhyay or Vedic tradition, but must discuss some aspect of philosophy or spirituality. Often, the young Swadhyayees meet weekly to discuss their understanding and feelings on the readings. They may also talk about whether the message of the reading is worth implementing in one's life, and if so, how to do so.

Another activity of DBT is a picnic or small retreat (overnight or weekend). Picnics or some other outdoor activity occur about once a month. Often times, there are more of these activities during school vacations. The basic idea behind picnics and short retreats is for the youth to get to know each other better while having fun. Often times, these events will be held with more than one Yuva Kendra in attendance. This is a great chance for Swadhyayee youth to meet their counterparts in different areas. At these events, there is always at least one discussion (there can be more depending on the length of the event) on a philosophical or spiritual topic. Often, the attending Yuva Kendras are informed of the topic beforehand so that they can attend the discussion with formulated ideas. Of course, the youth have enough free time to spend playing games, talking, exploring the environment around them, etc. One of the main reasons for holding these outdoor activities is to increase an appreciation for nature. The young people are urged to view nature as beautiful because God resides in it as well as themselves. Overall, the picnics and retreats function to take the DBT members out of their everyday environments, introduce them to other youth with similar interests, and discuss the ramifications of Vedic and other philosophies on their lives.

In the United States, a yearly youth camp is held in the summer. The youth camp is held at a different college campus in the United States or Canada every year. This

camp lasts for two weeks and youth from all of the United States and Canada attend. At the camp, young Swadhyayees attend sessions and discussion groups every day as well as participate in sports tournaments, learn arts and crafts, and meet other youth. The sessions cover topics ranging from world religions, the philosophy and history of Swadhyay, legendary South Asian heroes and heroines, and major works of Vedic philosophy. The discussion groups occur directly after each hour-long session and are comprised of approximately 20 youth with a young adult sanchalak. In these discussion groups, the members discuss the previous session and its relevance to their lives. In addition to the sessions and discussion groups, there are also movie nights, talent shows, cultural shows, and other forms of entertainment organized solely by the youth at the camp. Youth camp allows young Swadhyayees to make new friends from the other side of the country while learning about Swadhyay and Vedic culture.

#### *DBT in Gujarat, India*

While in Gujarat, I focused mainly on the city of Baroda for my research. While there, I noted the organization of DBT in the large city. Baroda has 48 Yuva Kendras. These Yuva Kendras are grouped by location into 13 larger groups, called vistras. The vistras are in turn grouped into four areas of the city. Each Yuva Kendra is also associated with a similar Yuva Kendra in the villages surrounding Baroda. Therefore, in the Baroda district, there are 96 Yuva Kendras. Each Yuva Kendra holds meetings once a week for approximately an hour (Bhalani 21).

On the first Sunday of each month, a representative from each of the vistras meets to receive the topics from Didi for the next month. Didi selects these topics every

month and every Yuva Kendra in India discusses the same topic on the same week. On the third Sunday of the month, these representatives meet once again, this time with the sanchalaks from each Yuva Kendra. Each Yuva Kendra has one main sanchalak who is in charge of the whole kendra and three minor sanchalaks who are in charge of various aspects of the meetings. These aspects include bhav geet (devotional song/hymn), vaicharik (actual discussion), and games (a fun way to illustrate the discussion material). At this meeting, the sanchalaks divide into their respective groups and discuss their particular aspect of the meeting. The bhav geet sanchalaks all sing the bhav geets together to make sure that they are singing it in the same way; sanchalaks bring the supplies for all of their games to make sure they make sense and work well. Once a month, the sanchalaks of a particular Yuva Kendra also meet with their village counterparts to pass along the topics and demonstrate the activities, who then hold the meetings on the same weeks and in the same manner as the urban Yuva Kendras (Bhalani 21).

An example of a typical DBT meeting I attended is as follows. I attended a Yuvati Kendra; the males and females were in separate groups because there were many young Swadhyaees in the area. Once most of the ladies had arrived, the bhav geet sanchalak sang the bhav geet, which we repeated. The bhav geet, and entire meeting, was in Gujarati. Printed copies of the bhav geet (in Gujarati) had been passed out so that we could follow along. Then the vaicharik sanchalak gave a small 5-10 minute overview of the topic, after which there was a group discussion. The topic of the meeting was the human body. The discussion centered on how the body is such a

precise system (such as temperature stays constant, heart beats without having to think about it, etc.) and how it is a tribute to God that so many processes that we do not understand continue to sustain our bodies. There was also discussion on how humans have been blessed with the capacity for higher thought and how one should be grateful to God for that quality. After approximately 20-25 minutes of discussion, the games began. The appropriate sanchalak passed around slips of paper folded in half. We then went around the room, each girl opening her slip of paper and talking for 30 seconds to a minute about why the body part written on the slip was important and interesting. The answers ranged from humorous to insightful. After everyone had a turn, the main sanchalak went over the major discussion points. The meeting was over after that, and the ladies mingled for some time before leaving.

#### *DBT in Texas*

In the United States, there is a much smaller concentration of Swadhyayees than in India. As a result, there are also fewer Yuva Kendras, though they each have a larger number of people. There are Yuva Kendras in every major city in Texas. I will explain the organization in Houston, TX as an example for the other cities in the state.

There are two Yuva Kendras in Houston; one in the southwest area of the city and one in Clear Lake. There used to be one in the north area of the city, but there was very little attendance and so it was combined with the much larger southwest kendra (approximately 40 youth). There are some differences between the Indian and American kendras. One of the main differences is that the meetings are held in English. This is because English is often the only language that every person can understand; in

America, the youth are from different geographical backgrounds, and therefore speak different native languages. The Houston kendras have both males and females since there are not enough youth to break the group into two. The Yuva Kendras in Houston have three sanchalaks, although their duties are not broken up in the same way as in India. They focus only on the vaicharik and games portion of the meetings; the bhav geet is led by any youth who volunteers at the meeting. Unlike India, the Yuva Kendras in Houston do not meet weekly for one hour, but biweekly for two hours. The sanchalaks are usually older than most of the group (late twenties/early thirties vs. late teens/early twenties) and do not rotate as often as in India. There are also no meetings with village or smaller town sanchalaks. However, like India, the sanchalaks attend large planning meetings, both with sanchalaks from around the state and with the other sanchalaks from Houston. The meetings in a certain city all discuss the same topic in the same week, similar to the setup in India.

A DBT meeting in Houston begins with a bhav geet led by one of the young individuals. Printed copies in English are distributed so that every person can follow along. Then, the main sanchalak introduces the topic. The other sanchalaks build upon the topic and then open the topic up for discussion. After discussion, the sanchalaks present a creative way to think about the topic and implement it into one's life (similar to the games section). Finally, the main sanchalak summarizes the topic and discussion. The meeting ends, and again, most of the youth mingle before leaving.

## RESEARCH METHODS

I used three main research methods to collect my data for this study. The first of these methods were the interviews I conducted both in India and the United States. The second method of research involved observation of Swadhyay activities. This included attending Yuva Kendra meetings and other Swadhyay activity. Finally, I conducted some literature research in order to comprehend the Swadhyay philosophy as well as to relate my findings to the larger scope of South Asian immigration.

### *Interviews*

The main portion of my research consists of interview responses from both Indian and American Swadhyayees involved in DBT. I interviewed 25 DBT members in Gujrat, India over a span of ten weeks in summer 2003. Upon returning to the United States, I interviewed 24 DBT members from Texas, United States through the fall and winter of 2003. The participants were young men and women with whom spent some time; it was essential that they felt comfortable with me or their responses might not have reflected their true feelings. While in India, I achieved this greater intimacy by attending DBT activities for over a month before conducting my first interview. I also spent time with many of the female participants outside of DBT and Swadhyay activities, including watching movies, going out to eat, and other social activities. In this way, the participants viewed me more as a new friend rather than an outsider. In the United States, I met with many of the interviewees during weekends and over school

breaks. We spent time together in order to increase our comfort with each other, much like in India. As with the Indian youth, I went with the American youth to movies, lunch and dinners, and other common social activities. Due to the fact that the school year was in session, I often visited the American participants at their respective college towns rather than in their hometowns.

The interviews themselves were conducted in casual settings (living room, bedroom at home, etc.), as opposed to a coffee shop or bookstore. Both the participants and I wore what we considered normal, everyday clothing. There was no preparation required of the interviewees and their comfort was stressed before the interview began. They were very informal and resembled conversations more than a interview. The interviews were conducted in the language of the area, so I spoke in Gujarati in India and English in the United States. Before beginning the interviews, I told that participants that they did not have to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with. During the interview, the participants were encouraged to ask me any questions about my research or my feelings towards Swadhyay, DBT, and other topics. As a result, the interviewees felt more like they were talking to a new friend rather than a foreign person.

The interview questions (Appendix A) are be grouped into two main categories: Swadhyay related and non-Swadhyay related. The first half of the questions are non-Swadhyay related; they ask for a basic background from the participant. This includes age, educational goals, family financial status, parents' education level and careers, etc. I collected this data in order to form an opinion on the environments in both India and

the United States. If the two groups had approximately the same education, financial status, parental background, and so on, any difference in the effect of Swadhyay on their lives would not be associated with a difference in their environments (based on the factors asked about in the interviews). However, if there was a difference in the environments, a difference in the impact of Swadhyay in the lives of the two groups could be associated with differing cultural environments (though not necessarily in a causal way). The second group of questions pertained to Swadhyay and how the participant viewed Swadhyay. These questions ranged from the amount of time one had been involved in Swadhyay to what Swadhyay means to the participant. The interviewees were also asked what they considered to be the impact of Swadhyay in their lives and whether they thought that impact was/would be greater for youth living in India versus living in the United States. These responses were recorded by hand during the interview and I later went over the notes to fill in any gaps, if necessary.

#### *Observation*

My second research method was observation. This consisted of attending and noting details about the Yuva Kendra meetings and other DBT activities. These activities included listening to recorded discourses by Dadaji and Didi and attending social DBT activities (both in India and the United States). During this time, I mainly recorded the basic structure and format of these events while also observing the behavior of the youth in attendance. For Yuva Kendra, I took notes on the topics and discussion of the meetings. In order to understand Swadhyay and the prayogs better, I took trips to visit nearby Vruksh Mandirs, Yogeshwar Krishis, and other prayogs. While there, I



watched and talked to the “priests” working in the prayogs. I also visited the pathshala in Mumbai, from where Dadaji used to give his discourses and where Didi now gives hers. I listened to a discourse by Didi for a Yuvati Kendra meeting. I also had the good fortune to be able to meet Didi for a short period (two to three minutes) and explain my project to her. I also had the privilege of seeing Dadaji in India, whose health prevented him from talking. While in the United States, I also attended discourses and Yuva Kendras. I participated in social activities among the youth, such as a potluck dinner and girls’ sleepover. From all of these observations, I was better able to understand Swadhyay as well as the role it plays in the lives of DBT youth.

#### *Scholarly Research*

My scholarly research focused on in two main fields: publications by or about the Swadhyay movement and its philosophy, and prior research on the experiences of South Asian immigrants to the United States. I found many publications by the Swadhyay movement detailing its philosophy and goals. The most useful of these was *The Systems (The Way and the Work)*, an English book published by Swadhyay explaining its philosophy, ideals, and organization. *The Systems* also detailed the prayogs and their setup and purposes as well. In addition to this book and other Swadhyay publications, I examined sources of commentary on the Swadhyay movement. These included information from the Templeton Award Foundation as well as other organizations that had either honored or worked with Swadhyay. My search also included local newspapers and magazines in India and South Asian publications in the United States to find information on Swadhyay. Unfortunately, most of those stories dealt with particular

Swadhyay events (stories on the celebration of a religious holiday, the anniversary of the pathshala, and Dadaji's declining health) rather than focusing on Swadhyay as a movement. They were more "human interest" stories than articles discussing the philosophy and goals of Swadhyayees.

The second field in my literature review covered publications researching South Asian immigration to the United States. This research focused mainly on the role spirituality plays in the lives of second generation South Asian Americans (the first members of the their families to be born and raised in the United States). I consulted various articles and publications, but found three books to be of particular value: Leonard's *The New Americans: The South Asian Americans*, Warner and Wittner's *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*, and Prashad's *The Karma of Brown Folk*. All three books deal with the experiences of South Asian immigrants and their children, and the role of spirituality in the lives of the second generation. By providing such a background, I hope to be able to relate my findings to the larger scope of overall South Asian American experience.

## DATA: QUALITATIVE

After completing the interviews, observing DBT youth, and reading books on Swadhyay, I interpreted the data in the context of my main question: Is there a difference in the effect of Swadhyay on the lives of youth in India versus those in the United States. Furthermore, if there is a difference, can it be attributed to different background environments? In order to answer these questions, we must first look at the responses of the interviewees concerning their experiences with and feelings about Swadhyay.

### *Indian interviews*

While in India during the summer of 2003, I interviewed and observed 25 Hindu youth that spanned an age range of seventeen to twenty-six. I kept the gender ratio as equal as possible, ending up with one more female interviewee than male. All of the youth were either in college or had finished their higher education very recently. As explained earlier, during the interviews I asked the participants about a variety of topics. Many of the answers could be quantified, but the answers that I was most interested in were qualitative. The responses essential to this project were those to three main questions: “What does Swadhyay mean to you”, “What has been the effect of Swadhyay on your life”, and “Do you think this effect is greater/would be greater in India vs. another location?”

The question “What does Swadhyay mean to you” allows the interviewer to understand the motivation behind the participant’s acceptance of Swadhyay. The

responses I received to this question were very varied. Every interviewee had positive feelings towards Swadhyay, but they were concerned with different topics. For many of the youth, Swadhyay is a method of life. One interviewee explained: “Swadhyay is the system of my life – it gives the framework for living life. It is the fulfillment of morals, truth, and my relationship with God and his love. It is transparent – not hypocritical. It doesn’t make a man, but rather shows man what he is and builds his relationship with God” (Patel, Bharat 27). For this youth, Swadhyay provided the framework upon which to make his decisions and set his goals. He aimed to perform actions with God in mind, making them devotional acts rather than selfish acts. This interviewee also emphasized that Swadhyay had made him realize the divinity in others due to the concept of indwelling God. This sentiment was echoed by the majority of the other youth. Swadhyay was where one learned about his relationship to the Lord as well as his divine relationship to other beings.

Another common response was that Swadhyay was a method for self-introspection. These youth derived their meaning from the word Swadhyay itself, meaning self study: “Swadhyay is a vichardhara – a place where I get thoughts/ideas to think about myself (introspection)” (Majmundar 21). This particular interviewee saw Swadhyay as a way to reflect on her life. By remembering the concepts of indwelling God and a God-centered ego, she would try to look back on her day and see if she had treated others with the respect of a brother or sister. She also said that Swadhyay was a “family of good thoughts”; through Swadhyay, she met other youth that had the same goals of nearness to God and recognizing divinity in others. By meeting these youth, she

was able to learn from their experiences and receive feedback on her own experiences and troubles during her attempts at implementing the Swadhyay philosophy in her life.

The last main group of explanations of the importance of Swadhyay to them focused on a different type of provided education. Many of the youth emphasized the idea that before Swadhyay, they did not understand why certain rituals were done and the basis behind certain Vedic beliefs. When they asked their parents and friends, many times the other party was as confused as the youth. As one young man explained: “Swadhyay is something that gives an education not found elsewhere. It explains the purpose of life, our relation with others, how to keep the Vedic tradition alive in society, and causes a development of the self. Doing things when intellectually convinced is different – you are more motivated to do them” (Patel, Diptesh 23). Another respondent described Swadhyay as being a “life-oriented education, not found in school” (Patel, Jaimini 23). The interviewees discussed how they received a different type of education from Swadhyay; it was education that related to spirituality and the true interpretation of Vedic culture. One of the main comments on this type of knowledge was that it was presented in a logical manner and that there was no pressure to accept anything without challenging the ideas. To many youth, this seemed like a departure from their school education, where they were taught to accept the information without much challenge. Some youth also expressed the idea that they felt more able to preserve the Vedic tradition than their non-Swadhyayee friends because they had more knowledge and understanding of the Vedic culture and beliefs.

In answering the question “What has been the effect of Swadhyay in your life?”, the interviewees gave three major categories of responses. The first of these was that Swadhyay provided a positive outlook towards other people and life in general. The interviewees explained that once they accepted that God resides within every person, they began to appreciate the positive qualities in people rather than focus on negative aspects. As one lady answered: “[I have changed] my relationship with others. Before, I was shy, quiet, and ignored the people I didn’t really like. Now, I’m more outgoing, count others as valuable, and look at the good qualities in people” (Patel, Ishita 21). Many respondents claimed that after becoming a member of Swadhyay, they were less likely to think negatively about other people and were more inclined to give others the benefit of the doubt in most daily situations. Once they began to view others as their divine brothers and sisters, they became more patient and willing to compromise. In one example, Ishita Patel had an acquaintance whom she did not like very much. She would avoid this girl by spending more time with her sister. However, after her sister got married, Ishita found herself in more situations with the girl. At first, she ignored her and did not value her friendship very highly. After participating in Swadhyay, she said that her whole outlook changed; she began to notice the good qualities in the girl. Ishita mentioned that she admired the fact that the girl was knowledgeable on a variety of topics and is able to speak clearly about most subjects without preparation. She also noticed that this girl speaks eloquently and can be very persuasive. These are qualities that Ishita not only admires in the girl, but also now wants to bring into her life. Although she has not become a best friend with the girl, they are now much better

friends due to the new positive outlook Ishita has received from participating in Swadhyay.

The second major change to occur in the life of the young Swadhyayees was an increase in confidence and self-control. The concept of indwelling God often increases *asmita* (self-confidence, self-respect, and self-resistance). This effect comes from the idea that if God resides in one's body, one is never alone. Many Swadhyayees gain confidence from that belief, feeling as though they have nothing to fear since God is with them at all times. This is shown in the practice the members receive from speaking at Yuva Kendras and other DBT functions. As *sanchalaks*, the Swadhyayees have to address the entire group and speak publicly to their peers. Since the *sanchalaks* rotate on a regular basis, almost every youth has had the chance to speak in front of the Yuva Kendra. In addition to this, DBT often have impromptu speaking as part of the "games" section of the Yuva Kendra meetings. Many of the informants felt as though they were more comfortable speaking at Yuva Kendra and DBT meetings because they knew that they were not being judged, but rather supported by their peers. This effect can be summed up by comments from a female interviewee: "In 10<sup>th</sup> grade (before DBT), I was shy and didn't talk any more than I had to. Now, through speaking at DBT and other places, I don't have that fear. I also used to feel alone when I had problems. Now I know that God is with me. My spirit and level of confidence have increased" (Patel, Payal 21).

In addition to the increase in self-confidence, many youth also reported an increase in self-resistance or self-control. This quality, as a component of *asmita*, is also received from the belief of indwelling God. Once one cultivates self-respect and respect

for others and the self-confidence needed to embark upon one's goals, self-control follows naturally. Not only does self-control allow one to resist unhealthy lifestyles, but it also promotes staying steadfast to achieving one's goals. Self-control means resisting distractions from achieving one's goal. For Swadhyayees, this goal is to recognize the divinity in others and better understand their relationship with God. To achieve this goal, Swadhyayees aim to change their ego from self-centered to God-centered and treat others with equality stemming from the indwelling God in every being. Many of the responses dealing with a change in self-control cited anger as a past problem: "Before, I used to get angry a lot. I didn't have self control and was very stubborn. I also said things with no regard to elders. Now, I find that all that is changed" (Patel, Namrata 19). Apparently, participating in Swadhyay and DBT taught these youth to become more patient and understanding. I believe the positive outlook that many experienced also plays a large role in this effect. As in Ishita's example cited above, once one respects another person, he or she also becomes more patient and understanding towards that person. This effect may have much to do with the change in anger levels and general self-control.

The third most common type of answer to "What has been the effect of Swadhyay on your life", dealt with an increased interest and pride in the Vedic culture. The young people who felt as though this had been the effect of Swadhyay on their lives focused on the clarification of the Vedic culture that Swadhyay had provided them. For many of the informants, Swadhyay was the only place that they learned not only the common practices, but also the reason behind those practices. These practices were



explained and discussed in a rational manner, which many of the Swadhyayees found refreshing. Often times, once the Swadhyayee learned more about his culture, he felt pride in being a part of it. The young Swadhyayees felt more reason to preserve their culture than before they participated in Swadhyay: “I didn’t have much pride and understanding in my culture and country. Now I know that I should uplift it – I have a duty to do so” (Patel, Mihir 20). Related to an increased pride in the Vedic tradition, some respondents also cited a greater appreciation about the importance of youth. For these Swadhyayees, youth was just a stage in life in which one was supposed to finish school, find a job, get married, and start a family. They did not feel the importance of youth that they were exposed to once they started participating in DBT. Youth no longer remained a mere stage in life, but a powerful tool to change society: “[Before Swadhyay] I didn’t realize my youth. Youth is like a river – if you use it right, you can cultivate villages. If not, it can destroy unknowingly” (Choksi 23). This particular Swadhyayee felt as though the energy and drive of youth is a gift from God and young people should use their gifts to become closer to others and to God. Participation in DBT was one of the ways he believed one could achieve those goals. It is important to note that many youth felt as though the change in their lives from Swadhyay included all three of these main groups. This change was sometimes also a complete reversal of past habits and thinking:

[I have received] a new birth. I used to get angry quickly and would curse a lot. I hung out with a bad group of people, and so had a bad outlook on life. I had no self-control and felt that it was good if I failed in something. Swadhyay has brought about a change in my thoughts.

When you change your thoughts, you change everything...before joining Swadhyay, I wanted to kill others (especially Muslims). However, after Swadhyay, I realize that the same God that resides in me resides in them as well. They are humans too, just like me... (Bhavsar 23).

The young Swadhyayees I talked with were passionate about the change in their lives and truly seemed committed to further positive change from continued participation in Swadhyay.

The final major question I asked was “Do you think this effect is greater/would be greater in India vs. another location?” Since none of the Indian respondents had lived in other countries for long periods of time while involved in Swadhyay, their replies were their own personal opinions on the matter. It was impossible to create two equal groups of people, send them to different countries, introduce them to Swadhyay at the exact same time, and then ask them about their experiences. I felt as though this was the best manner in which I could get a better understanding of how young Swadhyayees felt about Swadhyay and the influence of their environment. Responses were very interesting. A majority (68%) of the respondents felt as though the effect of Swadhyay on their lives is increased because they live in India. The most common reason stated was that the environment in India was more welcome to the ideas of Swadhyay. Since Swadhyay is based in Vedic philosophy, the fact that India has a majority of Vedic based religions (Hinduism and Buddhism) only helps to increase the familiarity of the topics discussed in Swadhyay. Many young Swadhyayees said that they already knew about the Vedic culture and beliefs before becoming involved in Swadhyay: “I think there is a greater effect in India – a more conducive environment. The majority of the community

celebrates [a Hindu holiday] whether they are Swadhyayees or not. There is a temple wherever you go in India. The culture is all around you” (Majmudar 21).

Other youth claimed that the fact that Swadhyay was started in India made it stronger in that country than others. There are more Swadhyayees in India than any other country, so any effect of Swadhyay would be felt greater in India. Other reasons for an increased effect in India included that there is a slower pace of life in India compared to other countries. The Indian youth saw their American counterparts as being much busier during the day than themselves. Indian youth are able to come home from school for lunch, have shorter school hours, do not have to participate in extracurricular activities, and have people to do the dishes and wash their clothes. Most American youth spend time on these activities and have more rigid schedules. As a result, the Indian informants believed that the American youth would not have the same amount of time to devote to Swadhyay activities.

Not all youth felt that India provides a more effective setting for Swadhyay. A sizeable minority (28%) felt as though the effect would be the same, no matter where one lives. They explained that since the philosophy and teachings of Swadhyay remained the same, the effect on the Swadhyayee would be the same as well: “The effect is the same everywhere (India vs. other) because the thoughts are the same. If the person’s understanding and willingness to accept these ideas is the same, the effect will be the same no matter where you are” (Patel, Amruta 17). Since the ideas of Swadhyay do not promote any religion or culture above another, these youth did not feel as though Swadhyay was necessarily tied to India. Although Swadhyay aims to explain the Vedic

tradition, it does not promote the Vedic culture or religion over other cultures and religions. Only one participant that believed the effect would be greater in another country: “When you lack something, you value it more. I would be more involved [if I lived in another country] because I would lack [Vedic] culture around me and want to preserve it” (Patel, Dhawal 18). He saw Swadhyay as a way of preserving the Vedic culture, and if he was not surrounded by it as in India, Swadhyay could have been his only connection to that culture.

### *US Interviews*

After returning to the United States in August 2003, I began to interview Swadhyayee youth in Texas. I interviewed and observed twenty-four Hindu informants who spanned an age of eighteen to twenty seven. I made sure to interview an equal number of males as females. As in India, all of the youth were either in college or had recently finished their higher education. I asked the American participants the same questions as I asked the Indians. Once again, the responses that provided me with the most insight into the lives of the youth were those to the following three questions: “What does Swadhyay mean to you”, “What has been the effect of Swadhyay on your life”, and “Do you think this effect is greater/would be greater in India vs. another location?”

There were two major groups of answers to the question “What does Swadhyay mean to you?” Many of the respondents felt as though Swadhyay was a way of life: “Swadhyay is a way of life that requires total immersion” (Shah 23), “[Swadhyay] is a way of life...it’s a philosophy about ourselves and the actions that we do” (Desai 20),

“[Swadhyay is] a way of life that is focused on personal (spiritual NOT religious) growth” (Lavani 23). These Swadhyayees saw the philosophy of Swadhyay as a guide in their lives. They explained that Swadhyay had given them the knowledge and experience to live an honorable life. According to these participants, the ideal life recognizes God in every being and explores the divine relationship between itself and God and between other people. Swadhyay provided them with not only the concept of such a life, but with a method to achieve it (kruti bhakti, God-centered ego, etc.). The interviewees also felt as though Swadhyay was very relevant to their lives: “It is the practical application of spiritual concepts to life” (Nagarsheth 26). Swadhyay not only provides a framework for life, but it also provides the way to achieve the goal of that ideal life. For these interviewees, Swadhyay was the way and goal of life.

The second major answer to “What does Swadhyay mean to you” referred to a greater understanding of the self. The respondents whose answers fell into this category felt as though Swadhyay was a way to learn about one’s self by way of learning about one’s culture and heritage as well as one’s relationship to God: “Swadhyay means learning about myself, which includes me (and God, who resides within), my heritage, my culture, my religion, and my country (India)” (Patel, Ameer 23). Keeping to the literal meaning of Swadhyay, many of these respondents expressed that Swadhyay gave them ideas upon which to evaluate their lives. These ideas included viewing God in others, performing actions with a God-centered ego, performing kruti bhakti, seeing the beauty in nature and in others, and keeping a positive outlook on life. In addition to this, the young people explained that Swadhyay was often the only resource for them to

rationally learn about their Vedic culture. Many expressed that although they knew about their traditions and rituals, they did not understand why these were performed until becoming involved in Swadhyay. By learning about their heritage, the youth felt as though they were learning about and understanding themselves as well.

The responses to “What has been the effect of Swadhyay on my life” were also found to fall into two categories. Furthermore, these two groups overlay the two response categories of the previous question. The first type of response was that Swadhyay has provided a goal for life. The youth that answered in this manner were usually the same youth that felt as though Swadhyay was a way of life: “[Swadhyay has given me] a life that has a goal beyond material happiness...a goal that I can strive for the rest of my life” (Lavani 23). Many of the answers recognized the indwelling God in every person as part of the goal. Overall, the goal that the respondents referred to was much like the ideal life that many of them had alluded to in their previous answers. The second category of responses to “What has been the effect of Swadhyay on my life” dealt with a greater understanding of the self and one’s heritage. Once again, most of the people who considered Swadhyay a place to learn about culture and to understand oneself better noted a corresponding effect of Swadhyay on their lives: “I appreciate Swadhyay for the gratefulness it has given to me for my culture. I am incredibly proud of my heritage, in part due to Swadhyay” (Patel, Ameer 23). Other responses in this category explained how Swadhyay helped them understand themselves better: “[Swadhyay] has helped me exactly what I am/who I am inside. Through Swadhyay, I’ve met a lot of people, seen different personalities and reactions to situations. These

things help me learn who I am because they make me think ‘What decision would I have made in that situation?’” (Bhaga 21). Through such introspection, the interviewee claimed to have helped her grow with her family and remain close to them though she does not live at home. Other interviewees felt that they had grown personally and were more aware and understanding of diversity: “I see things in a more positive light and am less ignorant. I am more accepting and understanding [than before I was involved in Swadhyay]” (Patel, Roshani 18). The main reason cited for this change was the understanding the concept of an indwelling God. Overall, the Swadhyayee youth I talked with indicated that they experienced only positive effects from their involvement in Swadhyay.

The final question to examine asks “Do you think the effect of Swadhyay on your life is greater/would be greater in India vs. another location?” The responses of the American Swadhyayees were quite different from the Indian youth (even though the reasons stated for each answer remained the same). The largest percentage of American youth (42%) claimed that the effect of Swadhyay on their lives would have been less if they had been living in India. There were two main reasons for this belief. Many respondents claimed that in India, it would be easier to take the culture for granted because it is surrounding you: “It seems that in India people tend to take their culture for granted, whereas more people here wish they had it in their lives” (Desai 20). In the United States, a conscious effort must be made to learn about and preserve the Vedic culture. Because Swadhyay is often the only place outside the family these American youth receive information and explanation about the Vedic culture, they view it as one of

their only links back to their heritage. In India, this would not be the case because a vast majority of the community and environment would have the same culture and values as the youth. As the preservation of the Vedic culture is so important to the American Swadhyayees, they think that they try to understand the philosophy and teachings of Swadhyay in more detail. This includes applying Swadhyay into their lives.

The other reason offered by informants for a lesser effect of Swadhyay in India than in America is that India is not as diverse as other countries. As discussed before, much of India follows the Vedic tradition. Though other religions are present in India, the majority of Indians are Hindu. In the United States, there is a greater profusion and awareness of different cultures and religions. Though the majority of Americans are Christian, it is not unlikely to meet people of other faiths regularly. One main difference between India and the United States is the racial makeup of the countries. In India, it is very rare to see many non-Indian people on a regular basis. In the United States, people of different races and ethnic backgrounds are quite common, and most people interact with people of different backgrounds on a regular basis. Some American Swadhyayees saw the great diversity of their cultural environment as a benefit to their practice of Swadhyay: "There is more of an effect in the United States because of the influence of different cultures and peoples. There is a broad range of different thoughts. In this situation, you can use the philosophy of Swadhyay to a greater degree. You can learn to love different cultures, people, religions, etc. instead of just Hindus/Indians" (Parikh 23). To this young man, by applying the Swadhyay philosophy to his relationships with people from different backgrounds, he felt as though he was closer to the ideal of seeing



divinity in every being. Had he lived in India, he would not have had the opportunity to do so, and believes that Swadhyay would not have made as great of an impact on his life.

The percentage of American young Swadhyayees who believed there would be a greater effect of Swadhyay on their lives had they lived in India was the same as the percentage who said there would be no difference (29% for both cases). Those who claimed the effect of Swadhyay is greater in India had the same reasons that the Indian youth expressed for claiming the same. Some of these interviewees said that there was more time in India for Swadhyay: "Over here, life is so busy and time intensive" (Mistry 19). These American youth explained that they would like to spend more time on Swadhyay activities, but that they were too busy fulfilling requirements for school or work. Some of these requirements (extracurricular activities, community service, and other non-academic school related activities) were not engaged in by their Indian counterparts. Other reasons given for greater impact in India dealt with the idea that the environment is full of Vedic culture. Informants believed that their Indian counterparts had more opportunities to learn about the Vedic culture: "...if I had been raised in India, I would have had the opportunity to learn Gujarati, Hindi, and Sanskrit. This would have opened many doors to me as to the amount of literature I would have been able to read to learn about the Vedas" (Purohit 21). The increased exposure to the Vedic culture in India was seen as an advantage towards understanding and implementing Swadhyay into one's life.

The young Swadhyayees that felt as though the effect of Swadhyay is the same in any country gave the same reasons as the Indian youth who felt similarly: the philosophy

and teachings of Swadhyay do not change from country to country so the effect should remain the same as well. One interviewee explained that while Indian youth may have slightly different activities and Swadhyay related experiences, the effect of Swadhyay would be the same among the young Swadhyayees in the United States: “The styles of Swadhyay are different [among Indian and American Swadhyayee youth]. In the US, I know how youth here think. But if I lived somewhere else, I would know the youth there well too. Perhaps there are different styles and people, but the effect and quality of the effect would be the same” (Naran 22). Since he believed the Swadhyay philosophy is universal, it would not matter where he was located; given the same philosophy, his life would have been effected in the same way.

#### *Summary*

In order to evaluate if there is a difference in the effect of Swadhyay on the lives of youth in India and the United States, let me sum up and compare the answers to the previous questions.

From the Indian youth, “What does Swadhyay mean to you” elicited responses such as a way of life, a method of introspection, and place to receive cultural information that cannot be found from other sources. The American youth felt Swadhyay to be a way of life and a means to learn about oneself and Vedic culture. The answers given by these two groups are almost identical, suggesting that they have no major differences in what they consider Swadhyay to be.

The second question, “What has been the effect of Swadhyay on your life”, resulted in different responses from Indian and American Swadhyayee youth. Indian

youth emphasized a positive outlook towards others, an increase in self-confidence and self-control, and greater interest and pride in Vedic culture and the importance of youth. While American informants also expressed a positive outlook and increased self-confidence, these were secondary to other effects. Many young American Swadhyayees found that the impact of Swadhyay on their lives was to define a goal to live an ideal life. This ideal life would recognize divinity in every being and understand its relationship to God. Another perceived effect on their lives was that they associated Swadhyay with helping them find their identity. Many American youth claimed that Swadhyay had helped them learn about themselves and their culture, helping them understand “who they are”. Although the Indian youth said that an increased interest in Vedic culture was an effect from Swadhyay, they did not mention any relation of this effect with a better understanding or formation of their personal identities. Overall, it seems as though the Indian youth see Swadhyay’s impact in more specific ways (positive outlook, increased confidence, etc.). The American youth, on the other hand, note the effect of Swadhyay on their lives on a large scale (life goal, source of identity), but only few mention any specific effects. It is interesting that although both groups personally define the meaning of Swadhyay almost identically, they claim different effects of Swadhyay on their lives.

The final question deals with a perceived difference in the effect of Swadhyay in India and other countries (specifically the United States). There were three responses to this question: the effect was greater in India, less in India, or the same no matter what country one resided in. The reasons given by both the Indian and American DBT youth

for all three choices were very similar. Supporting the theory that the effect of Swadhyay was greater in India, interviewees cited the fact that the cultural environment is familiar with Vedic ideas and philosophy. Additionally, in India, the youth have more free time in their schedules, which they can devote to Swadhyay. The proponents of the view that there is less of an effect in India claimed that since the environment and people in the United States as a whole are not familiar with Vedic ideas, the Swadhyayees try harder to preserve their Vedic culture here. In India, the environment and culture may be taken for granted, while not so in the United States. The youth that held the view that the effect remains the same regardless of geographical location based their ideas on the fact that the philosophy of Swadhyay remains the same no matter where one practices it. It is the philosophy that initiates change in a person, not their external environment.

A large majority of the Indian youth agreed with the idea that there was a greater effect in India, while a smaller majority of American youth felt that there was more of an impact in the United States. The percentage of youth from both countries that felt as though there was no association between effect and location was nearly the same (28% in India, 29% in the United States). This was not the case for the assumption that there is less of an effect in India. Of the Indian participants, only one (4%) felt that this was the case. This is much smaller than the 29% of American youth who believed that there was more of an effect in the United States.

In conclusion, there is no major difference between the personal definitions of Swadhyay among Indian youth and American youth. However, there are differences when it comes to the effect of Swadhyay on their lives and the perceived relationship

between location (India vs. America) and that effect. In order to determine whether these differences are associated with different cultural environments, one must first analyze the environments. This was done and the results of that analysis are explained in the next section.

## DATA: ENVIRONMENTAL BACKGROUND DIFFERENCES

In order to determine the degree to which the Swadhyay youth in India and the United States are steeped in different environments, I chose to look at three main environmental background categories: personal, family, and Swadhyay. The personal category includes data on age and sex, caste, educational level, current or planned career, and friends. The family subgroup includes data on number of siblings, family financial status, and the education and careers of the parents of the young Swadhyayee. The Swadhyay category includes data on the years the youth has been involved in Swadhyay and the hours per week he or she spends on Swadhyay activity. Information was collected on these three categories through the interviews and entered the data into SPSS 11.0 (Windows) software for analysis. The data was entered in two sets: one for Indian youth and one for American youth. Using SPSS, charts were generated for each factor from both data sets and analyzed for any differences between the two sets. In order to read the charts, please follow the following method. The first category listed on the key for each chart begins at the line on the chart that is positioned at "12 o'clock". The categories continue clockwise in the order of their listing on the key.

### *Personal*

The first two environmental factors in the personal category are age and sex. SPSS calculated the mean age and the gender ratio for both of my groups. The mean age for the Indian youth was 21.57 years, while the mean age of the American youth was

21.6 years. This small difference is not significant and I consider the two groups to have the same age distribution. The gender ratio was also similar: the American youth had a 1:1 ratio, while the Indian youth had only one more female than male. Once again, this is basically a 1:1 ratio for both groups. Although these two factors do not provide any information about the environmental differences of the two groups, by knowing that they are equal, it is possible to say that they will not affect the other data.

The next factor in this subgroup is caste. Caste is a social designation that is used in a greater social hierarchy. All castes fall into four main categories (in hierarchical order): Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Sudra. There is a “fifth caste”, lower than the Sudra. It is called the “Untouchable” caste and members of this caste are shunned by much of society. Although today the caste system is not officially legal, members of particular castes tend to marry and socialize within the same caste. Since all of the youth I focused on were Gujarati, there were some castes that were not represented among them. In Gujarat, the most common caste is Patel, a member of the Vaishya caste. Members of the Patel caste always have Patel as their last name. Patels also have subgroups within the caste itself. Another common caste is the Vaishya caste. Members of this caste can have various last names. Other castes represented in Gujarat include various Brahmin castes. The data from my interviews support these statements, although in different proportions in the two settings (Fig 1 and 2). In India, 56% of the youth were Patels and 24% were Vaniyas. In the United States, approximately 30% of the youth were Patels and 35% were Vaniyas. Although in both groups these were the

two main castes, in the United States, there was a greater percentage of other castes compared to the Indian data.

The third category in this section is education. In India, 56% of the youth had college degrees while 36% had post-graduate degrees. Among the American youth, by contrast, 82% had college degrees. Only 12% of the youth had post-graduate degrees at the time of the interview, though many of the informants with college degrees planned to enroll in post-graduation programs after college. While the Indian youth appear to have a greater percentage of post-graduate degrees, this assumption is misleading. Many of the US youth were still in college, though their peers in India had already graduated. This was due to the nature of the education system in the United States and the desire for a student there to take double majors, minors, etc. Many US youth said that they knew that it would take them longer than four years to graduate. However, they also said that they were interested in getting a higher degree as well. With this information factored into the situation, it seems as though US youth have an equal, if not greater, percentage of post-graduate degrees than India.

Related to the topic of education is the factor of current/future career (Fig 3 and 4). Among the Indian group, 40% of the youth wanted a future in business. The next commonly mentioned professions had nearly equal percentages: computers (20%), engineering (16%), and teaching (16%). In the American sample, business and medicine (35% each) were the top fields with engineering as the next most desired field (18%). One of the most interesting things that I found was that the second most common



Fig 1. Caste among Indian participants

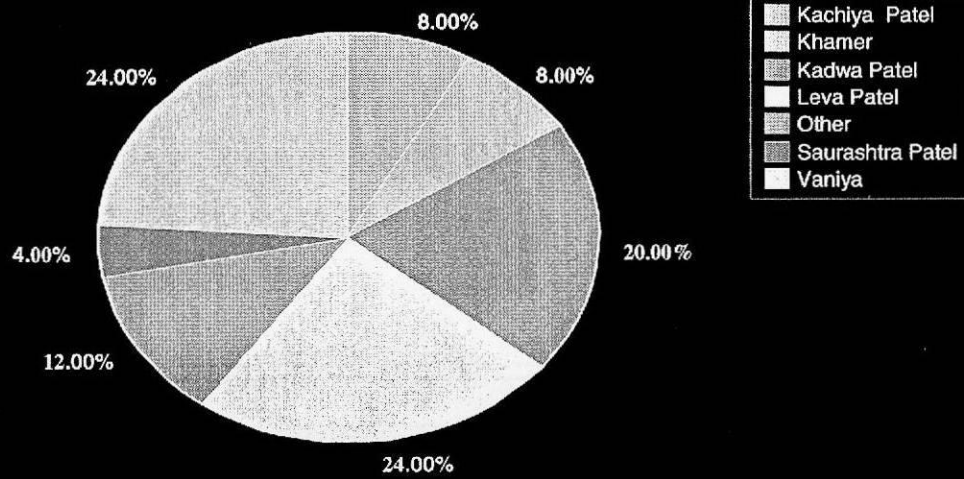


Fig 2. Caste among US participants

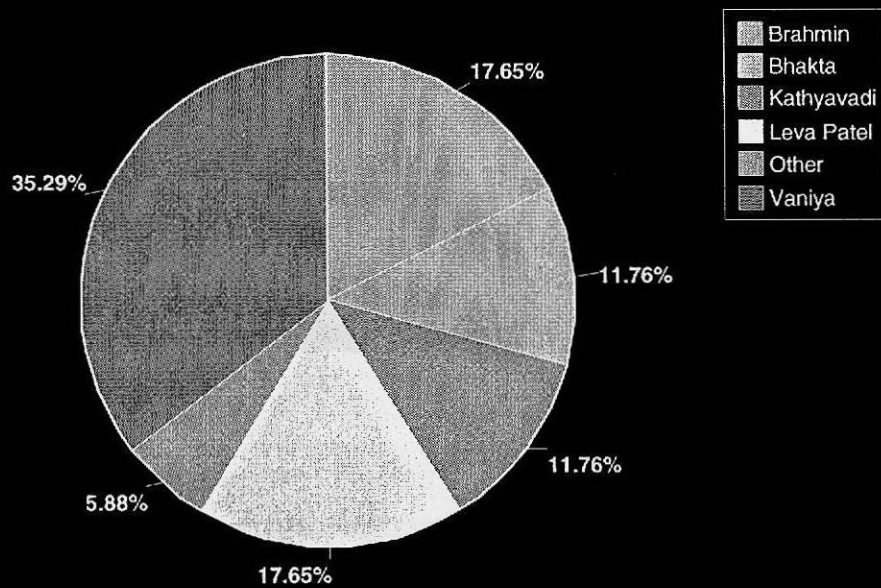


Fig 3. Professional field (actual or planned) of Indian participants

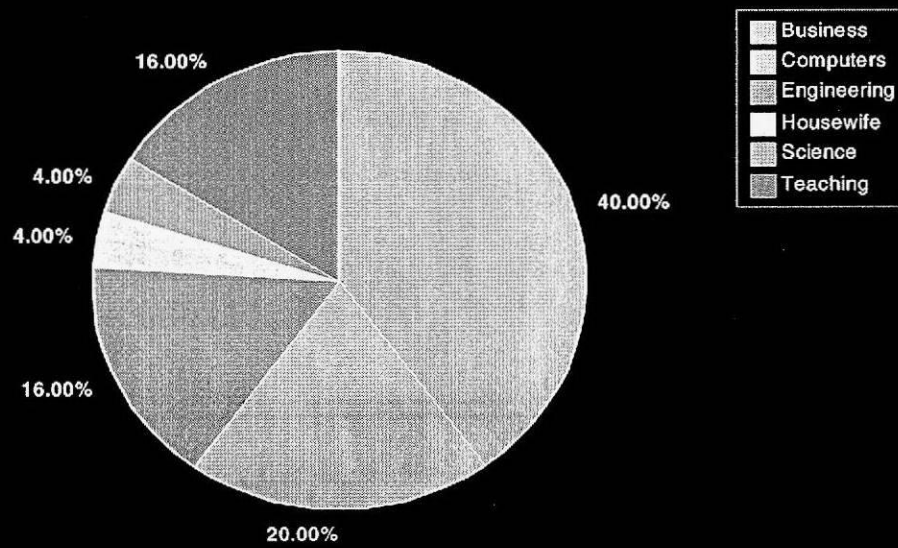
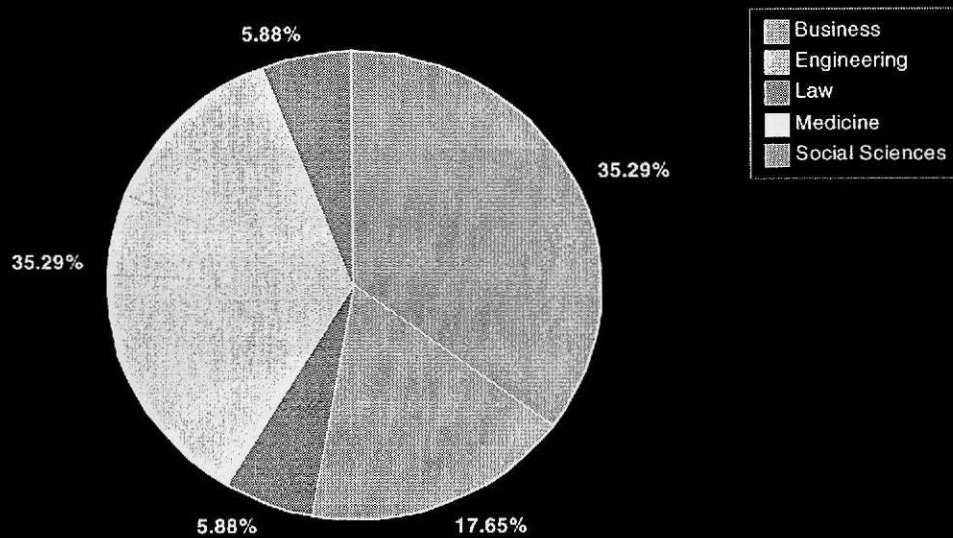


Fig 4. Professional field (actual or planned) of US participants



response in the Indian group (computers) was not chosen by even one of the American respondents. In fact, one of the interviewees in the United States told me that he had changed his major from a computer-related field to business (Naran 22). I believe that this is because in India, computer related jobs are in high demand (especially with the increased outsourcing to India). In the United States, the computer boom has all but gone, leaving many computer-related professionals out of work. It is only natural for the American youth to shy away from the computer industry. Also surprising was that according to the data, not one Indian youth planned on going into the medical field even though it was among the first choice of American youth. I could not think of any particular reason for this other than the personal preferences of the interviewed youth.

The final factor in this category is friends. I asked whether the informants were closer to their Swadhyay friends, non-Swadhyay friends, or equally close to both. Of the Indian youth, 56% said they were closer to their Swadhyayee friends while 44% said they felt the same intimacy between both groups of friends. Among the US interviewees, 65% said they were closer to their Swadhyayee friends, 6% stated that they were closer to their non-Swadhyayee friends, and 29% said they were equally close to both groups. Though a larger percentage of the US youth said they were closer to Swadhyayee friends, they were also the group to have anyone feel closer to their non-Swadhyayee friends. I think this can be attributed to the fact that there is not as large of a concentration of Indians in the United States as there is in India. For some American youth, Swadhyay may be the only Indian community they have. Therefore, if they want to have Indian friends, they are by default Swadhyayee. On the other hand, since there is

greater diversity in the United States, a young person can come in contact with people of different races and religions than their own. Basically, there are more varieties of people to get to know and some young people may take that opportunity to learn about others rather than confine themselves to peers of their own background.

### *Family*

The first factor to discuss from the family category of background questions is the number of siblings. In both the Indian and American groups, the range of siblings was from 0-2. 59% of the US youth and 60% of the Indian youth had one sibling. Two siblings was the next most common occurrence in both groups with the US group showing 29% and the Indian group showing 36%. The least percentages from both Indians and US young Swadhyayees refer to those without siblings (twelve percent of American respondents were lone children while the Indian group reported four percent as being lone children). These show a nearly equal distribution of siblings among the two groups. While the US youth are more likely to be single children than their Indian counterparts, the percentage differences between the two groups as a whole are not enough to warrant the number of siblings as playing a role in the difference of the two environments.

The next subcategory under family background is financial status. Not wanting to ask about the actual financial status of the interviewees for fear of alienation, I asked them to choose one of the following: lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. None of the respondents from either group chose lower or upper class as their financial status. Both groups showed a majority of middle class

(Indian – 64%, American – 53%). However, the American group responses had a greater percentage of upper middle class and lower middle class than their Indian counterparts. Once again, the US responses had the same majority as the Indian responses, but were more varied among the other values; they have a greater range than the Indian responses.

The next aspect considered was the educational level and careers of the parents. First I will examine the father's education level (Fig 5 and 6). In India, 36% of the youth had fathers who held post-graduate degrees. 28% of the fathers held college degrees, while 28% of the fathers held high school diplomas or less. In contrast, 48% of the US Swadhyayees' fathers held post-graduate degrees while another 48% held college degrees. Only 6% of the US fathers held high school diplomas and none of the fathers had less education than the high school level. There is an obvious difference between the two groups; the US groups' fathers are more educated as a whole and include higher percentages of college and post-graduate degree holders. Although the greatest percentage of Indian Swadhyayees' fathers held a post-graduate degree, this number is still smaller than the percentage of US Swadhyayees' fathers who hold the same type of degree. The main difference is that 28% of the Indian fathers hold high school diplomas or less, while only 6% of US fathers hold high school diplomas and none hold less than that. This difference may be because the fathers that were able to immigrate to the United States from India were probably quite educated. Without a college or higher degrees, it would be very difficult for them to find salaried employment that was enough to sustain a move to a new country. As a result, many of the fathers who are in the

United States have well educated backgrounds that were needed to immigrate from India.

Another factor to consider is the father's profession. The top two percentages in both groups were engaged in business and engineering. In India, 52% of the fathers were active in some sort of business or business related employment while 16% of the fathers were engineers. In the United States, 41% of the fathers were engineers while 35% were involved in business. Other common careers in India related to agriculture while in America there were significant numbers of computer and architecture careers. However, the majority of both groups fell into either engineering or business. There is a difference between the careers of the Indian and US fathers, but since the majority of the fathers are in the same two professional fields, I do not think that this background factor makes a large difference to the DBT youth in India versus the US.

Along with the fathers, it is important to look at the mothers of the interviewees. The educational level of the mothers in the United States and of those in India is very different (Fig 7 and 8). Among the Indian mothers, 48% hold only high school diplomas. This is a stark contrast from the only 12% of mothers in the United States with the same education level. Further differences are seen at the post-graduate level: only 12% of the Indian mothers hold post-graduate degrees compared to 35% of the US mothers. Obviously, the US DBT youth's mothers are more educated than their Indian

Fig 5. Father's education level among Indian participants

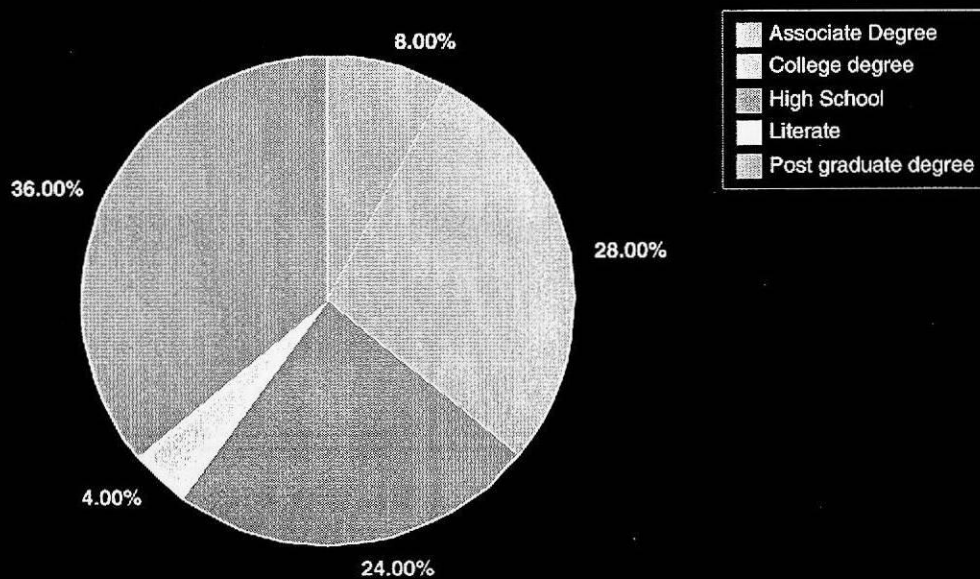


Fig 6. Father's education level among US participants

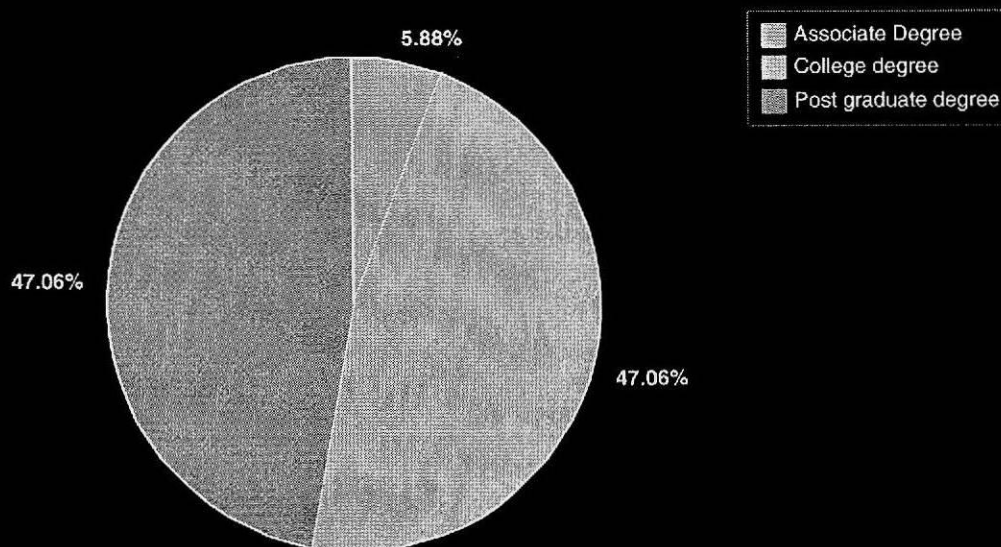


Fig 7. Mother's education level among Indian participants

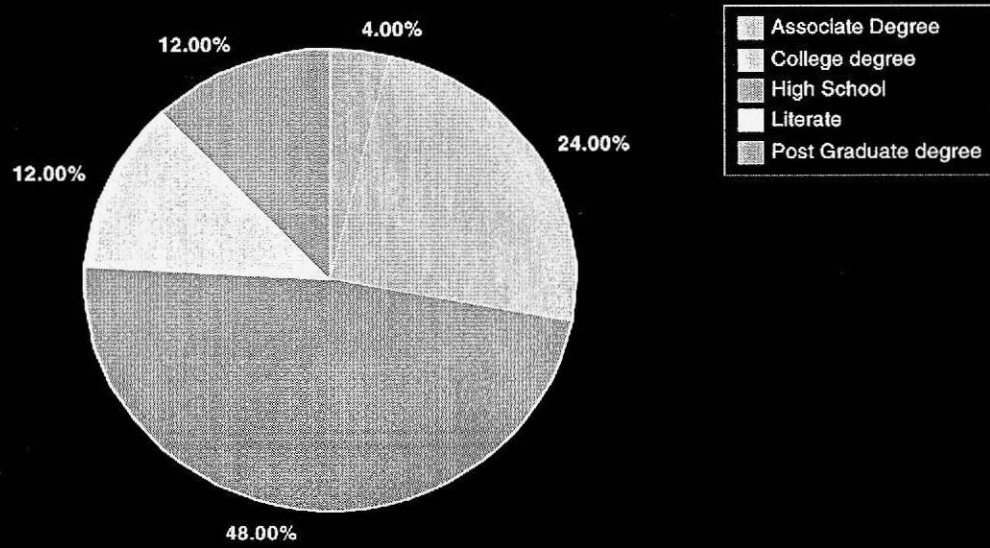
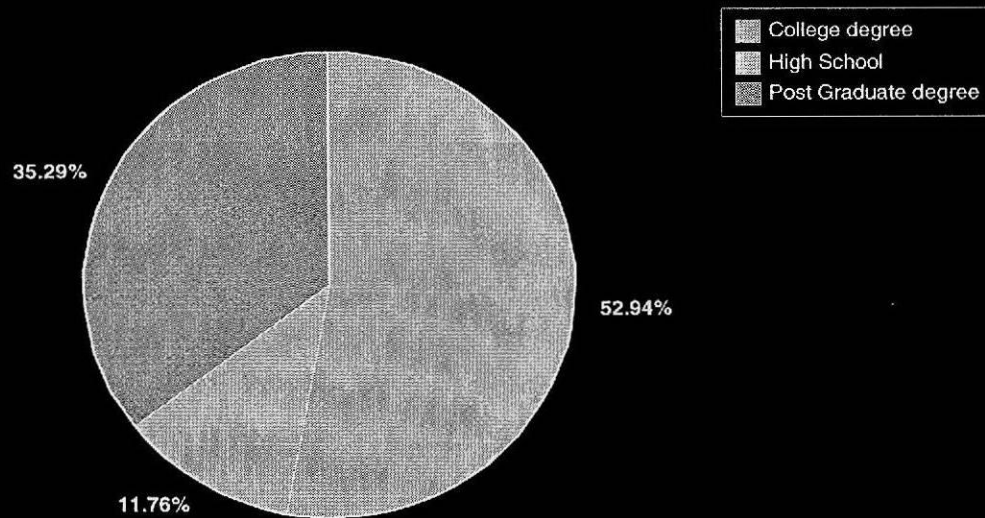


Fig 8. Mother's education level among US participants





counterparts. Perhaps the reason for this is the same as the reason for the trend in higher education for the fathers of the US youth: they had to have a higher education level in order to immigrate successfully to the United States.

The professions of the respondents' mothers show an even larger difference (Fig 9 and 10). Eighty eight percent of the mothers of the Indian Swadhyayee members were housewives, even though 40% had some type of college degree and 88% held high school diplomas or higher degrees. Only 12% of the Indian mothers were employed, compared with 70% of the American mothers. Among the various professions of the US DBT youth's mothers, business related professions had the greatest percent (35%) followed by medicine (12%). This difference in the professional lives of the mothers of the two groups is very significant. Because the vast majority of the mothers in India stay at home, their children may grow up differently than the youth whose mothers work. Youth with mothers who are housewives probably have spent more hours during the day with their mothers around them. Their mothers would have been there during lunch, after school, and other times that working mothers would not be able to be home. Individuals whose mother's work may have been put in day cares or watched by babysitters after school until their parents got off of work. This is a major difference that definitely effects the environment of the Swadhyayee youth.

Fig 9. Mother's profession among Indian participants

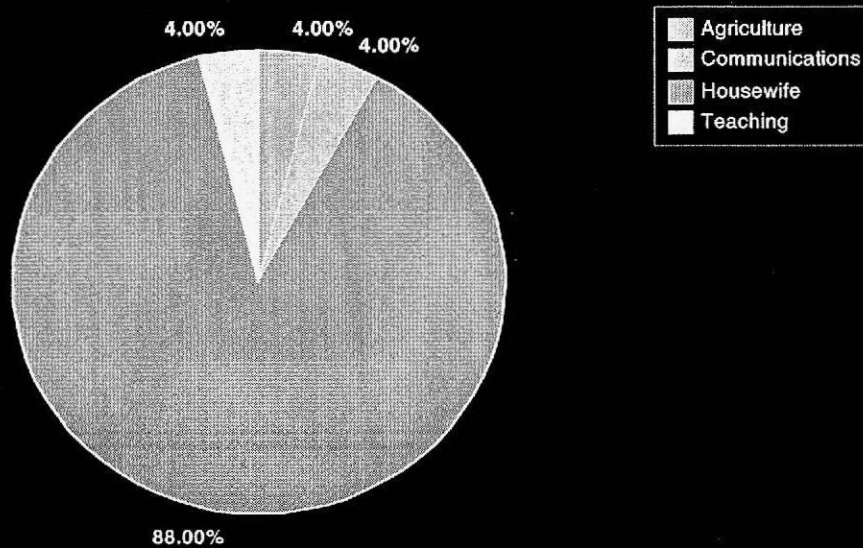
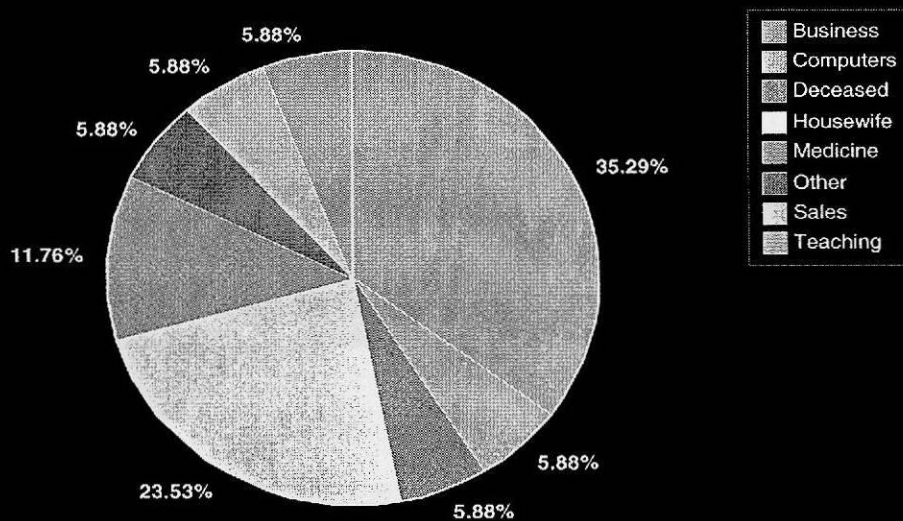


Fig 10. Mother's profession among US participants



### *Swadhyay*

The final subcategory that effects the environment is the length of time and involvement in Swadhyay. First, let us look at the length of time of involvement in Swadhyay for the Indian and American DBT youth. In mean years, Indian DBT youth had been involved in Swadhyay for 6.84 years while the American DBT ones had been involved for 9 years. However, the Indian youth spent a mean average of 8.44 hours per week on Swadhyay activities while the US youth spent a mean average 5 hours per week on Swadhyay activities. Although youth in the United States had been involved with Swadhyay for a longer period of time, they spent less time per week on Swadhyay activities than their Indian peers. Obviously, these factors can change the way the youth view and are affected by Swadhyay. If a particular individual has more experience with Swadhyay, he or she may be more able to apply the philosophy of Swadhyay in his or her life. In addition to this, the individual's life may have been more impacted by Swadhyay than another young person who does not have the same experience as the other. The reason for the difference in these two results may be that since the youth in America are not surrounded by their Vedic culture, they may have been introduced to Swadhyay at an earlier age in the hopes that it was a way to preserve the culture. As far as time per week spent on Swadhyay activities is concerned, both US and Indian youth felt as though there was more free time in the schedules of young people in India. This may be the reason for this difference in numbers. If the Indian Swadhyayee youth have more time, they are able to spend more time on Swadhyay activities. The American

youth may like to spend more time on Swadhyay activities, but may not be able to do so due to factors explored in the earlier section.

### *Summary*

In the personal background category, the major differences were seen in caste, career goals, and friends. Although the same two castes, Patels and Vaniyas, were most represented among both the Indian and American youth, the American youth displayed a wider range of castes, including a sizeable percentage of Brahmins. Business was cited as one of the main professions both groups of youth wanted to go into, but American youth also wanted to pursue professions in medicine, while Indian youth were more interested in computer-related fields. Though both groups displayed the highest percentage of close friends as Swadhyayees, the American group also had a wider range of responses. None of the Indian youth felt as though non-Swadhyayee friends were closer to them, as was the case for a minority of the American group.

The family category provided the most differences that could effect the environments of the interviewed youth. In general, both parents of youth in America were better educated than the parents in India. In addition to this, the mothers of the American youth were much more inclined to working rather than being a housewife, as was the case with the mothers of the Indian youth. Financially, both groups had most of their respondents come from middle class households, but the American youth had a larger range of responses, including greater percentages of lower middle class and upper middle class households than their Indian counterparts.

The Swadhyay category provided interesting information regarding the total time individuals have been involved in Swadhyay and the time per week spent on Swadhyay activities. While the American youth had a greater mean average years of being involved with Swadhyay, it was the Indian youth who spent more time per week on Swadhyay activities.

### *Conclusion*

Based on this data, it is impossible to conclude that the background environments of both groups are the same. There are many points on which they differ, but the main points are: the prevalence of Vedic culture, the differences in family background, and the differences in Swadhyay involvement. In India, Vedic culture is very prevalent. Most of the people in India either follow the Vedic tradition or are at least familiar with it. This is not the case in the United States. In the US, Indians, much less those who come from a Vedic background, are a small minority. Although the popular American culture recently has become more interested in Vedic culture (yoga, ayurvedic medicines, bhangra music, etc.), the average American is not as familiar with this culture as the average Indian. Furthermore, in the United States there is a greater diversity of people and beliefs than in India. Young American Swadhyayees may be interested in exploring this diversity, an opportunity that Swadhyayees in India do not often have. This exploration can require time and energy that could have been used in Swadhyay activity. The decreased amount of time or focus towards Swadhyay can result in a decreased effect on the individual in the United States.

The differences in family background between the Indian and American youth reinforces the existence of two different environments. The greater education of both parents and their greater likelihood of being employed is the main difference that sets the American youth apart from their Indian peers. More educated parents may have greater knowledge on philosophical subjects and may be able to understand concepts of greater complexity than parents with less education. This is not to imply that less education means less intelligence; it only means that less educated parents may not have had the opportunity to be exposed to higher philosophies and their analysis. If parents have greater experience with these topics, they are probably better able to explain them to their children, who then have a greater understanding of those concepts as well. The fact that both parents are more likely to work outside the household also plays a big role in environment. If both parents work, they are likely have less time to spend with their children, especially during the day. The effects on a child who receives much attention and time from his parents make a positive difference in the child vs. those children whose parents are not able to spend as much time with them. This difference, in turn, can affect one's home life and relationship to one's parents, which can result in a different environment.

The final major differences were related to the time interviewees had been involved in Swadhyay as well as the time per week they devoted to Swadhyay activities. As mentioned before, the American youth had been involved in Swadhyay for a longer period of time, but the Indian youth spent more hours per week on Swadhyay activities. Proposed reasons for this occurrence were previously discussed in this section.

Although there are different environments in Gujarat and Texas as well as different effects of Swadhyay on the lives of youth in the two areas, the most one can claim is that there is an association between the two factors. A causal relationship cannot be ascertained from this research because there is no evidence to suggest that one factor is caused by the other. In addition to this, there are many other factors in the lives of the youth I interviewed that could also affect their environments and their understanding of Swadhyay. The most one can say towards answering the question I had originally posed is that there is an association between environmental background and effect of Swadhyay as individually conceived, though it is not possible to define the exact nature of that relationship given the data set I was able to collect.

## SECOND GENERATION SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH

In studying the American DBT youth, it is important to compare their experiences with those of second generation South Asian youth in general. Second generation means that the youth in America with are not immigrants themselves, but the children of immigrants. The individuals I worked with had all been raised in the United States from a very young age (5 or under), and most had been born in the United States. To address whether the thoughts and feelings of the youth I interviewed in the United States mirror the sentiments of general second generation South Asian youth in that country, I decided to literature research the experiences of such youth regarding religion, broader culture, and assimilation.

### *Religion*

Religion often plays a large role in the life of immigrants and their families, especially if their beliefs are not the same as those of the greater population. This is often the case with South Asian immigrants in the United States. Many of the Indian immigrants, the specific group that I am concerned with, are Hindu. Hinduism, along with other Vedic religions, is a minority religion in the general makeup of the American population, which is predominantly Christian. For these families, religion is a link to their original countries. Since they are no longer surrounded by the same environment that exists in their home country, religion can become emphasized as a way of recreating their original cultural lives in the United States and provide a sense of identity in a



foreign environment: “Immigrants are religious – by all counts more religious than they were before they left home – because religion is one of the important identity markers that helps them preserve individual self-awareness and cohesion in a group” (Warner 1998:44). This sentiment is echoed by Leonard: “As the numbers of immigrants has increased, South Asian religions have become more, not less important to the immigrants, the United States, and in some cases, to the homelands as well. In the view of many American historians, the United States has always been a fundamentally religious nation, and religious identity is an important and accepted way of being different and yet integrated into American society” (Leonard 1997:108).

Many second generation Indian youth find that their religion and heritage helps them find their identity. By learning about their heritage, the youth claim to become more confident and feel like they “belong”. Their Hindu background is part of their culture and family, no matter how they try to deny it. Once they come to terms with this aspect of their personalities (whether they accept or reject the ideas), they will feel as though they have learned more about themselves. Warner and Williams describe a young woman's reaction after joining an organization that taught about Indian heritage and the Hindu religion: “I became more confident and sure of myself. With a wealth of knowledge by my side, I felt strong. I stood up to my [non-Indian classmates] and introduced them to my beliefs. To my surprise, they stopped mocking me, and instead, wanted to know more...I felt a sense of belonging, but not sameness, as though I were an individual piece adding color to the complete picture. I could fit in but still be different” (Warner 1998:53). This young lady's religion provided her with an identity

though which she could feel integrated with American society, yet still keep her individual heritage.

The religion that many of the immigrants practice with their families may not be of the exact nature of the religion as it is practiced in India. In the United States, rituals and beliefs may have to be adapted to conform to a different society. Because immigrants and their families live in an environment very different from India, they emphasize different points of Hinduism as well as change the way it is practiced:

The immigrants tend to emphasize beliefs only, not socioreligious practices – not the caste system, not village society, not gendered practices or the daily interactions with fellow citizens of other religious backgrounds. Daily rituals can be contracted, shortened on weekdays and lengthened on weekends; they can be combined, with both morning and evening rituals performed in the evenings. Rituals can be temporarily suspended, perhaps by students in dormitories, and resumed on return to the parental home (Leonard 1997:122).

Many of the college students I talked to said that they were not able to regularly attend Swadhyay or DBT meetings during the school year because their college towns did not have a Yuva Kendra. While some students have come together to form Yuva kendras in their college towns, some students did not have many other Swadhyayees at their college. Therefore, they could only attend DBT and Swadhyay activities when they were in their hometowns or other cities with Swadhyay activity. This and other changes in spiritual or religious matters effect the quality and type of culture the second generation youth experience.

#### *Broader Culture*

There are many aspects of the Vedic culture that are not completely preserved in the shift from India to the United States. As mentioned above, religious practice in the

United States tends to focus on theoretical beliefs rather than social practices and effects, unlike in India. There are also other elements that are lost in the transition between countries. One of the major losses is the native language: "It seems fairly clear that Indian languages do not have much chance of surviving beyond the first generation. Particularly because of the English-language fluency of professional Indian immigrants, very little of the ethnic language is retained by their children" (Warner 1998:64).

Of the American Swadhyayee youth I interviewed, most could speak Gujarati, but very few were able to read or write the language. Most of them claimed that they were interested in learning their native languages so that they could read religious literature. Second generation youth often lose their lingual roots when they begin school because they have to speak English constantly during school. In addition to this, as they grow, they must use only English in most public and social situations. If the family of the youth do not make the native language a priority by speaking it regularly in the house, the young have very little chance of being fluent in it by adulthood.

The American Swadhyayee youth I talked to regretted not paying attention to their parents and felt like they would be better able to understand their culture if they were proficient in their native language. One respondent even claimed his lack of knowledge about Indian languages as one of the reasons for a greater effect of Swadhyay in India (Purohit 21). A difference between Hindu culture in India and America is that in the United States, it is still primarily the family that "must transmit religious and cultural beliefs and practices" (Leonard 1997:127). In India, one can learn about the Hindu culture from the community and the media as well as the family. An individual is

able to observe the function of religion between different castes, neighborhoods, cities, and even nations. In the United States, there are not enough Hindus to adequately be able to do so. Therefore, the second generation youth lose an entire means of viewing, experiencing, and learning about their Hindu heritage.

### *Assimilation*

Perhaps the greatest question on the minds of second generation youth is how to achieve assimilation into the mainstream American society while maintaining their Indian heritage. One of the main hurdles that these individuals have to overcome is their parents' reluctance to accept American culture as their own. Though many immigrants have lived in the United States for decades, they still view American culture as foreign. In particular, they perceive the local culture to be full of negative ideas and activities: "Indian parents were concerned about the environment in which their children were growing up, which they perceived to be filled with unstable families, sexual promiscuity, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence" (Warner 1998:44). Parents felt as though their children were coming home with new and foreign values from school that created within them a fear of alienation. They worried that they would not be able to communicate with their children because they would become "total strangers" (Warner 1998:44). The second generation youth do not feel as though the American culture is foreign, nor do they find it particularly offensive as a whole. Because they have been raised in the United States, they are better able to understand the values of the mainstream culture rather than their parents.

Though second generation Indian youth are born and raised in America, they still feel “different” or like “outcastes” from the mainstream society. Obvious reasons for this include the names, skin color, facial features, heritage, and religion. of the young Indo-Americans, which set them apart from the average American. To remedy their feelings, they attempt to assimilate into American society, but usually revert back to some part of their original heritage: “Many of those born in the new land first try to assimilate in a one-dimensional way (to become ‘American’), discover the resilience of their own ‘pasts’ as well as of racism’s present, and then recover the resources within ‘national cultures’...” (Prashad 2000:123). The original leap into American culture leaves the young unsatisfied because it undermines their identity. Once they realize this and return to explore his heritage, they are able to fully assimilate into American society. After all, America is a country made up of different cultures and beliefs. In order to be “American”, one must have a firm grasp of one’s cultural heritage to bring to the “melting pot” that is American culture.

Prashad also sheds light on the particular experiences of high school and college age Indo-American youth: “Though young [Indo-Americans] may reject things Indian in the teen years,...the college experience draws them to India...[to learn from it] spiritual and ethnic authority, to gauge one’s roots” (2000:123). There are different reasons for this interest in India: a desire to learn about one’s roots and identity, a feeling of alienation from American society, and an increased appreciation of Oriental and Indian values in American society. The scope of this thesis does not allow for discussion of these reasons, but they are important to keep in mind when thinking about the renewed

(or new) interest in Indian heritage on the part of Indo-American youth. In the end, Indian American youth are able to reconcile their two cultures by recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive:

[The eagerness of Indo-American youth] to be accepted had initially led them to turn away from their Indianness and to try to be as much like their white friends as possible. This, however, only increased their identity crisis and feeling of alienation. According to [the youth], the crisis was only resolved when they accepted their Indian heritage and began to try to learn more about Hinduism and Indian culture. Over time...they came to see the beauty and value of their heritage and also finally started feeling comfortable with themselves as Indian Americans – Americans with Indian roots (Warner 1998:62).

With their new pride in their Indian heritage and familiarity with American culture, the second generation Indian youth understand their identity and role in both cultures due to their experiences with religion and assimilation.

#### *Swadhyay youth*

My interviews and interactions with the Swadhyay youth confirm the ideas presented above. Many of the interviewees claimed that Swadhyay had helped them learn “who they are” and had presented them with a life goal. These effects are related to a creation and understanding of one’s identity. As discussed earlier, religion (or broader philosophies that have the same basis as religions) is an important factor in creating an identity for Indo-American youth. The uncertainty about their native culture can also be seen in the lives of the Swadhyayee youth in the United States. Many of them were unable to read and write their native languages. In addition to this, many respondents were unable to participate in religious activities for much of the year because they were not with their parents or did not live in an area that had those types of

activities already established. The renewed interest in Indian heritage that functions to ease assimilation into American society can be seen among the Swadhyayee youth. Many of them claimed that they felt as though Swadhyay was an activity from which they derived understanding and explanation about their Vedic culture. This, in turn, caused an increased feeling of pride among the youth. Some interviewees felt as though Swadhyay shows them the relationship between themselves and others, making them feel less alienated from other people. Overall, I would categorize the experiences of Swadhyayee youth in the United States as comparable to the more general experience of the second generation South Asian youth at large.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored a range of topics from the Swadhyay philosophy to interview responses. The Swadhyay movement is a philosophy based on Vedic teachings. However, it is a way of thinking for all religions and beliefs. Swadhyay began as a movement in India in the mid-1900s under the leadership of the late Pandurang Shastri Athavale, or Dadaji. Since then, Swadhyay has grown to various countries and has been recognized on the global scale. The main ideas of Swadhyay are the concept of indwelling God, the goal of a God-centered ego, kruti bhakti, an increased understanding of Vedic culture, and the principle of non-asking. The Swadhyay philosophy includes prayogs, where Swadhyayees are able to put the ideals of Swadhyay into action. These prayogs support the ideas of Swadhyay while also helping the neighboring areas financially and otherwise.

The youth in Swadhyay have a special group called Divine Brain Trust, or DBT. This youth group is a forum where young Swadhyayees can discuss their ideas on spirituality, Vedic philosophy, or other similar topics. DBT kendras are found wherever Swadhyay is being practiced, including the United States. Though the topics and basic format of the meetings remains the same, different areas have adapted to their environments by changing small aspects of the meetings. As part of my research, I traveled to India to study DBT youth and compared my findings with similar data from DBT youth in the United States. I also consulted previously published material on the



background and philosophy of Swadhyay as well as material on the experiences of second generation South Asian youth to place my research in a broader scope.

To tackle the question of whether there were different effects of Swadhyay between youth in India and the United States, I focused on qualitative questions dealing with the perception of Swadhyay and its effects on one's life. The responses to these questions confirmed a difference in the effect of Swadhyay between the two groups. The Indian group was more likely to view Swadhyay's effects as more specific qualities in their lives, while the US youth viewed Swadhyay's effects as pertaining to their entire life and goals. Interestingly, though the two groups had different opinions on the effects of Swadhyay in their lives, they had very similar perceptions of what Swadhyay meant to them. The youth also had opposite ideas concerning where the effect of Swadhyay is felt greater, India or in another country. Most of the Indian youth stated that the effect is greater in India because of the increased awareness and availability of Vedic culture and customs. Many of the American youth, however, claimed that the lack of such an environment made Swadhyay one of very few links to their Vedic culture. Therefore, they were more affected by Swadhyay. Both groups had sizeable minorities who claimed that the effect of Swadhyay was the same regardless of location because the philosophy remained the same.

In determining whether the environments of the youth were different, I looked at various quantitative data in three groups: personal, family, and Swadhyay. The personal group included information on education level, profession, age, and sex of the interviewee. The family section dealt with the education and careers of the

interviewee's parents, the family financial status, and the number of siblings the interviewee had. The final section, Swadhyay, was concerned with the number of years of participation in Swadhyay and average weekly involvement. Based on these factors, there was a difference in the environments of the two groups. The personal section did not show any major differences between the two youth groups. However, the US youth had better educated parents who were more likely to work in contrast with the Indian youth whose parents were less educated and more likely to stay at home (mainly mothers). In the Swadhyay section, the US youth had been involved in Swadhyay for a longer period of time, but the Indian youth spent more time per week in Swadhyay activities. Though there are differences in the environment and experiences with Swadhyay between Indian DBT youth and American DBT youth, one cannot claim a causal relationship between the two groups of findings. There are other factors that were not taken into consideration in this study that may have influenced either the cultural environment or the perception of Swadhyay and its effects. As a result, the strongest statement that one can make concerning this data is that environment and effect of Swadhyay on DBT youth in India and the United States are associated, but not necessarily in a causal relationship.

Finally, the experiences of the American youth were compared to the experiences of second generation South Asian youth in the United States. This comparison dealt mainly with the topics of culture, religion, and assimilation. Based on my study, I found the experiences of the American DBT youth with Swadhyay to fit into the general experiences of second generation South Asian youth. These experiences include using

religion and spirituality as a form of identity. Once this identity is “discovered”, youth feel more comfortable in mainstream American culture, and become assimilated while remaining individual.

This study can prompt further research on the topic of Swadhyay and youth. Possible future projects include a similar study with more participants or with participants from different countries. It would also be interesting to see a study on the differences in the effect of Swadhyay among youth in different parts of the same country. Ideally, these findings could then be compared to studies of youth and spirituality in general.

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## APPENDIX A

Interview questions asked to DBT youth in Gujarat, India and Texas, United States:

1. Full Name
2. Age
3. Level of Schooling, Career Goals
4. Hobbies
5. Schedule of typical day
6. Married or not
7. Area of India your family is from, caste
8. Traveled outside city, state, and/or country? If so, where?
9. Dad's information: level of schooling, profession
10. Mom's information
11. Siblings' information (if any)
12. Family financial status: lower class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, upper class? (pick one)
13. How long have you been involved in Swadhyay?
14. Is the whole family involved? If not, who is?
15. How much time a week do you spend on Swadhyay?
16. Describe your involvement in Swadhyay
17. Are most of your friends in Swadhyay? Are you closer to them vs. other friends?
18. How did you get involved in Swadhyay?
19. Why do you stay involved in Swadhyay?
20. Do you go for Bhav Feri? Why?
21. What does Swadhyay mean to you?
22. What is the work of Swadhyay?
23. What do you consider to be God's work?
24. What has the effect of Swadhyay been on your life?
25. Do you think this effect is greater/would be greater if you were raised in India or elsewhere?
26. Have you seen/met Dadaji or Didi?
27. Do you plan in continuing Swadhyay in your life?



## APPENDIX B

**Apaarusheya Laxmi:** Impersonal wealth, obtained by attributing wealth to God

**Asmita:** Three-fold concept of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-resistance

**Bhagvad Gita:** Hindu holy text

**Bhakti:** Devotion to God

**Bhav Feri:** Devotional trips undertaken by Swadhyayees for the purpose of meeting their divine brothers and sisters

**Bhav Geet:** Devotional hymn/song

**Divine Brain Trust:** The youth organization within the Swadhyay movement (DBT)

**Ego:** The sense of self

**Indwelling God:** A concept that God resides in every being

**Kruti Bhakti:** Dynamic devotion; a type of devotion that stresses active rather than passive activities

**Matsyaghanda:** A Swadhyay prayog involving fishing communities

**Pariwar:** Family

**Pathshala:** The location in Mumbai from which Dadaji used to give his discourses. Currently, Didi gives discourses from the pathshala.

**Prayogs:** Experiments in the Swadhyay philosophy aimed at uncovering the true nature of the relationship between two people and between people and God

**Sanchalak:** A leader in the Yuva Kendra

**Study Circles:** Book study groups among DBT youth; the literature is usually spiritual or philosophical

**Swadhyay:** Self study; a philosophical movement originating in India

**Tapovan:** Ancient Vedic system of schooling in which young children were taught spiritual and philosophical subjects as well as regular subjects. Students went to tapovans at young ages and returned to society as adults.

**Tatvagnyan Vidhyapeeth:** The university connected with the Swadhyay movement. Students are usually college graduates who are interested in learning about Eastern and Western philosophy and religion

**Vaicharik:** Relating to thought; the part of DBT meetings that includes discussion on the topic of the meeting

**Vedic:** Relating to the Vedas, the holy scriptures of Hinduism and Buddhism

**Vistar:** A general area

**Vruksh Mandir:** A Swadhyay prayog involving the planting of orchards and gardens

**Yogeshwar Krishi:** A Swadhyay prayog involving farming communities

**Yuva Kendra:** Local chapters of DBT

**Yuvati Kendra:** A Yuva Kendra composed of females only

## VITA

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