

**VIVEKANADA : A STUDY IN NATIONAL, SOCIAL AND  
SPIRITUAL RECONSTRUCTION OF INDIA**

**THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **C E R T I F I C A T E**

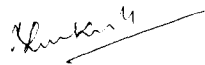
This is to certify that the thesis "**Vivekananda: A Study in National, Social and Spiritual Reconstruction of India**" submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of the University of Calicut is a record of bonafide research carried out by **N. Lekshmi Kutty** under my supervision and that no part of this thesis has been submitted for a degree.

  
*Supervising Teacher*  
16.4.02

## DECLARATION

I, N. Lekshmi Kutty, do hereby declare that this thesis "**Vivekananda : A Study in National, Social and Spiritual Reconstruction of India**" has not been submitted by me for the award of a degree, diploma, title or recognition before.

University of Calicut.  
April 2002.

  
**N. Lekshmi Kutty**

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## P R E F A C E

*While doing research for M.Phil on Swami Vivekananda, I had occasion to come across a vast expanse of materials about Swamiji's world wide activities, which if deeply probed into would unfold many things which will be useful to those who are interested in this area of study. The majority of his writings and speeches spread over in **The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda** are didactic in nature which not only every Indian but also every citizen of the world should know, for they are so comprehensive in nature, so catholic in views, so full of compassion for the poor and the downtrodden, so full of human and spiritual wisdom which the ancient Indian Rishis enshrined in the pithy saying "**Ekam Sat Vipra bahudha vadanti**" (Truth is one, sages call it in different names) which is the Supreme advaitic truth. All these works were the result of his efforts during the last ten years of his 39 years of life. The study of these works on religion divested of religious bigotry, on social matters without any sectarian views, on education devoid of any denominational slant but aiming at 'man making', on economic development of the country and people without making them avaricious but contribute to the general economic development and finally to attain perfection with a spiritual thrust and without any selfish motive as one's own moksha or liberation only, but for the good of all as enshrined in the motto of Sri Ramakrishna Mission "**Atmano mokshartham Jagaddhitaya cha**" is a desideratum for the well being, mutual understanding and community-living of all the people in the world.*

*Swamiji enunciated a philosophy which has not lost its relevance even now. The history of India after his Mahasamadhi (1902) is a testimony to the*

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\* Rigveda II, iii, 22.

*fact that "whatever we have achieved by way of political independence, by way of social awareness and national solidarity has come from that orientation of the ancient message of India's spirituality given by Swami Vivekananda".\*\* One hundred years have passed since he attained Mahasamadhi. Still, his teachings are regarded as the beaconlight for the progress of this nation. His life and work have become the subject of intensive study for the last ten decades and the innumerable studies made on him during this long period show that the historical estimation of his life, works and influence can never be finally wrapped up. The present study was taken up in the light of these considerations.*

*It is a well recognized fact that the humanism and universalism of Swamiji had become the main source of inspiration for the Indian nationalists and freedom fighters belonging to both the Moderate and Extremist Schools of thought. Though a product of the spirit of renaissance generated by the Religious and Social Reform Movements of the nineteenth century, Vivekananda transcended the restricted confines of Hindu revivalism and made a rich contribution to the on-going process of nation building. His pronouncements have therefore to be studied in a larger perspective of social regeneration. The task of nation building was preceded by a kind of social awareness which came as the end product of the tireless strivings of religious leaders, social reformers, political activists and educationists. Swami Vivekananda combined all these shades of national reconstruction in his life and teachings. The present study is an attempt to re-examine broadly these different aspects of his legacy.*

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*\*\*C. Subrahmanyam in his Foreword to V.R. Karandikar, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda (Poona, 1991) p.viii.*

*A proper presentation of Swamiji's political, social and religious ideals within the broad frame of reconstruction requires a deep diving into the nineteenth century socio-political milieu in which they were formulated. Hence the study has been made against this historical background. The study not only focuses on the impact it produced on Indian nationalists but also on its relevance in post-independence Indian situation and also in the modern world situation.*

*The study has also concentrated on the genesis and growth of Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala in relation to nationalism. Effort has been made to explore the role of the Mission in bringing social and cultural awakening in Kerala in a silent manner, as a matter of regional approach.*

*A short life-sketch of Swami Vivekananda and brief biographical notes on some of his most favoured disciples and admirers who helped him work out his plan in India have been appended.*

*I am indebted to several individuals and institutions for their assistance and encouragement in completing this study.*

*Foremost of all, I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Prof. (Dr.) K.K.N. Kurup, the honourable Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calicut under whose guidance and encouragement this study was carried out. He was my guide and supervising teacher for M.Phil also. In fact it was he who instilled in me a deep interest in the subject. In spite of his pressing engagements connected with his official work, he was very keen and enthusiastic in supervising my work. Let me therefore pay my respects to and sincerely thank him for his valuable guidance at all stages of the present study.*

*I am happy to record my thanks to Dr. S.M. Mohammed Koya, the former Head of the Dept. of History, for his valuable suggestions and support;*

*Dr. Kunjali, the present Head of the Department and all the members of the Dept. for their co-operation and encouraging words.*

*A study like this involved special way of investigation – visiting libraries and contacting individuals. I could save much of my time on travel in search of materials because I was fortunate to get some very valuable and authentic source materials related to my study from the personal collections of Sri. C. Vasudevan IAS (Rtd.) who is a scholar, researcher and one who is associated with the Ramakrishna Mission. Moreover, he is the winner of the Award from the Dravidian Linguistic Association of India, Trivandrum for his book **Koragas The Forgotten Lot, The Primitive Tribe of Tulu Nadu**. I am heavily indebted to him for the invaluable help he has rendered me.*

*I also acknowledge with sincere thanks a similar help I got from Sri. P.T. Nair, D. Lit., the historian of Calcutta and Professor of Asiatic Society of Bengal.*

*I am thankful to the authorities of all the libraries that I have visited, the list of which has been given in the Introductory Chapter. I am particularly thankful to Swami Purandaranandaji and other monks of Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram, Kalady from where I collected a major portion of the materials.*

*I started working on this on a part-time basis on 7<sup>th</sup> August 1997. But on my request, my part time Ph.D. registration was converted into full time with effect from 1.6.2000. The accommodation and other facilities provided by the University during this period enabled me to complete my work before the stipulated time and I am immensely grateful to the authorities for the same.*

*My heart felt thanks goes to many persons including the members of my family who have helped me by word, gesture or prayer and have brought*

*comfort and encouragement to me in my long and lonely venture into the unknown.*

*Finally, my thanks to Mr. Balu of Bina Photostat, Chenakkal, who has taken great pains to get the manuscript typed neatly into this final form of the thesis.*

*On this occasion, I invoke the blessings of my parents, my husband and my teachers whose memories have been a constant source of strength and encouragement in the whole process of consummation of this study. And, it is dedicated to them.*

*Calicut University,  
April 2002.*

*N. Lekshmi Kutty*

# INTRODUCTION - BACKGROUND STUDY

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekananda : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION - BACKGROUND STUDY

Nineteenth century witnessed a great transformation in India in the form of an awakening or regeneration in political, social and religious fields. This great awakening had been the result of various historical factors which had emerged in the socio-economic spheres in the country. As a colonial state under the British, India had been unified in a "common subjugation" and administration. The process of Westernisation under the Raj had taken place in the metropolis of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta (Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata respectively). The traditional elite or the "Bhadralok" of these urban centres had been more exposed to this process and their language and culture had faced a potential challenge than ever before.

As a region, Bengal was the earliest province which came under the British and Calcutta was the nerve centre of the English East India Company's administration. The process of evangelisation had been introduced since the Charter Act of 1813 and Serampore had been one of the centres of missionary activities in India. This marked a step towards recognizing the role played by religion in consolidating the hegemony of Empire.

It seemed that the British conquest provided physical and material security at least in urban centres. But this was only a short phase. The western conquest proved to be a political slavery. This political slavery became a challenge and tended to uproot the cultural inheritance and naturally restricted the aspirations of society. In fact the challenge came from both the fronts, cultural as well as political. India rose to meet the challenge first on the cultural front and then on the political. Broadly speaking, the second half of 19th century evidenced the first, while the dawn of the 20th century witnessed the second. In other words, political regeneration was preceded by cultural awakening. A nation in stupor regenerated and rediscovered her self, her potentialities, particularly spiritual which almost remained intact inspite of the incursions of foreign culture.

An important feature of India's rise to the new cultural challenge from the West is the quality of dynamic synthesis. This term implied "inclusion" and not "exclusion", Synthesis became the chief characteristic of new India's awareness and activity. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)<sup>1</sup> stands as the most effective spokesman and representative of this phase of India's cultural movement. He appeared on the scene when India was at the cross roads of two diametrically opposite ideals, viz., on the one hand, a large section of English educated classes, dazzled by the

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<sup>1</sup> For details of his life and mission see His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vols. I-II, 5<sup>th</sup> edn. (Mayavati, 1979-1981).

Also see Appendix I.

splendour, power and progress of the European countries rushed head long to imbibe and imitate the European culture, beliefs and traditions in which they found a panacea for their sufferings. Soon there arose a class of saviours of Indian culture who vehemently denounced everything European or Western and declared the superiority of Indian culture.

Here Vivekananda differed. His mission was to reconstruct and regenerate the nation. To him the national regeneration depended upon two things - revitalization and renovation of India's religion, "the central theme of her national life" and the remoulding of Indian society. The first thing which he said to his compatriots was not to imitate the West. To him, the moment India tried to become Europe, she was destined to die. Indian society or religion was not to be reformed on Western lines. What was required was a reinterpretation of religion in a manner acceptable to the modern mind and the readjustment of social structure which would establish social mobility. He also asked the Indians to look to India's ancient traditions which were rooted in the Vedas and Upanishads which preached the universal unity and to draw inspiration from them. He was the first to tell his countrymen that every nation has what might be described as a national elan and national destiny. To some it may be politics, to some it may be religion. Indians were destined to garner all the spiritual values to combine them and to concentrate them, to preserve them so that at a suitable moment of need, India may flood the

world. His method was to preserve the past by reconstructing it and thus, he preached a philosophy of "preservation by reconstruction."

But at the same time, he preached a philosophy of synthesis - synthesis between the East and the West. He was the one who found in the British connection a potent means for breaking the moribund Indian society and civilization of his time. In his personality was fused the past and the present, ancient wisdom and modern knowledge. He was a Hindu to the backbone, but he loved other religions as well. His was not the role of a reactionary patriot who would take his country away from the assimilation of other cultures. He loved India, but he loved humanity too, particularly the poor and the downtrodden masses. This universalism and humanism of Swamiji make his philosophy modern. This particular aspect attracted both the Moderates and Revolutionaries of Indian freedom struggle to his philosophy.

Swamiji proved himself to be the representative of Renascent India at the World Parliament of Religions held in 1893. He had gone there for a free exchange of ideas on the basis of equality with the West. The inspiring address made at Chicago formed the seed from which blossomed forth the entire teaching of Swamiji in all its ramifications which we find today contained in so many volumes of his *Complete Works*.

This piece of research consists of eight chapters as given below.

1. Introduction – Background Study
2. The Indian Awakening
3. Vivekananda's Concept of Emerging India
4. Ideology and Transformation
5. Education and National Reconstruction
6. Dream of an Egalitarian Society
7. The Ramakrishna Mission and Kerala
8. In Retrospect

The first chapter deals with a formal introduction of this study. Since the purpose and relevance of the study have been dealt with in the Preface, this chapter points out its scope. A survey of the major works on Swamiji is also given. They include the sources and previous studies helpful in providing information for this study.

Chapter II discusses the factors which led to the awakening of India. A discussion of the social and religious conditions of the nineteenth century India is followed by an examination of the effects of the cultural intrusion of the West creating new stirrings in Indian society. The study attempts to trace the role of Socio-Religious Movements in bringing the awakening. Of these movements the Ramakrishna Mission was unique in its own way because of the ideals that it

preached like the gospel of unity of all religions, synthesis of cultures keeping national identity, identification of the service of the poor with service of God etc. A discussion of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, characterised as a self-renewal movement, its active part in inspiring every form of healthy national activity leading to the strengthening of national consciousness has been made in this chapter.

A nationalist and a patriot-saint, Swamiji had envisioned the dawn of New India, how and what it should be. According to him future India would be the proud home not only of the advanced sections of Indian society, but also of its backward sections. Chapter III analyses his concept of emerging India. Swamiji has been projected as a social reformer, with his emphasis on upliftment of masses and women, his concept of social change, his views on caste, his prophecy of Shudra Raj and their impact on Indian nationalists. In addition to all these, his vision of a United India and the role of future India in the country of nations also have been discussed in this chapter.

Swamiji considered national regeneration and religious dynamism as two sides of the same coin. That is why while envisaging his views on national reconstruction, he attached paramount importance to revitalization of religion. The greatest accomplishment of Swamiji in this direction was the reinterpretation, clarification and redefining of the true nature of Indian traditions which he made on

an international platform in 1893. His success in lifting religion from the abyss of dogmas and giving it a dynamic meaning by linking religion with social service, resulted in the building of a new ideology which went a long way towards promoting national unity. Chapter IV deals with all these aspects.

Fifth chapter examines the educational concepts of Swamiji who saw education as a national problem and considered it a vehicle for social transformation. The chapter is an attempt at analysing his views on reorientating the then prevailing system of education, giving stress on a "man-making" and a "nationally oriented" system of education. Effort has been made to show that Swamiji's philosophy of education was a harmonious blending of cultural heritage of India and Western science. The impact of his concepts on Indian nationalists like Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore has been given special attention in the study.

Swamiji had dreamt of an ideal society based on the principles of equality and brotherhood. The miserable conditions that existed in Indian society called his attention. Inspired by social vision and moulded by social aim, he dreamt of an egalitarian society and worked out a plan for it. Chapter VI focuses on these aspects of his philosophy. The chapter also projects the difference between his concept of Socialism and Marxian concept and the impact of his concept on the emerging intelligentsia of the middle class.

Chapter VII traces the history of the Ramakrishna Mission against the Indian background. The central theme of the chapter is the genesis and growth of the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala in relation to nationalism. This study made against the background of Swamiji's visit of Kerala, highlights the pioneering role played by Swami Nirmalananda, Swami Agamananda and Swami Tyageesananda in converting the movement into a crucial factor in bringing social and cultural awakening in Kerala. It has been done as a matter of regional approach.

The last chapter (Chapter VIII) provides the conclusions and observations of the study. The conclusion centres round the following points:

1. Though Swamiji remained a Hindu, his concept of religion had secular thrust.
2. Liberation of the poor.
3. Fight against the institution of caste.
4. Love to one's motherland.
5. Impact of his message on nationalists, particularly Bengal Revolutionaries.
6. Promotion of indigenous culture.
7. World outlook – Universalism.
8. Indian placement in a world context – Asianness in him.

The Methodology adopted in this study is descriptive, analytical and interpretative.

The study is based on primary and secondary sources dealing with the life teachings and activities of Swamiji in India and in the West. All these sources are published works. Primary sources include the *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, *The Complete works of Sister Nivedita* and *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Admirers. In addition to these primary sources a variety of materials like biographical studies on Vivekananda, journals, periodicals, commemorative volumes, historical studies and booklets also have been utilized for this study. Most of the materials were collected from the libraries attached to various centres of the Ramakrishna Mission in Kerala, particularly Vivekananda Library attached to Sree Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram Kalady and Vivekananda Vijnan Bhavan, Poomkunnam (Trichur), Department Libraries (History and Philosophy) of Calicut University, C.H. Mohammed Koya Library, University of Calicut, Binany Library Union Christian College, Alwaye and Personal Libraries of individuals. Some valuable materials were made available to me from the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta. Materials collected from Internet also have been used for this study. Besides, I had informal talks with Swami Siddhinathanandaji and Swami Golokanandaji of Sri Ramakrishna Sevasram of Kozhikode, Swami Purandaranandaji and other monks of Sri Ramakrishna Ashram Kalady and Swami Gabhiranandaji of Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Vytila (Ernakulam) which had given me better insight into the subject.

A short review of the materials relied upon for this study is given below. These basic sources, apart from the *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, include the writings of the Westerners and Indians who had an intimate knowledge of Swamiji or his works, and many of whom had actually felt the aura of his personality and his spiritual magnetism. All these are concrete materials which when put together form a wonderful mosaic of this patriot - saint's universal stature in a cosmic background. Evidently, his glory has percolated into these works which had made them great unlike those cases where persons are projected into prominence by the penmanship of the author. These works do, therefore come under a singular category providing authentic information about the varied aspects of his life and work.

Among the *Primary Sources* consulted, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* come first. The entire collection had several editions, in eight volumes. A ninth volume was added in the year 1997, which was based mainly on the new materials unearthed by Ms. Marie Louis Burke (U.S.A) and published in her monumental work "*New Discoveries, Swami Vivekananda's Second Visit to America* (5 vols) and also the works of Shankari Prasad Basu and the materials published in the several issues of *Prabuddha Bharata*, the monthly organ of the Ramakrishna Mission. The list of the editions of *Complete Works* published by the Advaita Ashram, Mayavati and consulted for this study is given below.

Vol. I	15 <sup>th</sup> edition	1977
Vol. II	13 <sup>th</sup> edition	1976
Vol. III	12 <sup>th</sup> edition	1979
Vol. IV	11 <sup>th</sup> edition	1978
Vol. V	11 <sup>th</sup> edition	1979
Vol. VI	10 <sup>th</sup> edition	1978
Vol. VII	9 <sup>th</sup> edition	1979
Vol. VIII	6 <sup>th</sup> edition	1977
Vol. IX	1 <sup>st</sup> edition	1997

The subjects dealt with in these nine volumes are Swamiji's address to the Parliament of Religions 1893, Lectures, Discourses and Interviews, Conversations, the classes he took for the disciples and admirers in America, England and India and Letters and Poems. These subjects pertain to spiritual and religious matters, philosophy, history and also general matters relating to the development of the poor people and countries. Most of the speeches, talks and lectures were taken down by J.J. Goodwin an Englishman who gave up his journalistic career to become Swamiji's disciple and confidant from the very beginning of his tour of America.

Of the subjects dealt with in these volumes the most important, absorbing and didactic are the letters published under the title "Epistles." These are published in five series in the five volumes, nos. V, VI, VII, VIII and IX each containing 123, 168, 53, 197 and 277 letters respectively. These interesting letters convey the philosophical thoughts of Swamiji - some of his sublimest thoughts, his views on

education, social change, his plan for starting the twin organization of Rama Krishna Math and Mission, his egalitarian and democratic concepts etc; addressed to his most favoured disciples, admirers and friends in India and the west. They were written sometimes in an easy style giving instructions, directions, advices, comments and sometimes admonitions too. Some of the vital questions related to India's future are answered in these letters. The most interesting aspect of these letters is that in a letter addressed to a particular person, references about many others are also conveyed, thus weaving a wealth of information into one unit and thus avoiding a monotonous tone or a "one track line." Whatever Swamiji said and expressed was with a broader vision, a larger perspective, and a deep analysis without a bias or narrow outlook.

Vol.III and Vol.IV of the *Complete Works* are of special mention, since the former contains his nationalistic and patriotic speeches, whereas the latter contains his famous article "*Modern India*" in which he makes his pronouncements on Shudra Raj. Some of the articles published in these volumes are translated from the original Bengali versions. Sanskrit passages are also quoted and they are given in Devanagari script. But when translation was made from Bengali and Sanskrit versions, it was done without the loss of fire and faith of the original. These volumes reveal the many sided facets of this towering personality - the patriot -

prophet, the nationalist, the philosopher, the reformer, the educationist, the sociologist, the historian, the orator, the poet and above all the humanist.

The entire collection of *Complete Works* come under a singular category unlike the ordinary literary work. In short it is an encyclopaedia of a unique kind where the ancient and the modern, the rich and the poor the atheist and the devoted, science and superstition, the spiritual and the worldly all mingle together to form a human civilization. The present study is mainly based on these volumes.

Next to the *Complete Works* come the *Complete works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta, 1982 edn.). This work in five volumes may be considered as a condensed version of India's philosophy, religion and art all rolled into one, written by the most beloved and trusted disciple of Swamiji to whom Miss Noble was not different from himself in thought, speech and action. In fact none has followed so closely and understood Swamiji as Nivedita. The writings are true echo of Swamiji's thoughts, speech and action. Even if Swamiji were to go through these writings, it is doubtful whether he would have got a chance of crossing the 't's and dotting the 'i's; so accurate and so deep in thought are the renderings of Swamiji's messages recorded in this work. In fact she has rendered a reinterpretation or elucidation of Swamiji's messages in these works. "*The Master As I Saw Him*" which is her most popular book, is included in Vol.I of this collection and it being

an authoritative document for any study of Swamiji, has been consulted extensively for the present research work.

Yet another *Primary Source* used for this study is *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Admirers* (Calcutta, 1999 edn.), It is a collection of articles published by the Advaita Ashram, Mayavati in the form of "Reminiscences" (36 nos.), the contributors of which have been styled as *His Eastern and Western Admirers*. Some of them were disciples, some friends and some admirers of Swamiji. They were a generation that knew Swamiji in life and heard his voice. These reminiscences are attractive, informative and instructive and since they reflect the thoughts that he shared with these "privileged" ones, it can be regarded as an authentic account. The present study is also indebted to this source.

For preparing this study, some *Biographical Studies* on Swami Vivekananda have been relied upon. These studies, though they come under the category of *Secondary Sources*, have been considered authentic materials for any study on Swamiji. Among them the most important is "*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*" by His Eastern and Western Disciples in two volumes, (Vol.I, Fifth edition, 1979 and Vol.II fifth edition, 1981) published by the Advaita Ashram, Mayavati, which is considered to be the official biography of Swamiji. The authors remain anonymous under the title. "His Eastern and Western Disciples." The first publication having come out in 1912, ie. within ten years of his Samadhi, must have been contributed

by many who knew him personally and experienced some of the events mentioned in the work.

In this biographical sketch of Swamiji, the accounts given follow more or less in the chronological order, the ancestors of his family, his childhood and student days, his coming into contact with Sri Ramakrishna whose influence made him what he was, the founding of the monastery after the Samadhi of his Master, the Parivrajak days when he toured almost all parts of India, his first tour of America, England and Europe after attending the Parliament of Religions, Chicago, his return to India, the tour and reception given to him from Colombo to Almora and later other parts of India in the North, his founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, his second visit to America, his founding of some centres in America, and his acquiring a number of Western disciples besides admirers and wellwishers etc. There are extensive quotations from Swamiji's own lectures and speeches, besides those of others, letters written by Swamiji to others both in India and abroad. His contacts with several persons both in India and abroad, besides those who came to India to meet and discuss with him spiritual and philosophical matters and his line of thinking of how to improve the conditions of India and the people in distress have been vividly explained. His meeting with the then leaders of India like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and others who were engaged in wresting freedom from the colonial powers and his last days when he immersed in spiritual Sadhana foreseeing

his life's end etc. have also been described. On the whole this is an authoritative biography which presents to the world at large and to posterity the vision, the ideas, the work and the greatness of that personality which Swamiji's life embodied.

An equally important biography is Swami Nikhilananda's *Vivekananda, A Biography* (Mayavati, 1964). It is a thoroughly revised Indian edition of the American edition of this book written in 1953, while the author was the President of the Ramakrishna - Vivekananda Centre, New York. It is one of the best biographies of Swami Vivekananda and a scholarly work projecting his national and international mission. The fact that it is based on the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and the *Official Biography*, and also on press reports enhances its authenticity as a source material.

Yet another *Biography* consulted as a source material, is *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* (Madras, 1975) by S.N. Dhar. This work in two volumes running to about 1400 pages is unique in many ways. Deviating from the beaten tract the author while highlighting the biographical aspects as it should be, have set them against the historical backgrounds and geographical delineations, with route maps of Swamiji's journeys not only in India but also in the West. Photographs of Swamiji at different places at different times and also those of important personalities who stood by him till the end, enhance the quality of the work. The author has taken care to see that philosophical and metaphysical matters

are given place to the extent necessary, thus avoiding the monotony of a dissertational nature. As observed by R.C. Majumdar in his foreword, the author has "avoided emotions and sentimentalism as far as possible" which makes the work balanced and impregnable to criticism of any kind. Since it is written against historical background, the present study has drawn ideas from it.

Last comes *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Mayavati, 1988 11th Reprint) by the eminent French scholar, Romain Rolland. This is a concise biography of Swamiji, beginning with his parivrajaka days until his last. The book is divided into three parts of which Part I deals with his tour of India upto his return to India after his second visit to the West. The remaining parts deal with Philosophical matters in the background of Hellenic - Christian mysticism. The incisive way in which the author has examined the salient features of Swamiji's personality in such a concise text together with a clear background of the Christian philosophy is very clear cut, thus giving the reader the cream of Swamiji's philosophy.

The present work has also drawn ideas from other sources like journals, periodicals and commemorative volumes. Of these *Prabuddha Bharata*, the monthly magazine started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896 and currently published from Mayavati comes first. It is a good source material in the sense that the articles

are contributed by eminent scholars and writers from the East and the West and the subjects dealt with are of high standard both in content and language.

Another periodical consulted is SAMVIT, the bi-annual organ of Sri Sarada Math Dakshineswar, Calcutta, published by the Sarada Math and Mission. The articles devoted to religion and philosophy published in this periodical also provide us with material for research. A list of other periodicals consulted has been included in the Bibliography.

Of the commemorative volumes consulted, three are important. They are: (1) *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta, 1963) (2) *Parliament of Religions (1963-64) Proceedings Volume* (Calcutta, 1965) and (3) *Swami Vivekananda, A Hundred Years since Chicago – A Commemorative Volume*, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (Belur, 1994). These volumes contain articles by erudite scholars from India and abroad analysing the accomplishments of Swamiji from different perspectives.

A study of Vivekananda in relation to "Reconstruction of India" will be incomplete without a reference to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission since it was a machinery created by him for national awakening. *The History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1957) by Swami Gambhirananda which is the first comprehensive history of this organization since its inception in 1897, is the most authentic source material available for its study. After giving a

short life sketch of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master whose inspiration guided his disciples to form the two organizations to carry on his message, the book deals with the ways in which the rules and regulations were formed, the progress achieved step by step, the ordeals the disciples had to undergo and the obstacles they had to face etc. At one stage, the fear of split haunted them, as a dispute regarding the Bangalore centre had to be taken to the civil court. But success was awaiting the disciples who carried on the consolidation and expansion of the activities throughout India and abroad. This gave a fillip to them to take up not only spiritual activities but also philanthropical and missionary work and opening of more centres. There are three appendices which give details about the types of centres, their locations and the activities carried on.

Researches on Swamiji's international mission resulted in producing an excellent work by one of his western admirers Marie Louise Burke, entitled *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries – His Prophetic Mission* (Mayavati, 1992 edn.). This work now in six volumes, and first published in 1957 covers the events, press reports, etc. on Swamiji's activities in America and other miscellaneous facts which were unearthed by reference to old newspapers and journals in America by the author with the assistance of members of the New York Vedanta Society. Reference to Indian authors like Sankari Prasad Basu etc. is also there. No major changes in the versions of the newspaper reports have been made,

but minor corrections and additions have been made without detriment to the original texts. In fact for the ninth volume of the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1997) most of the materials were provided by this work.

Of the previous studies that throw light on the facets of Swamiji's personality, Bhupendranath Datta's *Swami Vivekananda, Patriot-Prophet – A Study* (Calcutta, 1954) is an attempt at portraying him as a patriot-prophet with a cosmopolitan outlook. The author being the brother of Swamiji, argues that the latter was not a Sannyasin of the old variety – engaged in the pursuit of God and oblivious to the problems faced by humanity – but a man of vision who could look into the future and suggest remedies for the most complicated problems faced by mankind. Datta has taken up for his discussions questions like what sort of a reformer he was, whether he was a revivalist etc. and gives Swamiji the credit of being the first to exhort his countrymen to raise the downtrodden, the first to speak of "the new civilization to be ushered in by the proletariat" and "the first to envisage a government of the toiling masses". Sanat Kumar Rai Chaudhari's *Swami Vivekananda – The Man and His Mission* (Calcutta, 1966) is a scholarly work written from the social and historical standpoint and it throws much light on the fundamental aspects his philosophy. *Understanding Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1972) by A.K. Majumdar is mainly an exposition of the basic thought of Swami

Vivekananda, assessing his role in building India and as such it is a useful work for a study on his role as a builder of Modern India.

Swamiji's teachings contained the principles and philosophy forming the basis of all good educational system. The book entitled *Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (Coimbatore, 1964) by T.S. Avinashilingam deals with the message of Swamiji on education, highlighting its role in bringing social awareness. One of the recent studies made on Swamiji's egalitarian views is *Swami Vivekananda and Indian Quest for Socialism* (Calcutta, 1986) by Arun Kumar Biswas. It not only analyses his views on caste, class and struggle for equal privileges but also makes an indepth analysis of modern Indian leaders like Gandhiji, Aurobindo, Subhash Chandra Bose and others and as such it is a good reference material.

*Eternal Values for a Changing Society* (Calcutta, 1971) now in four volumes, written by Swami Ranganathananda, President of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, also an erudite scholar, author of several epoch making books and articles and widely respected in international domain, is a collection of speeches, broadcasts and articles. The different facets of Swamiji's personality such as nation builder, spiritual leader, educationist, enunciator of "man-making" philosophy etc. have been delineated with his exquisite penmanship. It also provides information about Swamiji's concept of East-West relations and synthesis of religion and science.

Swami Vivekananda's message was noted for its universalism and humanism which make it relevant for all time. *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age* (U.S.A., 1978) by Swami Satprakashananda founder head of Vedanta Society of St. Louis, U.S.A. analyses the legacy of this great vedantin in terms of the reconstruction of humanity.

Swamiji still continues to be a source of inspiration to the American people to whom he had given a gift, a message in words of universal wisdom and power in 1893. Eleanor Stark in her book *The Gift Unopened – A New American Revolution* (Portsmouth, 1988) says that the time has come for her countrymen "to open the great gift that he gave us". The book throws light on his message of regeneration and East-West synthesis as perceived by an American.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement has been a subject of recent researches. *The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement – Impact on Society and Politics* (1893-1922) (Calcutta, 1997) by Jayasree Mukherjee which is a study based on her Ph.D. Thesis, provides an understanding of the impact which the movement produced on Indian politics and society in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the recently published works entitled *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, OUP (Delhi, 1998) edited by William Radice gives new depth to our understanding of the aims and achievements of Swamiji. A collection

of fourteen papers written by eminent scholars both Indian and foreign, it shows how modernising trends in Indian society wrestled with traditional features of Hinduism such as caste. It also links his religious and social ideals to thinkers and theologians in the West.

Swamiji had spoken at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago with a global vision. *Swami Vivekananda: His Global Vision* (Calcutta, 2001), edited by Santi Nath Chattopadhyay which is the latest work on Swamiji's synthetic vision, attempts at evaluating the global ideas and outlook of this world Thinker by distinguished scholars in India and abroad.

Taken as a whole, these works unfold a picture of Swamiji seen from different angles. With the above picture as the background, the present work attempts at an integrated study encompassing all aspects of his philosophy which contributed to strengthen the on-going process of regeneration and reconstruction of colonial India. An integrated study of this kind which involves a re-examination and re-assessment of his contribution to the process, has not been attempted so far. In fact, this particular aspect of his legacy which was almost neglected in the previous studies mentioned above, has been highlighted in the present work. As such, this piece of research is different from previous studies made on Swami Vivekananda.

# THE INDIAN AWAKENING

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekanada : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER II

### THE INDIAN AWAKENING

Nineteenth century witnessed tremendous changes in Indian polity and society consequent to the expansion and consolidation of British imperialism in India. The most powerful and enduring effect of the British rule in India reflected itself in the intellectual development of the people on an entirely new line, which in turn brought changes in their political, social and religious outlook. The latter half of the nineteenth century was particularly characterised by the growing spirit of Indian nationalism which aimed at giving back to the nation its lost identity. Though the conflict between British interests and Indian aspirations was not so obvious in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the early years of the latter half, it became apparent, culminating in the Rebellion of 1857. And in the last quarter of the century Indian nationalism became self conscious and assertive.

It is a historical fact that Indian nationalism was the consequence of an awakening which was marked by momentous changes embracing various spheres of national life. It was a broad movement of regeneration affecting almost all spheres of life such as political, religious, economic, social, educational etc. and is popularly called "Indian Renaissance" or the "Indian Resurgence", though none of these terms is altogether satisfactory".<sup>1</sup> Bengal was the centre of this awakening

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<sup>1</sup> Nemai Sadhan Bose, *Indian Awakening and Bengal* (Calcutta, 1969), Preface.

because it was in Bengal that British rule was first firmly established, western education was introduced and a new economy was set up "leading to the birth of middle-class intelligentsia which was in the forefront of the awakening."<sup>2</sup> Naturally the principal social, religious and political movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century connected with the awakening also emanated from Bengal.

### **New Middle Class**

The awakening of India resulting in the reconstruction of the nation in socio-political and cultural fields was the result of historical forces unleashed by colonialism. The first and foremost among these forces was the emergence of a new middle class. This class was constituted by a new class of zamindars created by the Permanent Settlement of 1793<sup>3</sup> and a new class of merchants who grew rich as middlemen in the East India Company's trade. This class played a decisive role in the social history of Bengal in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the sense that the initiative for social reform came first from the educated sections of this class.

The emergence of this new middle class also created the atmosphere for the introduction and growth of English education which proved to be an important

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> This measure of Lord Cornwallis led to the transformation of the land revenue collectors in the province of Bengal into land holders with permanent tenure. For its own political convenience, the East India company thus "created a class of vested interests who became the allies of the English rule". See Bhupendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda Patriot Prophet - A study* (Calcutta, 1993.edn) p.21.

factor leading to the Indian awakening. The purpose of the introduction of English education, was of course, to meet the imperialist needs rather than popular needs which is clear from the Minutes of Macaulay, the law member of the viceroy's council. He recorded "we must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinion, in morality and intellect".<sup>4</sup> Throughout the colonial period, the British were using English education as a channel through which "they were bringing their own waves to India"<sup>5</sup> and acting as agents for European or Western culture. Yet, it cannot be denied that the British introduced English education in India with the support of the newly emerged middle class. These men were anxious to obtain an English education for themselves and their sons, for knowledge of the rulers' tongue was required to obtain employment. It may be noted in this context that the orthodox and wealthy families of Bengal took a significant part in the foundation of the Hindu college in 1817 which was a "landmark in the history of the growth of English education in India."<sup>6</sup> Further, this proved to be "the most important step in

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<sup>4</sup> Young, G.M, ed., *Speeches by Lord, Macaulay with his Minute on Education* (London, 1935) p.359.

<sup>5</sup> Percival Spear, "The Mughuls and the British" in A.L. Basham, ed; *A Cultural History of India* (Delhi, 1975), P.360.

<sup>6</sup> a. Bose, n.1, p.88.

b. Jawaharlal Nehru has noted that it was "due to the pioneering efforts of able and earnest Englishmen who gathered enthusiastic groups of Indian students around them that English thought and literature and political tradition were introduced to India see J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (OUP, 15<sup>th</sup> Imprint, 1998), p.313.

the nineteenth century towards the formation of an educated middle class and an intelligentsia in the western sense of the term,"<sup>7</sup> who played a leading role in the movements related to regeneration.

The point needs an explanation. With the introduction of English as the medium of instruction, it became the channel through which India discovered the liberal thought that was then transforming Europe. Western learning put the tools of rationalism and scepticism in the hands of a generation of young Indians. In fact the policy of English education and the establishment of universities in the three presidency cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857, resulted in the emergence of a class of English – educated elite imbued with western liberalism, who acted as catalysts in bringing about the much needed reform in Indian society and religion.

### **Serampore Missionaries**

It will not be an exaggeration to say that in making the Bengali mind receptive to new ideas like social reforms, the activities of the Serampore missionaries<sup>8</sup> had done the ground work. Apart from the educational activities,

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<sup>7</sup> Pradeep Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal – Aspects of Social History* (Calcutta, 1965) p.93.

<sup>8</sup> The Baptist mission at Serampore (Calcutta) headed by William Carey, Marshman and Ward was the pioneer of missionary movement in Bengal. The Renaissance of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was very closely interlinked with the development of Bengali language and literature and the latter was deeply indebted to the Serampore mission.

their work covered a wide range of other activities like translation of Bible into vernacular Bengali, publishing books on various subjects like History, Geography and general knowledge, reprinting old Bengali verses, etc, by which the missionaries gave an impetus to Bengali particularly to its prose literature. Though they gave stress on the study of Sanskrit, their main object was to challenge the very citadel of Hinduism i.e. to study and expose the fallacies of the sacred texts all of which were in Sanskrit. Although a few conversions took place, the publication of translated works from Sanskrit language drew the attention of the people into their ancient culture which in turn helped the revival of oriental learning. The crusade against Hindu religion, society, customs and practices was in fact proving a blessing in disguise. At least a minority section of the population began to feel that "everything was not right with Hindu religion and society."<sup>9</sup> Again, the missionary publications created people's interest in the outer world and enlarged the horizon of their knowledge. This immensely helped to correct the prevailing exclusiveness and the sense of satisfaction which had made the Indian society "apparently inert". The net result of the missionary activities in Bengal was that the Bengalis became curious and interested in the wider world. A spirit of self criticism developed and they began to look backward for lessons and inspiration and forward to a future of progress and achievement. Existing religion, society, social norms and practices and sense of values were reexamined and reassessed.

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<sup>9</sup> Bose, n.1, p.21.

### **Rise of Calcutta as Metropolis**

In making Bengal the cradle of Indian awakening, urbanization contributed much. In fact the urban transformation of Calcutta prepared the ground for this. The city of Calcutta hailed in the latter half of the nineteenth century as "the British jewel in the crown of British Empire," "had in the beginning" neither physical glamour nor cultural ancestry."<sup>10</sup> Until the eighteenth century, Calcutta was a cluster of villages inhabited by occupational group or caste. The very face of it changed with the establishment of Fort William, the trade centre of the East India Company. Soon its population became strikingly heterogeneous. It also developed the "nexus of continental trade"<sup>11</sup> in cotton cloth. With the growth of industries, people belonging to all castes began to throng there either as agents or writers to foreign merchants or as just fortune seekers. Among these inhabitants included all classes and castes from the Brahmins to the fishermen. Superseding and discarding caste limitations, grew the business community which amalgamated all castes and by the nineteenth century, Calcutta's indigenous business had begun to be dominated by higher caste Hindus like Brahmins and Kayasthas. Many of the high caste men were Banias – "Suppliers of cash and cash keepers". The expanding British trade soon attracted to Bengal a growing number of non-

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<sup>10</sup> Aravind Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal – Quests and Confrontations* (Simla, 1970) p.229.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.231.

Bengali Indians who included bankers and merchants, thus adding up new elements to local population of the city".<sup>12</sup> In addition to these people, foreigners belonging to various nationalities, European and Asian also began to come and settle in Calcutta which thus quickly expanded into a cosmopolitan city. And Indo-European co-operation in matters of trade and commerce became an important feature of its economic life.

In making Calcutta a cosmopolitan city, the growth of merchant capitalism and urbanisation had an important role. Bengal remained the major investment outlet for British. The foreign owned and foreign financed industries included cotton, jute, tea and mining. The introduction of railways gave a fillip to these industries. There was an influx of population to Calcutta from other parts of Bengal also in search of employment. Calcutta being the focal point of colonial administration and trade and the seat of political power, became the receptacle of talent and man power and developed a heterogeneous culture which having an original mode of thought often came in clash with old culture and civilization of the place. Naturally the city "acted as a catalytic agent for socio-cultural change".<sup>13</sup> Moreover, increasing volume of trade brought large number of Bengalis into contact with Europeans as agents, interpreters, associates, money lenders, etc. This European Bengali contact infused an element of dynamism into the

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.232.

<sup>13</sup> S.P. Sen, ed., *Modern Bengal – A Socio-Economic Survey* (Calcutta, 1973), p.22.

"apparently inert society"<sup>14</sup> and at long last the hitherto unchangeable began to stir and change. The enormous amount of European participation in Bengal's economic life enabled her to take the intellectual lead over the other provinces of India.

Urbanization also created circumstances in which individuals were compelled to break through the orbit of their family occupations and taboos, to find situations inconceivable to earlier generations i.e., members of all castes – the Brahamins and the so called low castes – were entering upon trade and service. In other words, an individual's choice of occupation was no longer conditioned by his belonging to particular caste. This facilitated one's movement from a caste to an economic class and at the same time brought about a revolution in perception. This "Social mobility which shook the caste-ridden organization of Indian society in urban areas"<sup>15</sup> particularly in the metropolitan city of Calcutta resulted in the formation of a new culture. The restrictions of castes were eliminated here. Interdining and intermarriage became frequent. Along with this, there took place an erosion of old values also.<sup>16</sup> Thus the city of Calcutta did send ripples to the distant corners of Bengal. A new social mobility led to a new awakening. It was

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<sup>14</sup> Poddar, n.10, p.9.

<sup>15</sup> Tara Chand, *History of Freedom Movement in India* (Delhi, 1984) Vol. II, p.115.

<sup>16</sup> The situation has been beautifully portrayed in the Bengali works like "*Ramtanu Lahiri O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*" by Sivanath Sastri, "*Sekal ar Eakal*" and "*Atmcharit*" by Rajnarayan Bose and *Kalikatha Kamalalya* by Babani Charan Bandopadhyaya.

quite natural that Calcutta which was the "nerve centre of modern Bengal"<sup>17</sup> should become the cradle of the spirit of renaissance.

### **New Literature**

The process of transformation in Bengal was accelerated by the literary resurgence taking shape in the thirties and forties of the nineteenth century. Literary creation does not take place in vacuum. It is very often in response to social and cultural changes that literature originates. Literature can also act as an instrument or medium for effecting changes in social outlook. The same is true of Bengali literature which blossomed and enriched itself by drawing inspiration from indigenous and western sources as well. A distinctive feature of the "New Literature" which flourished under the impact of western learning was its humanism<sup>18</sup> and rationalism and its infinite capacity to inspire the masses with patriotic feelings and national sentiments. The entire nineteenth century particularly its first half was marked by ideological conflict, cross currents and contradictions. In different spheres of life, there was a certain amount of inconsistency and hesitancy and this was reflected in Bengali literature of the period. In this age of ideological conflict, the press became the main platform for effective propaganda and the news papers like *Samachar Darpan*, *Digdarshan* and

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<sup>17</sup> Sen, n.13, p.13.

<sup>18</sup> Man and his activities on earth became the theme of Bengali literature, instead of exploits of Gods and Goddesses, which was its main theme till the nineteenth century.

*Sambad Kaumudi* which appeared during the period between 1818–1829 highlighted these issues and produced a profound impact on the minds of the reading public.

However creative literature began with socio-religious reformers of the nineteenth century. An important point to be noted in connection with literary renaissance in Bengal is that all pioneers of early Bengali literature were active social reformers of outstanding moral stature".<sup>19</sup> Eg: Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1774-1883) the great social reformer used literature a means for giving expression to his social and religious ideas which were based on reason and shastras. The "new age" found expression for the first time in his writings. Equally great literary figures like Babani Charan Banerjee, Iswar ChandraGupta, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Akshay Kumar Dutta highlighted in their writings contemporary social issues like Kulin System,<sup>20</sup> women's education, widow remarriage etc. By highlighting such issues, the literature of the time was serving as a reforming agency. In fact their writings could create a great stir in Bengali society.

The period witnessed the development of all branches of literature like poetry, novel and drama which helped in bringing attitudinal changes in society. The contemporary poets were influenced by both Western and Sanskrit literature

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<sup>19</sup> Krishna Kripalani, "Modern Literature" in Basham, n.5, p.412.

<sup>20</sup> The custom of girls being married away to (old) men of kulin (noble) or Brahmin caste.

which is quite evident in the poems of Hem Chandra Banerjee (1838-1903) and Nabein Chandra Sen (1837-1909). Contemporary poetry made a profound impact on the educated intelligentsia from among whom the nationalists of the period came.

It has been remarked that the flowering of the Renaissance began with the poetry of Madhusoodan Datta, the drama of Dina Bandhu Mitra and the novels of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. In the words of J.N. Sarkar: "Each of them reigned over one branch of literature and turned it into a new channel where it has since flowed, at his bidding".<sup>21</sup> Michael Madhu Sudan Datta (1824-1873) who was the foremost Bengali poet of modern style, through his compositions exposed social abuses. The main purpose of his writings was to awaken national consciousness by breaking down the old traditional values. His famous work *Virangana* which occupies a unique position in Bengali literature caught the spirit of the movement for emancipation of women led by Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar.

Dina Bandhu Mitra (1828-1873) made his mark as a playwright of unsurpassed promise by his famous drama *Nila Darpan* which gave expression to popular indignation against the brutal tyranny of the indigo planters in Bengal. All his works are charged with the spirit of realism and a deep sympathy for the people and they give a vivid picture of contemporary social life. There was a close

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<sup>21</sup> J.N. Sarkar, *India Through the Ages* (Calcutta, 1960), p.65.

relation between Bengali stage and nationalism and in stirring the feelings of the people against the worst evils of the British rule, the dramas of Dina Bandhu did play a vital role.

The nineteenth century Bengal produced a great patriot like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) known as "the literary prophet of Indian nationalism". The spirit of patriotism found its finest expression in his novels. "By choosing socio-cultural themes for writing, he was preparing the ground for a political awakening which was to come later".<sup>22</sup> Of all his works, the most important was his immortal work *Anandamath* which became a source of inspiration for the entire generation of nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The famous song "Bande matharam" which it contained, became the national hymn and inspired people to be ready to sacrifice every thing for their motherland. Thus the new literature which embodied the national spirit and aspirations was shaping the ideals of Indian nationalism. It may be added that not only the Bengali literature, but literature in other regional languages also developed similar trends in the nineteenth century and naturally served as a medium for promoting national consciousness among the Indians.

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<sup>22</sup> Arun Bhattacharji, *Prophets of Indian Nationalism* (Calcutta, 1993), p.75.

**Work of the Orientalists**

Political awakening in India was preceded by a Cultural Renaissance. The work of the Orientalists like William Jones, Max Muller and Monier Williams contributed much in bringing the Cultural Renaissance. Their increased interest in the study of India's past, her classical lore, resulted in the translation of many Sanskrit works into English and other foreign languages through which the world came to know of the cultural attainments of India. The Asiatic Society of Bengal founded by William Jones in 1784 did creditable work in revealing the greatness of ancient Indian culture to the Westerners. This created a new interest among the Indians to know more about their past and shed their inferiority complex. The Cultural Renaissance which India witnessed in the early years of the nineteenth century proved to be a very significant force in producing a new awakening, and in generating creative activities. This cultural awakening had an abiding impact on the ideology of Ramakrishna – Vivekananda Movement which played a significant role in bringing Spiritual Renaissance in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

**Socio-Religious Movements**

Of the various forces that brought forth the Indian Awakening, the Socio-Religious Movements of the nineteenth century had a decisive role. These movements were an expression of the rising national consciousness and spread of liberal ideas of the West among the Indian people. These movements, says A.R.

Desai, "increasingly tended to have a national scope and programme of reconstruction in the social and religious spheres".<sup>23</sup>

A deep analysis of these movements will reveal the fact that a major concern of them was religious reform; yet none of these movements was "exclusively religious in character".<sup>24</sup> Strongly humanist in inspiration, their attention was focused on worldly existence. This is clear from the agenda of reform proposed by reformers like Raja Rammohun Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar, Swami Vivekananda and others. Vivekananda even emphasized the secular use of religion and used spirituality to take cognizance of the material conditions of human existence.<sup>25</sup> At the same time all these reformers worked for religious reform because of their conviction that in India the religious beliefs and social practices were so closely connected that reform in this direction was a pre-requisite for social progress. As advocates of political freedom, they were also guided by the notion that "political freedom can have no meaning and reality without social freedom and equality".<sup>26</sup> Therefore it was natural that the Socio-Religious movements of the nineteenth century – whether they were reformistic or revivalistic – should affect

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<sup>23</sup> A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1991 Reprint), p.240.

<sup>24</sup> Bipan Chandra, ed., *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi, 1989), p.83.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> K.C. Vyas, *The Social Renaissance in India* (Bombay, 1957), p.4.

the growth of national consciousness in the country. An analytical study of the movement requires an investigation into the milieu in which they originated.

### **Challenge from the West**

It may be noted that the nineteenth century for India was one of the great moments of cultural confrontation, confrontation between modern scientific culture and a traditional culture. It was accepted that the West which had become the creators and representatives of a virile culture and civilization and whose aim was material prosperity had come to India through England in the nineteenth century. The dominant European culture came to India through the new system of education introduced by Macaulay in 1836. Before the dazzling civilization of the West, the tradition-bound Indian society could put up only a poor show.

As the new education advanced, imitation of the West began to spread and very soon the traditional culture ceased to have any hold on the English educated generation. The proselytization of Christian missionaries who indulged in wholesale vilification of Hindu religion, further tended to weaken the hold of religion on the minds of the western educated Hindu youth. As such it was believed that India was to lose her culture and her soul as well.

## **Social Conditions**

The Indian society itself was caught in a vicious web created by superstitions and social obscurantism. The Hindu religion had fallen on evil days. The religion of the Upanishads and the Gita had degenerated into meaningless formalism. Superstition was rampant. The race had almost lost its spirit of independence and fearlessness due to long subjection to an alien rule.

Social conditions were equally depressing. The most distressing was the position of women. The birth of a girl was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. Hindu society was characterised by the prevalence of such evils like female infanticide, child marriage and sati.

Another debilitating factor was caste which "sought to maintain a system of segregation hierarchically ordained on the basis of ritual status".<sup>27</sup> The rules and regulations of the caste system hampered social mobility, fostered social divisions and sapped individual initiatives. It is a natural consequence that social rigidity and exclusiveness would nurture many an injustice and oppression. Above all was the humiliation of untouchability which militated against human dignity. The dynamic conception of life taught by the Upanisads had given place to a static complacency. There was a languishing of spirit everywhere in Indian society during the nineteenth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Bipan Chandra, n.24, p.84.

It was into this old bottle of "social and national life that, was poured the new wine of European culture".<sup>28</sup> There was a ferment, unrest and questioning which issued forth in a Renaissance of the Spirit of India.

It may be recalled in this context that the impact which the Western ideas produced on Indian society, particularly Bengali society was varied. The orthodox section revolted against the new ideas outwardly but searched inwardly for a change. The intellectuals found it necessary to rationalise the traditional society. The new ideas made them conscious of the need to change their society. The learned discovered common grounds on which Hinduism, Islam and Christianity met, since the essence of all religions were the same. A wave of unrest swept over the thinking minds in the early years of the nineteenth century. Out of that unrest "the Indian Renaissance" began to take shape.

### **Raja Rammohun Roy and Indian Awakening**

At the head of this movement in its first phases, guiding it to a healthy direction stands the personality of Raja Rammohun Roy, the "Father of Indian Renaissance". As a reformer he had perceived religion as the dominant ideology of the times and believed that it was not possible to undertake any social action without coming to grips with it. He also realized the need of religious and social

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<sup>28</sup> Swami Ranganthananda, *The Ramakrishna Mission Its Ideals and Activities* (Calcutta, 1963), p.4.

regeneration to precede the political regeneration which he gave expression in 1828. He wrote:

I regret to say that the present system of religion adhered to by the Hindus is not well calculated to promote their political interests. The destruction of castes introducing innumerable divisions and sub divisions among them has entirely deprived them of patriotic feeling and the multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from understanding any difficult enterprise. This, I think necessary that some change should take place in their religion at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort.<sup>29</sup>

These words represented the immediate Indian response to the dissemination of colonial culture and ideology, resulting in an inevitable introspection about the strengths and weaknesses of indigenous culture and institutions. They also project the deep feeling of Rammohun that, even for the attainment of political freedom, social reform was essential.

Rammohun's passionate love for reform led him to found the Brahmo Samaj in 1828 which inaugurated the first important religious reform movement that

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<sup>29</sup> Rammohun Roy quoted in Charles Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform* (Bombay, 1964), p.24.

"fairly dealt with the Western challenge and the new ideas that came from the West".<sup>30</sup> In meeting the challenge he had adopted a method acceptable to the educated Indians who had come in contact with the sciences of Europe and who hungered for a faith consistent with modern rationalism. Quite distinct from some other social reformers of the time, Rammohun dealt with the rationalist, utilitarian and liberal challenge of the West by incorporating all that could be incorporated therefrom into Hinduism and by discovering afresh in Hinduism "the real source of its universal humanism and ethical monotheism which had been concealed by the inertia and thoughtlessness of an overgrown priest craft and a lethargic populace".<sup>31</sup>

Thus on the one side Rammohun wanted to preserve Hinduism by re-interpreting it, but at the same time, his mind was broad enough to recognize what was good and assimilable in the message of the West. From this it follows that his Brahmoism was not a rebel child of Hinduism, instead he sought to keep it close to Hindu moorings. In fact he founded the Samaj to save Hinduism from Christian attacks by purifying it from within. The reinterpretation of Hinduism that he made as a means of making it more humanistic found its fulfilment later in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement which strengthened India's struggle for self-discovery and self-realisation as a nation.

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<sup>30</sup> Sankar Ghose, *The Renaissance to Militant Nationalism* (Calcutta, 1969), p.3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

It is true that the reform movement started by Rammohun went a long way towards liberating the Hindu society in Bengal from the clutches of superstitious customs and practices which in turn invoked a sense of value of political freedom. But under Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-1884), it took a radical turn. The reformistic movement initiated by Keshab Chandra intended to mark a radical break with the traditional Hindu society and provoked a reaction to it in the mind of the parent body. The educated youth particularly of Bengal were searching for the discovery of their national self. They aspired much more than what was stated by reformistic Keshabsen, whose leanings towards Christianity, the religion of the rulers, did not fit in well with the Indian identity which was then seizing the youthful minds.

The point needs an explanation. Keshab Chandra Sen who joined the Brahmo Samaj in 1857 wanted to reform the Hindu society on Western lines. His belief in the cult of great men and his acceptance of Christian idea of original sin and repentance began to have an impact on the activities of the Samaj. Such trends were not liked by other leaders of the movement like Devendranath Tagore who did not share Keshab's zeal for social reform like giving up sacred threads, inter-caste marriages, etc. This group who did not want to break with the Indian moorings, soon came in clash with Keshab Chandra and his followers resulting in a schism within the Samaj. That indicated the development of new trends in the process of Indian reform movement, i.e., a trend for reform, by keeping the national identity.

It was but natural that the initiative for religious and social reform soon passed from Keshab Chandra Sen and the Samaj to other reformers of India like Dayananda Saraswathy (1824-1883) and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886) whose message was rooted in Indian tradition and derived strength from indigenous ideas.

### **Arya Samaj and Indian Awakening**

The national awakening which found expression in Brahmo Samaj, assumed a new dimension through Arya Samaj founded in Bombay in 1875. Its founder Swami Dayananda Saraswathi was guided by the belief that the Indians could not rise as a nation unless they radically transformed their social system. He was also of the opinion that India had been subjected to foreign rule because Indian life and society suffered from manifold defects and vices and that without the necessary religious and social reform political subjection of India was to continue. Therefore he sought to found a religious reform movement on national and indigenous lines.

The Arya Samaj which took its final form in 1877,<sup>32</sup> undertook the task of reforming the Hindu religion by attacking the hereditary caste system and untouchability, which recording to Dayananda had "no sanction in the vedas".<sup>33</sup> He also attacked polytheism and idolatry as being inconsistent with the teachings of the

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<sup>32</sup> The principles of Arya Samaj were finally defined in June 1877 at Lahore (Punjab).

<sup>33</sup> Dayananda Saraswathi, *Light of Truth* (tr. Chiranjiva Bharadwaja), Allahabad, 1915, p.97.

Vedas. The interpretation which he gave to the Vedas were similar to the religious and social reforms that other Indian reformers were undertaking. His ideas made him a liberal orthodox, according to Max Muller, the nineteenth century orientalist.

A dreamer of splendid dreams, Dayananda visualised an India purged of her superstitions, filled with fruits of science, worshipping one God, fitted for freedom, having a place in the comity of nations and restored to her ancient glory. And all these he hoped to be accomplished by rejecting outright the accumulated superstitions of centuries and returning to the "pristine purity" of the vedas. His watchword "Back to the Vedas"<sup>34</sup> was the first religious watchword leading to the political principle "India for the Indians". By this slogan he meant a return to the pure teachings of the Vedas which would gradually fit the people of India for self rule and eventually for independence. However since the Arya Samaj retained its narrow Hindu basis, national unity that it proclaimed could not gather into its fold the non-Hindu communities such as the Mohammedans and the Christians.

Yet it cannot be denied that the Arya Samaj was a crusading and reforming movement. Its crusade against untouchability, child marriage etc. on the strength of the authority of the Vedas went a long way towards taking the Hindu society on the path of progress. And as a reforming movement its principles and teachings

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<sup>34</sup> His call for a return to the Vedas was a call for India's social, economic and political regeneration in accordance with the changed religious and social ideas of his times. In fact he had made social and religious reform a necessary pre-condition to the reconstruction of India's past.

fostered patriotism. In the words of A.R. Desai "it played a progressive role in the earlier stages when the national awakening was just sprouting".<sup>35</sup> It was the progressive features of the movement like attack of religious superstitions and superiority of Brahmins, adoption of a programme of mass education, of the elimination of sub-castes, of the equality of man and woman etc. that perhaps drew to itself hundreds of nationalist Indians inspite of its narrow Hindu basis. How the Samaj was able to strengthen the spirit of patriotism in a natinalist like Lala Lajpat Rai is expressed by him in the following words:

All that was good and creditable in me, I owe to the Arya Samaj. It was the Arya Samaj that taught me to love the vedic religion and to be proud of Aryan greatness . . . . It was Arya Samaj that instilled into me love for my nation and that breathed into me the spirit of truth . . . . and of liberty. It was Samaj again that taught me that society, Dharma and country command our worship and that those shall inherit the kingdom of Heaven who make sacrifices to serve these.<sup>36</sup>

It was cultural nationalism that was promoted by this reform movement which would in turn strengthen political nationalism. But it failed to see that in

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<sup>35</sup> Desai, n.23, p.292.

<sup>36</sup> Lajpat Rai in *The Bengalee*, 14 June, 1905, cited in Sankar Ghose, n.30, p.40.

India national unity had to be secular and above religion so that it would embrace the people of all religions. A movement which would preach the fundamental unity of all religions, at the same time would impregnate Hinduism with the loftiest ideals of a non-sectarian religion, a movement which with its "man-making" and "nation building" messages would give a mighty fillip to India's anti-British struggle, was the need of the hour. Ramakrishna Movement which was started by Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) towards the close of the nineteenth century fulfilled this need.

### **Ramakrishna Mission and Indian Awakening**

In spite of the activities of the reformers like Rammohun Roy and Swami Dayananda Indian society had not achieved the desired measure of reform. It may be recalled in this context that in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century faint rumblings were heard here and there as an echo of Brahmo Samaj. The Prarthana Samaj of Bombay which was an offshoot of the Brahmo Samaj founded in the sixties of the nineteenth century was another attempt at keeping alive the ancient light. Later another religious movement, the Theosophical Society (1878) made its appearance in India from abroad which was a western fad of Eastern occultism and it played a similar role in Madras. Of course, the movement helped to check to a certain extent the influence of Christian as well as materialistic thoughts of the period.

But neither the early reform movements like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj nor the later movements like the Prarthana Samaj and Theosophical society were yet successful in restoring India's national ideals and cultural integrity. Neither was there any definite sign of Indian regeneration. The country had to be given back a sense of direction and faith in herself. The nation needed not only a philosophy of action but also a man who could articulate such a philosophy. The kind of man India needed was in the words of Swami Vivekananda:

One who in one body would have the brilliant intellect of Sankara<sup>37</sup> and wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya,<sup>38</sup> one who would see in every sect the same sect, working the same God, one who would see God in every being, one whose heart weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcaste, for the downtrodden . . . . such a man was born . . . .<sup>39</sup>

He was none other than Sri Ramakrishna whom the French philosopher Romain Rolland introduced to the West as the "Messiah of Bengal". According to him Sri Ramakrishna was "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of

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<sup>37</sup> Sankaracharya (A.D. 788-820) was one of the greatest saints and philosophers of India, the foremost exponent of Advaita Vedanta. He was born at Kalady, Kerala.

<sup>38</sup> A prophet born in A.D. 1485, who lived at Navadvip, Bengal and emphasized the path of divine love for the realisation of God.

<sup>39</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. III (Mayavati, 1979), pp.267-268.

three hundred million people".<sup>40</sup> It meant that this great saint from Dakshineswar (near Calcutta) represented an India which remembers herself in her ancient Vedas and Upanishads, in Buddha and Sankara and which continues to exist as a beacon of spiritual hope for man everywhere. "In him India's hoary spiritual legacy became alive and vital".<sup>41</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna<sup>42</sup> appeared at a psychological moment in the history of India. The country was in a transitional phase, resulting from the conflict of rationalism and empiricism which led to never-ending controversies between the modern reformers and the traditionalists. A new phenomenon which would be a genuine growth from within and which would strike a balance between the two was the need of the hour. In other words a re-examination, a reinterpretation and a re-adjustment of ancient Indian religion and ethics in the light of the most advanced modern thought were needed. In fact Sri Ramakrishna appeared in the spiritual horizon of Bengal to fulfil that need. As Swami Nirvedananda observes:

In him the orthodox society found a pre-eminent seer who had the potency of bringing about a mighty awakening of the old religion of Hindus with all that it stands for. The radicals too found in the

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<sup>40</sup> Romain Rolland, *Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta, 1947 edn.), p.14.

<sup>41</sup> Ranganathananda Swami, *The Meeting of East and West in Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1968), p.10.

<sup>42</sup> For his biographical details see (1) *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashram (Calcutta, 1924); (2) Rolland, n.40.

realization of Ramakrishna a wonderful solution of their intellectual doubt.<sup>43</sup>

What is implied in this observation is that Sri Ramakrishna was not an ordinary Indian monk. He expressed the highest wisdom or greatest truth in simple sentences and parables. His simple comments struck an even balance between the orthodox and the radicals, "incorporating the best of both and thus leading to the emergence of something which was characteristically Indian in its approach and yet universal in its application".<sup>44</sup>

### **Universalism of Sri Ramakrishna**

It may be noted that the British after the Rebellion of 1857 had intensified their policy of "divide and rule" in India. Therefore, the need of the hour was a philosophy which would pinpoint the central unity in the diversity of creeds. The contemporary religious reformers failed to display that panoramic vision of religion which pinpointed the underlying unity of all religions. It was at such a time that Sri Ramakrishna appeared with his ideal of unity of all religions. His concept of religion was universal. To be religious, according to him was to struggle to realise God; nothing more and nothing less. Spirituality is the core of religion and to be spiritual, meant to be humanistic and service minded. He used to say that dogmas

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<sup>43</sup> Nirvedananda, Swami. "Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance" in Haridas Bhattacharya, ed., *Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta, 1969), IV, p.653.

<sup>44</sup> Shukla Das, "India's Awakening and Sri Ramakrishna" in *SAMVIT*, No.7, March 1983.

and doctrines were as stones to a hungry man. They divide and lead to conflict and these conflicts have brought religions into conflict.

Perhaps the most important contribution of Sri Ramakrishna and that which made him distinct from other social reformers of the time, was his effort to bring all religions together "in a golden bond of understanding and love". He showed the underlying unity behind the multiplicity of religions and proved the validity of each through direct perception and disciplined experiments. The conclusion that he arrived at, was expressed in his famous saying "yata mat tata path" which meant that all religions of the world are but different ways of reaching God. Thus he went beyond his contemporaries in proving that all religions were "not partly but wholly true".<sup>45</sup> This was synthesis and not mere eclecticism or syncretism. This amounted to acceptance and not mere toleration. Ramakrishna's universalism and cosmopolitanism did not lead to mechanical uniformity but to unity in diversity. In fact this spirit of universalism, he salvaged from the hidden depths of Hinduism and released it, liberalising all sectarian views.

This marked a new era in the evolution of religious thought which recognized the individual identity of each sect or religion. By highlighting identity and individuality of religion Ramakrishna exposed the hollowness of religious conversion which was one of the serious challenges faced by Hinduism in those

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<sup>45</sup> C.A. Stark, *God of All - Sri Ramakrishna's Approach to Religious Plurality* (USA, 1974).

days. This also indicated his originality in thinking in regard to the question of Christian proselytism of the time.

### **Humanitarian Ideals**

Apart from this, Sri Ramakrishna gave a new interpretation to the concept of God worship according to which "the jiva was none other than Siva" meaning that every creature was god himself in a particular garb of name and form. This interpretation implied that one could realize god by serving him through the poor as through an image. His emphasis on service to humanity, not mercy or pity was the strongest protest ever made against the prevailing social inequalities, discrimination and domination. This social content of his teachings together with its universalism became an integral part of the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the most noted and the most favoured disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. These two ideals were the motivating force behind the founding of the Ramakrishna Order of monks by him.

One of the principal targets of criticism by Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century was the so called Hindu idolatry. Sri Ramakrishna's clear and decisive reply to this criticism was that God is with form and without form, which implies that both views of God are not contradictory but complementary. It is for the individuals to select his path according to his predilection. "Sree Ramakrishna thus spoke about the harmony of religions and taught about a God who is above all

gods, a religion which ascends above all our religiosities, transcending all dogmatism, rituals and contrivances".<sup>46</sup>

Yet another ideal preached by Ramakrishna was the development of character. In fact he regarded the development of character as superior to knowledge. The idea of character development was given prime importance by Swami Vivekananda in his scheme of national regeneration.

An important characteristic feature of his teachings is that Sri Ramakrishna expressed the highest wisdom or greatest truths in simple sentences and parables. Here he differed from the contemporary intellectuals like Rammohun, Devendranath Tagore and Keshab Chandrasen who tried to build up a spiritual unity, with their approach being more intellectual and academic. Sri Ramakrishna, by his direct and simple approach could reach the hearts of people from all walks of life. Referring to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna a translation from Bengali, which contains these conversations and parables, Aldous Huxley has remarked: "To read these conversations, is in itself a liberal education in humility, tolerance and suspense of judgement".<sup>47</sup>

That was a time when under the influence of rationalism of the West, the intellectuals of Bengal used to look down upon the idea of god and religion. But

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<sup>46</sup> Das, n.44, p.22.

<sup>47</sup> Aldous Huxley in his Foreword to Nikhilananda, Swami, ed. & tran., *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras, 1969).

Sri Ramakrishna, whenever he met them would correct their flippant attitudes towards things spiritual by his humble yet piercing remarks. Even for a vexed question like caste which had become a target of attack by the missionaries as well as radical reformers, Ramakrishna had a solution to offer. In reply to a question as to how the caste distinctions could be removed, he said:

There is only one way to remove them, and that is by love of God. Lovers of God had no caste. Through this divine love the untouchable becomes pure, the pariah no longer remains a pariah.<sup>48</sup>

The above passage reveals the humanism of Sri Ramakrishna, his love for the poor and the lowly in whom he saw the divine. His teachings were so original and appealing that even the radical reformers like Keshab Chandra Sen came under his profound influence so much so that his 'Navavidhan' or New Dispensation became "a practical representation of the truths which Ramakrishna had taught for a long time".<sup>49</sup> Thus the universalism and humanism of Ramakrishna gave the Hindu revivalism a new dimension of spiritual significance.

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<sup>48</sup> Nikhilananda, n.47, p.89.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Rolland, n.40, 1970, edn., p.294.

### **Foundation of the Ramakrishna Mission**

It was to keep up the ideals preached by this noble soul and to rejuvenate the Indian society based on them that Swami Vivekananda established the twin institutions, the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 with Belur as its head quarters. Both these wings together came to be known as the *Ramakrishna Order of Monks*. Among the various factors that influenced the foundation of the Order, the influence of Sri Ramakrishna, Buddhist influence, influences of Christian monasteries and the Brahma Samaj, the first hand experience which Swamiji had during his travels in India during 1891-92 etc. are to be considered. But his conviction that in a country like India which had fallen into stupor under alien rule, no great cause could succeed without an organization, was what actually prompted him to found the Order. In other words, to awaken the nation from the age old slumber a machinery of dedicated and selfless sanyasins and lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna was needed. He organized the machinery of Ramakrishna Order with that conviction and it was quite natural that it should play a crucial role in the awakening of the nation. The rules and regulations governing the organization which contain its aims and objectives, and the activities it carried out indicate the role it played in strengthening the emerging national consciousness in India.

### **Uniqueness of the Movement**

The Ramakrishna Movement was unique in the sense that it represented India's inward quest for spiritual awakening. If the Brahmo movement of Rammohun Roy was an outcome of external influences emanating from the enlightenment and rationalism of modern West, the movement represented by Ramakrishna and his disciples was "the result of an inner resurgence of the Hindu spirit to recover and reassert itself".<sup>50</sup>

Secondly, though the Mission was organised on the Principle of Organization borrowed from the West, its main thrust was on social service, which is an integral part of nation building activity. When compared to other movements of the time, the Ramakrishna Order had its novelty in that it preached not only god-realisation, but also service to humanity. The concept of social service which was enjoined with the Order was a revolutionary concept. As Swami Tapasyananda has noted:

In India monks traditionally were expected to confine their activities exclusively to study, meditation and wanderings from one holy place to another. To engage oneself in activities of any other kind including work of service in the field of education.

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<sup>50</sup> P.N. Chopra and others, *A Social, Cultural and Economic History of India*, (Bombay, 1974), Vol. III, p.107.

health, etc. relating to worldly needs of men, was considered outside the pale of monastic ethics. It was in this respect that Swami Vivekananda produced a revolution by including active social service as a part of the Sanyasin's spiritual discipline.<sup>51</sup>

To ask the monks in India to approach service as a spiritual discipline was a revolutionary step. By creating this order with service as its central thrust, Swamiji gave monasticism a new meaning, a new dimension and a new dignity.

It may also be added that the Mission took up the work of social service basing it on Vedantic ideals. How the intellectuals of the time were struck by this new approach and tried to assess its significance is revealed in the editorial articles which appeared in Poona daily "Native Opinion" dt. 12 July 1900 which observed:

The work of the Ramakrishna Mission utterly proves the hollowness of the contention that the vedantic system of philosophy preaches a gospel of extreme selfishness. The members of the Ramakrishna Mission are vedantists to the hilt and in trying to relieve distress in a particular manner, they are simply following the noblest dictates of their creed. It is indeed difficult to conceive how a system, the corner-stone of which is

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<sup>51</sup> Swami Tapasyananda in his Foreword to Swami Akhandananda, *From Holy Wanderings to Service of God in Man*, Ramakrishna Math (Madras, 1979).

the oneness of life, can ever be charged with being selfish by those who have really understood its creed.<sup>52</sup>

It showed that the Mission was offering social service not in the conventional sense, its service was for the sake of service, demonstrating the truth that the same self is immanent in all beings.

It also indicates that Vedanta which had been viewed by Rammohun Roy as a "positive impediment to modernity and progress" or dismissed as a "false system of philosophy" by Vidya Sagar did stage a comeback towards the closing decades of the nineteenth century. It was through Ramakrishna Mission that Vedanta acquired a practical dimension.

Yet another feature of the Movement was its non-sectarian character. Though rooted firmly in ancient Hindu monastic ideals of chastity and absence of possession, the Ramakrishna Order was not committed to any particular creed, community or country. It stood for humanity itself. "Its source of strength is its universalism, its readiness to accept every thought, every emotion that comes from the pure spirit of man".<sup>53</sup> Moreover the movement proved itself to be a progressive one in the sense that it accepted both Indian tradition and Western science. Scientific

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<sup>52</sup> Cited in Sankari Prasad Basu, "Temple for Worship of the Virat" in *50 Golden Years, Selections from Annual Souvenirs*, R.K. Mission Seva Prathishtan, (Calcutta, 1982), pp.94-95.

<sup>53</sup> Lokeswarananda, Swami, "Ramakrishna Order of Monks: A New Orientation of Monasticism" in R.C. Majumdar, (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta, 1963), pp.440-41.

development was recognized by the Mission as a must, in view of its conviction that "you cannot speak religion to an empty stomach" as Ramakrishna used to say. So, to remove poverty and also to remove superstitions, the study of science was welcomed. The ideal of East-West Synthesis and Synthesis between spirituality and science as conceived by Rammohun Roy reached its consummation in the Ramakrishna Movement.

The Mission was unique also in its approach to the question of social reform. Quite distinct from the nineteenth century reform agencies like Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission did not take up social reforms as its programme of action. In fact the Mission was kept away from political activities and social reform through the discerning insight of Swami Vivekananda. His contention was that if individuals reformed themselves, there was no need of social reform. What was needed was to create a climate for the elimination of evils in society through "a man-making education" and "a man-making religion" – the two ideals which the Mission was entrusted to carry out. Similarly, Swamiji also believed that a national awakening would lead to the liberation of the country from colonial regime. The Mission's task was again, to work in this direction. Hence, no need of it directly involving in the political struggle for freedom. However, the Mission repudiated casteism in all its forms and untouchability in its all kinds of manifestation. By not keeping any distinction of caste either among the permanent

residents or among visitors and also by starting schools and hostels for the study of the Harijans and tribals, the Mission tried to fight such evils.

Finally, the process of regeneration in the nineteenth century "derived its main strength and support, not from emotional appeals to the masses of the common people, but from the sympathy of the rising educated classes".<sup>54</sup> The Ramakrishna Movement, too first worked among modern educated youths and through them went out in wider and wider circles. This resulted in a general uplifting of Indian masses.

A brief study of the unique features of the Ramakrishna Movement was attempted here, in order to show that it was these features which enabled the Mission to silently prepare the Indian mind for revolutionary social changes which became an integral part of national regeneration.

In general, the Indian awakening was the cumulative effect of various historical forces that were generated by colonialism. Yet, the Socio-Religious Movements had an unstinted role in creating national consciousness. Their significance lies in the fact that they embodied the democratic yearnings which the Indian nationalism felt from its birth. In varying degrees, these movements sought to eliminate privilege from social and religious fields to democratize social and religious institutions of the country to reform and dissolve such disruptive

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<sup>54</sup> C.F. Andrews, *The Renaissance in India, Its Missionary Aspect* (London, 1909), p.146.

institutions as caste which were obstacles to national unity. They sought to equal rights of all individuals irrespective of caste or sex. The reformers in general argued that such democratization of institutions and social relations was vitally necessary to build up a sound national unity to achieve political freedom and social, economic and cultural advancement of the Indian people.

Secondly during the period of the Religious Reform movements, the people of India began to look beyond the limits of India. The broader vision and comparative outlook which developed, awakened the people of India to a realisation of their achievements and capabilities. The Indian discovered himself anew and this discovery gave him hope and strength. This religious revival and the growth of national consciousness affected each other. As K.C. Vyas has observed, "the stream of socio-religious movements merged itself into the bigger stream of the national movement for the regeneration of India".<sup>55</sup>

### **The Awakening – A Process of Self-Renewal**

The above discussion on the Indian awakening leads us to an enquiry into the actual nature of the process. Rabindra Nath Tagore had once remarked that "the Indian nationalism was not fully political, but began to give voice to the mind of our people".<sup>56</sup> What he meant by this observation is that the national movement

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<sup>55</sup> Vyas, n.26, p.116.

<sup>56</sup> Rabindranath Tagore, *The Religion of An Artist* (Calcutta, 1993 ed.), p.2.

was directed to the search of India's national soul. In this search for national soul first effort was made in the socio-religious sphere and that involved a process of self-discovery and self-renewal.

A study of the Indian past will reveal the fact that Indian society has always kept itself alive by retaining most of its basic values and nature through a process of socio-cultural regeneration, revival and reconciliation. The forces of self-renewal have played a significant role in shaping and preserving Indian society whenever the country faced cultural crisis which often followed foreign invasions. During the Islamic invasions in the medieval period, the Bhakti movement kept the torch burning. Through this movement which implied religious awakening, the cultural potentiality of India was expressed itself. This movement of self preservation acted as the main force in keeping the Indian society alive and afresh under changed circumstances.<sup>57</sup> The cultural synthesis achieved under the Mughul Emperor Akbar, Prince Dara Shikoh and others was primarily an outcome of Hindu awakening.

But the process of self renewal received a temporary set back due to colonial intervention in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As a consequence of British occupation, the country came into grip with all the evils of colonial subjection. Under such

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<sup>57</sup> M.C. Joshi, "Self-Renewal in Indian History and Swami Vivekananda in *India's Contribution to World Culture – A Vivekananda Commemoration Volume* (Madras, 1970), p.698.

circumstances, the Indian society became helpless and developed an acute inferiority complex. The proselytizing activities of the Christian missionaries and their sharp attacks on most of the Hindu traditions, practices and beliefs, besides the sweeping current of western education, created doubts, distrust and aversion in the minds of the educated youth about many aspects of Hinduism. A process of de-Indianization commenced. The Hindu society for a while became totally perplexed as there was no one to lead and guide. It was at this time that the Socio-Religious movements took their origin. Under the pioneering leadership of Raj Rammohun Roy the renovation of Hinduism began. In fact, the self-renewal process got a restart with him. His propagation of Vedantic monotheism and Upanishadic liberalism through Brahma Samaj was an attempt in that direction. This process continued under Dayananda who revived the militant spirit in Hinduism besides a deep sense of nationalism. Other parallel movements of this period also contributed to the mainstream of social life, national awakening and modern Indian Renaissance. The consummation of this process reached in Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, who really succeeded in renewing the Hindu soul and reviving the noblest values of ancient Indian culture based on Universal Religion. In fact the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Doctrines combined the best elements of other reform movements and ensured allround progress of Indian society. How the self renewal process attained its fulfilment in the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement has been evaluated by Sri Aurobindo in the following words.

The movement associated with the great names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda has been a very wide synthesis of past religious motives and spiritual experience topped by a re-affirmation of the old asceticism and monasticism, but with new living strands in it and combined with a strong humanitarianism and zeal for missionary expansion.<sup>58</sup>

It was by propagating the ideals like unity, service and sacrifice and by inculcating a sense of pride in India's past that Ramakrishna Movement represented the culmination of the process of self renewal. Through this movement, ethical nationalism was recreated which indirectly paved the way for political liberation.

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<sup>58</sup> Aurobindo Ghose, *Renaissance in India* (Pondicherry, 1951), p.54.

# VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF EMERGING INDIA

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekananda : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

### CHAPTER III

## VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF EMERGING INDIA

The awakening of India in the nineteenth century infused into her people a new life and hope. The foundation for this new spirit of resurgence was laid by Swami Vivekananda the great nationalist, "the prophet and the patriot - monk"<sup>1</sup> of India. Though Swamiji was a spiritual leader, he was a true nationalist, a fire - brand of social revolution. A man of great vision, he believed that freedom or liberation would be the logical consequence of the awakening of the country. In 1890's itself he had envisioned the dawn of a New India (Modern India), how and what it should be.

According to Swamiji, future India would be the proud home not only of the advanced sections of Indian society, but also of its backward sections. As he put it:

Let new India arise . . . . out of the peasant's cottage grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from

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<sup>1</sup> This epithet well suits him. Vivekananda was endowed with a prophetic vision. A patriot of the first order, he defined what true patriotism was and the new definition of patriotism inspired many contemporary nationalists. He was also a monk who gave a new orientation to Indian asceticism by founding the Ramakrishna Order of Monks.

marts and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests,  
from hills and mountains.<sup>2</sup>

This concept of emerging India did have a profound impact on the social and political ideology of the freedom struggle.

The writings of Vivekananda clearly indicate that he came to have the vision of New India during his meditation at Kanyakumari. As his biographers have recorded, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in 1886, like many other disciples, Vivekananda went over the length and breadth of India as a Parivrajaka or wandering monk. During his travel he met the princes in their palaces and beggars in their huts. His travel was a great educational experience to him, since it enabled him to study the people of India, their very confusing customs, dogmas etc. He was deeply grieved to see the tragic face of real India, the millions of battered, bruised and broken men and women of his country. The travel also did enable him to meditate on the factors behind the degeneration of the country and the way for her regeneration. In fact his life as a wandering monk has immense significance for the reshaping of India's destiny in the modern age.

As recorded by his biographers, at the end of his journey Swamiji sat in meditation at the southern most tip of India, the rock at Kanyakumari. There emerged before his vision the past glory of India, the present degradation and the

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<sup>2</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta, 1979), VII, p.327.

future eminence. To quote the words of Swami Vivekananda from a letter written by him after the Parliament of Religions. ". . . . At Cape Comerin sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan".<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to say that sitting on the last stone of India, he passed into meditation upon the present and future of his country. He sought for the root cause of her downfall and with the vision of a seer he understood "why India had been thrown from the pinnacle of the glory to the depth of degradation".<sup>4</sup> In those moments, he thought not of Bengal, or of Maharashtra or of Punjab but of INDIA and of its very life. The letter further reads that the whole history of India unfolded before his vision and he became identified as it were with the achievements and failures, sorrows and triumphs of his motherland. Her past glory and continued existence through milleniums filled him with inspiration, but her present condition filled him with dismay and dejection. Yet presently future filled him with hope.<sup>5</sup>

An important discovery of Vivekananda was that in spite of diversities, there was a spirit of unity underlying in Indian culture, which the foreign rule was trying to undermine. He saw her greatness and weakness as well, the central evil of which was that the nation had lost its individuality.

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Swami Ramakrishnanada, cited in Vivekananda, C.W., VI, p.250.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

It has been remarked that it was during his meditation on the rock at Kanyakumari that Swami Vivekananda discovered his mission in life, which was to dedicate himself to the regeneration of India, to reawaken her from her long slumber. And this reawakening was to be the real good not only to herself but also to the whole world as awakened India was to be a complete synthesis of the past and the present, of the East and the West.

For the enlightenment or realization which Swamiji got at Kanyakumari, he has been called the Second Buddha, because he emerged from his meditation with the same determination which impelled Buddha 2500 years ago to preach his great gospel - "for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many - "Bahujana hitaya, bahujana sukhaya". In other words he realized the need of dedicating the vast reservoir of India's spiritual energy to the urgent work of the social, economic, cultural and all-round betterment of the millions of her people. Meditation combined with action resulting in the evolution of a perfect national character i.e., synthesis of spiritual strength with modern scientific and technical efficiency was the need of the hour. There is no doubt that his vision of a reconstructed and revitalized Indian Society was born in those moments of his meditation at Kanyakumari.

### **INDIA'S DEGRADATION**

It has been noted that his parikrama or tour of the country was a great educational experience for him. "Like a medical doctor with gifted clinical eyes

and experience" Swamiji diagnosed the root causes of the ailments from which India was suffering.

### **Neglect of the Masses**

A humanist to the bottom of his heart, Vivekananda attributed the most important reason for India's degradation to the neglect of the masses. He considered neglect of the masses a "national sin".<sup>6</sup> His concern for the poor is revealed in a number of letters written by him from America to the monks of the Ramakrishna Mission in India. In one of these letters he said:

The peasants, the weavers and the rest who constituted the lower classes in India have always been uncared for by the conquerors as well as by the so called upper caste. From time immemorial these classes have been working silently without getting the remuneration for their labours.<sup>7</sup>

He further stated:

The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help - they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and

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<sup>6</sup> C.W., V, p.152.

<sup>7</sup> C.W., VIII, p.538.

lower every day, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society and they do not know whence the blow comes.<sup>8</sup>

The egalitarian outlook of Vivekananda and his sympathy for the labouring classes of India are well revealed here. No other reformer of the period has held the upper classes responsible for the degradation of the masses as Swamiji did. By an analytical study of the particular social situation, Swamiji came to the conclusion that the main trouble in India was the loss of her individuality as a nation and that the lost individuality could be restored only by raising the masses. Thus the regeneration of India depended upon the upliftment of the masses who had been practically reduced to the position of slaves. Swamiji pointed out that no amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India were educated and well cared for.

### **Monopoly of Education**

Another factor which Vivekananda ascribed to the fall of the nation was the "monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by the dint of pride and royal authority among a handful of men".<sup>9</sup> Education had been denied to the common man. Lack of education made the Indian masses illiterate and diffident. This faithlessness and the resultant sense of inferiority made the Indians

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<sup>8</sup> *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram (Mayavati, 1970), p.140.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p.338.

incapable of resisting the foreign attacks. According to him the main reason why it was easy for the English to conquer India was because they were a nation while Indians were not. India lacked educated men, according to his evaluation. He remarked:

A nation of 30 millions has the smallest field of recruiting its great ones compared with nations of thirty, forty or sixty millions, because the number of educated men and women in those nations is so great . . . . This is the great defect in our nation and must be removed.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike other reformers of the time, Vivekananda realized the need of rectifying this great defect from which the nation suffered. Dissemination of true knowledge alone will restore self-confidence among the masses. With self confidence will come self-respect and thereby the lost individuality of the nation could be restored.

### **Religious Oppression**

From his wide travel which gave him an opportunity to witness every aspect of Indian life, Vivekananda came to the conclusion that religion was the very blood and life and spirit of India's millions, but it was being practised in a wrong manner. In fact it was mass oppression in the name of religion that was taking place. He

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<sup>10</sup> C.W., VIII, pp.306-307.

pointed out that "no religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism".<sup>11</sup>

An important discovery of Vivekananda was that religion was not the cause of India's downfall, but the fact that true religion was nowhere followed. For, religion when dynamic would be the most potent of all powers. It is true that India had produced big leaders in the past; but for the past two thousand years, they were discussing only trivial matters like "whether to take food with the right hand or the left, whether to take water from the right hand side or from the left".<sup>12</sup> Swamiji wondered whether such a country did not go to ruin, what else would be. So it was this kind of attitude on the part of the masters which paved the way for India's subjectification by alien power. In his opinion religion should answer social needs; Religion should address the problems of the masses. Religion should be scientific and reasonable. Further, he was convinced that since Religion was the very blood and life of India, Indian regeneration would be possible only through the renewal and restoration of true religions. i.e., dynamic religion. The kind of religion which India needed was Dynamic Religion. He made it clear in a letter that he wrote to Sister Nivedita on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1897:

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<sup>11</sup> C.W., IV, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> Swami Nirvedananda (compiled), *Swami Vivekananda on India and Her Problems* (Calcutta, 1992), p.24.

In India lectures and teachings cannot do any good . . . . India shall rise only through the renewal and restoration of that highest spiritual consciousness which has made of India at all times the cradle of the Nations and the cradle of the Faith.<sup>13</sup>

The point needs an explanation. Swamiji was fully convinced that the main current in Indian life was religion and that India was sure to gain her lost stature in the comity of nations through the force of religion, the mainstay of Indian culture. Therefore he stressed the point that before her political and social emancipation, India needed religious upheaval. In the words of Vivekananda "before flooding India with socialistic and political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas".<sup>14</sup> His attitude to religion was marked by liberalism, humanism and a refreshing boldness. His concept of religion was free from dogmatism, ritualism, racialism and communalism. So when he spoke of "deluging the land, with spiritual ideas", what he meant was that the ancient wisdom of Indian thought and the spiritual heritage assimilated from elements drawn from various sources like the Upanishads, the Gita, the Ramayana and the Mahabharatam must be translated into

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<sup>13</sup> C.W., VIII, Epistles, p.407.

<sup>14</sup> C.W., III, p.221.

the service of the poor and the ignorant millions of countrymen. He regarded religion as a weapon for social and moral regeneration of India.<sup>15</sup>

### **Laziness and Meanness**

With the true instinct of a psychologist, Vivekananda studied the mind of Indians and came to the conclusion that the general character of the Indians was to a great extent responsible for the degradation of the country. The general character of the Indians was described by Vivekananda in these words:

We would do nothing ourselves and would scoff at others who try to do something. That is the bane that has brought our downfall as a nation. Want of sympathy and lack of energy are at the root of all misery and you must therefore give these two up . . . . Let all have opportunities and leave the rest to the Lord. It is indeed very difficult to have an equal love for all, but without it there is no Mukti.<sup>16</sup>

According to him, "speaking parrot like and doing nothing" had become a habit with the Indians and he believed that this sort of weak brain was not able to

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<sup>15</sup> For details see in Reply to the Maharaja of Khetri in Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, IV, p.324.

<sup>16</sup> C.W., VI, p.357.

do anything and therefore it had to be strengthened. Moreover, everyone in India, irrespective of caste, class or creed must be given opportunities to grow himself.

### **Lack of Organizing Capacity**

One of the original observations of Vivekananda was that the faculty of organizing capacity was entirely absent in the nature of Indians. But this had to be infused, because it was this shortcoming which again gave an incentive to foreigners to invade the country in the past. His evaluation as to why the Indians, in spite of their numerical strength, were subjugated by the British, is worthy of note. To quote him:

why that forty millions of Englishmen rule three hundred millions of people here? What is the psychological explanation? These forty millions put their wills together and that means infinite power and you three hundred millions have a will separate from the other. Therefore to make great future of India, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power and coordination of wills.<sup>17</sup>

According to him foreign conquerors were fully aware of the unwillingness on the part of Indians to make a common cause and they exploited this weakness to

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<sup>17</sup> C.W., VII, p.250.

their advantage. If the Indians wanted to make a great future of their country, he believed that they must learn to organize themselves.

### **Exclusiveness**

In his opinion one important reason for the degeneration of India was India's isolation from the rest of the world for the last few centuries. This had narrowed her views and narrowed the scope of her actions. In a speech which he made at Madras in 1897 he said:

Perhaps a factor contributing to India's misery and downfall has been that she narrowed herself, went into her shell as the oyster does and refused to give the life giving truths to the thirsting nations outside the Aryan fold. That has been the one great cause; that we did not go out that we did not compare notes with other nations . . . .<sup>18</sup>

A thorough study of the past led Swamiji to analyse the reasons for the isolation. According to him, ancient India had never shut her doors against noble ideas, since her ideal was the great Rigvedic mantra - "Let noble thoughts come to us from every side". But it was sad that the very same country later narrowed her views and built a wall of customs of isolation round herself. Swamiji ascribed the

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<sup>18</sup> C.W., III, p.317.

abandonment of this ideal to a spirit of hatred of others developed in India, with the passage of time. To quote him:

To my mind the one great cause of the downfall and degeneration of India was the building of a wall of customs, whose foundation was hatred of others, round the nation and the real aim of which in ancient times was to prevent the Hindus from coming into contact with the surrounding Buddhist nations.<sup>19</sup>

To Vivekananda, the isolation finally resulted in the degeneration of the isolating country.

### **Neglect of Women**

Swamiji observed that two great evils that existed in India were "trampling on the women and grinding the poor through caste restrictions". Women in India remained a depressed and backward section in the society for several centuries. In his opinion ill-treatment of women was one of the greatest sins of India. Analysing the then prevailing situation in the country, he remarked "why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because Sakti<sup>20</sup> is held in

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<sup>19</sup> Nirvedananda, n.12, p.28.

<sup>20</sup> The concept of *Sakti*, the female representation of infinite energy took deep roots in India in the Vedic age. According to this concept, woman is the symbol of universal motherhood. This elevation of womanhood to the status of divinity is unique to Hinduism.

dishonour there".<sup>21</sup> Women in ancient India occupied a prominent place in the intellectual field, but later they were relegated to an inferior position by denying them equal rights with men in education and in knowledge of scriptures. This situation should however change. He believed that no country or nation that does not respect its women can become great. In his opinion there is no hope of rise for that family or country where "there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness".<sup>22</sup>

### **THE QUESTION OF REGENERATION**

The fact that India had degenerated over the centuries did not make him a pessimist. Swamiji was an optimist and as Tagore has remarked, "everything was positive in him". With his keen eyes, he had studied the conditions of India and with a prophet's vision he foresaw the emergence of an awakened India. To his mind, what had happened in India was that the land was being exploited on all sides. Indian culture was not receiving its due share of appreciation from foreigners and even from Indians. The common people were a sunken mass. To the superficial eyes it appeared that this giant tree of India would soon wither and perish. But in reality, all this gloom on the Indian surface had not affected in the least the roots of its existence. The sap was still strong in India's plant. A passing

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<sup>21</sup> Letters, n.8, p.181.

<sup>22</sup> C.W., VII, p.213.

mist had just spread itself over the foliage. It will disappear soon and the light will come again.

Swamiji believed that India had a glorious past and she will have a glorious future. The stupor to which she had fallen was only a temporary phase in her history. "She will be awakened and will be seated on her eternal throne rejuvenated more glorious than she ever was".<sup>23</sup>

Swamiji had an obsession for the past of India because "India's future is to take shape from that background". He also believed that out of the consciousness of our past greatness we must build an India yet greater than what she has been. Periods of decadence there have been, but out of these India emerged always as something greater, as a mighty tree from a decadent fruit.

He assessed the Indian situation in the following words:

A mighty tree produces a beautiful ripe fruit. That fruit falls on the ground, it decays and rots and out of that decay springs the root and the future tree, perhaps mightier than the first one. This period of decay through which we have passed, was all the more necessary. Out of this decay is coming the India of the future. It

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<sup>23</sup> Letters, 1976 edn., pp.168-69.

is sprouting, its first leaves are already out and a mighty gigantic tree is here, already beginning to appear.<sup>24</sup>

The interpretation that he made of India's decline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was aimed at arousing a slumbering sub-continent. An awakened India with a "still more glorious" future was his dream. But how was it possible to awaken her? A lover of suffering humanity, he believed that India would wake up again, if any one could love with all his heart the people of the country, "the poor, ignorant masses of India".

He expressed his firm faith in the emergence of an awakened India, in these lines:

I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country - bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, ever starved, quarrelsome and envious. Then only will India awake when hundreds of large hearted men and women giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their country men who are

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<sup>24</sup> C.W., III, p.287.

gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance.<sup>25</sup>

The above passage indicates that India's national regeneration depended upon the upliftment of the masses. A real patriot is one who loved the masses, who engaged oneself in uplifting them.

### **Upliftment of the Masses**

Swamiji believed that the awakening of India was possible only with the upliftment of the masses. He had always felt that the real strength of the country lay in the masses. He discovered that millions of the poor, not the few rich of the upper classes constituted the backbone of the Indian society. No plan to liberate the country would succeed unless the power of the masses was harnessed to that cause.

More than any other nationalist of the time, Swamiji loved the masses with his whole heart and soul, with an intense sincere devotion that was absolutely unselfish. In his speeches and writings, he made clear of the necessity of a dedicated programme of action for them. With unflinching vigour and never damped enthusiasm he exhorted all to take up his supreme and sublime vow of service of the masses as divine duty. According to him the greatest service that one could do

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<sup>25</sup> Letter written to Smt. Sarala Ghoshal, Editor of *Bharati* on 6 April, 1897. See details in C.W. Vol.IV, pp.481-487.

for them was to educate them, so that they might develop their lost individuality killed by the tyranny of priests and foreign conquests. He stated:

They (masses) are to be given ideas, their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them, and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man and woman must work out their own salvation . . . . Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallisation comes in the law of nature.<sup>26</sup>

### **Role of Education**

A keen observer, Vivekananda linked the degradation of Indian society with the denial of education to the masses. And he discovered that education was the panacea for the ills of society like poverty and illiteracy. Once the light of education is given to the downtrodden masses, they will wake up, realise their problems and fight for their rights and remedies. So the watchword of Swamiji for the uplift of the masses of India was education. He gave expression to his ideas on it in a letter:

Education, education, education alone! . . . . I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses . . . . Through education

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<sup>26</sup> C.W., VIII, p.307.

comes faith in one's own self and through faith in one's own self, the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant.<sup>27</sup>

Education should also make the masses self reliant. "All the wealth of the world cannot help on a little Indian village if the people are not to help themselves".<sup>28</sup> i.e., Vivekananda considered self help as the best help. Any kind of assistance to an individual will be of no avail unless he becomes self-reliant, for, only a self reliant man can solve his problems by himself. Therefore he proposed a scheme of education which would enable the society to solve its own problems.

But Vivekananda was alive to the fact that poverty was a great hindrance to the path of education. The poor boys preferred to go to the field to work with their parents instead of going to schools. Even free education would not serve any purpose for them, because due to extreme poverty they were compelled to earn their bread themselves. In such a hopeless condition Vivekananda thought of another grand plan to educate the poor boys of the country. He said that if the poor boys would not come to school, education must go to their huts. He observed thus:

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<sup>27</sup> Letters, n.8, pp.328-29. Also see C.W., IV, pp.482-83.

<sup>28</sup> C.W., VII, p.504.

Now if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him.<sup>29</sup>

This work of educating the poor, he thought, would be taken up by thousands of single minded self sacrificing Sanyasins in India going from village to village teaching religion. They would go from place to place, from door to door not only preaching but also teaching secular matters.

This was his practical plan for educating the poor people of India. He suggested this programme with the full conviction that "the nation lives in the cottage". There were reformers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century India, who pondered over the ills of society, but no one did think of a radical and practical solution for them as Swamiji did.

Again, at a time when other reformers were advocating piece-meal reforms, Vivekananda came out with a still loftier ideal. He called the people not to dabble in petty social and religious reforms but to strike at the root - the source of all social problems. His earnest craving was for the uprising of the lowly. And for this, the masses should be educated. The ideal which he placed before his country men was, "not a petty-bourgeoisie moderate aim of social reform, but it was an advanced

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<sup>29</sup> C.W., IV, p.363.

social revolutionary programme."<sup>30</sup> By his programme of social reconstruction, he sought not only temporary relief or amelioration for the suffering masses, instead a thorough social transformation, to be heralded by the masses themselves in the Renascent India.

### **Emancipation of Women**

The Indian women of the Nineteenth century led a cloistered existence, subsisting on whatever her husband provided and having almost no freedom of expression and action. The age-old repressive social systems like child marriage, dowry system, the taboo against widow marriage, unfair property inheritance laws etc. ,had worsened the lot of women-folk in this land. It was into this darkness that Swami Vivekananda stepped in "like the autumn sunbeam, with a freshness of wild mountain flowers"<sup>31</sup> and redefined India's age-old ideals of womanhood. He did not consider the condition of women as an isolated social issue, instead, he regarded it as intimately connected with the well-being of society as a whole. Sister Nivedita has recorded that Swamiji had once reminded her "Never forget the words women and the people".<sup>32</sup> This indicates that the backwardness of women and the people in general made Swamiji restless. Therefore, to him, upliftment of masses

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<sup>30</sup> B.N.Datta, *Swami Vivekananda - Patriot Prophet: A Study* (Calcutta, 1993 edn.), p.137.

<sup>31</sup> Padma Ghatgir, "Vivekananda's Ideas of Womanhood" in *Swami Vivekananda - A Hundred years since Chicago: A Commemorative Volume* (Howrah, 1994), p.343.

<sup>32</sup> Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him*, Udbodhan Office (Calcutta, 1972), p.280.

meant upliftment of women also and national regeneration depended upon the upliftment of these sections.

Swamiji's great objection to the treatment of women as second-class citizens was based on two fundamental convictions. The first was his firm belief that all distinctions between individuals based on gender were, from the highest point of view, untenable.<sup>33</sup> The second reason why Swamiji was so passionate about improving the condition of women goes back to his old quarrel with *adhikaravada*. According to the exclusive practices of *adhikaravada*, women of all castes were lumped together with Sudras and thus were denied access to the sacred scriptures and forbidden to enjoy certain other religious privileges, such as taking the vows of Sanyasa. Swamiji considered such treatment neither fair nor in accordance with the authoritative writings of Hinduism.<sup>34</sup> In fact, he often spoke of the establishment of a monastery for women as being of a higher priority than one for men.<sup>35</sup>

### **Method of Emancipation**

Swamiji's attitude towards the question of women's emancipation was expressed in a letter written to Swami Ramakrishnananda:

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<sup>33</sup> As a philosopher monk, he was convinced that every one was in reality non different from the One Universal Self.

<sup>34</sup> See details in the Conversation between Swamiji and Sarat Chandra Chakravarti in C.W., VII, pp.214-15.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.482. Swamiji's desire for starting a monastery for women was fulfilled in 1954 with the founding of Sree Sarada Mission in Belur.

There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing.<sup>36</sup>

What he pointed out was that as a bird with only one wing cannot fly, similarly a nation with her women in shackles could make no progress.

His attitude towards women's rights was very much the same as his attitude towards all social questions. i.e. Help the weaker sections to help themselves. Help should be given only in removing the obstacles impeding progress. Education should be offered when necessary; then "hands off". In a lecture delivered in Madras in 1897 he observed:

Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong if any one of you dares to say "I will work out the salvation of this woman or child . . . . Who are you to solve women's problems? . . . . Hands off! They will solve their own problems."<sup>37</sup>

The above exhortation reveals that for the emancipation of women, Vivekananda laid more emphasis on the growth of education and self dependency among them than on specific social reforms because education will enable them to know what is

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<sup>36</sup> C.W., VI, p.328.

<sup>37</sup> C.W., III, p.246.

good for them and what is bad. The evils like child marriage could be eliminated if women were given proper education. Swamiji had great faith in women whom he regarded as symbols of *Sakti*. And he believed that if they were given opportunities and training, they would be able to do great things for the society and nation as well.

Thus, the liberation and education of women in Vivekananda's view was most crucial for national development. But at the same time he held that it had to be for all women, particularly the lower castes. Swamiji's keen perception led him to arrive at the conclusion that in thinking about women many reformers failed to look outside their own social groups. Unlike these reformers, Swamiji wanted that emancipation should start from the level of the masses. As he had said, "put the fire at the level of the masses and let it burn upward and make an Indian nation". In other words, emancipation should aim at raising the lower to the higher.

Though he had been highly impressed by the social independence and freedom of American women, the ideal woman of future India as envisioned by Swamiji was the one who could emulate the greatness of Sita, Savitri, Gargi and Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi, each of them representing higher and noble

virtues.<sup>38</sup> Indian women should make themselves models of high idealism based on spiritual excellence, practical efficiency and dynamism.

Vivekananda's ideas on gender justice had a profound impact on the Women's Emancipation Movement in India where feminism and nationalism were closely interlinked. During the long drawn out struggle against colonialism "Indian women established their moral right to equality".<sup>39</sup> As women took to political activity, many of the taboos and restrictions which had been placed on them were either lifted or overlooked. Women were accepted as political comrades and were given equal opportunities for participation in the freedom struggle.

### **Religion and the Masses**

In his scheme of national regeneration, religion occupied the premier place.

He had stated:

The problems of India are more complicated, more momentous than the problems in any other country. Race, religion, language, government - all these together make a nation . . . . Therefore a first plank in the making of a future India . . . . is the unification

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<sup>38</sup> The special ideal of Indian womanhood according to him was Sita (of Ramayana) - "purer than purity itself, all patience and all suffering". But at the same time, he wanted Indian women to acquire the intellectual brilliance of Gargi (of vedic time), the spiritual resources of Savitri (of Purana) and the physical prowess of Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi.

<sup>39</sup> B.R. Nanda, *Indian Women from Purdah to Modernity* (New Delhi, 1976), p.xi.

of religion . . . . I do not mean to say that political or social improvements are not necessary, but what I mean is this . . . . that religion is primary.<sup>40</sup>

By unification of religion, he meant the union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune. Swamiji insisted that "for the well-being of our race, we must give up all our little quarrels and differences. National union in India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune".<sup>41</sup>

According to him "every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion". In his travels he found that for the uplift of the nation it was necessary to energise the masses which could be achieved only through religion, rejuvenated and revitalized by infusing Vedantic ideas.

Now the question arises as to what he meant by revitalization and why he wanted to revitalize religion. Vivekananda stressed the point that,

Each nation has its own past, peculiarity and individuality with which it is born. Each represents as it were, one peculiar note in this harmony of nations and this is its very life, its vitality. In it is

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<sup>40</sup> *Selections from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashram (Calcutta, 1993 edn.), p.278.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

the backbone, the foundation and the bed rock of national life.

Similarly in each nation as in music there is a main note a central theme, upon which all others turn. Everything else is secondary.

India's theme is religion. Everything else is secondary.<sup>42</sup>

He pointed out that the central theme in each nation was different. For some it may be economic, for some others it may be politics or social life. In the case of India it was religion and it formed "the very core of the national heart".<sup>43</sup> The religion was the backbone and the life centre. Therefore he reiterated that India's salvation lay in the revitalization of this life centre. By revitalization he meant making the religion more meaningful and practical. He wanted a religion which would "give us faith in ourselves, a national self-respect and the power to feed and educate the poor and relieve the misery around us".

In his speeches Swamiji had outlined and explained a religious revival encompassing all the religious communities aimed at achieving a common national goal. The importance of his plan of revitalization of religion lies in the fact that "in

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<sup>42</sup> C.W., III, p.148.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.204.

an age when religion was acting as a divisive factor, Swami Vivekananda sought to use religion as a binding force for an all Indian nationalist upsurge".<sup>44</sup>

But when religion was referred to be used for awakening the masses, Vivekananda was well aware of the fact that any such action plan should have a populist strategy. A well thought-out and clearly spelt-out strategy for the purpose was made public by him in 1894.<sup>45</sup> This strategy contained among other things, the following aspects:

1. to raise some money,
2. to build a small lecture hall in an area inhabited by poor and low-caste people
3. the hall would be used to arrange public lectures with magic lanterns and other necessary aids on religion, geography, astronomy, etc.
4. to raise and train a group of young men who would disseminate the message of national awakening far and wide, and
5. the ultimate goal would be to awaken the common masses.

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<sup>44</sup> Anwar Husain, "Swami Vivekananda and Mass Awakening in India" in *Swami Vivekananda - A Hundred years since Chicago: A Commemorative Volume* (Howrah, 1994), p.771.

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Alasinga Perumal dated 28 May 1894 in *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1998 edn.), p.108.

He insisted that persons spearheading such a missionary work have to be selfless workers and not self-seeking leaders. The scheme reveals a comprehensive idea of mass mobilization as enunciated by Swami Vivekananda. In a society where religion was a potent driving force, it was a perfect strategy to start a programme with religious teachings for the common man. Such teachings were aimed at exposing the illiterate people to the real meaning and purpose of religion. Another aspect of this strategy is to stress the role of young and dedicated workers. Finally the essential qualities of the required type of leaders were also indicated. The letter contained a cautionary note for his colleagues in the following words: "Do not try to lead your brethren, but serve them".<sup>46</sup>

It may be noted that when Vivekananda spoke of religion as a means for regenerating India, emphasis was placed on the inner and real message of religion as a catalyst for national unity and awakening.

### **Swamiji's Concept of Social Change**

Swamiji was one who summoned the new India into existence and he foresaw revolutionary social changes taking place in modern India, and not just a few "cosmetic" or "ornamental" reforms and adjustments. He also foresaw that that was going to be a tumultuous experience and not an easy change-over. And he welcomed that prospect, for he knew that for achieving nation wide and total

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

human development, that was vitally needed. In the course of his lecture on *My Plan of Campaign* delivered in Madras in 1897, he specially referred to this prospect of revolutionary change ahead. To quote him:

To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root and branch reform . . . . I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth.<sup>47</sup>

Vivekananda had a clear idea of the kind of social change that was needed in India. He had seen the impact of the social reform movement in first hand, during his travels in India and was convinced that the motives and methods of the movement were fundamentally wrong. He admitted that the reformers had been well intentioned. But he pointed out that "the one hundred years of social reform has produced no permanent and valuable result".<sup>48</sup> The reform did not produce lasting result because the reformers were merely imitating the West. They had copied blindly the western means and methods of altering society. Moreover they had adopted destructive rather than constructive attitude towards the Hindu social institutions. In their zeal for reform they wanted to demolish all that was old and traditional and blamed religion for all the social ills. This they did in imitation of

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<sup>47</sup> C.W., III, p.213.

<sup>48</sup> Selections, n.40, p.210.

the west. Swamiji warned the early reformers against imitating the West, as imitations of other societies will never pay; on the contrary they will sap the national vitality. His advice was to assimilate what is good and viable in other traditions, but one should not barter away the soul. In his words "we should not merely approve what the west approves and what the west rejects. For instance . . . the west condemns image worship and so we also reject it as sinful."<sup>49</sup> In this message, he reminded that the question of capital importance is whether the mere disapproval of the westerners be the measure of abomenableness of our customs and manners. Whether these customs are to be rejected or not, is to be decided by the Indians themselves after judging their merits and demerits.

Another point to be noted in connection with the sort of social change advocated by Vivekananda is that he was against reforms affecting only narrow sphere of society's life. He criticised the crying inadequacy of the kind of reforms advocated by the reformers of his time i.e., half-hearted measures and the begging of favours from the colonialists to solve cardinal social (and political) problems of the age. Most of the reforms that had been agitated for during the nineteenth century had been ornamental and every one of these reforms only touched a small section in the society. The question of widow marriage would not touch seventy percent of the Indian women, and all such questions only reached the higher castes

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Also see Swami Vivekananda, *Modern India* (Calcutta, 1982 edn.), pp.84-85.

of Indian people who were educated and that too at the expense of the masses. He observed:

You talk of social reform. But what do you do? All that you mean by your social reform is either widow remarriage or female emancipation or something of that sort . . . . Such a scheme of reform may be good to a few no doubt, but of what avail is that to the whole nation?<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to such half-hearted reforms affecting only narrow spheres of society's life, Vivekananda sought to put up cardinal demand for a change in the condition of working masses. He wanted the reformers of the time to think of giving the masses their rights. In the place of miserly reforms which they advocated, Swamiji called for "root and branch reform"<sup>51</sup> or "a comprehensive reform" which will benefit all sections of society. Such a reform was radical in nature.

When he spoke of a radical reform, he meant a revolutionary change in the social system. He put it in these words: "you must go to the basis of the thing, to the very root of the matter. That is what I call radical reform".<sup>52</sup> For his views, he was a revolutionary rather than a reformer. His advocacy of revolutionary changes

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<sup>50</sup> C.W., III, p.213.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.316.

<sup>52</sup> C.W., V, p.215.

in the social system was based on a clear understanding of the active role which the masses played in the historical development of India. This is shown in particular by his statement that the influence of the Brahmin, the prowess of the Kshatriya and the wealth of the Vaisya are possible only thanks to the physical work of the Sudra. It is they that formed the true body of any society. Vivekananda was the first reformer to see with his unerring insight that the upper classes prospered at the expense of the physical labour of the Sudras.

Swamiji had a clear vision as to who will launch and lead the social revolution in India. According to him "the new order of things is the salvation of the people by the people".<sup>53</sup> He held that the people themselves should decide whether certain things were evil or not. It is not for a few men to decide it. He observed:

A few men who think that certain things are evil will not make a nation move . . . . First educate the nation, create your legislative body and then the law will be forthcoming. First create the power, the sanction from which the law will spring . . . . the new power of the people.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> C.W., III, pp.215-216.

<sup>54</sup> C.W., VII, p.149.

The above observation points to the role of the enlightened masses in bringing progressive changes in society. Vivekananda's ideal was progress and it could be achieved by any society only by following a constructive method. For any social reform to be effective and successful, the people must be educated first. In other words, a strong healthy public opinion has to be created before any social reform is introduced. A reform that is enforced without the cooperation and understanding of the people is bound not only to fail, but to produce adverse effects. By making this observation, Swamiji had drawn the reformers' attention to the source of the country's strength viz., the masses.

Swamiji also had his own views on the nature of social change that was to take place in India ie. Should the social change be violent or peaceful? He maintained that strength should be the medicine which the poor must have when they are tyrannised by the rich. He also foresaw that the lower classes were gradually awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, to exact their legitimate dues. In European countries this section had already awakened and started fighting. As early as 1897 he wrote to one of his disciples "signs of this awakening have shown themselves in India too as is evident from the number of strikes among the lower classes now a days".<sup>55</sup> He also made it clear that in future India a situation would come where the upper class would no longer be able to repress the lower. Moreover the well being of the higher classes lay in helping the

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.149.

lower to get their legitimate rights. Therefore he asked the upper classes to set themselves to the task of spreading education among the masses and tell them and make them understand that the masses "are our brothers – a part and parcel of our bodies and we love you and never hate you . . . ." <sup>56</sup> Vivekananda gave a warning to the upper classes that it was their duty to arouse the lower classes from slumber by imparting learning and culture to them. Thus in future India, Swamiji dreamt of an ideal society where the relation between upper classes and lower classes would be based on mutual understanding, friendship and harmony.

The above discussion of Swamiji's concept of social change leads us to the following conclusion. His attitude towards reform was no "piece-meal reform" but "root and branch reform". Evils will eliminate themselves when circumstances behind them are identified and removed. Again, one could not change society by deliberate attempts at change, for social change has its own laws. All that one could do was to create a consciousness for change through service, example and propoganda and leave it to people to work out their own destiny.

### **Views on Caste**

Vivekananda's vision of future India was a country free from the inequalities of caste. In his scheme of social reconstruction, he gave serious attention to the problem of caste since it was a vexed question throughout the nineteenth century.

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the original observations of Vivekananda was that the evil like caste privileges has nothing to do with religion, instead, it is a political and social ill. He boldly declared that "beginning from Buddha down to Rammohan Roy, everyone made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste together and failed".<sup>57</sup> Religion has no business to interfere in social matters as it "aims at realization of the universal unity". In the same way, caste cannot be held responsible for multiplying distinctions and privileges. Therefore, to him it was not religion which was responsible for the sorry state of things, but the misapplication of religion to social problems.

What is unique about Swamiji's attitude to the question of caste is that he has spoken so much about the nature and role of castes in such great depth and detail. Further, he based his opinions on this institution on the deep study of Hindu society and religion, from its vedic to modern times. In fact, through his deep study, he revealed the secret of caste, its true meaning and its power for good. He had also cautioned against the danger of the current false views about caste. What receives our attention is his approach to the question of caste which is entirely different from that of his contemporaries. The solution which he suggested was also marked for its uniqueness and originality. Let us analyse these points one by one.

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<sup>57</sup> Letters, n.8, p.42.

## **True Meaning of Caste**

The principle underlying caste, according to Swamiji, is the following. The word caste stands for 'Jati' in Sanskrit. The original idea of Jati was the freedom of the individual to express his nature. And so it remained for thousands of years. To explain this point further, the original idea behind the caste arrangement in India was that every individual should have the freedom to express his nature, his prakruti. Every individual chose his occupation according to his aptitude which can be characterised as Gunas like Sattva, Rajas and Tamas.<sup>58</sup> In other words castes carry on their function in accordance with their gunas or psychological nature. Thus Swamiji suggests that caste represents individuality, variety or diversity which is the real principle underlying it. The principle of harmony based on a division of labour characterises the Indian caste in its ideal form.

## **No Privilege**

Swamiji interpreted that according to the original idea of caste there is no privilege based on birth. There is no question of superiority and inferiority. Mending shoes is as valuable as reading Vedas. There is no privilege for any one. The chances to rise are equal for all. The position of Sudra and that of a Brahmin under the caste system was defined by Swamiji in the following words:

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<sup>58</sup> Sattva (goodness) – characterised by pleasure and illumination. Rajas (passion) – characterised by pain and actuation. Tamas (darkness or dullness) – characterised by indifference and restraint. The characterisation of the gunas is primarily in terms of psychic states or effective conditions.

I can perform one duty in social life and you another; you can govern a country and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes you are clever in reading Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head.<sup>59</sup>

In this sense caste is a natural order with an emphasis on the performance of one's duty in social life.<sup>60</sup> Under this arrangement the so called lower caste's upward mobility was fully open because of the freedom to choose one's vocation.

A historical study of the evolution of caste system led Swamiji to conclude that the so called higher castes, superarrogated themselves a purely mythical excellence of birth, converted a flexible and continuously fluctuating arrangement into a rigid scheme of division based on accidental circumstances i.e., with birth as the sole criterion, privileges were grabbed by the upper classes. The religion of the day sanctioned untouchability, what Vivekananda calls "Don't Touchism". Thus with its narrow outlook and separatist tendency, caste has become the "greatest

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<sup>59</sup> C.W., III, p.245.

<sup>60</sup> His statement that caste is a natural order is supported by historical facts. While narrating the history of the Mauryas, Will Durant has recorded that Megasthenese the Greek ambassador was struck by the "absence of slavery" in India of his time. Durant has quoted him saying that though the population was divided into castes according to occupation, it accepted these divisions as natural and tolerable. See details in Will Durant, *Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage* (New York, 1954 edn.), Part I, p.441.

dividing factor".<sup>61</sup> According to Swamiji it was the monopoly of privilege especially the privilege of spirituality which paved the way for the inhuman practice of segregation.

Though convinced that the days of exclusive privileges and claims were no longer relevant, Vivekananda did not recommend the abolition of the system or a class conflict. He admitted that the caste system had some defects. But at the same, he believed that it had some merits or advantages also and merits outweighed defects.<sup>62</sup> It may be recalled that the opinion of Abbe J.A. Dubois, the French missionary of Mysore (who was more acquainted with Indian society than any other European) on the value of caste is quite relevant in this context.<sup>63</sup>

Swamiji did not favour fighting among the castes as it will further divide weaken and degrade the society. The poor untouchables were to be redeemed

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<sup>61</sup> Letters, n.8 (1964 edn.), p.383.

<sup>62</sup> See details in Chapter VIII.

<sup>63</sup> In his book *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* he wrote: "*I believe caste division to be in many respects . . . the happiest effort, of Hindu legislation. I am persuaded that it is simply and solely due to the distribution of the people into castes that India did not lapse into a state of barbarism and that she preserved and perfected the arts and sciences of civilization whilst most other nations of the earth remained in a state of barbarism. I do not consider caste to be free from many great drawbacks; but I believe that the resulting advantages, in the case of a nation constituted like the Hindus, more than outweigh the resulting evils . . . such an institution was probably the only means that the most clear-sighted precedence could devise for maintaining a state of civilization amongst the people endowed with the peculiar characteristics of the Hindus*". See details in Abbe Dubois, *Maeurs, Institutions et Ceremonies des peuples de' Inde*, trans. and ed. Henry K. Beauchamp, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies* (New Delhi, 1999 edn.), Vol. I, p.28.

socially and the higher castes are not to be degraded. In his opinion "the solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower upto the higher".<sup>64</sup> In order to remove the misery of the lower castes, the Brahmin need not be crushed out, because Swamiji regarded Brahminhood as the ideal of humanity in India. He defined the term Brahminhood in the light of the true and original Vedantic conception according to which a Brahmin is one who has killed selfishness and who lived and worked to acquire and propagate wisdom and the power of love. For enabling the Sudras to reach "Brahminhood" they were to be imparted knowledge both spiritual and secular, which would raise them to new realization of intellectual and moral strength. The culture and education, which is the main stay of higher classes should be appropriated so as to bring about the levelling of caste. He urged the Brahmins themselves to work to that end, for according to him, it was their duty to work hard to raise the rest of Indian people by teaching them culture they had accumulated for centuries. At the same time he advised the Sudras to acquire knowledge through education which is the strength of the higher castes.

Swamiji advocated both education and industrialisation for removing inequality based on caste. Education should enable a man "to stand on his legs" and industrialisation would provide employment to the youth and thereby the economic status of the lower classes could be raised. Swamiji was confident that in due course the rigid walls separating caste from caste would vanish due to

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<sup>64</sup> C.W., III, p.295.

economic causes and there was no need of destroying caste. Moreover he believed that "liberty is the first condition of growth". Social progress was possible only if the country was liberated from foreign rule which was only perpetuating social evils like untouchability. His new interpretation of caste aimed at eliminating the barriers that divided man from man and it was hoped that the process would ultimately promote unity and integrity in the nation which was necessary for the liberation of the country.

Swamiji's views on caste particularly his view that the institution should not be destroyed had a profound impact on Indian Nationalists. Eg. in 1920's Gandhiji "defended caste by describing it as a creative social institution."<sup>65</sup> Making his position clear he said:

I am one of those who do not consider caste to be a harmful institution. In its origin caste was a wholesome custom and promoted national well-being. In my opinion the idea that inter-dining and inter-marriage is necessary for national growth is a superstition borrowed from the west.<sup>66</sup>

These words indicate that like Vivekananda, Gandhi also rejected the practice like untouchability as characteristic of the institution of caste and held that

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<sup>65</sup> Ravinder Kumar, *Essays in the Social History of Modern India* (Delhi, 1983), p.55.

<sup>66</sup> *Complete Works of Gandhi*, Vol. XVII, p.44.

caste was not an institution to be reformed on Western lines.

Even a bitter critic of untouchability like Dr. Ambedkar seems to have been influenced by Swamiji's views on caste when he said in a paper presented at the Anthropological Seminar held in 1916 at the Columbia University, New York that there existed in olden days in India only class system and not caste and that individuals according to their qualification could change their class at any time.<sup>67</sup>

### **His Concept of Shudra-Raj**

In the New India which he envisaged, he foresaw the rise of the labouring classes. A patriot - Prophet, he envisioned the advent of the 'Shudra Raj'<sup>68</sup> a government run by the toiling sections of the society. His vision of the 'Shudra Raj' was not merely the wishful thinking of a sentimentalist. It was based on an intelligent interpretation of history and a sound grasp of sociological phenomenon which reassured him that the high handedness and tyranny of the strong over the weak could not go on for long. Analysing the trend of world history, he sensed that the Indian masses have to be given the legitimate status in society. The shudras or

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<sup>67</sup> For details of the paper see *The Indian Antiquary* No. XLVI (May 1917), Bombay, pp.81-95. One may recall in this connection what Swamiji said more than one hundred years ago that there was nothing wrong in recreating the caste system in its original form where there was the liberty for people to move from one class to another according to one's qualification or temperament. Dr. Ambedkar's view appears to be an echo of Swamiji's views.

<sup>68</sup> This idea was expressed by him in an essay titled "*Varthaman Bharat*" originally written in Bengali and published in March 1899 in *Udbodhan*, the organ of the Ramakrishna Order. Its English version entitled "Modern India" is included in the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV.

the toiling masses will be the future rulers in the next historical phase of human civilization, he prophesied.<sup>69</sup>

What is significant about his prophecy is his pronouncement that the depressed and the downtrodden castes will gain prominence without leaving the kind of work which they have been doing for ages, i.e., the Sudras will rise to power without leaving their Sudrahood.

When Swamiji used the term depressed or Sudra, he did not intend to convey any sense of inferiority. He maintained that in the new age these classes would attain power and prestige on the basis of humanitarian principle without abandoning their class or cult. He also dreamt of an ideal state in which the good features of all the four castes (the Brahmana, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Sudra) would be kept in tact minus their evils. It may not be possible to translate this ideal into action. But one can appreciate the kind of harmony which he found desirable in human society.

It has to be seen that it was with this picture of an ideal society in his mind that he exhorted "Let new India arise out of the peasant's cottage . . . ." <sup>70</sup> The history of India after independence is a testimony to show how his prophecy has come true. The country in the last fifty years witnessed the political power

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<sup>69</sup> For a detailed analysis of his concept of *Shudra Raj* see Chapter VI of this thesis.

<sup>70</sup> Vivekananda, n.2.

gradually coming to the deprived sections of Indian society and these sections utilizing the power for their emancipation.

### **Hindu - Muslim Unity in Future India**

Though a Hindu to the backbone, Swamiji had the highest respect for other religions particularly Christianity and Islam. He was convinced that a country like India where people of various faiths lived, could be kept united only through mutual "tolerance and acceptance." He was saddened by the vituperations of Christian missionaries, but he warned his country men against understanding the positive side of Christianity. Swamiji's evaluation of Islam shows the same flexibility. He was deeply conscious of the important role of Islam especially as represented by medieval Sufi Saints, in the evolution of India's national culture. Similarly Akbar's vision of a universal faith extracted Swamiji's unstinted admiration. What attracted him to Islam was the spirit of equality and brotherhood which enabled the Prophet and his followers to build a strong social organization in a vast area comprising many nations and in a remarkably short period.

As a prophet who foresaw the communal or religious problem arising in New India, he unfolded his vision of future India in these words.

. . . . I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We

want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION which is Oneness so that each may choose the path that suits him. For our own motherland, a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam - Vedanta brain and Islam body - is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible with Vedanta brain and Islam body.<sup>71</sup>

When Swamiji speaks of the junction of 'Vedanta brain and Islam body' he is not suggesting that the former is superior to the latter. By Islam he meant the democratic and egalitarian social polity as envisaged by Islam. By Vedanta he meant the highest spiritual ideas. Spirituality in essence is knowing man as the manifestation of God. Therefore, the idea is that philosophical wisdom should be combined with practical wisdom.

Again, when he speaks of a place "where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible nor the Koran" he is not suggesting that the scriptures of the major religions should be superseded, but that none of them should have exclusive claim to truth so

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<sup>71</sup> Letters n.61, p.452.

that to repeat his words "each person may follow the path that suits him best." Actually it was with such a broad mind that Swami Vivekananda found a solution to the Hindu - Muslim communal divide and he hoped that a just society in India could be built up on the basis of these ideals. It may be noted that his ideal of Hindu - Muslim unity was accepted by the Congress under Gandhiji as one of its programmes. Later events in India showed that politically such a pious dream failed to be realized. Yet it had left a mark on the minds of those who would have liked to see a non-communal India survive and prosper.

### **Future India's Mission to Mankind**

Vivekananda was the "discoverer of India's long lost mission in the world."<sup>72</sup> The optimist in Swamiji always looked forward to India having her mission in the world. He believed that India had been a teacher to the world in the past, in spiritual matters and she will continue to lead the mankind in that field. His conclusion was that the very fact that India could produce a spiritual giant of the magnitude of Sri Ramakrishna even when she was in a state of political subjection and cultural decadence was positive proof of her undying spiritual vitality. In the many sidedness of the Master's personality and the all-inclusiveness of his teachings, Swamiji found the channel through which the spiritual thought of India

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<sup>72</sup> Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (Mayavati, 1988 edn.), p.193.

could flow to all parts of the world. To him, the Master had heralded a new age in India's cultural life by the quickening he had given to its spiritual energies. He foresaw the great material changes that were going to take place in the country and the Master was the spiritual ballast that would hold the equilibrium of India's national life.

Swamiji's penetrating mind also realized the plight of the West. Science and technology no doubt gave the west material prosperity, but they did not give it inner peace. A materialistic culture contains the seeds of its own destruction. In a competitive society mutual war and hatred become inevitable. In such a situation what the west was required to do, according to Swamiji, was that it must deepen its spiritual outlook and in this could be helped by the ancient wisdom of India. Hinduism, he thought, could especially teach the West, Universal compassion, the ideal of seeing unity in diversity and the harmony of religion.

But at the same time Swamiji keenly felt that both the West and India needed each other for their mutual welfare and for the ultimate good of humanity, a new society, a synthesis of the East and the West, a synthesis of Science and spirituality was needed.

Swamiji who lived at the dawn of the era of Indian nationalism summoned the new India into existence. The message of spiritual hope that he gave to India proved a powerful force in the course of Indian awakening. In his scheme of

thought he emphasized the upliftment of the individual as well as the collective march of the people towards progress and prosperity. By advocating the upliftment of masses he was advocating the principles of social justice and equality which influenced the nationalists of the time. Religion related to social service, opposition to social hierarchy based on birth, the need to uplift the lower castes and communities, keen awareness of the poverty of the common man – these were the stages through which Vivekananda made his progress till he reached the advocacy of social equality and removal of injustice. By holding fast to these principles, he made a valient effort to awaken the national spirit which forms the basis of patriotism. Of course, patriotism took an important place in his scheme of thought. He would present social thoughts while talking about religion and at the same time advocate patriotism. Through his ideas on upliftment of masses, he had advanced a new definition of "true patriotism," which went a long way towards shaping the socio-political ideology of Freedom Struggle.

The ideas which he advocated for the remaking of Indian society, had elements of eclecticism. They combined in themselves a spontaneous, rebellious spirit against social injustice and inequality. He presented such ideas with a fervent desire to make India march forward. Again, the ideal of the harmony of religions which he preached was to become the bed rock of nationalism of future India. Without this concept of harmony of religions and tolerance to all creeds, the spirit of national consciousness could not have been built up in this country with

diversities. The history of India after the demise of Swamiji is a testimony to the fact that his ideas played a constructive part in the development of national liberation movement, in rallying the Indian people against colonialism.

# IDEOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATION

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekananda : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER IV

### IDEOLOGY AND TRANSFORMATION

While envisaging his views on national reconstruction, Vivekananda attached paramount importance to revitalization of religion, since he considered national regeneration and religious dynamism as two sides of the same coin. He believed that national regeneration was possible only by stimulating the pride of Indians in their own customs, civilization and way of life. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of Swamiji in this direction was the reinterpretation, clarification and redefining of the true nature of Indian traditions which he made on an international platform at Chicago in 1893. During his stay in the West for three years (1893-96) he also countered the charges and propaganda of Western detractors who branded India as a nation of barbarians. In fact he took it as his duty to set right the distortions that had been caused to Hinduism by the missionary propaganda.

After his return from the West in 1897, Swamiji was engaged in a struggle of adapting Hinduism to the changed socio-political, economic and cultural needs of the time, a situation which had been created by colonialism. It was a struggle which involved bridging the gap between religion and society. Religion fulfils itself, when it comes out of the caves, monasteries, the pooja room and centres of worship to answer social needs. "You cannot preach spirituality to a hungry

people" stated Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji had fully understood the meaning of his Master's words. Religion would lose its relevance unless it addresses itself to the problems of the masses viz., hunger, poverty, disease, squalor, illiteracy, etc. Therefore religion had to be made practical by relating it with social service. It was with this end in view that he organised a band of committed ascetics who would be involved in social service and in the eradication of illiteracy and bring the benefits of modern education to the common people. Thus his programme of revitalization or reconstruction of religion involved two things - (1) Reinterpreting Hinduism on universalist terms which set a challenge to colonial culture and (2) linking religion with social service, which was in tune with the changed socio-political and cultural climate. Through this process, he was building up a new ideology which went a long way towards promoting national unity.

### **His Concept of Religion**

Before entering into a discussion on how he attempted to reconstruct Hinduism, let us note on his ideas about Religion, because his reinterpretation of Hinduism was an echo of the broader views which he held about Religion. Though he was a man of many facets, principally Vivekakananda was a man of religion and spirituality. He had his own views on religion, its uses, abuses and future possibility which he expressed at Chicago in 1893, before an international audience. He has given different definitions about religion at different times. Some of them are,

1. "Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man".<sup>1</sup>
2. Religion is the Realisation of God.<sup>2</sup>
3. Religion is Realisation, not talk, nor doctrine nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging. It is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the above definitions, Swamiji has also given a few descriptions of religion in his *Collected Works*. He said "Be good and do good; that is all of religion". Here he was speaking of ethical religion where one can see the influence of the Buddha. Secondly he said:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest, divinity in man and that can be achieved by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control, or philosophy, by one or more or all of these and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Calcutta, 1968), IV, p.358.

<sup>2</sup> C.W., I, p.417.

<sup>3</sup> C.W., II, p.396.

<sup>4</sup> C.W., I, p.257.

On the basis of these statements we may get Swamiji's idea of religion. His concept of religion was different from what an ordinary man understands by it. To an ordinary man Religion means external practices - rituals, dogmas, doctrines books, etc. But to Vivekananda these are only secondary details. Manifestation of divinity which is implicit in each soul, is religion proper. Controlling of external and internal nature and sacrifice of egoism are necessary to reach this goal. This may be achieved either by work (karma), or worship (Bhakti) or psychic control (Rajayoga sadhana) or philosophy (jnana) or by more than one such disciplines or by the synthesis of all. When a man is religious in this sense, he has love and charity for the whole human race. In his words, "Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness".<sup>5</sup>

When Swamiji said that religion is realisation it implied a very high ideal. i.e. realisation of universal unity. According to this concept, there is only one Religion and the prevalent different religions are the different manifestations of the one ultimate Religion. According to their different tastes and temperaments human beings follow religion in different ways and thus different religions develop. It is in this sense that India understood religion, and it is this idea of religion that Swami Vivekananda expounded in the West and the East through his powerful voice. As he put it in one of his speeches:

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.325.

One infinite religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist and this religion is expressing itself in various countries in various ways.<sup>6</sup>

When religion is looked at from this point of view, there will be no scope for religious quarrels, for religious quarrels are always over the husks. As the Swami has pointed out, "when spirituality goes, leaving the soul dry, quarrels begin, and not before".<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, according to him no true religion has ever persecuted men nor ever burnt witches. Religion never did any of these things. If at all they have happened, they were the work of interested people who did so for their selfish end under the banner of religious fanaticism which is really the negation of religion. Swamiji thought that if religion is interpreted in its correct sense and understood by everybody, much of our miseries, mutual conflicts and social evils would be automatically removed.

Thus Swamiji held that true religion must have a positive approach. It must not only teach man to refrain from evil but must insist on doing good to others. Religion must awake the spirit within man.

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<sup>6</sup> C.W., VI, p.82.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.127.

### **Concept of Universal Religion**

A discussion of Vivekananda's concept of religion will be incomplete without a discussion of his concept of Universal Religion, because while defending Hinduism during his Western mission, he tried to establish that Hinduism had all the characteristics of a Universal religion. Swamiji used to say:

What I want to propagate is a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds. It must be equally philosophical, equally emotional, equally mystic and equally conducive to action.<sup>8</sup>

Swamiji's ideal of a perfect man combines within him the elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and work in full. That is why he stood for a combination of Sankara's intellect, Buddha's heart and an Islamic body. Similarly in an ideal of a perfect religion he thought of a harmonious balance of all the elements of the human mind. Such a unique harmony he finds in Vedanta. The Vedanta serves the basis of Hinduism, according to him and therefore he dispelled all false notions and doubts about Hinduism. In his essay "The Ideal of a Universal Religion",<sup>9</sup> he had discussed this point elaborately. It is in this essay that Swamiji introduced the concept of unity in variety and tells us that different men take to different religions according to their tastes and temperaments, but the religions

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<sup>8</sup> C.W., II, p.381.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.375-96.

exhibit unity so far as the goal is concerned. Every religion is for the realisation of the divinity within and this gives them unity.

At the same time Vivekananda pointed out that a mere discovery of certain points of agreement or similarity of attitude between one religion and another would not make Universal Religion. The fundamental principle of Universal Religion is toleration which must necessarily lead to acceptance. The followers of different religious paths must develop a mutual understanding which results in what may be called a confluence of selves. The bond of unity is spiritual, "it is timeless deathless; it is pure consciousness" the great Vedantin asserted.

### **Unity in Variety**

The central theme of his religious ideology was unity in variety. He held that unity in variety was the law of nature. As has been noted earlier, multitudes of creeds have emerged in order to suit the different temperaments of distinct groups of people. But the fundamentals of these creeds are the same. Vivekananda believed that variety of faiths has only enriched the world and has made religion accessible and comprehensible and practicable to all men. So he said: "you cannot make conform all to the same ideas". Therefore it was erroneous or insensible on the part of the institutionalised religions to insist that there should be only a single faith or a single church for the whole world. This idea he conveyed in his addresses, particularly in his final address at Chicago in 1893.

In the context of Indian conditions, Vivekananda was particularly concerned with good relations between two great religions of Hinduism and Islam. In a letter to his Muslim friend Mohammed Sarfaraz he made his position clear:

The truth is that Advaitism is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions of the future enlightened humanity.<sup>10</sup>

He wanted the two religions to form a synthesis for the promotion of the common good. In the same letter he wrote:

I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible nor the Koran, yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.<sup>11</sup>

He wanted complete freedom for each individual to choose whatever religion he thought best.

Finally Vivekananda's view on religion were not divorced from social realities. In fact his religious ideology was to a great extent influenced by the

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<sup>10</sup> C.W., (Calcutta, 1963), VI, p.415.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

conditions of the suffering humanity in India. That is why he said that he did not believe in a religion which could not give bread to the poor or wipe out the tears of the widows. In other words, "he did not absolve religion of its social responsibility".<sup>12</sup> Following the humanitarian ideals of his Master, he always exhorted people to seek god in fellow human beings. To him service of god meant service of the poor, which was the highest expression of religion and the clearest statement of humanism. By trying to convert the abstract oneness within Vedanta to ideals of practical Social Service, Vivekananda made religion a matter of dynamic and purposeful living.

It was within the broad frame of universalism and practical social service that Swamiji tried to reconstruct Hinduism. Such an attempt marked the culmination of a process which began with early intellectuals and reformers of the Nineteenth century Bengal.

### **Factors which shaped his Religious Ideology**

Various factors played a crucial role in shaping the religious views of Swami Vivekananda. The direct experiences which he had during his sojourns, his early association with Brahma Samaj, Western rationalism and influence of Buddhism were some of them. But over and above all these the influence of the Upanishads and the influence of his Master Sri Ramakrishna were the most profound on him in

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<sup>12</sup> Amiya, P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal* (Delhi, 1993), p.294.

fulfilling his mission of reinterpreting Hinduism which was so urgently needed in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

### **Influence of the Upanishads**

Of the various factors which shaped the religious ideology of Swami Vivekananda, the Upanishads were a powerful factor. Swamiji always used to speak of a "strength-giving religion" which he wanted to see Hinduism transformed into. By a strength giving religion he meant a religion which would give men inner strength, a confidence in themselves, and the power to overcome crisis. This strength he believed, one could derive from the Upanishadic teachings, for he considered the Upanishads the gospel of strength. To quote him "The Upanishads are the mine of infinite strength".<sup>13</sup> Therefore he stressed the need of Upanishadic teachings of Atman which says "I am the Soul, Me the sword cannot cut: nor weapons pierce, me the fire cannot burn, me the air cannot dry; I am omniscient".<sup>14</sup> Such a philosophy was urged for the regeneration of India and the world at large.

In other words, Swamiji believed that Reconstruction of India must be based on the bed rock of Spiritual resources because it is the spiritual resources which actually give men innerstrength, the strength for self discovery. This strength for self discovery was what the Indians needed for their liberation from the colonial

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<sup>13</sup> C.W., III, p.238.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.244.

rule. To what extent he was influenced by the Upanishads is revealed in the following passages. He exhorted:

Strength, strength is what the Upanishads speak to me from every page. It has been the one great lesson I have been taught in my life . . . . Be not weak . . . . stand up and be strong.<sup>15</sup>

Again he said:

In the Upanishads lies the strength enough to invigorate the whole world . . . . They will call with trumpet voice upon the weak, the miserable and the downtrodden of all races, all creeds and all sects to stand on their feet to be free. Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are watchwords of the Upanishads.<sup>16</sup>

He further stated that,

Upanishads are "the only literature in the world where you find the word "Abhiih" meaning "be fearless" used again and again. In no other scripture in the world is the adjective applied either to God or man."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.237.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.237-38.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.223-25.

Swamiji wanted to demonstrate that the very foundations of Hinduism lay in the Upanishads or the Vedanta. Such a vision rejects empty ritualism and offers a dynamic healthy concept. This devotion to strength and fearlessness made him an apostle of liberation, the liberation from all bondages.

### **Influence of Sri Ramakrishna**

When we analyse the religious ideology of Vivekananda, we can see that to a great extent, it was indebted to the religious concepts of his Master Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji's irresistible quest to see God was defined early in life as a quest for ultimate realization and he sought its fulfilment as a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>18</sup> It is a known fact that at first when Narendra met Sri Ramakrishna he was not ready to believe in him under the influence of his Western mentality of rationalism. But in his own appealing manner Sri Ramakrishna successfully turned the vibrant youth who was in a confused state of minds, to Hindu spiritual philosophy from his Western and Brahma Samaj background.<sup>19</sup> The Master emphasized that to see God alone, without world is a kind of philosophical knowledge ie. Jnana, but to see all beings permeated by the spirit of God is

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<sup>18</sup> Tapan Ray Chaudhury "Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism", in William Radice, ed., *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism* (OUP Delhi, 1998), p.1.

<sup>19</sup> Before his meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda was familiar with the activities of the Brahma Samaj. Most authorities are agreed that he was a member of the Sadharan Brahma Samaj and he himself acknowledged that he had been influenced by his links with it.

Supreme wisdom, Vijnana.<sup>20</sup> Thus Swamiji learned from his Master mainly three things, the synthesis of knowledge and devotion, the harmony of religions and the worship of God in man.

These three things which he learnt from Sri Ramakrishna became the steering force of his life's mission. That mission was to reinterpret Hinduism and thereby to demonstrate the scientific spirit contained in it, which was the need of the time. In fact the need of reinterpreting religion scientifically was brought home to the disciple by the Master himself who used to remind him that "the Mughul coins have no currency under East India Company's rule" meaning religion today would have to be scientific to fit into the wave of future: Men wanted to understand the meaning of their lives, the meaning of the Universe.

Swamiji always wanted to show that Hinduism as interpreted by his Master transcended all sectarian barriers. In a letter to Mrs. Bull he made this idea more explicit.

My Master used to tell us that Hindu, Christian etc. are but different names (of the same truth). They are barriers to fraternal

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<sup>20</sup> Bharati, K.S., *The Political Thought of Vivekananda in Encyclopaedia of Eminent Thinkers*, Vol. VIII, (New Delhi, 1998), p.33.

feelings between human beings. We must first try to break these  
down . . . .<sup>21</sup>

What is revealed in these words is Ramakrishna's faith in the basic unity of all religions which he had stated in a folk epigram "Jato mat, tato path" meaning there are as many paths as there are creeds. "Vivekananda developed this simple notion, the truth of which Ramakrishna is said to have realized through his own mystical experience, into a systematic philosophical statement".<sup>22</sup> In fact the concept of Universal Religion which Vivekananda presented before the West in 1893 was rooted in this principle of harmony.

Though an advocate of religious harmony, Swamiji was against religious conversion, which was an essential tool of European cultural imperialism of the nineteenth century. A believer in the principle of "growing according to one's own normal law of growth", Swamiji had made his position clear in his final address at the Parliament of Religions in 1893 that the Christian is not to become a Hindu or Buddhist to become a Christian, but each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Letter to Mrs. Bull dt. 21 March 1895, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1964 edn.), p.259.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> C.W., I, p.24.

How far these ideas were an echo of his Master's voice is clear from the following passage. Exposing the hollowness of religious conversion and highlighting identity and individuality of Hinduism, the Master in his inimitable style had said:

The cowherds take the cows to graze in the pasture. There the cattle mix. They all form one herd. But on returning to their shed in the evening they are separated. Then each stays by itself in its own stall. Therefore, I say, dwell by yourself, in your own Chamber.<sup>24</sup>

It seems that Sri Ramakrishna had anticipated the spirit of the world's parliament of Religions, which indicated that tolerance and chastity were essential attitudes of all higher religions.

Finally, while speaking on the need of a strength giving religion and equating worship of God with service of humanity, Vivekananda was reflecting the very same thoughts of his Master. For instance, man's alleged corruptibility became a subject of discourse by both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. To give his followers an extra measure of power and self-confidence, Sri Ramakrishna said "By repeating countless times, "I am a Sinner", one actually becomes a Sinner!"<sup>25</sup> This

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<sup>24</sup> Nihilananda, Swami, ed. & trans., *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras, 1969), p.637.

<sup>25</sup> *Kathamrita*, III, p.157. Quoted in Sen, n.12, p.345.

of course finds an echo in Vivekananda, who said "Say not man is a Sinner. Tell him that he is God."<sup>26</sup>

This perception of God in man by Vivekananda was nothing but a reiteration of the philosophy of his master, which held service to humanity as tantamount to serving God in true spirit. In fact it was to give practical application of his Master's philosophy (of serving God through service of suffering humanity) that Swamiji founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1897.

### **Impact of Western Humanism**

It may also be added that his commitment was in favour of a scientific religion, based on rationalism and pragmatism. Like Rammohan Roy he was ready to accept the humanism of Christianity, but rejected its miracles. This rationalistic approach made him devoted to Vedanta, the quintessence of Hinduism. While adopting the principles of religion like asceticism and renunciation, he was more concerned with humanism, the 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of the west. Thus in religion he served as a bridge between the East and the West. This universality of his religious ideology had a magic spell over many of his disciples of the East and the West. It was this universalism of his approach to religion which made him the master mind of the intellectual movement in India. Hence the impact of nineteenth

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<sup>26</sup> Vivekananda to Friends, Reply to Madras Address, C.W., IV, p.351.

century humanism of the West was also a significant factor in shaping his religious ideology.

### **Contemporary debates on Hinduism and their impact on its Reconstruction**

The reconstruction of Hinduism which was an outcome of Vivekananda's participation in the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, had definite links with contemporary debates on Hinduism among the Christian missionaries, colonial officials, reformers and members of the articulate indigenous elite. During the greater part of the nineteenth century, the attitude of missionaries was one of hostility to Hinduism,<sup>27</sup> which was considered to be at best the work of human folly. For instance, William Carey, wrote from Serampore in 1794:

The Hindus were literally sunk into the dregs of Vice . . . Moral rectitude makes no part of their religious system and therefore no wonder, they are sunk nay wholly immersed in all manner of impurity.<sup>28</sup>

The distaste which the missionaries felt for Hinduism on theological ground was reinforced by the revulsion which they felt against social customs and

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<sup>27</sup> K.A. Ballhatchet, "Some Aspects of Historical Writing On India By Protestant Christian Missionaries" in C.H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon* (London, 1961), p.344.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Aravind Poddar, *Renaissance in Bengal - Quests and Confrontations* (Simla, 1970), p.11.

institutions which they associated with it. Thus a general tendency that was seen among missionary writers was to associate every depraved Hindu custom and institution with religion.<sup>29</sup> Charles Grant, an eminent personage in the missionary circle, wrote in his "*Observations On the State of Society Among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*" in 1772 that "Hindus were in a degenerate condition and Hinduism is the chief cause of it."<sup>30</sup> According to him the evils like dishonesty, perjury, selfishness, social divisions, the low position of women, sexual vice, cruelty to animals etc. were wide spread and they were the result of Hinduism. He shared the general view held by the missionaries that they had gone to India to make converts and thereby save the people from traditional customs and that for a similar purpose, God was allowing the British to conquer the country. He went to the extent of saying that Britain owed a debt to India and that debt could be paid by promoting western education in English language, "thus weakening the false fabric of falsehood and facilitating the spread of Christianity."

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<sup>29</sup> Here Vivekananda differed. A study of the evolution of Indian Society led him to conclude that institutions like caste had nothing to do with religion. According to him caste was a Social institution.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Ballhatchet, n.27, p.344.

Other missionaries like W. Ward, James Peggs, J. Marshman and R. Caldwell also wrote their works<sup>31</sup> with a firm conviction that the intellectual and moral improvement of India could have been expected only under British rule. Caldwell admitted that the thirst for riches, the unscrupulous efforts of ambition, the reckless violence, etc., on the part of Britain which often struck Hindoos with terror were a disgrace to the English, but according to him, "there was no other way in which India could have been regenerated."<sup>32</sup>

Another point to be noted is that when the missionaries turned to religious topics in their historical writing, they did not always even try to be impartial.<sup>33</sup> In the writings of Peggs and Marshman idolatry was one of the important targets of criticism. Moreover such writers took special care to highlight the social abuses, religious superstitions and those actions of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses and corrupt practices sanctioned by Hinduism which were considered to be grossly

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<sup>31</sup> The important works of the missionaries were the following:-

- (a) W. Ward - *A View of the History, Literature and Religion of the Hindoos* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn.), 4 Vols., London 1817-20.
- (b) James Peggs, *A History of the General Baptist Mission established in the Province, appended to A - Sterling, Orissa, Its Geography, History, Religion and Antiquities* (London, 1846).
- (c) J. Marshman - *The History of India from the Earliest Period to the close of Lord Dalhousie's Administration* (3 Vols., London 1867).
- (d) R. Caldwell - *A Political and General History of the District of Tenevelly in the Presidency of Madras* (Madras, 1881).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Ballhatchet, n.27, p.346.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

immoral and highly obnoxious to modern minds. But while the missionary writers were vociferous over abuses in Indian society, they were silent on similar abuses in their own society and religion. While the burning of widows was regarded as a barbarous trait in Hindu culture, no thought was given to the burning of heretics in Europe. While caste system was condemned, no reference was made even for the sake of comparison to the slavery and serfdom in ancient and medieval Europe and the treatment of the blacks by the whites in modern times. Generally speaking, the European writers with a few honourable exceptions were guilty to this kind of partisan national spirit, and often indulged in the habit of comparing the Hindu with the European culture by contrasting the worst features of the former with the best aspects of the latter.<sup>34</sup>

But a more sympathetic attitude towards Hinduism emerged during the course of the nineteenth century. This was the result of two factors. (1) The disappearance of practices like Sati which the early missionaries had found most offensive and (2) the growth of a more scholarly knowledge of Hinduism through the Orientalism.

When the missionaries came to understand the "sublime conceptions of Hindu theology" a more sympathetic and at least a more tactful approach was soon

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.420. Also see K.K.N. Kurup, "Attitudes of the Missionaries towards the Traditional Society" in *Peasantry, Nationalism and Social Change in India* (Allahabad, 1991), p.95.

apparent. This is evident from the proceedings of a "*General Conference of Bengal Protestant Missionaries Held in Calcutta from September 4-7, 1855*",<sup>35</sup> which refers to the need of a rethinking of the earlier hostile attitude to Hindu practices. More over, in the last quarter of the 19th century we find a fundamental change in the attitude of missionaries developing, when a Wesleyan Missionary from Madras argued at a Missionary Conference held in London in 1888 that "everything non Christian is not of the Devil" and that there were "fragments of truth in Hinduism."<sup>36</sup>

One of the important reasons for this change in their attitude was the researches carried out by the Orientalist scholars, which elevated Hinduism as the product of an ancient civilization. Friedrich Max Muller led this class of writers. According to this construction,

The current degeneration of Hinduism into idolatry and superstition had been induced by Muslim tyranny. The Hindu thus became identified as a victim figure whose deliverance from the colonial imputations of being ignorant, prejudiced and superstitious was a part of the Orientalist Mission.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Cited in Philips, n. 27, p.420.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.349.

<sup>37</sup> Sen Gupta, Indira Chaudhary, "*Reconstructing Hinduism on a World Platform: The World's First Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1892*" in William Radice, ed., no.18, p.18.

By characterising the Muslim as the "repulsive and barbaric other," Max Muller established Hinduism as a set of currently corrupted manners that required an urgent rescue.<sup>38</sup> In this connection, it is paradoxical to note that even a great admirer of Indian Philosophy like Max Muller, had at one stage contemplated a plan of proselytising heathen India for the reason that Hinduism "the ancient religion of India is doomed."<sup>39</sup> For him, in the 60's and 70's of the nineteenth century India was much riper for Christianity than Rome or Greece were at the time of St. Paul." The nineteenth century European mind is reflected in these words. It was prejudiced with racialism and colonialism.

A study of the reasons for the sorry state of Hinduism of nineteenth century India will compel us to attribute it to the ignorance of the masses about Indian scriptures. Mahendranath Datta, the younger brother of Swami Vivekananda, has recorded the condition in the Nineteenth century. Speaking about mid-nineteenth century, Datta says:

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> (1) Two letters written by Max Muller, one letter to Dr. Milan, Dean of St. Paul's dtd. 26 Feb. 1869 and the other letter to Duke of Argyl, dtd. Dec. 16, 1868, give evidence of a plan contemplated by him of converting heathen India into Christianity. See for details, R.K. Das Gupta, "Swami Vivekananda and Maxmuller" in Prabudha Bharata, October 2000, p.518.

(2) A modern scholar has observed "while in the West culture is achieved by widening the surface of knowledge, that in the East can only be acquired by means of a change in the mental plane in terms of depth. This is why even Max Muller's mind, culturally so high could not escape this proselytizing spirit". See, Satindra Mohan Chatterjee in *The Modern Review*, Vol. CXXIII, Oct. 1968, p.723.

Few people in those days knew what Hinduism was or its essentials; fewer still had read the scriptures which were rarely available those days. Hence people found it difficult to refute the ideas of the missionaries.<sup>40</sup>

Definitely, the inability of large sections of the Indian population to respond to Western forms of abstraction was often taken by missionaries as a sign of ignorance of the deeper levels of significance that religious practices embodied. The language in which these scriptures were written was not the language of the people and that made them inaccessible to the masses.

Similarly the Baptists contrasted Brahmins they met, with descriptions of them in scriptures and challenged them to live upto their textual counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Often they failed to identify themselves with the noble and ideal Brahmin characters as described in the scriptures. Thus by the last quarter of the nineteenth century Hinduism stood challenged by distorted missionary propaganda, which needed correction on intellectual and philosophical planes.

It is not to be forgotten that there came virulent opposition to missionary propaganda from the intellectuals and social activists in different parts of the

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<sup>40</sup> M.N. Datta, quoted in S.N. Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, (Madras, 1975), p.65.

<sup>41</sup> James Kennedy, *Christianity and the Religions of India* (Mirzapore, 1874) p.163. Cited in Gupta, n. 37, p.18.

country. The initial response was to disprove the missionary propaganda at the religious plane, first by pointing out its fallacy in relation to Christian doctrines themselves and second, by highlighting the religious truths contained either in Hinduism or Islam.<sup>42</sup> In Bengal, the initiative was taken by the Tattwabodhini Sabha under the leadership of Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and Akshay Kumar Datta. The vigorous Campaign mounted by its members against the missionaries was so effective that Alexander Duff described the Sabha as "the grand counter antagonist of an aggressive Christianity."<sup>43</sup> Thus arguments and counter arguments about Hindu tradition together with the rise of nationalism came to direct several attempts to interpret and define the true nature of ancient Indian tradition.

### **Vivekananda's role in the Reconstruction of Religion**

Eventhough attempts had been made by early intellectuals to defend Hinduism against missionary propaganda through a programme of religious reform, they had failed to find a permanent solution to the social problems. Vivekananda's attempt in this direction was unique in the sense that he was the first reformer to study the issues in their entirety and suggest remedies. One of the important suggestions which he placed before the contemporary intellectuals and reformers was to dissociate religion with depraved Hindu customs and institutions. For this a thorough knowledge of Indian scriptures was necessary. His contention was that

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<sup>42</sup> K.N. Panikker, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony* (New Delhi, 1995), p.103.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

Vedanta which is the basis of Hinduism does not sanction such customs. Moreover, when religion becomes dynamic or revitalized, unhealthy developments in society will automatically disappear. Here he was following the foot steps of Rammohan Roy and other reformers of the 19th century.

In a letter which he wrote from U.S.A. on 29th September 1894, to Alasinga Perumal, Vivekananda laments on the failure of social reformers to find a permanent solution to social problems because of their lack of understanding of the true nature of Indian traditions. He stated that,

. . . the modern reformers saw no way to reform but by first crushing out the religion of India. They tried and they failed. Why? Because few of them ever studied their own religion and not one ever underwent the training necessary to understand the "Mother of all religions." I claim that no destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society and that this state of society exists not on account of religion, but because religion has not been applied to society, as it should have been. This I am ready to prove from our old books, every word of it. This is what I teach, and this is what we must struggle all our lives to carry out.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Letter to Alasinga Perumal, Letters, n.21, p.177.

This letter also reveals Swamiji's conviction that the main cause of India's degradation was the monopoly which the Brahmins established over knowledge and their unwillingness to disseminate it among the people. In the religious thought of Swami Vivekananda, this aspect received special attention. It was the very same conviction which led him say that the ancient Indian scriptures should be disseminated among the masses, so that they might know the eternal truths contained in them. Therefore in the nationalistic and religious speeches which he made in India with a view to awaken the masses, he had exhorted the upper classes to undertake this task as their sacred duty. Also he said that the scriptures should be translated into the language of the people.

The above discussion suggests that what prompted Vivekananda to reinterpret Hinduism before an international audience was the attacks made upon Hinduism by the Christian missionaries, the defections or conversions that had taken place, the ignorance of their own religion among the Hindus, their consequent inability to defend it when it was assailed; etc. So he had to defend it against arguments that were made against it. Moreover, Western views of Indian society were particularly critical of the ways in which the Hindus treated their women. The questioning of tradition was also deeply involved with the same issue. The debates on Sati, widow remarriage, child marriage, polygamy and women's education were central to the nineteenth century programmes of reform. Influenced by Western rationalism and humanism, the reformers attempted to reconstruct Indian society on

the model of the West. The intense passion evident in the debates on social issues particularly those concerning women, reflect the depth of such sensibilities. Vivekananda whose approach to such issues was different from those of his contemporaries, also had to make his position clear before the western audience during his discourses in the west. All these he did, as a part of his programme of reinterpreting Hinduism which he considered as the "Mother of all religions."

### **Vivekananda's Motive of Western Mission - A Study**

It was in the West, specifically at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago that Vivekananda fulfilled his mission of Reconstructing Hinduism, which was to have a tremendous impact on Indian Nationalism. Regarding the motive of his Western Mission - whether he attended the Parliament of Religions to preach the ideals of Hinduism or to seek the assistance for the suffering humanity in India - there are different views among scholars.

Swamiji's wanderings throughout India had taught him that religion was unpalatable to empty stomachs and that "the alleviation of human suffering was a more tangible objective than bestowing spirituality on innocent souls."<sup>45</sup> Of course, Swamiji did not ascribe religion to the cause of the suffering of Indian humanity as was interpreted by the Missionary writers of the time. But he was convinced that a dynamic or practical religion could be instrumental in raising the nation high. And

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<sup>45</sup> Sen, n.12, p.322.

religion could be revitalized or made practical only if it was dynamically related to a social cause. So the immediate task was to manage resources for providing the basic amenities to the starving masses. This was an ambitious plan that required huge funds and application of science and technology. However, judging by varied experiences of his tour, neither of these appeared to be easily obtainable in India. The Idealist in the Swami felt that he should go to the West and secure material resources and technology for the regeneration of the masses. The purpose of his visit of the U.S. was stated by him quite explicitly in a letter to Mrs. Mary Hale:

In fact I am herewith the object of quietly raising some funds; but  
have been caught in a trap and I shall not be left in peace.<sup>46</sup>

On another occasion Swamiji himself has said again. "It is to find means for the salvation of the poor of India that I am going to America."<sup>47</sup>

Lucy Monroe the American reporter endorses the aforesaid explanation given by Vivekananda regarding the purpose of his visit to America:

His original purpose in coming to this country was to interest  
Americans in the starting of new industries among the Hindoos,  
but he had abandoned this for the present.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> C.W., VII, p.25.

<sup>47</sup> Swami Vivekananda, quoted in Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume (Calcutta, 1963), p.202.

<sup>48</sup> Lucy Monroe, "A Report" (Critic Oct. 7, 1983), in C.W. III (Calcutta 1979), p.477.

According to Marie Louise Burke, a great American admirer of Vivekananda,

Vivekananda went to the West not primarily to fulfill his religious quest. He went to seek aid for the poverty stricken people of India.<sup>49</sup>

But Swamiji realized how difficult it was to get help for the heathens from Christians in a Christian land."<sup>50</sup> Commenting on the statement of Vivekananda that he went to the west to seek aid for the suffering humanity of India, Tapan Ray Chaudhuri has argued thus:

It is not quite clear how he proposed to set about achieving this end. We have somewhat imprecise references to his two fold expectation - that he might help secure Western technology for India's industrial development and that the Americans would help with funds to set up a monastery in India which would be the centre of a programme of ameliorating the condition of the masses. The available record however suggests that his plan of

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<sup>49</sup> Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries about Vivekananda in America*, (Calcutta, 1992 edn.) Vol. I, p.14; Also see, C.W. VI, pp.254-55.

<sup>50</sup> Swami Vivekananda on Himself (Calcutta, 1963), p.138.

action in the West emerged gradually and was partly determined by changing circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

But in an interview with Vivekananda, when asked why he went to America rather than to England on his mission, Swamiji has explained:

That was a mere accident - a result of World's Parliament of Religions being held in Chicago at the time of World's Fair, instead of in London, as it ought to have been. The Raja of Mysore and some other friends sent me to America as the Hindu representative.<sup>52</sup>

S.N. Dhar has noted in his work titled *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* that Swamiji had eloquently described his mission before the Maharaja of Mysore.

He dwelt on the condition of India saying that India's possession was philosophical and spiritual and that it stood in need of modern scientific ideas as well as a thorough organic reform, that it was India's place to give what treasures it possessed, to the people of

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<sup>51</sup> Chaudhury, n.18, p.4.

<sup>52</sup> C.W. V, (Calcutta, 1975 edn.), p.196.

the West and that he himself intended going to America to preach the gospel of Vedanta to Western nations.<sup>53</sup>

Again on another occasion Swamiji himself made it clear that,

From time immemorial India has been the mine of precious ideas of human society. Give those valuable gems in exchange for what you receive from them .... It is not the law of nature to be always taking gifts with outstretched hands like beggars. Any individual or class or nation that does not obey this law never prospers in life . . . . That is why I went to America.<sup>54</sup>

From the above statements it is clear that whatever be the criticism that had been levelled against Hinduism and whatever be the drawbacks from which it suffered in the mid-nineteenth century, Swamiji was proud of India being the possessor of rich philosophical and spiritual treasures. And he wanted to project the glory of Indian culture before the Western critics, so that the denigration that had been caused to Hinduism could be dispelled. In fact he thought that he was duty bound to place before the world, the spiritual treasures of ancient India "lying hidden in caves and forests, temples and religious seminaries since the heydays of

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<sup>53</sup> Dhar, n.40, p.361.

<sup>54</sup> C.W., V, pp.355-56.

Buddhist and Hindu evangelism."<sup>55</sup> He was moreover convinced that a free and honourable exchange of ideas between the East and the West was a desideratum of the age. This would break both the spell of torpor of the conservative masses and the spell of cultural hypnotism of the modern intelligentsia and inspire both these wings for a complete rejuvenation of the kind.

So the above stated facts lead us to the conclusion that the issue of seeking technological help from the scientifically advanced America might have been one of the expectations of Vivekananda, but the propagation of Hindu ideals in a Christian land was a major project of his visiting the U.S., since he wanted to remove misconceptions about Hinduism in the West. To be more specific, impelled by patriotic and spiritual urges, he made up his mind to go forth to America.

### **Reinterpretation of Hinduism and its impact on Indian Nationalism**

It has been noted earlier that to Vivekananda, religion was no longer an isolated human endeavour, instead it embraced the whole scheme of things, not only the Dharma, the Vedas, the Upanishads, the meditation of the sages, the asceticism of the great monks, the vision of the most high, but the heart of the people, their lives, their hopes, their misery, their poverty, their degradation, their sorrows, and their woes. The new interpretation given to Hinduism had to be explained to the west so that its bitter critics could be corrected. The ensuing

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<sup>55</sup> Bhattacharya, Haridas, (ed.), *Cultural Heritage of India* (Calcutta, 1969), IV, p.706.

world's Parliament of Religions gave him a golden opportunity for the same. By explaining to the west the universalism of Vedic thoughts, the inherent divinity of the soul, the higher duties that man owed to man, and the harmony of all religions, he was able to reconstruct Hinduism, which had a tremendous impact on Indian nationalism.

The World's Parliament of Religions was part of the commemorative festival to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Columbus's Voyage to America. The intention of the organizers was "to display the achievements of Western Civilization and to benefit American International trade".<sup>56</sup> But since religion was closely tied up with Western Civilization, the plan for the Parliament of Religions recognized the pre-eminent position of religion. There was a general belief in the West that Christianity was responsible for the development of the modern civilization and therefore religion was in no way to be "excluded from the Columbian Exposition."<sup>57</sup>

It is surprising that the Archbishop of Canterbury expressed his voice of dissent to such a gathering and refused to attend it for fear that the pre-eminent position of Christianity will be at stake.<sup>58</sup> This should be taken into account when

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<sup>56</sup> William E. Emilsen, "Vivekananda and the Theosophists" in Journal of Indian History, Vol. LXII, 1984, p.207.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Sen Gupta, n.36, p.21.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.22.

we see that it was before such a gathering that Swami Vivekananda interpreted Hinduism on universal terms. In fact the very new idea he gave about religion's relation to Hinduism reflected India's spiritual renaissance which had reached its culmination with Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

Before the final session of the Parliament on 27th September 1893, Swamiji delivered ten or twelve speeches through which he acquainted the house with the lofty ideas and ideals connected with various aspects of Hinduism and also with his central theme of Universal Religion based on the findings of Vedic seers. The five addresses which he made at the plenary session, besides the speech in response to welcome on the opening day ie., on September 11th 1893, are of special significance, because it was through these speeches that Vivekananda answered the allegations raised by the imperial and missionary writers against Hinduism. These speeches bore the following titles. (1) *Why we Disagree* (15th Sept. 1893) (2) *Paper on Hinduism* (19th September) (3) *Religion not the Crying Need of India* (24th September) (4) *Buddhism The fulfilment of Hinduism* (26 Septembr) and (5) *Address at the final session* (27 Sept).

There were delegates from India representing various religions organizations like Brahma Samaj: Arya Samaj, Theosophical Society, Buddhism and Jainism.

But in the matter of presentation, Vivekananda differed from other representatives from India. While some attempted a schematic representation of

Hinduism, Vivekananda presented Hinduism in Universalist terms. A modern scholar Indira Chaudhury Sengupta has brought out this distinction.<sup>59</sup> The author has pointed out that Manubhai D'Vivedi<sup>60</sup> who spoke on 12th September presented it with the pre-supposition that Hinduism had only been partially understood by the West. His speech focused on refuting the Orientalist scholarship, the ignorance of the western scholars of the correct meaning of Sanskrit words. His strategy consisted of playing off science against the superior claims forwarded by Christianity in India. On the other hand Vivekananda attempted to highlight the Universal principles of Hinduism itself. In a sense it was an attempt to take his Master's maxim of "Yata mat, tata path" further. Moreover as the author states, following the foot steps of his Master, he spoke in a language which sounded the superiority of Hinduism on the ground that it was "the Mother of all religions" and its ability to tolerate and accept all religions as true.

In his first address itself he presented himself in terms of a bearer of an ecumenical tradition large enough to accept the whole world and subsume individual religious identities.<sup>61</sup> Addressing the Parliament he said:

I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world. I thank you in the name of the mother of religions and I

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<sup>59</sup> See for details, Sen Gupta, n.36, p.24.

<sup>60</sup> He was the Justice of Peace of the town of Nadiad in Maharashtra.

<sup>61</sup> Sen Gupta, n.36, p.25.

thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects . . . . I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.<sup>62</sup>

Thus Vivekananda established three essential features of Hinduism at the very beginning of his address, its ancient origins, its vast following and its universal toleration. Moreover he had also explained the reasons why a Hindu should be proud of being a Hindu. In his "Paper on Hinduism", presented on 19th September, he developed these ideas with a special emphasis on Universalism of Hinduism. In the words of S.N Dhar "it was a masterly summary of the philosophy, psychology and general ideas and statements of Hinduism, in its all inclusive aspects."<sup>63</sup> This paper also covered within its sweep all religious thought from absolute monism to the lowest idolatry which had been the subject of missionary attack. He touched this aspect to express his idea on true religion. According to him, all the religions from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism meant so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realize the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association and each of them marking a stage of progress.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> C.W. I Mayavathi Memorial Edition (Calcutta, 1972), p.3.

<sup>63</sup> Dhar, n.40, p.460.

<sup>64</sup> C.W., I, p.17.

In his *Paper on Hinduism*, Vivekananda stressed that Hinduism essentially required a pedagogy of the spirit which could move from perfection to everlasting perfection. He carefully developed this point to illustrate the superiority of Hinduism over Christianity and other religions. Thus he argued that "the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce, him the fire cannot burn, to him the water cannot melt and him the air cannot dry."<sup>65</sup>

Further he also went on to illustrate the fundamental difference in approach between Christianity and Hinduism. As far as the Hindus were concerned, they perceived themselves as "Children of the immortal bliss" and in this, Vivekananda pointed out, lay the triumph of Hinduism.<sup>66</sup> Inspired with the vision of the Vedic Seer, Swamiji addressed the vast humanity before him:

Allow me to call you brethren by that sweet name heirs of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, to divinities on earth sinners: It is a sin to call a man so, it is a standing libel on human nature.<sup>67</sup>

Though Vivekananda defended Hinduism without attacking other religions, he definitely did not accept the original sin concept of Christianity. From the above

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Sen Gupta, n.36, p.26.

<sup>67</sup> C.W. I, p.9.

passage what one can infer is that the Hindu in Vivekananda's construction was able to move from perfection to higher perfection because Hinduism admitted of man's perfectibility. As he said, "To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth."<sup>68</sup> By highlighting the Hindu concept of "divinity in man," he attempted to demonstrate to the Parliament that Hinduism treated human nature with greater dignity than did Christianity which assumed that man was essentially sinful and debased and could only be redeemed by divine grace.

Yet another allegation which Swamiji denied was Hinduism being characterised as Polytheism. "There is no polytheism in India," Swamiji roundly declared. In every temple, said he, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. He explained the psychological necessity of lower forms of religious ideas and worship, of prayers and ceremonies as aids to the purification of mind and of image worship as a help to spiritual concentration. The Hindu, he said, did not abuse any one's idol or call its worship sin and on the contrary, recognized it as a necessary stage in life. The following passage from his *paper on Hinduism* contains the answer to the allegations against Hindu beliefs and mode of worship. He said:

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas and tries to force society to adopt them . . . . The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realised, or thought of or stated through the relative and the images, Crosses and crescents are simply so many symbols - So many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on.<sup>69</sup>

Thus by providing a rational basis to the practice of idol worship Swamiji established that the Hindu worshipped the idol knowing that it is not God, but it is only a medium for realizing the Absolute. He added that the whole religion of the Hindus was centred in realization and that man was to become divine by realizing the divine. This interpretation marked an echo of Sri. Ramakrishna's expression of the same idea that "God is both with form and without form and He is that which includes both form and formlessness." By giving this interpretation to the modes of worship in Hinduism, Swamiji established that "it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation are paths of realisation."<sup>70</sup>

Having established Hinduism superior to Christianity in this respect, Vivekananda declared that because of its unique balanced approach to human nature, Hinduism could claim to be a universal faith, that did not need to proselytize. Moreover, he also tried to show that the world was in need of such a

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>70</sup> C.W., I, (1990 edn.), Introduction, p.xv.

universal faith. In fact, through his ideal of Universal Religion or Vedanta, Swamiji demonstrated the cosmopolitanism of Hindus. In the words of a modern scholar:

Buddha gave India a world religion and also helped her consolidate and shape a national one. These are Buddhism and Hinduism. And it was left to Swami Vivekananda to transform Hinduism into Vedanta Series.<sup>71</sup>

What is implied in this remark is, when Swamiji began to speak at the parliament on September 11th, it was of "the religious ideas of the Hindus," but when he ended on September 27th, Vedantism had been created to go on a new pilgrimage. In other words, Hinduism became transformed into Vedantism and started for the first time on its missionary career.

It may be noted that even at the Parliament sessions, Swamiji had to deal with sharp criticism against Hinduism from Christian delegates. One of the important issues which he took up for discussion was the Christian nations' claim that their material prosperity was due to their belief in "the only true religion" of the world (viz. christianity) and India's degradation was due to Hinduism. Swamiji courageously countered this argument by showing that religion had nothing to do

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<sup>71</sup> O Neil Biswas. "The significance of the Chicago Message" in Swami Lokeswarananda and Others (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years Since Chicago* (Hourah, 1994), p.194.

with the material prosperity of the western nations like England, whose prosperity was brought about "by the use of brute force." *The Indian Mirror, Calcutta* of 28th November 1893 had reported the manner in which Swamiji argued:

We who have come from the East have sat here day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept christianity because christian nations are the most prosperous. We look about us and we see England the most prosperous christian nation in the world, with her foot upon the neck of 250 million Asiatics. We look back into history and see that the prosperity of christian Europe began with the invasion of Spain. Spain's prosperity began with the invasion of Mexico. Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellowmen. At such a price the Hindu will not have prosperity.<sup>72</sup>

Connected with the same point, he also expressed his conviction that nearly all conversions to christianity in India were based on the exploitation of Indian poverty. In his paper on "*Religion Not the Crying Need of India*" (20th September, 1893) he brought home the point that the Christian missionaries were very eager to save the souls of the heathens but they did not try to save their bodies from starvation. Christians, Vivekananda ruefully remarked, did nothing during terrible

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<sup>72</sup> Cited in Dhar, n.40, p.460.

famines in India. They erected churches forgetting that bread, not religion was the dire need of the suffering millions of the East. He reminded the missionaries.

They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics.<sup>73</sup>

Yet another issue which Swamiji dealt with at the Parliament session was the identification of caste with Hinduism. Western knowledge of Hinduism usually filtered through missionary or Orientalist interpretation which misrepresented caste hierarchy to be one of the distinguishing features of Hinduism. In his speech on "*Buddhism, the Fulfilment of Hinduism*" (26th September, 1893) he rejected this notion. He explained that the religion of the Hindus is divided into two parts: the ceremonial and the spiritual part. The spiritual part is the domain of the monks who transcend the confines of caste. He argued that caste and religion do not go together; caste is simply a social institution.

His "*Address at the Final Session*" (27th September 1893) made a passionate appeal for cultivating understanding, harmony and peace as the eternal message of all religions or as the common ground of religious unity. He argued in a convincing manner that this unity will not come by the triumph of anyone religion and the destruction of others; but through peaceful co-existence of various religious

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<sup>73</sup> C.W., I, p.20.

orders and sects. Thus his final address was particularly notable, for it was through that address that he firmly established the Hindu thought in its rightful place, proved the equal validity of all religions and exposed the futility of religious conversion. "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian; but each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth."<sup>74</sup>

Thus in resisting Christian proselytism successfully, in showing to the world that India had something substantial to offer towards the creation of a Universal Religion and world fraternity, Vivekananda represented the culminating point of nineteenth century quest for national and cosmopolitan identity.<sup>75</sup>

The net result of Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Hinduism has been summed up by a modern scholar in the following words:

By establishing harmony between Vedanta and Science, reason and faith, mysticism and logic, polytheism and monotheism; by delineating the essential divinity of human nature against the

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p.24.

<sup>75</sup> There were efforts to revitalize Hindu religion from other directions also. The Theosophical Society of India founded by Col. Olcott emphasized the universal ideas of Hinduism. After hearing his lectures, Dilger, a Basel missionary wrote: "*The Colnel attempted to show that no god, but man's spirit is to be our chief aim. In spite of the many hundreds of castes and caste prejudices obtaining among the Hindus, he expatiated on the brotherhood of Hindus and wound up by saying that through his teaching Theosophy, he has saved the Hindus from the hands of cruel missionaries. What a wonderful samaritan!*" See Basel Mission Annual Report for 1888, p.15.

Christian belief in Original sin and laying emphasis on the spiritual oneness of mankind, by applying the principle of unity in variety in nature to social conditions and religious diversities, by lifting religion from the abyss of dogmas and doctrines and giving it a dynamic meaning and interpretation which could lead humanity towards peace, harmony and progress, Swami Vivekananda succeeded in evoking admiration and gaining some adherents for his faith.<sup>76</sup>

It may be recalled that prior to his visit of the US, Hindu Philosophy had trickled to the West in droplets, and that too in a westernised way. The misconception and distortion of Hinduism had evoked interest and not admiration among the Westerners; But now he succeeded in dispelling such notions about Hinduism and in raising it in the eyes of the West. Hinduism was no longer to be a jigsaw puzzle with practices like "throwing the widows into funeral pyre or throwing children into crocodile ponds" as was misconceived by the Americans; instead it was an ancient faith with a catholic outlook, comprehensive system of ethics, lofty metaphysics and a monotheistic base. In fact through Vivekananda the Western world had seen the reascent India, the New India. As B.N. Datta had noted:

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<sup>76</sup> Satish K. Kapoor, "Swami Vivekananda: Impact on the West-Some Dimensions" in Prabudha Bharata, Sept. 1993, p.417.

. . . Indeed so long India had been regarded as the land of rope-trick, lifting flowerpot from the ground by magic, belief in spooks and goblins and what not, interested westerners had interpreted Hindu culture and religion in that way. New India-India that was unfolding herself had never been interpreted in America.<sup>77</sup>

Hence, what is more important is that through the new interpretations given by Vivekananda it was brought to the knowledge of the world that the "Sanatana Dharma"<sup>78</sup> had still its eternal vigour and that India is as great in the present as ever in the past and at the critical moment, it can gather up and voice the communal consciousness. In fact at the Parliament of Religions, it was the religious consciousness of India, that spoke through him.

### **Impact on the Indian Mind**

Swamiji's interpretations of Hinduism in fact brought in new lifeblood in the enslaved people of India. The kind of impact it produced on the higher strata of Hindu society is evident from the Annual Reports of the Basel Mission.<sup>79</sup> It shows

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<sup>77</sup> B.N. Datta, *Swami Vivekananda, Patriot Prophet - A Study* (Calcutta, 1993 edn.), p.129.

<sup>78</sup> The term is applied to Hinduism in its higher level.

<sup>79</sup> (a) In the words of Missionary Diez, Vivekananda's activities in fact "excited and stunned the higher strata of the Hindu Society". See *Basel Mission Annual Report* for the year 1897, p.30.

(b) Another Missionary Sersonsoens wrote "The higher the position of our Hindus as to caste and education, the greater their oppositions to Christ and his gospel, especially since they have heard of Vivekananda and of his book". See *Annual Report of Basel Mission* for 1901, p.37.

that a new consciousness was emerging in India, particularly in the upper sections and influencing the nationalist sentiments. This situation further promoted the anticolonial feelings. At the dawn of the twentieth century many nationalists turned to be terrorists also in Bengal. These youths were highly influenced by the philosophical discourse of Swamiji and were committed to die for a cause, the freedom of the motherland. When the Ramakrishna Mission was founded in different parts of India, those centres initiated a struggle against the evils of casteism and social divisions. In fact by founding this organization Swamiji who was the embodiment of youthful energy, stirred the youth with a new concept of values. The youth were made to understand that philanthropic-patriotic impulses were parts of meaningful existence.<sup>80</sup>

Further, a feeling of oneness was promoted through the activities of the Mission not only in the urban centres but also in the rural settings. Those who were attracted towards these centres turned to be nationalists and pioneers of freedom struggle in India. In brief the discourses of Swamiji and his reinterpretation of Hinduism created an ideal setting for the growth of Indian nationalism.

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<sup>80</sup> Among the youth of South India, inspired by the patriotic ideals of the Mission, was V.O. Chidambaram Pillai (1872-1936) an ardent nationalist, popularly known as VOC of South India and the well known pioneer of Swadeshi Shipping Movement which the British Govt. crushed and whom they imprisoned. He had been inspired by Swami Ramakrishnanada, the first President of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras. See S. Dorai Raj, Doyen of Swadeshi Shipping", *The Hindu*, 22 Sept. 2001.

The philosophers of French Revolution (1789) had visualised a new ideal society and inspired a mass movement against the monarchy. In India Vivekananda, the philosopher of national awakening, visualised the freedom of a subjugated nationality, inculcated the philosophy of fearlessness in their minds and inspired them to sacrifice and worship God through service to humanity. This was a great lesson for the millions in India who were ready to face any situation, in their march to the great goal of freedom.

# EDUCATION AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekanada : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER V

### EDUCATION AND NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

It has been noted earlier that with the true instinct of a sociologist Swami Vivekananda had diagnosed the causes of India's degradation. During his wandering in the country (1890-1892), his penetrating intellect could scan all her national problems and hence he was not superficial in his diagnosis of the causes of the ills which were eating into her vitals. He also learnt from his travels that the lack of education had led to the degradation of the Indian masses.

During his travels in the West (1893-97) Vivekananda became convinced of the importance of an education – intellectual, technical and most important of all, social – which would help Indians to develop those national traits which had made the Western nations great and progressive. He felt that the Indians had inherited a great culture and tradition and India had produced many great saints and sages who were international in their stature. Yet, as a people, Indians had failed to develop those traits of character and social awareness which alone could make for general welfare and happiness through a wide diffusion of intelligence and efficiency among the people.<sup>1</sup> Swamiji saw in the Western people tremendous energy, self discipline, efficiency, the spirit of social awareness and co-operation. Actually

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Ranganathananda, *Eternal Values for a Changing Society* (Bombay, 1963 edn.), p.484.

these are the virtues which contribute to build a healthy society. But he saw these things lacking in India. Jealousy, self-centredness, love of ease, utter lack of social awareness and work efficiency and too much talking and too little working – these traits of Indian national character of his time pained Swamiji. In his letters and speeches, he gave expression to this anguish of his heart and the remedy for these ills. And he discovered that remedy in education and more education. As he put it:

Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people there was brought to my mind the state of our own people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got.<sup>2</sup>

In fact he discovered that education was the panacea for the ills of Indian society. Swamiji pondered over education as a national problem and he even considered it as a vehicle for effecting national, social and even spiritual reconstruction of the country.

As a patriot – prophet and reformer, Swamiji's message to India was meant to introduce life into her people, to give vigour to her national life, to shake her people out of their age-long lethargy and to make them proud of their ancient heritage. Naturally, his discussions and speeches contained a whole body of library

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<sup>2</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works IV* (Calcutta, 1970 edn.), p.483.

bearing on the subject of education, though he did not build up or systematise any theory of education as a thinker or a philosopher. Gifted with a radiant mind, penetrating intellect, social consciousness, spiritual thrust and moral uprighteousness, Vivekananda made a number of observations and spirited comments on education as a national problem which were profound, revealing and stimulating.

### **The Attitude of Intellectuals to Education**

The nineteenth century intellectuals were firm believers in the efficacy of enlightenment as a remedy for the ills of Indian society. The reformers from Rammohan Roy to Swami Vivekananda emphasized the need of education. They traced the source of all ills in Indian society including religious superstition and social obscurantism to the general ignorance of the people. The dissemination of knowledge therefore, occupied a central place in their programme of reform.<sup>3</sup> For eg: Rammohan Roy believed that if the Indians received proper education, "they would be worthy of respect by all men".<sup>4</sup> Another reformer Keshab Chandra Sen expected that education would enable the poor "the men of consequence"<sup>5</sup> to

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<sup>3</sup> K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectual and Social Consciousness in Colonial India* (New Delhi, 1995), p.9.

<sup>4</sup> Rammohan Roy, "Modern Encroachments on the Ancient Rights of Females" in Nag and Burman, ed., *English Works of Rammohan Roy* (Calcutta, 1945), Vol. I, p.9.

<sup>5</sup> In his powerful essay entitled "*Men of Consequence*" Keshab Chandra Sen addressed the poor as "men of consequence" for their being an exploited class. He argued that wealth was created by the poor classes, but was enjoyed by the rich.

improve their condition and also "to forcibly stop outrage, cruelty and oppression".<sup>6</sup> Vivekananda was more positive about this question. While the other reformers expected the dissemination of knowledge under the bureaucratic control of the British administration, Swamiji showed the boldness to state that Indians must have a hold on the spiritual and secular education of the nation. He exhorted his fellow countrymen, "you must dream it, you must talk it, you must think and you must work it out. Till then there is no salvation"<sup>7</sup>. He said so because he was conscious of the defects of the colonial system or Macaulayan pattern of education, prevalent during his days.

### **Defects of the Colonial System of Education**

Swamiji pointed out that the educational system established and nourished by the British government was imperialistic and colonial in character, because it was based on Western knowledge and through the medium of English. It was anti-Indian and was negative in its attitude towards the cultural heritage of India. To quote him:

We have had a negative education all along our boyhood. We have only learnt that we are nobodies, seldom are we given to

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Panikkar, n.3, p.9.

<sup>7</sup> C.W., III, p.301 and IV, p.362.

understand that great men were ever born in our country.

Nothing positive has been taught to us.<sup>8</sup>

Such a system of education, he said "did not impart the virtue of confidence and faith".<sup>9</sup> Thus Vivekananda characterised the then prevailing system of education as "negative", its main defect being the cultural enslavement of the entire nation. He believed that "A negative education or any training that is based on negation is worse than death".<sup>10</sup>

It is a widely shared view that the educational policy of the British government was motivated by the twin objectives of (1) dissemination of colonial ideology and (2) utility for administrative needs. To the Christian missionaries education was primarily an instrument for evangelisation. The debates on education within the official circles were never concerned with how best Indians could be educated, but on the contrary was concerned first, with how best the educational policy could serve the administrative needs and secondly and perhaps more importantly, with how best it could inculcate the colonial dominance in the mind of Indians.<sup>11</sup> Education was used as an effective instrument for projecting British institutions and values as the ideal. Therefore the educational enterprise of the

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<sup>8</sup> C.W., V, p.332.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.367.

<sup>10</sup> C.W., III, 8<sup>th</sup> edn., p.301.

<sup>11</sup> Panikkar, n.3.

government, vernacular, primary or university education, was always within the confines of the colonial needs.<sup>12</sup>

Another defect which he pointed out was that education, particularly higher education, was the privilege of a microscopic minority. It was inaccessible to the poor masses who could not afford it. Connected with this, it may also be noted that English education at the beginning produced only a literate class who put up an insurmountable barrier between themselves and the unlettered masses. During the first fifty years of English education, a large section of educated Indians followed Western ideas blindly and initiated Western mode of life somewhat thoughtlessly. This section of educated Indians lost all touch with the rich human soil and were quite oblivious of their surroundings. The common masses were removed far away from the educated class. They could neither accept the new learning nor go back to the past because traditional system of education was fast disappearing. No effort was made to harmonise the traditional values of India with the new scientific spirit brought from the West.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, there was a growing realisation that scientific knowledge was crucial to the progress of the country and to the development of modern thought and culture. The need of dissemination of scientific knowledge was recognized, also in view of a rational approach to social

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

problems. But, working within the constraints of its colonial needs, the British government was neither interested in general dissemination of scientific knowledge nor in encouraging higher pursuits of scientific studies by Indians.<sup>13</sup>

To Swamiji, the prevailing system of education was defective, also because it gave premium on cramming and not on original thinking, character formation or development of personality. He evaluated that,

Our pedagogues are making parrots of our boys and ruining their brains by cramming a lot of subjects into them. . . . What a fuss and fury about graduating and after a few days all cooled down . . . .<sup>14</sup>

The negative education which in Vivekanand's view, existed in India at that time was bookish and not practical. It conveyed some information undigested. It did not help the assimilation of ideas, growth of thought patterns or flourishing of the creative faculties in a man. Rather it deadened human potentialities. Vivekananda observed:

And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in the three presidencies. Every man of originality that has been produced, has been educated

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>14</sup> C.W., V, p.366.

elsewhere, either outside India or in the traditional centres of learning within the country.<sup>15</sup>

This statement of Swamiji need not be taken at its face value. But it certainly contained an element of truth.

When the English education was introduced in Indian schools and colleges, the British policy makers expected that the new system would produce a group of 'denationalised' Indians fit only to be means to an end i.e., serving in the subordinate ranks of administration by reason of their competent knowledge of English. It is true that a great many Hindus of middle class or 'Bhadralok' assiduously learnt English with a view to obtaining suitable jobs in the British administrative machinery because these jobs were more secure and less exacting than other avenues of employment. But the education which they received was not often a "proper" one for, as Swamiji pointed out that it was meant passing some examinations. He said that it was "nothing but a perfect machine for turning out clerks".<sup>16</sup> It was a "clerk-making" rather than a "man-making" education which was being imparted to the young Indians. His abhorrence for the prevailing system of education was expressed in the following words:

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<sup>15</sup> C.W., III, p.302.

<sup>16</sup> C.W., V, p.364.

Will you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures? The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion – is it worth the name?<sup>17</sup>

What he meant was that education should be for life as opposed to education for a profession. To him the aim of education, particularly that of higher education should be to make man competent to solve the problems of life.

Finally he held that new life giving ideas did not find any place in the existing scheme of education. Education was confined to mastering a mass of facts only. It was "slowly making man a machine".<sup>18</sup>

Swamiji's analysis of the Macaulayan pattern of education indicates that even in the midst of his cyclonic activities, he clearly saw the defects of the system. That too at a time, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, when people were enamoured of the prevalent system of education, he could clearly envisage its underlying defects. He was not blind to the good aspects of the system, but in its ultimate effect it proved to be "a bundle of negations". So he observed thus:

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<sup>17</sup> C.W., VII, p.147.

<sup>18</sup> C.W., IV (Calcutta, 1979 edn.), p.490.

The education that you are getting now has some good points, but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place it is not a man-making education.<sup>19</sup>

He believed that the very survival of India depended upon the replacement of the prevailing system of education. Swamiji was not against Western Science and Technology. In fact he welcomed western knowledge for material well-being of the nation; but not at the cost of India's rich cultural heritage. Swamiji wanted a harmonious blending of cultural heritage of India and Western Science. His philosophy of education was a synthesis of the two.

### **Educational Concepts of Swami Vivekananda**

Swamiji could, not only point out the defects of the educational system in vogue but also could clearly and unmistakably enunciate and formulate a new system. This new system was contrary to the system of education that prevailed in his time. He firmly believed that "the very strength must come to the nation through education".<sup>20</sup> Therefore he suggested a nationally oriented education, an education which would make men real patriots, promote national integration and make "true men".

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<sup>19</sup> Vivekananda, n.10.

<sup>20</sup> Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta, 1972), p.198.

Swamiji spoke of a nationally oriented education for India with his conviction that only a national education could offer the best preparation for the attempts to solve the national problems. Sister Nivedita defines the concept in these words:

National education implies a training which has a strong colour of its own and begins by relating the child to his home and country through all that is familiar, but ends by making him free of all that is true, cosmopolitan and universal. This is the necessary condition of all healthy education, in all countries, whatever their political position or stage of development.<sup>21</sup>

From this it could be seen that a national education is first and foremost an education in the national idealism. We must remember that the aim of education is the development of man himself – "the emancipation of sympathy and intellect".<sup>22</sup> To emancipate the greatest number of people most easily and effectively it is necessary to choose familiar ideals and forms. Education through vernacular languages and familiarisation of the child with indigenous culture were part of this scheme of national education. It may be noted in this connection that the colonial system of education "aimed at stuffing the heads of young learners with ideas not

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<sup>21</sup> *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Advaita Ashram (Calcutta, 1982), IV, p.351.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

close to the Indian soil.<sup>23</sup> This had led many a young Indian to follow the Western ideas blindly and their mere imitation of Western mode of life accelerated the process of intellectual and cultural enslavement.

The scheme of national education for India as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda rests on the following basic principles:

1. Education is training of the mind. It is the life building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. It is a growth from within - manifestation of the perfection already in man;
2. education must help the common mass of people to equip themselves in the struggle for life;
3. education must provide means for developing one's physical as also moral strength.
4. religion is the core of education; and
5. education should inspire every Indian to take pride in and be sensible of his glorious heritage and it should, at the same time, equip him in such a manner that he can imbibe new values brought forth by Western education particularly through the progress of science and technology.

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<sup>23</sup> A.K. Majumdar, *Understanding Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1972), p.64.

It may be noted that Vivekananda did not write any scholarly work on his educational ideas, nor did he express them in a well knit form with logical precision. His ideas were expressed through different lectures and writings in a scattered way. But if we connect them in a logical sequence, we get his idea of national education in whose scope all sections of society were brought and in which particular stress was laid on mass education and women's education.

Critics have pointed out that Vivekananda's views on education were not original and similar ideas were expressed by other Indian reformers.<sup>24</sup> It is true that his ideas like national system of education and education of the masses were part of the educational programme proposed by the contemporary reformers like Akshay Kumar Dutta, Dayananda Saraswathy, Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen and others.<sup>25</sup> The ideas and activities of these reformers might have influenced

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<sup>24</sup> Vivienne Baumfield, "Science and Sanskrit: Vivekananda's View on Education" in William Radice (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism* (Delhi, 1998), p.210.

<sup>25</sup> K.N. Panikkar points out that Akshay Kumar Dutta was the first Indian to evolve a national scheme of education. He advocated a free and compulsory education and the educational facilities to be made available to peasants and workers. Dayananda went to the extent of suggesting that there should be a government order and national custom that nobody should keep their children at home once they attained the age of eight and "those violating it should be severely punished". To Vidyasagar "the extension of education to the mass of the people" was the immediate need of the country. Keshab Chandra Sen stressed the importance of mass education in his popular magazine *Sulabh Samachar*. See details in K.N. Panikkar, *Presidential Address - Section III, Indian History Congress, Aligar, December 1975, p.10.*

Vivekananda's philosophy of Education. The impact of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and his influential novel *Anandamath* (1882), was also profound on him.<sup>26</sup>

But what made Vivekananda distinct from the contemporary intellectuals and reformers was that he saw education as the key to India's national development. He was the first religious leader to declare openly that the greatest problem of India was the upliftment of the masses. And he developed a method of uplift in harmony with Indian culture. The practical aspect of this method was based on education. Only he could say with utmost sincerity and conviction that the only service to be done for the lower classes in India was to give them education so that "they will work out their own salvation".<sup>27</sup> Thus, even at that distant time, Swamiji understood the enormous importance of education in the transformation of Indian society.

Moreover, Swamiji's educational concepts which are noted for their

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<sup>26</sup> (a) Mahendranath, a brother of the Swami, has pointed out that the Swami read Bankim Chandra's works with avidity and the spirit of "Bande Mataram" has undoubtedly been a great force in shaping his early life. See *The Modern Review*, Calcutta, October 1968 Issue, p.726.

(b) In his influential novel *Anandamath* (1882), Bankim describes a band of Sanyasins who seek political liberation through the integration of "physical knowledge" borrowed from the West, with the tradition. According to Baumfield "the band of Sanyasins described in *Anandamath* has clear parallels with Vivekananda's view of their role in his education policy". See details in Baumfield, n.24, p.204.

<sup>27</sup> C.W., IV, p.362.

pedagogic soundness<sup>28</sup> exerted a profound impact on other Indian thinkers like Gandhi and Tagore who devised schemes of educational reforms similar to that of the former. That also makes him distinct from early Indian reformers.

The salient features of his thinking on education are recorded in a letter headed "*The Education that India Needs*" written to Shrimata Sarala Ghosal, Editor of *Bharati*, in April 1897<sup>29</sup> in which he speaks of a "man-making education".

### **Man-making Education**

The educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is noted for the stress it laid on "man-making" education. The true purpose of education as defined by him should be man-making. Man-making education is that which makes one strong - physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. True education is that "training by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet".<sup>30</sup> By character he meant such virtues as courage, strength, self-respect, love and service of others. A character making education, he suggested, as part of his programme of national reconstruction. Swamiji had visualised an ideal system of education for Indians which would make them self-confident and remove their inferiority complex.

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<sup>28</sup> Sister Nivedita's remark is significant in this context. She wrote "with regard to the details of his educational suggestions, their pedagogic soundness had always been startling to me", Nivedita, n.20, p.282.

<sup>29</sup> C.W., IV, pp.481-87.

<sup>30</sup> C.W., V, p.257.

Therefore he maintained that the object of education should not merely be the advancement of theoretical knowledge but also the advancement of life, development of the highest power and capacities and the unfoldment of the noblest potentialities of the student. He must be enabled at the same time to apply intelligently to his own life all the ideas that he has learnt and gathered and thus promote his growth physically, intellectually, morally and spiritually. From this it is clear that Swamiji had completely comprehended all the aspects of education not neglecting its main purpose of imparting knowledge. Therefore he had clarified:

If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library . . . . If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias the rishis.<sup>31</sup>

That is why he held that the object of an ideal system should be not merely to acquire knowledge but to develop a capacity to face the problems of life intelligently.

Now the question arises as to why Swamiji advocated a man-making education. In his scheme of national liberation, upliftment of masses gained primacy. Upliftment of masses meant creation of a pattern of excellence in society

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<sup>31</sup> C.W., III, p.302.

as well as within its individual members. In his scheme of social reform he had always envisaged the development of fuller personality of the individual. This was possible only if a "man making" education was imparted to all. Manliness connotes the virtues of strength, freedom, mutual help and appreciation and equality i.e., a sense of *Samabhava*.

Swamiji set forth his ideal of national education with a view to uplift the masses, because national rejuvenation could be achieved only through their uplift. Naturally, as opposed to the prevailing notion, education was not to be the monopoly of a chosen few, instead it was to be all pervading. It must not only touch, but rejuvenate the masses who have so long been denied the benefit of education. According to A.K. Majumdar "The communication between the highly sophisticated elite of the Indian society and the common masses which was snapped as a result of our following the Macaulayan pattern of education, was sought to be restored by the Swami".<sup>32</sup>

But this upliftment, according to him, was to be achieved through "proper" education. By the term "proper" he meant an education, comprehensive in character. It was to be comprehensive to embrace all aspects of human culture both secular and spiritual. For realising this end, he stressed the need for developing physical culture. As has been noted earlier, Swamiji found that the main reason for

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<sup>32</sup> Majumdar, n.23, p.66.

India's downfall was the neglect of the masses. Owing to a thousand years' tyranny by kings, preists and the higher castes, the masses had become weak. The Swami considered physical weakness as the cause of at least one third of the miseries of the Indians. Pointing out that physical weakness as a great hindrance to Indian life, Swamiji says:

We speak of many things parrot like, but never do them. Speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of it? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything. We must strengthen it.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore the focal point of his message constitutes an urge to give up the soul killing weakness - "the only sin which human nature falls victim to". The sin of weakness can be removed by strength - physical, mental and spiritual. A sound mind necessarily pre-supposes a sound body. Therefore he insisted on the need of developing a physical culture and this idea was to be incorporated into the curriculum. In course of his conversation with a disciple, Swamiji said:

You must learn to make the physique very strong and teach the same to others . . . . Body and mind run parallel . . . . When the necessity of strengthening the physique is brought home to people, they will exert themselves of their own accord. It is to

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<sup>33</sup> C.W., II, p.301.

make them feel this need that education is necessary at the present moment.<sup>34</sup>

His insistence of developing a physical culture was born out of the scientific principle that a man is a body-mind complex. Hence the body cannot and should not be neglected. As he said on one occasion "the physically weak are unfit for the realisation of the self".

There are numerous passages where the Swami urged upon his countrymen to be strong physically before all else. Two such passages may be noted. Addressing the youth of Calcutta he said:

Be strong my young friends! That is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through Gita. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger, you will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet and you feel yourselves as men.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> C.W., VII, p.190.

<sup>35</sup> C.W., III, p.242.

These words convey the message that only a healthy mind can understand the real meaning of Religion and there can be a healthy mind only in a healthy body. He had also pointedly stressed that strength implies the vitality of both the body and the soul.

In another place he says:

What the country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it is meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face.<sup>36</sup>

The above passage indicates that Swamiji wanted India to have men of tremendous will. For that he emphasized the idea of the development of an integrated personality i.e., the development of the body, mind and heart. He said that perfecting the body by acquiring "muscles of iron and nerves of steel" one must try to perfect the other instrument necessary for acquiring knowledge i.e., the mind. And the only method for perfecting this instrument is concentration. To him, the very essence of education is concentration of mind.

Swamiji had a firm faith in the youth who are future citizens and believed that the nation was safe in the hands of properly educated youth. That is why he

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p.190.

wanted education to effect a total transformation in the youth by making them strong, bold, proud and independent. He repeatedly pointed out that strength implies the vitality of both body and mind. Fearlessness and abiding faith in the self must go side by side. Moral growth must accompany the intellectual growth which would be meaningless without sound physical growth. A recent scholar has stated that "It is this harmonious blend or the total growth of an integrated human personality that seems to be the major thrust of Vivekananda's philosophy of education".<sup>37</sup>

### **Scientific Education and National Regeneration**

It has been noted earlier that Vivekananda had envisaged a scheme of national education for the national regeneration in India and emphasized the spiritual basis of education. But it is incorrect to say that he overemphasized the spiritual basis of education to the utter neglect of the need of scientific and technological training. Rather, recalling the message of his Master, he used to say most emphatically. "It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion, it is an insult to a starving people to teach them metaphysics."<sup>38</sup>

When Swamiji set forth an ideal system of education he was aiming at the regeneration of India as a whole and his plan for national regeneration included an

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<sup>37</sup> H.L., Agnihotri, *Swami Vivekananda: His Dynamic Vision* (Hisar, 1994 edn.), p.145.

<sup>38</sup> *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1964 edn.), p.141.

urge to remove poverty, unemployment and backwardness of the masses. He was convinced that for India's regeneration, she should take from the Western nations all that was good in their civilization. The material prosperity of the West made him think as to what could be the source for their material progress. He was convinced that the physical basis of the western civilization was sufficiently strong and this explains why the West achieved amazing material progress. So he urged upon his countrymen to be adequately sensible to the material values of life and naturally, the study of science and technology did receive adequate notice in his scheme of education. He often stated that he would like Indian Youth to learn technical education from the advanced nations and serve the country. Education, he asserted, should be controlled by the awakened countrymen, but the teaching of English and Science must be given priority. Swamiji had said that,

What we need, you know, is to study independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own and with it the English language and Western Science. We need technical education and all else and that may develop industries, so that men may earn enough to provide for themselves.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> C.W., V, pp.368-69.

Again he stated that,

With the help of Western science set yourselves to dig the earth and produce food stuffs, not by means of mean servitude of others but by discovering new avenues to productions - by your own exertions aided by Western Science.<sup>40</sup>

From these passages it is clear that he gave adequate place to the study of Western Science and technology in his scheme of education. In fact he urged the young Indians to dispel their poverty with the help of scientific agriculture and technology so that they stand on their own feet without depending on others.

### **Mass Education and Culture**

Swamiji attached much importance to character development in his scheme of education because of his conviction that "the success of a nation depends on its men". Apart from spiritual education the disciplines of languages and humanities will help the students to develop this great quality. Therefore he thought that the study of science and technology must be accompanied by the study of languages. Though the Swami was strongly in favour of teaching through the medium of the

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<sup>40</sup> C.W., VII, p.183.

mother tongue<sup>41</sup> of the student, he laid great stress on the study of Sanskrit as an obligatory subject because he believed that the spiritual ideals of India were hidden in Sanskrit language. The gems of spirituality that were stored in our sacred books and were in possession of a few fortunate people should be broadcast and made known to everybody. To quote him: "The abstract Advaita must become living, poetic in everyday life".<sup>42</sup> It may be noted in this context that it was as a Socialist that he had held the view that no Indian should be denied the benefit of education and even the poorest man in the country should be enabled to acquire it so that the lost individuality of the masses could be restored. But as a spiritualist, he also held the view that literacy and culture should go together and in order to give permanence to the raised masses, "they must be given culture". For him, the real culture could be imparted in India only through the popularisation of Sanskrit, and that was why he wanted to make the study of Sanskrit obligatory. His advocacy of the study of Sanskrit was also born out from his conviction that without a real knowledge of Sanskrit, a Hindu would remain an alien to his own rich culture.

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<sup>41</sup> A proper knowledge of the language of the country as a necessary pre-requisite for the progress and regeneration leading to political freedom was a conviction shared by the intellectuals of the time. The Macaulayan system was creating a group of people emasculated from national culture and alienated from their own country men. Therefore the lack of knowledge of mother tongue was seen as one of the major reasons for the misery and degradation of the country. In Vivekananda's scheme of National Education, special emphasis was given to the study of Vernacular languages.

<sup>42</sup> Letter dated 17 February 1896, written to Alasinga Perumal, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1970), p.338.

## Female Education

Swamiji's scheme of national education is worthy of note for the stress it laid on female education and for suggesting a peculiar system of education for women. His anxiety for educating the women is expressed in one of the conversations which he made with his disciples in 1897 at Calcutta. To quote him:

It is seen from the official statistics that only three or four percent of the people in India are educated, and not even one percent of the women . . . . Nothing can be done to improve the state of things unless there is spread of education first among women and the masses . . . . But the whole work must be done in the style of our own country.<sup>43</sup>

These words of Swamiji point out the need of uplifting Indian women on national lines. He used to say that just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, so a society cannot progress when one of its limbs is paralysed. So he wanted to put into operation a scheme of education for women which would make them fearless and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He had the confidence that if women got the right type of education, they will be able to solve their own problems in their own way. Therefore he wanted to start centres for teaching women where,

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<sup>43</sup> C.W., VI, *Conversations and Dialogues*, p.489.

Brahmacharinis of education and character should take up the task of teaching . . . . History, and the Puranas, housekeeping and the arts, the duties of home-life and principles that make for the development of an ideal character have to be taught with the help of modern science and the women students must be trained up in ethical and spiritual life. We must see to their growing up as ideal matrons of home in time.<sup>44</sup>

He had suggested a kind of education which would make women proficient in managing their homes, since they had a greater role to play in the family. His concept of female education was based on his firm conviction that a great nation is born out of great men and "it is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born".<sup>45</sup> Hence the need of making women truly enlightened. He also held the view that along with other things, women should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism, so that they will not feel helpless at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger. Hence, Swamiji suggested that Indian women should learn the art of self-defence. As he put it, "In the present day it has become necessary for them (women) also to learn self-defence. See how grand was the queen of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

Jhansi!"<sup>46</sup> According to him the ideal Indian woman was one who has acquired not only the purity and patience of Sita, the intellectual resources of Gargi and fearlessness of Savitri, but also one who has acquired the physical prowess of Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi.<sup>47</sup> Swamiji was the first Indian reformer to suggest that the art of self-defence should be included in the curriculum for women. What he said more than one hundred years ago is relevant even for the present day.

Swamiji stands distinct from other social reformers of the time, by advocating a peculiar system of education for women. He believed that education and economic independence would eliminate the social evils relating to women and it would in turn help the emergence of an awakened nation.

Gandhiji's concept of women's education had been greatly influenced by Vivekananda's ideal of female education. His famous statement that "educate a man, you are educating an individual; educate a woman, you are educating the whole family" was nothing but an extended version of the latter's concept.

### **Education and Social Awareness**

A peculiar feature of his scheme of education was that it wanted the involvement of a very large number of young but honest men and women, who

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<sup>46</sup> C.W., V, p.342.

<sup>47</sup> Refer to foot note No. 38 in Chapter III of this thesis.

should voluntarily spread themselves all over the country to impart the knowledge to the toiling people. About the method to be followed, he himself had written in a letter to his co-disciples that,

A hundred thousand men and women should go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up - the gospel of equality.<sup>48</sup>

Vivekananda gave a call to the wandering and self-sacrificing Sannyasins to go to every village, to every door not only to preach the gospel of Vedanta but also to teach history, geography, science, literature, agriculture, commerce, etc. Preaching and teaching should go hand in hand. Swamiji suggested this method because of his realisation that education during his days was the privilege of a chosen few and the schools and universities of those days had failed to initiate the work of regeneration. Therefore if the poor boy cannot come to school, education must go to him. In the words of Swamiji "If the mountain does not come to Muhammed, Muhammed must go to the mountain".<sup>49</sup> Moreover education should create social conscience by stimulating social awareness. The point needs an explanation i.e., Swamiji was fully aware of the fact that no amount of social

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<sup>48</sup> Letter to Alasinga dtd. 20<sup>th</sup> August 1893, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1998 edn.), p.41.

<sup>49</sup> C.W., IV, p.363.

reform from outside would bring national regeneration, for there was hardly any urge among the common masses to rejuvenate themselves. Some highly enlightened people, however, attempted to thrust their own ideas of social reform on the people in general without any appreciable success. Vivekananda urged that first, the people must stand on their legs and then they must reform themselves. His concept of reform was self reform. All that was needed to bring about this change in outlook was the spread of education. Through an adroit blend of the secular and the spiritual in the scheme of education, the Swami wanted not only to make the masses enlightened, but also wanted education to enable the enlightened masses to do away with superstitions and obscurantism. His plan for national reconstruction was marked by an earnest desire to preserve all that was good in the past. According to Aurobindo, "Preservation by Reconstruction " was the dominant feature of his programme of action. This was reflected in his philosophy of education also. His "man-making education" was not meant to be carried out under the prevailing method of teaching. Since education aims at "growth", he maintained that real growth comes only in the company of dedicated men of learning living far away from the madding crowds. Thus he stressed the need of reviving the "Gurukula" system by which he meant the setting up of residential

educational institutions.<sup>50</sup> He was of the opinion that there could be no education without the impact of the personal life of the teacher. Vivekananda's emphasis on the virtues of celibacy on the part of the students and the company of the Guru and his insistence on free tuitions and an absence of any material motive behind imparting and receiving of education offered a re-orientation of the traditional process of education. His scheme was a happy blend of the modern and the traditionalist concepts, placing due emphasis on the study of science and technology, and all those disciplines which would hasten intellectual, moral and social growth of the individual and equip him with means of living.

Evaluating the features of Vivekananda's concept of education, T.S. Avinashilingam, the great educationalist and freedom fighter of the Old Madras Presidency, has remarked thus:

Swami Vivekananda's concept of education is as broad based as life. It is not utilitarian, being not confined only to bread winning. It is not merely national, as it transcends the narrowness of geographical boundaries. He wanted the use of technology for

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<sup>50</sup> The ideal of education within traditional Hinduism was expressed in the "gurukula" system. For Swamiji, there was within the gurukula system much that was worthy of emulation. The emphasis on the religious teacher who was responsible for the pupil's spiritual, moral and intellectual development was something he hoped to recreate in the residential schools of Ramakrishna Mission. The official history of the Ramakrishna Mission mentions his support for the Gurukula system. See Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Mission* (Almora, 1957).

eradicating the poverty of the masses. He wanted the development of a strong and healthy body. But both these were not ends in themselves but means for a higher life, leading to spiritual blessedness.<sup>51</sup>

In fact Swamiji was a great pragmatist to design a new educational system for Indians, with a view to liberate them from the clutches of colonial system of subjectification, by incorporating indigenous methods and concepts, in the educational field. Life was focussed as the central theme of education. The emphasis given by the Western mind was on rationalism, science and technology. As a matter of pragmatism, it was acceptable to him. But he also found that there should be a combination of religion and spiritualism and also of ethics in a nation building educational system. The colonial system of education had not undertaken a process for this achievement. Therefore, he initiated a vision entirely radical for India of the poor millions. When he spoke of education, the masses were always in his mind and their upliftment by education meant "helping them to help themselves". That was why he became an ideologue of the weaker and depressed sections and took pride in calling himself a socialist, a term which had connotation with egalitarianism. Though a Vedantin and Sannyasin, he was committed to science and technology, the western product of intelligence and rationality; Science

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<sup>51</sup> T.S. Avinashilingam, *Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (Coimbatore, 1997 edn.), Preface.

coupled with vedanta was the ideal he visualised. In brief, he had envisaged a new system of education for the Indians in the colonial context.

Later, the nationalists in India advocated 'national education'<sup>52</sup> to counteract the limitations of Western education. The Basic Education or the 'Nayi Talim' was an outcome of such theoretical debates initiated by Swamiji. To explain it further, Swamiji's plan for the reawakening and resurrection of masses by "self help" through the right type of education, influenced Gandhiji and his concept of Basic education<sup>53</sup> which aimed at equipping the boys and girls to earn their bread after completing their school education. Similarly, Swamiji's concept of a total development of personality including the development of psyche influenced the curriculum which Rabindranath Tagore devised at Santiniketan which became an ideal educational centre during the national struggle for freedom.

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<sup>52</sup> The concept of national education was accepted at the Wardha conference of 1937.

<sup>53</sup> Basic because it was expected to form the basis of our national culture.

# DREAM OF AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekanada : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER VI

### DREAM OF AN EGALITARIAN SOCIETY

According to Collin's Cobuild English Language Dictionary, Egalitarianism is the belief that all people are equal, and should have the same rights and opportunities, or the practice of this belief. Egalitarian society is the one that expresses or supports the belief that all people are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities. Equal opportunities imply absence of privilege and exploitation.

The Indian Society of Swamiji's time was feudalistic, caste-bound and priest-ridden. The general features of the society were marked by the dominance of priesthood, despotic divisions, the exclusion of masses on the ground of caste, creed and untouchability, which had become barriers to socio-political progress. Further, there existed strange inequalities - inequality of opportunities, inequality of social status, inequality of wealth and of culture. The overwhelming majority of the people in the country were steeped in poverty, squalour, disease and ignorance and a select few lived in comfort, luxury, power and position. The misery, pain and suffering consequent upon the denial of adequate share in the production and distribution of wealth and material prosperity and the callous continuation of poverty, hunger and ignorance constitute the absence of social justice and the negation of democratic spirit. As a wandering monk, Swami Vivekananda had

occasions to witness everywhere in India, the terrible misery, crippling poverty, paralysing slavery, and the inhuman exploitation of the masses. Such a state of affairs called the attention of Swamiji.

Inspired by social vision and moulded by social aim, Swamiji worked out a programme of action which he gave expression to in a series of speeches and writings. Like any other Social Philosopher of the day, Swamiji also dreamt of an ideal society, a socialistic or egalitarian society where "the knowledge of the priest period, the culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial and the ideal of equality of the labourer will be kept in tact minus their evils."<sup>1</sup> Swamiji had once called him a "Socialist"<sup>2</sup> not because "socialism was a perfect system," but because it guaranteed at least "half a loaf" to the poor.

### **His Approach to Socialism**

It has been noted earlier that the Indian social conditions of the nineteenth century had led Swamiji to study the then prevailing situation. With the true instinct of a sociologist, he studied the situation and proposed a plan for a new social order. As a monk, he found that in India, Society was divided more on caste than on wealth. A Brahmin was a privileged person, even if he was poor. He was

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<sup>1</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1956 edn.), VI, p.381.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Mary Hale, written from London on 1st November 1896. See details in *Ibid.*, pp.378-82.

authoritative, tried to impose his will upon others, enjoyed more power than he could legitimately claim. A Sudra, though economically sound, was the social underdog. Economic or social, the division was cruel and arbitrary in so far as it put so much power in the hands of a few and denied the majority their basic rights.

Swamiji need not have bothered about these social problems, but he did bother much about them. This was because he was interested in everything that concerned man. To him man was God himself, "The only God I believe in" as the Master used to tell him.<sup>3</sup> Naturally Vivekananda could not be indifferent when he found that "God suffered". As noted above, during his extensive travel, he saw the human suffering in its worst form. The suffering, he observed, was in most cases man-made, the rich taking advantage of the poor, the strong of the weak, the Brahmin of the Sudra and so on. Thus his long wanderings throughout India not only enabled him to realise his own self better, but also alongside, the visible trauma of man's existence. It was on such arduous unchartered journey that he discovered "the real India where a piece of bread could be more coveted than a vision of elusive Gods and where therefore problems of material suffering assumed as much importance as spiritual mission."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Jagadananda, Swami, ed. & trans., *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Madras, 1963), p.187.

<sup>4</sup> Amiya P. Sen, *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872-1905: Some Essays in Interpretation*, OUP (Delhi, 1993), p.312.

A humanist to the core, Swamiji was now pre-occupied with the thought as to whether there could be a social order with no loop holes for the strong to exploit the weak.

A Vedantin to whom religion was his first concern, Swamiji was of the conviction that religion must intervene to stop exploitation. Religion as he understood, could not countenance social injustice. But religion as practised of his days, was only promoting inequalities. In an outburst for the utter callousness shown by religious people to human suffering, he said: "I do not care for a God who cannot wipe the widow's tears and provide food to the hungry orphans."<sup>5</sup>

Religion for him was not an instrument of social discrimination or continuation of taboos, but an understanding that inspires the devotee to mitigate the suffering of the people.<sup>6</sup> To him religion should address social needs. The appeasement of the distressed people's hunger, educating the poor masses providing opportunities for the down trodden and removal of the evil of priest craft were all part of religion, so that a just society could be created. That is why he said:

Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God who cannot give bread  
here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! Pooh! India is to be

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<sup>5</sup> C.W. V, p.53

<sup>6</sup> H.L. Agnihotri, *Swami Vivekananda: His Dynamic Vision* (Hisar, 1994 edn.), p.180.

raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread and the evil of priest craft is to be removed; No priest craft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunities for everybody!<sup>7</sup>

Thus religion according to Vivekananda implied action against social injustice. But under the then prevailing situation, this action was slow to come. The miserable social conditions of the day, he thought, could be resolved by some other means, socialism. Perhaps he might have looked upto the Philosophy of Socialism "as a probable ray of hope, if not as permanent sunshine."<sup>8</sup> He has explained why he turned towards Socialism. He wrote:

The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this be tried . . . if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. A distribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same persons having pains and pleasure."<sup>9</sup>

With his deep knowledge about man and society, he knew full well that there was no short cut, no magic cure or simplistic solution to the complex problems that confronted humanity. He also knew that Socialism was no perfect philosophy, no

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<sup>7</sup> C.W. IV, p.368.

<sup>8</sup> P. Parameswaran, *Marx and Vivekananda - A Comparative Study* (Madras, 1996 edn.), p.40.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Mary Hale, n. 2, p.381.

foolproof paradigm that could provide a real and lasting solution. Nevertheless, he hoped that it could probably ameliorate the conditions of the poor and the down trodden, albeit to a limited extent. At the same time he was conscious of the limitations of that system. His attitude towards socialism was expressed in a letter which he wrote to Mary Hale. "I am a socialist, not because it is a perfect system, but because, I believe that half a loaf is better than no bread."<sup>10</sup>

It is clear from this passage that Vivekananda supported Socialism because he saw in it an attempt to end exploitation of the poor, an attempt to end privileges of all sorts, and an assurance of equality of opportunities.

The term Socialism represents a variety of thoughts and movements. Socialism aims at a social reconstruction by removing all inequalities and exploitation. However, it is difficult to give a precise answer to what exactly was the nature of Socialism that Swamiji recommended to his country men. But one thing is certain, that by Socialism he meant "a movement whereby the individuals acted freely and spontaneously for the good of the whole."<sup>11</sup> So he had said:

The individual's life is in the life of the whole: apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> A.K majumdar, *Understanding Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1972), p.89.

<sup>12</sup> C.W. IV, p.463.

### **Socialism and Social Reconstruction**

Swamiji was an optimist and as such he believed that Socialism was the best ideology that India could adopt. He advocated this ideology as a part of his programme of remoulding Indian society. To him, for remaking Indian society, a movement or an active struggle was necessary. He considered the social reconstruction, a means for social regeneration which in turn would lead to national liberation. Dr. Chelysev, the Director of Indian Institute of Asian Studies, Moscow, has rightly remarked that Vivekananda was one of the first ideologists of national awakening who openly and resolutely called for active struggle to remake or remould Indian Society and to win independence.<sup>13</sup>

Since the ideology of Socialism is usually associated with Marxians, the question arises as to whether Vivekananda was acquainted with the literature of Socialism as practised in the west or to what extent the Socialism that he recommended was of his own. It is out of question whether Swamiji had read *Communist Manifesto* of Marx and Engels (written in 1848) since it was translated into English by Helen Mac Farlane in 1850.<sup>14</sup> The American Edition of this English translation appeared in New York in 1871. Samuel Moore's English

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<sup>13</sup> Y. Chelysev, "Swami Vivekananda - The Indian Humanist, Democrat and Patriot "in R.C. Majumdar (ed.). *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume* (Calcutta, 1963), p.517.

<sup>14</sup> R.K. Das Gupta, *Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Socialism* (Calcutta, 1995), p.20.

translation of the *Communist Manifesto* appeared in 1888. By the time when Swamiji arrived in the U.S. in July 1893, Socialist Labour Party was active in preaching Socialist ideas and obviously he was acquainted with its activities. He was also acquainted with the spread of Socialist ideas in England. It may also be noted that when Vivekananda left for U.S., he had already reflected on the trends of Socialist thought in Bengal<sup>15</sup> and we can assume that he had read Bankim Chandra Chatterji's famous essay titled "Samya", which is a milestone in the intellectual

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<sup>15</sup> The point needs an explanation. The history of the Socialist thought in Modern Bengal begins with Raja Ram Mohan Roy who initiated the struggle for social and political equality in India. Later, the members of the 'Young Bengal', inspired by the ideals of the American Revolution and the French Revolution, preached the concepts of freethinking, equality and liberty. Then, the intellectuals, like Akshay Kumar Datta through the issues of *Tattvabodhini* and Dina Bandhu Mitra in his play *Nila Darpan* depicted the hardships and sufferings of the downtrodden. Keshabchandra Sen also dwelt on the exploitation of the poor by the rich in his writings. The period also witnessed the growth of labour movement, influenced by the activities of the great social Philanthropist, Sasipada Bandopadhyaya. In the early seventies of the nineteenth century, Bengal was Surcharged with the thought of equality and even revolt against oppression. Bengal witnessed two important peasant revolts in the year 1873, which led to the passing of the Bengal Tenancy Bill in 1885. The railway strikes and the cotton mill strikes which followed in Bengal and other parts of India in the eighties and nineties reflected the popularity and spread of the socialist thought in the country. Vivekananda who was a keen follower of history and contemporary events must have followed the events as well as the trends in labour agitation wherever he stayed or went. During the itinerant days in India, he formed a first hand impression of the impoverished peasantry of India. He might have been profoundly influenced by the famous Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya's (1838-1894) writings on the poor peasant and the need for economic equality, which set new trends in socialist thought in Bengal. See details in Arun Kumar Biswas, *Swami Vivekananda and the Indian Quest for Socialism* (Calcutta, 1986) pp.18-25.

history of modern India.<sup>16</sup> In that essay Bankim Chandra had located the causes of inequality and the nature of its manifestations in Indian society. Bankim accepted and justified inequality based on natural differences, but considered inequality engendered by unnatural differences "unjust and harmful" to mankind. One can see the profound impact of this aspect on the Social Philosophy of Vivekananda, especially when he discussed the problem of inequality based on caste privileges.

A modern scholar<sup>17</sup> has argued that when Vivekananda was advocating Socialism for India, he was not really offering a Socialist doctrine based on the Socialist ideas as they developed in the West in the Eighteenth or Nineteenth centuries. He had no doctrinaire interest in the Socialist ideology. He never made any European or American Socialist his master when he gave his own ideas about Socialism. It is however true that Swamiji was pleased to see in Socialist movement of the West a promise of the rise of the masses which he thought was vital for the peace and happiness of mankind.

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<sup>16</sup> Bankim Chandra's classic work "Samya" (Equality) was published in 1879. Through this work the author brought home the point that equality in privileges or rights must be ensured because this alone would bring peace and prosperity to the human race.

<sup>17</sup> R.K. Das Gupta, the Vivekananda Professor of the Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, Calcutta has presented his arguments in the book entitled *Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic Socialism*. See details in Gupta, n. 14, p.20.

The scholar further contends that Vivekananda's idea of the supremacy of the Sudra in India and the world of the future was not derived from the Marxist idea of the Dictatorship of the proletariat. To quote him:

If he was really indebted to Marx and Engels for this idea, he would have unreservedly acknowledged the debt in his writings of human history and he had such an understanding as we can call his philosophy of history. For this understanding, he did not turn to either Hegel or Marx.<sup>18</sup>

Before entering into a discussion of Swamiji's concept of Socialism, let us try to understand how he perceived History, because his concept of the rise of the Sudras has much to do with his concept of Egalitarian Society. Swamiji presented his own analysis of history in a series of articles contributed to the Bengali journal, *Udbodhan* and later compiled and brought out in bookform with the title *Modern India*. He said that, "From a careful study of the history of the world, it appears that, in conformity with the law of nature, the four castes, the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Sudra, do in every society, one after another in succession, govern the world."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> C.W. IV, (Calcutta, 1948 edn.) p.382. See also Swami Vivekananda, *Modern India* (Calcutta, 1982 edn.), pp.24-25.

According to his concept of Social evolution, the Brahmin caste, of priestly form of government was the earliest. It was prevalent in all primitive societies. The priest was the spiritual mentor and natural leader of the society. "When the priest (Brahmin) rules, there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds . . . Its glory is that at this period is laid the foundation of Science. The priests cultivate the mind, for through the mind they govern."<sup>20</sup> But according to Swamiji, in course of time, the priestly order became degenerated. It indulged in sense gratification and to build up exclusive privileges for itself and thereby estranged itself from the mainstream of the community. As it hindered social progress, it was replaced by the Kshatriyas, the royal power.

The kings (Kshatriyas) who succeeded the priests developed urban civilization, promoted arts and crafts and ruled the people with paternal love. Thus the greatest merit of the military or Kshatriya rule is that, they are not exclusive, and during that period arts and social culture attain their height, eventhough they are tyrannical. However, later on kings too became selfish and ignored the interests of the community. According to Vivekananda, as society developed itself and attained its manhood, it refused to be cowed down by royal threats. Where the society is healthy and strong, there soon follows a fierce contest between the king and his subjects, often resulting in the weakening of the royal power.

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<sup>20</sup> C.W., VI, pp.380-81.

As reflected in his theory, the struggle between the king and the people resulted in the establishment of the Vaishya or the commercial rule. "It is awful in its silent crushing and blood sucking power. Its advantage is, as the trader himself goes everywhere, he is a good disseminator of ideas collected during the two previous states. They are still less exclusive than the military, but culture begins to decay."<sup>21</sup> Analysing the history of Europe Vivekananda came to the conclusion that the Industrial Revolution in England heralded the Vaishya Supremacy and the kings became its puppets. But the Vaishya power, as its predecessors, alienated itself from society and it will be replaced by the Shudra, the proletarian or the working class. He further stated: ". . . Last will come the labourer (Shudra) rule. Its advantages will be the distribution of physical comforts - its disadvantages (perhaps) the lowering of culture. There will be a great distribution of ordinary education, but extraordinary geniuses will be less and less."<sup>22</sup> Through this assessment Swamiji tried to establish that whether the leadership of society lies in the hands of those who monopolise learning, or wield the power of riches or arms, the source of its power is always the subject masses. By so much as the class in power severs itself from this source, by so much it is sure to become weak. Swamiji

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Modern India*, n. 19.

predicted that "the first three castes have had their day. Now is the time for the rise of the Shudra and none can resist it."<sup>23</sup>

Swamiji's analysis of history and concept of Sudraraj has been commented upon by modern scholars. In the words of Ratna Reddy:

Vivekananda identified democracy with the rise of the Shudras. He called this the age of the Shudras and welcomed it, for it brings about mass awakening and progress. He wanted to awaken them to shoulder their responsibility of self government. He was of the view that inspite of the numerical majority of the Shudras, they always remained the subjects because of their "mutual hatred". But he was not dismayed. He hoped "a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class with their Shudrahood and they will gain absolute supremacy in every society".<sup>24</sup>

The above passage has got certain specific implications. Swamiji's ideas about social evolution have provided us with a concrete framework for social analysis. Moreover, he asks us to view the historical process through the concept of

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<sup>23</sup> C.W., pp.380-81.

<sup>24</sup> A.V. Ratna Reddy, *The Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi, 1984), pp.39-40.

the fourfold vedic social order known as "Chaturvarnya" which he describes as the "Law of Nature". Of course, he does not approve of the rigid, orthodox, petrified classification as it developed in post-vedic India, when the social order lost its dynamism and became fossilised. Yet there is no denying the fact that he understood and accepted it as a tool for his comprehension and interpretation of social evolution. To him, this four-fold order of society was not just a temporary freakish local phenomenon, but "a law of nature", global in character. He has elucidated this in his exposition.<sup>25</sup> It is in this context that Swamiji spoke about the emergence of Shudra Raja in India and all over the world. He also prophesied that socialism of some form or the other was coming on the boards. Thus he correlated the coming of Socialism with the future sharing of political power by the Shudras.

One point that should be noted in connection with his concept of Shudra Raj is that he did not consider Shudra Raj as the highest state to be attained or as an unmixed blessing. Government by each of the four castes, has its own strong points and weak points. The greatest shortcoming of the Shudraraj that he pointed out was that "as the result of grinding pressure and tyranny from time out of mind, the Shudras as a rule, are either meanly, servile, licking dog-like the feet of the higher class, or otherwise, are as inhuman as brute beasts". Again, "at all times their hopes and aspirations are baffled, hence a firmness of purpose and perseverance, they

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<sup>25</sup> C.W., IV, pp.24-25.

have none".<sup>26</sup> Swamiji was of the view that inefficiency and decline of culture would be the marked features of Sudra Raj, though education may spread among the masses and there will be general distribution of comforts. That is why Swamiji said that the ideal society will be one where the good qualities of each caste would be retained minus their evils.

### **His Ideal Society**

As a great teacher of human values, he believed that society should consist of certain values. These values were absolutely necessary for the perpetuation of an ideal society. Therefore the existing society demanded a thorough change or transition in favour of an ideal society. The philosophers like Rousseau and Voltaire believed in the formation of an ideal society for mankind. Swamiji also emphasized such a society in India against the background of a subjugated colonial society dominated by colonial culture and its mechanism of acculturation. Therefore, his concept of an ideal society in India was a combination of politics, philosophy and ethics. Such a vision of idealism blended with pragmatism was his great contribution to the cultural heritage of India. That made him one of the pioneers of Indian nationalism, as nationalism itself was the creation of the long desire for an ideal situation.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.59.

## Freedom and Equality

The Ideal Society which Swamiji visualised was to base itself on two principles, Freedom and Equality. To Swamiji, freedom or liberty and equality were inseparable because only in the setting of equality that true freedom can ever be enjoyed. According to him, every individual was to enjoy the basic privilege i.e., the freedom to grow. Swamiji used to say that "liberty is the first condition of growth".<sup>27</sup> "To advance oneself towards freedom physical, mental and spiritual, and help others to do so, is the supreme goal of human life".<sup>28</sup> Again, to quote him: "Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being; where it does not exist, the man, the race, the nation must go down".<sup>29</sup> Therefore he found that where liberty was strangled, the individual or society or the nation degraded itself. However, liberty according to him did not mean licentiousness or unlimited freedom. Liberty of one individual is bounded by the liberty of another. Man must have liberty to think and speak, in food, dress and marriage and in every other thing "So long as he does not injure others".<sup>30</sup> He has explained the meaning of liberty as follows:

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<sup>27</sup> C.W., III, p.246.

<sup>28</sup> C.W., V, p.147.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

<sup>30</sup> C.W., IV, p.368.

Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of mis-appropriation of wealth etc., by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will without doing any harm to others, and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge.<sup>31</sup>

The philosophy of egalitarianism as conceived by Vivekananda is embedded in the above passage. In fact "this is a socialistic interpretation of liberty where liberty is not a negative concept, but a positive one where it refers not to absence of restraint, but to positive opportunities".<sup>32</sup>

Further, in a letter addressed to Alasinga Perumal, he made clear that obtaining liberty should be conditional to giving liberty. To quote him:

None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty. Suppose the English give over to you all the power. Why, the power that be then, will hold the people down, and let them not have it.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1965), p.618.

<sup>32</sup> Santwana Dasgupta, "Vedanta and Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda" in *Parliament of Religions: Proceedings of Swami Vivekananda Centenary 1963-64* (Calcutta, 1965), p.252.

<sup>33</sup> C.W., IV, p.368.

These words reveal the ardent desire of Swamiji that political independence of the country should be followed by economic and intellectual emancipation. i.e., Intelligence and wealth would not be monopolised by the cultured few and liberty may be extended to the lower classes. Hence it follows that in the ideal society that he visualised, liberty was to be extended to the lower classes who had been deprived of the same earlier, due to several factors.

As a Spiritualist or Vedantin, Vivekananda stood for Mukti or Spiritual freedom of the individual which could be attained by three-fold means of work, worship and knowledge.<sup>34</sup> But Vivekananda did not stop there. He was a practical Vedantin or a Karmayogi. "Therefore along with spiritual freedom he demanded the material or external freedom of man; he was convinced that without material freedom, spiritual freedom is meaningless. Both are complementary".<sup>35</sup>

### **Socialism and Liberty**

Though an upholder of individual liberty, Swamiji as a Socialist was fully conscious of the contradictory stances of Socialism and individual liberty. He was conscious of the fact that Socialism involved some curtailment of liberty for the sake of common good. "This surrender of liberty must be voluntary and from a

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<sup>34</sup> C.W., V, p.434.

<sup>35</sup> V.K. Arora, *The Social and Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1965), p.91.

spirit of sacrifice rather than following oppressive social rules".<sup>36</sup> In one of his letters to Mrs. Mrinalini Bose, a Bengali devotee, Swamiji touched upon the contradictory stances of socialism. In that letter he defined as to what should be the measure of individual freedom and how much should be sacrificed for the common good. "Society everywhere is busy finding the solution of those problems . . . . The doctrine which demands the sacrifice of individual freedom to social supremacy is called socialism, while that which advocates the cause of the individual is called Individualism".<sup>37</sup>

Although Swamiji's definition of Socialism is incomplete, from the above statement one can infer that by Socialism he meant "the sacrifice of only some and not all freedom for common good particularly towards equal distribution of privileges and betterment of the underdogs".<sup>38</sup> In other words, when he called himself a Socialist, he had in his mind a programme of action which would provide for equal distribution of opportunities so that the condition of the underdogs could be improved.

In the above letter Swamiji also emphasized the point that true Socialism "is not dictatorship", on the other hand it must protect the concept of liberty for all

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<sup>36</sup> Biswas, n.15, p.75.

<sup>37</sup> C.W., IV, pp.488-92.

<sup>38</sup> Biswas, n.15, p.75.

round growth. In an egalitarian Society "there should be more liberty and privilege for the underprivileged and more sacrifice and surrender of some liberty by those who are privileged and powerful".<sup>39</sup> Just the opposite prevailed in the country under the colonial system in India.

What he meant by surrender of liberty and privilege needs an explanation. One of the defects of the caste system that existed in India was the prevalence of hereditary privileges. The hereditary transmission of privilege led to claims of superiority by certain castes and evils like untouchability. India's degradation owed much to such unhealthy traditions. Hence the need of surrendering such privileges by the so called higher castes and providing opportunities for the social underdogs had come up as a historical necessity.

### **Socialism and Equality**

Connected with the principle of Liberty is the principle of Equality. A staunch supporter of equality, Vivekananda held that equality was the way to freedom and inequality the way to bondage. So he said, "No man and no nation can attempt to gain physical freedom without physical equality, nor mental freedom without mental equality".<sup>40</sup> "Ignorance, inequality and desire" according to him,

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> C.W., IV, p.328.

"are the three causes of human misery and each follows the other in inevitable union".<sup>41</sup>

As a Socialist, Swamiji noted that one of the reasons for human misery in India under the colonial system was the inequality in wealth. He even used Karl Marx's oft quoted phrase to characterise the Nineteenth century economic conditions. He wrote "as a result of the economic system of the day, the poor are becoming poorer and the rich richer".<sup>42</sup> His great desire for creating a just society in India, by removing poverty was expressed for the first time on an international platform in 1893 at Chicago where he made critical remarks on the activities of the Christian missionaries in India. . In his speech, he emphatically said that it was not religion that India needed most, but "It is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats".<sup>43</sup> He also made it clear that he went there to see if there was any way of ending the misery of his country men with the help of the West. But as he himself confessed, "I fully realised how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian land".<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p.329.

<sup>42</sup> 'Letter', n.2, pp.381-82.

<sup>43</sup> C.W., I, p.20.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

It was quite natural that under such circumstances he should think of recommending the ideology of Socialism for removing the poverty of the masses, which was one of the causes of their degradation. Socialism meant the establishment of equality and fraternity which the lower classes needed so much. As already stated, Vivekananda regarded equality as a way of individual freedom. He wanted that every individual irrespective of caste or class "should have the same rights and insisted upon freedom of thought and action in every way".<sup>45</sup> From this it follows that his concept of an ideal society based on socialism was centred around the human liberation from material wants. The freedom of individual was emphasised in every respect. It was further based on the principles of equality.

But when he spoke of equality, it did not imply equalising of all human beings. "Men are never equal" he said, "they are born with different capacities . . .  
<sup>46</sup> He maintained that differences in Gunas and Karmas i.e., in aptitudes, skills and outlooks should be taken into account, while the question of equality is considered. Such differences are natural and necessary. Sameness in Physical forms or Social Status can never be attained, or doing away with all differences is likely to thwart the individual's growth. Each individual has to grow in his own way according to his genius. No body can grow according to a pre-fixed model. Since "liberty is the

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<sup>45</sup> C.W., IV, p.356.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p.434.

first condition of growth", Swamiji held that it is the duty of the society to provide such an atmosphere. What he meant was that if there is inequality in nature, there must be equal chances for all. This is for elimination of privilege and upliftment of the backward sections in society.

Considering the social situation prevalent then in India, Vivekananda argued that if needed, the weaker should be given more chances than the strong. He may need some special assistance, because he may have draw-backs which he cannot overcome, left to himself and also having made a late start he may have much delay to make up. This is why Swamiji said in connection with uplifting the masses through education that if a Brahmin boy needed one teacher a Sudra boy might need two or even more. In the words of the Swami:

A Brahmin is not so much in need of education as a Chandala. If the son of a Brahmin needs one teacher, that of a Chandala needs ten; for greater help must be given to whom nature has not endowed with an acute intellect from birth.<sup>47</sup>

He even went to the extent of arguing that "if the Brahmin is born clever, he can educate himself without help . . . . So spend no more money on the Brahmin's

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<sup>47</sup> C.W., VI, p.319.

education, but spend all on the pariah. Give to the weak, for there all the gift is needed . . . ."<sup>48</sup>

Here one can see the impact of the ideas of Herbert Spencer<sup>49</sup> on Vivekananda, for, like Spencer, he also believed that environment was much more important. Creation of favourable conditions by society itself will go a long way towards elimination of privileges and exploitation. This in turn will enable the individual to grow.

Connected with the creation of favourable conditions for the masses to come up, Swamiji has pointed out that the treasure of knowledge has been with the Brahmins for ages. Now they must distribute and share it with the rest of the society. He even argued that it was the duty of the Brahmin to help the Sudra to come up by educating themselves or Brahmins were to take the initiative to educate them. If the Brahmins did not do that he warned that "nature will force them to give willingly". He observed:

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<sup>48</sup> C.W., III, p.193.

<sup>49</sup> Swamiji had the rare privilege of corresponding with Herbert Spencer, the British Scientist whose ideas had influenced him. See details in Vivienne Baumfield, "Science and Sanskrit: Vivekananda's View on Education" in William Radice (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda and Modernisation of Hinduism* (Delhi, 1998), p.204.

Nature will force you to give, so give willingly . . . . with clenched fists, you want to take. But nature puts a hand on your throat, and makes your hands open.<sup>50</sup>

With the instincts of a historian and a Sociologist, Swamiji had formulated his own theory as to why knowledge, wisdom, power, etc. should be diffused. He held that concentration of power, wisdom and wealth as such is not an evil. In fact when the society is in its infancy, such concentration is badly needed. History shows that at a certain time, every society attains what may be called its manhood. It is then that a conflict arises between the ruling power and the common people. It is therefore necessary to know how power, wealth and wisdom should be so used as to remove any conflict between the ruling power and the common masses. Vivekananda points out that "wisdom, knowledge, strength, wealth, prowess and whatever else nature gathers and provides us with, are only for diffusion, when the moment of need is at hand".<sup>51</sup> Then he comes to the conclusion that "We suffer because we ignore this noble truth".

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<sup>50</sup> C.W., II, p.5.

He spoke these words in a critical tone when he found that the social tyranny of the Brahmins and their claim of superiority were only aggravating the social divisions. The false pride of birth on which this claim was based was taken by him as a sign of death and stagnation.

<sup>51</sup> C.W., IV, p.464.

Swamiji has compared the diffusion of knowledge, wealth and power, to the process of blood circulation in the human body, to establish that diffusion is as necessary as or more than its accumulation. He said:

The accumulation of blood in the heart is an indispensable condition for life; its non-circulation throughout the body means death. For the welfare of society it is absolutely necessary at certain times to have all knowledge and power concentrated, but that concentrated power is focussed for the time being only to be scattered broadcast over the whole of society in future. If this diffusion be withheld, the destruction of society is, without doubt near at hand.<sup>52</sup>

He used this analogy to explain that human society like the human body is a dynamic system and decentralisation, most essential for harmonious growth. Knowledge, wealth, prowess, etc. should not be concentrated in one particular class, it must be distributed among other classes as well. Otherwise it may result in a social explosion. Man will one day rise against accumulated injustice. That is why he said:

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.458.

Society is like the earth that patiently bears incessant molestations; but she wakes up one day, however long that may be in coming, and the force of the shaking tremors of that awakening hurls off to a distance the accumulated dirt of self-seeking meanness piled up during millions of patient and silent years.<sup>53</sup>

Thus in his ideal society, there will be left no space for privileges of force, wealth, intelligence, birth or spirituality. All privileges have to be overcome and all members of the society will have the same opportunities to acquire education, wealth and so on. It may also be added that the diffusion of wealth, power etc., is closely related to the upliftment of masses, to whom, Swamiji thought, had a role in heralding a new and just social order. For uplifting the masses he wanted to organize the youth of India and "send them like waves over India, urging comfort, morality, religion and education to the doors of the meanest and the most down trodden".<sup>54</sup> Swamiji was the first social reformer to highlight the role of the educated youth in creating an atmosphere for the dawn of a just social order in the country.

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.463-64.

<sup>54</sup> D.R. Bali, *Modern Indian Thought* (Calcutta, 1984), p.41.

### **Philosophic Concept of Equality**

Finally Vivekananda looked at the principle of equality from the point of view of a Vedantin. In the words of Swamiji, "The whole universe is a play of unity in variety, and differentiation is the sign of life".<sup>55</sup> That all men should be the same can never be, however we may try. Men will be born differentiated, some will have more power than others, some will have natural capacities, others not. Therefore according to Swamiji, it is obvious that the sameness as regards the external forms and positions can never be attained. But "what can be attained is elimination of privilege". Explaining this matter further, Swamiji observes: "The difficulty is not that one body of men are more intelligent than another but whether this body of men, because they have the advantage of intelligence, should take away even physical enjoyments from those who do not possess this intelligence".<sup>56</sup> Hence the philosophic conception of equality was sought to be realised not by stopping variation, but by removing privileges based on variation. Stopping variation was impossible, because that was going against nature. "True equality allows individual variation and seeks to eliminate privileges and actualise in society a unity in variety".<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> C.W., I, 1990 edn., p.41.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Again as a spiritualist, Vivekananda's approach to the problem of equality was more fundamental in as much as he wanted a change in man's moral outlook through a greater consciousness of his true spiritual nature. He found the panacea of all social evils in non-dualistic Vedanta, which declares the essential divinity in all. The Socialistic ideas of Vivekananda had their roots in this Advaita view of reality. In the celebrated dictum, "That art thou", we have the essence of Advaita philosophy. Swamiji expanded this to mean the Upanisadic dictum that "thou art one with this Universal Being" and as such "every soul that exists is your soul and every body that exists is your body and in hurting any one you hurt yourself, in loving anyone you love yourself".

It is here that the foundation of Socialism - equality and absence of privilege - is to be sought. This concept suggests that since individual soul is basically identical with the universal soul of Brahman, there cannot be any difference between one individual and another. The most ignorant person is as great a messenger of God as any that ever existed. In society however, we come across inequality of various types. The work of Advaita is therefore, to break down all privileges. Since everyone is potentially divine, it follows that the same power, the same consciousness lies in every one of us. It may be, this power is manifested in different degrees in different persons. It is the opportunity that one gets which enables him to manifest the divinity in him. Hence the claim of privilege is not

justified. According to Advaita, it is wrong to say that one man is born superior to another. As a spiritualist, Swamiji wanted everyone to realise this sublime truth. He also hoped that through proper education, one could be enabled to imbibe this ideal. He hoped that the realisation of the Ideal of Oneness or the Sameness and Omnipresence of the soul of the universe "would bring hope in oneself, compassion for one's fellow beings and universal tolerance".<sup>58</sup>

From the above statement it is clear that Vivekananda was not enamoured of mere equality; he also stood for cultural and spiritual fraternity. Thus for establishing an Egalitarian society, he emphasized the need of bringing about an attitudinal change. This idea of Universal Brotherhood, preached by Swami Vivekananda is of great political significance in modern times. It is the cornerstone of the Indian tradition, the chief content of the Indian national character.

### **Conclusion**

The American admirer of Swamiji, Marie Louise Burke observes that his assertion that he was a socialist obviously did not apply as some have thought, to his views on Indian politics; it applied rather to the socio-economic problems of the late nineteenth century Industrial West.<sup>59</sup> But as Jayasree Mukherjee has pointed out

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<sup>58</sup> C.W., I, p.338.

<sup>59</sup> Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda In the West : New Discoveries* (Mayavati, 1983), IV, pp.380-81.

"even if Swamiji was not a socialist in the modern sense of the term, his occasional utterances exhibit, no doubt, his keen concern for the down trodden masses and the thought of their social up-lift was undoubtedly uppermost in his mind."<sup>60</sup> As a comment it may be added that Swamiji's whole hearted dedication to the cause of upliftment of the teeming millions of his fellow countrymen, his occasional indulgence in tirades against the richer classes and privileged sections of Indian society and his stress on equality of opportunity for all indicate that he had dreamt of an egalitarian society in future India.

His concept of an egalitarian society in India was mainly based on a philosophical hypothesis of spiritualism and humanism. It was not based on the principles of scientific socialism as envisaged by Karl Marx or Engels. Although he did not substantiate the theory of historical materialism and its determinism, he had expounded a hypothesis of the evolution of power structure in the Indian Socio-Political context. That is why he had explained the concept of the Shudra Raj. It is an interesting fact that he had rejected the theory of class war, emphasized by the Marxian ideologues. Therefore, even if he had projected the theory of Shudra raj, he had not explicitly analysed the evolution of political power towards the lower stratum of society. However, Marxians had dwelt upon the analogy of class war in

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<sup>60</sup> Jayasree Mukherjee, *The Ramakrishna Vivekananda Movement : Impact on Indian Society and Politics (1893-1922)*, Calcutta, 1997, p.207.

the transition of power structure from one stage to the other. This rejection of class war must have originated from the philosophic rediscovery of humanism and spiritualism.<sup>61</sup> Further, his generation of nationalists in India had been inspired by the nineteenth century ideology of liberalism and its offshoot of individualism. Therefore he did not reject individualism, even when he was committed to the cause of an egalitarian society in the place of a colonial society in India. In fact he was trying to make a compromise between the levelling historical forces of socialism and individualism as revealed in the principles of liberalism and Laissez faire. However with all such theoretical limitations of a scientific approach for a new egalitarian society, he became a strong advocate of decentralisation of power, wealth and education.

In a colonial society of India, this message had an electric effect particularly on the emerging intelligentsia of the middle class. The roots of this middle class or Bengal Bhadrakok as explained by Anil Seal and others were tied up with the emerging new economic sections of the colonial society. Although they rejected the colonial society, they were part of it and attached to its cultural moorings. Such dialectics could be found in the teachings of Vivekananda also. While he accepted

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<sup>61</sup> By spiritualism he meant Vedanta. To him Vedanta was the rationale of all religions. In an interview with the correspondent of *The Hindu* in February 1897 (Madras) he said that in the West where the leaders of social movements used to attend his lectures had required the Vedanta as the basis of the new order of things. He stated this in support of his view that material progress should rest on spiritualism. See details in C.W., V, p.212.

the egalitarian principles, he did not reject the paradigms of individualism and its identity. This dichotomy with its values in conflict was the characteristic feature of the contemporary Indian society.

# THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND KERALA

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekanada : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER VII

### THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND KERALA

Of the many gifts of Swami Vivekananda, the most important was the Ramakrishna Order of Monks which he founded in 1897. The idea of a new type of monastic order developed in his mind over a number of years till it found its concrete shape in the organization of the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and the Ramakrishna Math at Belur in 1898. In the words of Swami Gambhirananda "Swamiji founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, two distinct institutions with separate funds and accounts, but common management - the first for training a band of monks and the second for charitable activities.<sup>1</sup> These Sanyasins were to be trained as teachers of Vedanta as propounded by Sri Ramakrishna and in conjunction with the lay disciples to carry on missionary and philanthropic work looking upon all, irrespective of caste, creed or colour as "veritable manifestations of the Divine".<sup>2</sup>

The twin institutions taken together constitute Sangha or the Order of Ramakrishna. In the words of Swami Gambhirananda again, "the Order forms the

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta, 1983), pp.95-96.

<sup>2</sup> *A General Report of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission*, Belur Math, 1991, p.1.

nucleus – nay the centre and omphalos of a world-wide spiritual empire.<sup>3</sup> It may be noted that the Order constituted of Math and Mission has indeed served as the beacon light of spirituality leading to selfless service.

From the *Memorandum of Association* of the Ramakrishna Mission which contains the aims and objects of the Ramakrishna Mission, it can be seen that the Mission represented the fulfilment of Swamiji's dream of a "man-making religion". While giving effect to this plan, he had to face difficulties posed by his brother-disciples who were eager for their personal salvation and were unable to accept this new religion. To them, his answer was that as Sannyasins, they were right in seeking their own salvation, but they were also to seek the salvation of others by mitigating the sufferings of India's millions. That is why "Renunciation and Service" were made the twin ideals of the Mission and "Atmano mokshartham jagaddhitaya cha" (for one's own liberation and for the liberation of the world) was enshrined in its motto. Swamiji's explanation of the term renunciation that "the idea behind renunciation is not to turn away from the world but to understand what the world really is" is significant in this context. Thus by founding the Ramakrishna

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<sup>3</sup> Gambhirananda, n. 1, p.335.

Order of monks, Swamiji actually "sought to make vedanta a practical philosophy, a philosophy of social activity".<sup>4</sup>

The Ramakrishna Math was registered as a trust in 1901 for the efficiency of the work of the organization and the Ramakrishna Mission was registered in 1909 under Act XXI of 1860. Its management was vested in a Governing Body. Both the Math and the Mission gradually extended their spheres of activity as a result of which a number of branches in different parts of the country and abroad came into existence. Now, the Mission is a world movement, a living organization having 141 centres in all, of which 96 are in India.

From the year of its inception, the Mission had a phenomenal growth. The dynamic factor behind a spiritual movement like this was always the tremendous force generated by its leaders. It is true that Swamiji strove hard to put the Ramakrishna Math on a solid footing. But his work would not have taken a solid footing without the active help and co-operation of his sixteen other brother monks, all of them direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus the movement grew "from the force of character of its initiators".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sankari Prasad Basu, "Temple for Worship of the Virat" in B.C. Talukdar and others, ed., *50 Golden Years, Selections from Annual Souvenirs*, Ramakrishna Mission Seva Prasthan (Calcutta, 1982), p.94.

<sup>5</sup> Swami Prabhananda, "Second Convention of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission: A Look Backward and Forward" in The Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, 1980 Souvenir, p.53.

But the social bearings of its ideology were also significant to its rapid development. Its efforts to eliminate caste rigidity etc., involvement in humanitarian activities<sup>6</sup> like famine relief, medical service, rural work educational work, etc. made the movement unique in its own way. The notion that the Sanyasins had a role in nation building and in social transformation was something which changed the very image of Indian Sanyasins. It was this particular feature of the Movement which attracted nationalists and freedom fighters to it during the period of Freedom Struggle.

Yet another feature of the movement was its non-allegiance to politics. At the time of its foundation Swamiji had made it clear that the new Order of Monks "shall have no connection with politics". True to his ideal, the Movement refused to become politically involved even in such a relatively noble and worthy cause as that of Indian independence. "Yet nearly almost all its members had a strong sympathy for the nationalists".<sup>7</sup> This indicates that the mission was nationalist in spirit.

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<sup>6</sup> One should take into account the famine relief work in Murshidabad by Swami Akhandananda, Services of Sister Nivedita and Saradananda to the plague stricken Calcutta, medical and health services of Kalyananda and others in Varanasi etc. See details in Gambhirananda, n.1.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Isherwood in Foreward to *Ibid.*, p.vii.

## THE MISSION IN KERALA

A peep into the social and cultural history of Kerala will reveal the fact that like other parts of India, Kerala also had come under the influence of the Indian Socio-Religious movements of the nineteenth century. Kerala had particularly caught up with the spirit of the Ramakrishna Movement which had produced a deeper impact on certain sections of its Society. The Mission with its propaganda against caste tyranny and its programme of creating social awareness among the masses, went a long way towards promoting the spirit of nationalism in Kerala, in a silent way. It was the visit of Swami Vivekananda to Kerala in 1892 and his comment on caste-ridden Kerala as a 'lunatic asylum'<sup>8</sup> which roused widespread interest within the state in the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission. In due course, the Mission established a net work of branches in select centres of the state.

Before tracing the origin and growth of the Movement in Kerala, a brief study on Vivekananda's visit (to Kerala) and his observations on the then prevailing social conditions in the state will be desirable, because his visit had a profound impact on the social transformation that was heralded here at the dawn of the Twentieth century. Moreover, it was his visit which set the background for the birth of the Sri Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala.

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<sup>8</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*, (Calcutta, 1992 edn.), p.224.

It has been noted earlier that Sri Ramakrishna's comment that "Every Jiva is Siva" and therefore "it is not 'daya' or compassion but 'Seva' or service to Siva that is the duty of the faithful" had planted the idea of social service as a spiritual sadhana in the mind of Vivekananda. To make this idea work for the regeneration of society and for the revival of true religion it was imperative that he should see personally and at close quarters India and her people.<sup>9</sup> That was what he achieved during the itinerary in the Northern and Western India. He had a close glimpse of the degeneration of Indian masses and a vague notion of the causes of degeneration during his long travel.

At Bangalore, Vivekananda was taken in as a guest by Dr. Palpu,<sup>10</sup> the Municipal Medical officer of the place. Dr. Palpu belonged to the Ezhava community of Kerala, but inspite of having the necessary qualification, he had been denied a job in the Travancore state service because of the caste prejudice prevalent in the state. Subsequently, he obtained a post in the Mysore state service. The doctor during his long talk with the Swami briefed him about the caste tyranny to

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<sup>9</sup> Swami Maitrananda, "Sri Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala" in *Gana Madhuri Souvenir*, Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram (Kalady, 1970), p.85.

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Palpu was one of the pioneers in the Social Renaissance in modern Kerala. His meeting with Sree Narayana Guru and the consequent starting of the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam at Aruvipuram in 1903 has been attributed to the profound influence that Swami Vivekananda exerted on him. The sangham established under the spiritual patronage of Narayana Guru initiated a major socio-religious movement in Kerala.

which majority of the people of Kerala were subjected to and depletion of Hindu society due to proselytisation by other faiths.

It was after this briefing by Dr. Palpu at Mysore that Swami Vivekananda entered Kerala which then consisted of the princely states of Cochin and Travancore and some neighbouring districts which comprised the present Kerala state.<sup>11</sup> From Palghat to the then southern most tip of Kerala, Kanyakumari, Swamiji travelled. During his travel, he personally witnessed the caste devilry and inhumanity practised with religious ferosity by man on man.<sup>12</sup>

Swamiji has referred to Kerala and its people ten or twelve times in the Complete Works, in different contexts. Among other sources which tell us about Swamiji's experiences in Kerala, the most authentic are the reminiscences of Sundara Rama Iyer<sup>13</sup> the tutor of Prince Marthandavarma of Travancore and that of

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<sup>11</sup> See details of Swamiji's visit to Kerala in His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama (Calcutta, 1979), I, pp.320-331. Also see S.N. Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda* (Madras, 1989), Part I, pp.362-69.

<sup>12</sup> Maitrananda, n.9, p.85.

<sup>13</sup> Sundara Rama Iyer, who belonged to the Madras Educational Service, had lent his services as tutor to Prince Marthanda Varma, the nephew of the Maharaja of Travancore. During his Trivandrum visit in December 1892, Swamiji stayed with him as his guest for nine days. Later, for the benefit of posterity he wrote an excellent account of the nine days stay of the Swami with him which was published as Appendix I to the First Edition of "The Life" in 1913. It is especially valuable because besides being a record of events, it contains the views expressed by Swamiji on many important subjects that his host discussed with him. Also see, His Eastern and Western Admirers: *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta, 1999, second impression), pp.57-70.

his son Mr. Ramaswami Sastri.<sup>14</sup> They reveal that Swamiji was pained to see the deplorable social conditions of the state, especially the caste tyranny. In fact such a situation was inviting more conversions to other faiths. How the christian missionaries had taken advantage of caste tyranny to convert vast numbers of people into Christianity has been explained by Swamiji himself in a letter. He wrote:

. . . If a bhangi comes to anybody as a bhangi, he would be shunned as the plague; but no sooner does he get a cupful of water poured upon his head with some mutterings of prayers by a padri and get a coat on his back, no matter how threadbare, and come into the room of the most orthodox Hindu - I don't see the man who then dares refuse him a chair and a hearty shake of the hands ! Irony can go on further. And come and see what they, the padris are doing in the Dakshin (south). They are converting the lower classes in lakhs, and in Travancore, the most priest-ridden country in India where every bit of land is owned by the Brahmins . . . nearly one-

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<sup>14</sup> Ramaswami Sastri was the eldest son of Sundara Rama Iyer, who had the privilege of being in the company of Vivekananda during his stay in their house. He also has given a brief account of the visit in a lecture in connection with the Vivekananda Birth Day Celebrations at Madras in 1906. First published in "Brahmavadin" in its issue of February 1906, it has been included in the "Reminiscences". See pp.98-105. These accounts are authentic sources available to us for reconstructing the history of Swamiji's visit to Kerala.

fourth has become christians ! . . . when, when, O Lord ! shall man  
be brother to man !<sup>15</sup>

The social conditions of Kerala as revealed in the above letter, have come to his bitter criticism on another occasion when after his return from the west, he met the people of Madras where he gave lectures. Particularly in his lecture on the "Future of India" he castigated the Keralites for the caste tyranny they practised: He observed thus:

. . . was there ever a sillier thing before in the world than what I saw in Malabar<sup>16</sup> country? The poor pariah is not allowed to pass through the same street as the high caste man, but if he changes his name to a hodge-podge English name, it is all right. What inference would you draw except that these Malabaris are all lunatics, their homes so many lunatic asylums and that they are to be treated with derision by every race in India until they mend their manners and know better. Shame upon them that such wicked and diabolical customs are allowed; their own children are allowed to die of

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<sup>15</sup> Letter dt. 20 September 1892, written to Pandit Sankarlal of Khetri, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati, 1970), p.28.

<sup>16</sup> Malabar was the common name for Kerala used by the Arabs and the Europeans.

starvation, but as soon as they take up some other religion they are well fed. There ought to be no more fight between the castes.<sup>17</sup>

In the above passages we find Vivekananda painfully remembering his experience in Kerala. The institution of caste, he found, had degenerated to such a degradation that untouchability and unapproachability had become its fixed features. The abject manner in which the so called lower castes grovelled before the priestly class, led Swamiji to hurl a two worded bomb "Lunatic Asylum" at Kerala. He did it for nothing but to cleanse the striking caste-polluted atmosphere of Kerala.

It may be noted in this connection that for a long time Swamiji's mind agitated over the plight of the "untouchables" in Kerala; especially over the disabilities from which these communities suffered. Neither the Travancore government nor the British government took any interest to resolve the issue. Then there arose the cry that the issue should be raised in the British Parliament. Dr. Palpu was the brain behind this move.<sup>18</sup> In 1896, when Barister G.P. Pillai went to England, he was requested to take this problem to the British Parliament. But he needed to be introduced there by some influential person. Now Swami Vivekananda readily came forward to help him. He sent a letter to Sister Nivedita

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<sup>17</sup> Vivekananda, n.8.

<sup>18</sup> A.R. Sreenivasan, *Swami Vivekanandan Keralathil* (M) (Trichur, 1992), p.9.

in England asking her to extend all possible help in this respect. The letter written by him is something to note on, the content of which is given below:

*I have just found a bit of important work for you to do, on behalf of the down trodden masses of India. The Gentleman, I take the liberty of introducing to you, is in England on behalf of Tiyas, a plebian caste in the native state of Malabar. You will realise from this gentleman what amount of tyranny there is over these poor people, simply because of their caste.*

*Indian Government has refused to interfere, on the ground of non-interference in the internal administration of a native state. The only hope of these people is the British parliament. Do, kindly, every thing in your power to help this matter being brought before the British Public."<sup>19</sup>*

The letter reflects the great concern which Swamiji had for the deprived sections of Kerala. It also indicates that he considered the question of improving their lot as his life's mission itself. It may also be noted in this connection that the Sri Ramakrishna Movement which took its birth in Kerala a few years after Swamiji's visit, was led by a set of dedicated and selfless sanyasins who tried to give a practical meaning to this mission. And it is no wonder that the movement has been a powerful factor in bringing social regeneration in the state.

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<sup>19</sup> Letter cited in Disciples, n.11, Vol. II, p.241.

## Origin of the Movement

In the wake of Swami Vivekananda's triumph at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, a number of religious groups came to be started in many parts of Kerala.<sup>20</sup> There were many who, having derived inspiration were eager to follow him. At the invitation of Babu Kalipada Ghose<sup>21</sup> who was a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Ramakrishnananda<sup>22</sup> one of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna visited Trivandrum in 1904 and stayed there for some months. He used to give lectures, among other topics, on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Many were inspired by him. Thus, next to Swami Vivekananda, it was Swami Ramakrishnananda who visited Kerala.

Of the Religions groups or Associations formed in Kerala, the Association formed at Haripad invited Swami Ramakrishnananda to participate in the birth day celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna in 1911. Padmanabhan Tampi, the president of the Association was already acquainted with the Swami at Madras. The Swami, then deputed Swami Nirmalananda, a co-disciple of his and who had already made his mark as an excellent speaker and conversationist, to Haripad. Nirmalamandaji

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<sup>20</sup> Swami Siddhinathananda, "Influence of Sri Ramakrishna" in *Wealth and Wisdom of India*, (Mumbai, 1980), p.153.

<sup>21</sup> A lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Mr. Ghose was then in Trivandrum on Business.

<sup>22</sup> Swami Ramakrishnananda (1863-1911) was noted for his organization of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement in South India with its base at Madras. He started the Madras Math in 1897 and Mylapore became the centre of its activities.

arrived there on 15th of February 1911, impressed the audience through his eloquent addresses, gave to the members of the Association valuable advice and direction regarding their programme of activities for the future.<sup>23</sup> This event marked the beginning of a spiritual Association which has been the main abiding influence for the spread of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in Kerala.<sup>24</sup>

Many a life was transformed by this contact. Some local people came forward to donate land and money to start an Ashram. In due course, an Ashram was built at Haripad. And it was in Haripad that the first Sri Ramakrishna Ashram was founded. Later on, similar centres grew up in Tiruvalla and Trivandrum. The name of Swami Brahmanandaji,<sup>25</sup> the first president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission deserves special mention in this connection, for, it was he who laid the foundation stone for the Trivandrum Ashrama. In Trivandrum Padmanabhan

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<sup>23</sup> Tulasee Theerthan, *Swami Nirmalananda: His Life and Mission*, Sree Ramakrishna Ashram (Kayamkulam, 1997), p.49.

<sup>24</sup> Siddhinathananda, n.20.

<sup>25</sup> Swami Brahmananda who came to Kerala on an invitation of Swami Nirmalananda, gave *mantropadesa* to many devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. This was followed by the emergence of a set of missionaries among whom the most prominent was Swami Agamananda who founded the Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, at Kalady in 1936.

Tampi and his brother Raman Thapi were the pillars of work.<sup>26</sup> Brahmanandaji, then visited several places and initiated devotees of Kerala in 1916.

However the actual pioneer of the Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala was Swami Nirmalananda. The history of Ramakrishna Movement at least in Kerala for a quarter of a century from 1911 to 1938 was synonymous with the life and activities of Swami Nirmalananda. During this eventful period, the movement under his able guidance, became a progressive force bringing a great change in the social and religious outlook of the Hindus of Kerala. Hence an attempt at tracing the life and activities of swamiji is made here.

### **Swami Nirmalananda (1863 - 1938) : His life and mission in Kerala**

Tulasidas Dutta who later on became Swami Nirmalananda was born in the Dutt family of Kayastha community on 23rd December 1863 at Bagh Bazar, Calcutta. His parents were Debnath Dutta and Takamani. Endowed with charming face, shining eyes and rich voice, Tulsi was both intelligent and resourceful, strong willed and stout hearted. Even as a young boy, he showed unmistakable signs of a good natured, yet masterful personality of a spiritual hero that he was destined to become in later years.<sup>27</sup> Under the watchful guardianship of his maternal uncle, he mastered Sanskrit in which he could converse as fluently as in Bengali, Hindi and

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<sup>26</sup> Siddhinathananda, n.20, p.153.

<sup>27</sup> Tulaseetherthan, n.23, p.7.

English. It stood him in good stead in later years. His stay in Benaras during his school days and his acquaintance with some of the future disciples of Sri Ramakrishna like Swami Turyananda and Swami Akhandananda during his college days, were moulding him for his future role as a religious teacher and guide.

Tulasi's acquaintance with Sri Ramakrishna was not a pre-fixed one. Sri Ramakrishna used to visit his devotees at Bagh Bazar where Tulasi lived. It was during one such visit that Tulasi had the good fortune to meet him for the first time. This meeting turned out to be a momentous one in the sense that it gradually drew him to the Great Master. He became not only one of the most favoured disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, but also one "carefully chosen and trained by the master to spread his message" to the far corners of India and beyond. Tulasi took Sanyasa from Swami Vivekananda who named him Nirmala on account of his rare purity of character.<sup>28</sup> Thus Swami Nirmalananda, one of the seventeen direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, was to become a powerful and worthy personality through whom the message of Ramakrishna - Vivekananda would reach the southern most part of India.

After the Samadhi of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Nirmalananda travelled far and wide all over India, spending most of his time in the Himalayas for 12 years.

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<sup>28</sup> Nirmalananda himself had admitted in a letter to Swami Madhavanandaji of Ramakrishna Order that Swami Vivekananda was responsible for his joining the Ramakrishna Order of monks. Letter quoted in Tulaseetherthan, n.23, p.14.

During this period he proved himself well conversant with the Hindu Scriptures and well competent for preaching and organisational duties. His ability as an organizer and teacher of vedanta impressed Vivekananda so much so that in 1901, in his presence Nirmalanada was unanimously elected Assistant Secretary of Belur Math. Later, from 1903-1906, he assisted swami Abhedananda in his missionary work in U.S.A. Nirmalananda's lectures created a good impression among the American people as the contemporary Prabuddha Bharata reports.<sup>29</sup>

### **His activities in Kerala**

A few years after his return from America, Swami Nirmalamanda took the charge of the Bangalore Ashram in 1909. With his base at Bangalore, he carried on extensive missionary work in the South, like a true successor of Vivekananda and Ramakrishnananda, for about three decades. Besides improving the status and usefulness of the Bangalore Ashrama beyond recognition, he succeeded in establishing eighteen Ashramas in the South in the course of a quarter of a century from 1913 to 1937. Of these Ashrams, sixteen were in Kerala. They were founded as part of the project organized under the name of "The Ramakrishna Kerala Mission Bangalore."<sup>30</sup> The list of these Ashramas founded by him is given below.

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<sup>29</sup> The Prabuddha Bharata; Vol. IX, 1904, p.93 and January, 1905, p.16.

<sup>30</sup> Gambhirananda, n.1, p.192.

1. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Haripad, 1913.
2. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla, 1913.
3. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Quilandy, 1915.
4. Sri Ramakrishna Brahmananda Ashrama, Trivandrum, 1924.
5. Sri Ramakrishna Yogananda Ashrama, Alapuzha, 1924.
6. Sri Ramakrishna Premananda Ashrama, Muttom, 1925.
7. Sri Ramakrishna Niranjan Ashrama, Ottapalam, 1926.
8. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kayamkulam, 1930.
9. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kulathur, 1930.
10. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Palai, 1930.
11. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Aroor, 1930-1935.
12. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Adoor, 1930-1935.
13. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Neyyar, 1930-1935.
14. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Moovattupuzha, 1930-1935.
15. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Pudukkad, 1930-1935.
16. Sri Ramakrishna Seva Ashrama, Calicut, 1937.

The above list of Ashramas founded by Nirmalananda is indicative of his great organizational capacity. But this noble achievement which he made, was the result of sustained and arduous labour which he undertook in the face of great challenges and difficulties of various dimensions.

## **Against Caste**

Most of the Ashramas founded by him were in inaccessible and remote areas. The Swamiji was unfamiliar with the language of the people, their customs and manners. He had to suffer all sorts of personal discomforts and inconveniences.<sup>31</sup> Often he had to travel by carts and country boats and make it even on foot in order to reach out to the people in remote villages. But what was more challenging was the bitter criticism launched against him by the local conservatives for his attempt to introduce an egalitarian culture in the Ashrams. Nirmalananda started his missionary activities in Kerala at a time when the state was steeped in superstition, orthodoxy and casteism. But he lived and moved in utter disregard of the prevalent orthodoxy and casteism. Naturally great consternation was roused in the citadels of orthodoxy at the disregard of caste rules on the part of him. For instance, in 1913, when the first Ramakrishna Ashram was opened at Haripad, it was celebrated with due religious ceremony and solemnity. All devotees irrespective of caste were allowed to worship at the new temple of Ramakrishna. The intermingling of various castes, particularly the equal treatment, which the so-called lower caste people received there, provoked the savarnas of the place. For treating the Harijans as touchables, some of the inmates of the Ashram were stoned and man handled by

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<sup>31</sup> Thulaseetherthan, n.23, p.125.

them.<sup>32</sup> However the inmates of the Haripad Ashram decided to remain firm in the face of this social persecution and on the occasion of the next celebration, a large gathering, without any distinction of caste met together and participated in the *misrabhojana* or interdining. Thus it was under the leadership of Swami Nirmalananda that interdining on a public occasion took place in Kerala for the first time.

Swami Siddhinathananda has recorded how this incident marked the first metal blow to the citadel of caste in Kerala in the following words:

After the first batch had finished, the leaves were to be removed; but the servants engaged for it refused to work because all kinds of low caste people had eaten there. There was a sense of suspense. The observant eyes of Swami Nirmalananda grasped the situation and he acted rising equal to it. He said: "They are all devotees of Bhagavan. I am their servant. I have no caste. But you should all maintain yours." So saying, he started removing the leaves. No sooner had he removed a leaf or two than there was a rush by one

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<sup>32</sup> Maitrananda, n.9, p.86.

and all to do the work. With this one stroke, he broke the backbone of the age-old demon of caste.<sup>33</sup>

The significance of this incident in the social history of Kerala is that the first blow to caste was struck by Swami Nirmalananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a co-disciple of Swami Vivekananda. That was the first metal below on the citadel of caste which in due course under further blows from all quarters crumbled.<sup>34</sup> Again, it was Nirmalananda's successful experiments in the Ashrams in Kerala – the practice of the brahmacharins and sanyasins being drawn from all castes, from the "untouchable" pulayas to the most aristocratic Brahmins – that had anticipated, and in fact paved the way for the historic Temple Entry Proclamation by the Maharaja of Travancore in 1936.

### **Idea of a United Kerala**

Those were the days when Kerala was under three separate administrative units, the two native states of Travancore and Cochin and the District of Malabar under the British rule. Though they were culturally and geographically one unit, each of them jealously guarded its aloofness, often looking down one another. But Swami Nirmalananda brought his followers from the various parts of Kerala together. Devotees from Ottapalam were invited to Trivandrum or Haripad. People

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<sup>33</sup> Swami Siddhinathananda, ed., *Quest and Bequest* (Calicut, 1990), p.29.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

from these parts were invited to centres in Malabar. Thus he had formed a united spiritual Kerala long before the political leaders began to dream of Kerala as one.

### **"The Prabuddha Keralam"**

A unique contribution of Nirmalanandaji was the founding of the "Prabuddha Keralam" the monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam on the Vijayadashami day in 1915, on the lines of the "Prabuddha Bharata", the English journal of the Ramakrishna Mission. The monthly journal became the vehicle through which the revolutionary ideas on religion, society, culture and even on politics emerging from the discussions and parlour talks<sup>35</sup> initiated by the Swami at various mission centres, reached a wide circle of readers. It is no wonder that the "Prabudha Keralam" contributed to a new thinking in Kerala. It is the only religious monthly in Kerala which continues its publication even to this present day for an unbroken period of eightysix years.

It was while the national movement was gathering momentum that the Ramakrishna Mission was founded in Kerala and within a period of twenty five years, it made a "pleasing record of progress" thanks to the indomitable zeal of Swami Nirmalananda. Though the Mission kept away from politics, it was nationalist in spirit. Nirmalananda, particularly used to appeal to his followers to

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<sup>35</sup> See details of the conversation on Caste and Harijan movement in the Prabuddha Keralam, Vol. XIX, 1933, p.31.

love their motherland and stand united for the common cause whatever their differences of views might be. According to him caste was not responsible for disunity in India, as otherwise propagated by some colonial historians. And he argued that the destruction of caste differences was not the way to establish unity. Like Vivekananda, he also believed that differences in caste and religion were natural and what was needed was that Indians should cultivate the habit of uniting together when their country's cause was at stake, inspite of differences in religion and caste.<sup>36</sup>

The Mission in Kerala also had made Daridra Narayan Pooja or poor feeding, an integral part of the Ashram activities. So also was flood-famine epidemic relief work. But these were not mere poverty alleviation programme. Instead they were work done in the spirit of worship to the God in man, purifying and elevating both the giver and the receiver. On that account itself, the Mission did have a tremendous impact on social life in Kerala.

Because of the tremendous work that Nirmalananda did in Kerala as the messenger of Sri Ramakrishna, Kerala can claim the Swami as its own, for, no religious teacher has done as much as Swamiji in spiritually awakening the Keralites from a mockery of religion, which speeded up the on-going process of social regeneration.

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<sup>36</sup> Cited in Tulaseetherthan, n.23, p.225.

### Other Centres

Inspired by the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and the contact of Swami Nirmalananda, several young men entered the monastic order. Innumerable lay men drew spiritual sustenance from them and supported the various activities of the Ashramas. There were others who had met Swami Vivekananda or Ramakrishnananda or Brahmananda at Madras and had been inspired by them. These missionaries of Ramakrishna spread the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda throughout the length and breadth of Kerala. Of these Swami Agamananda, a direct disciple of Swami Nirmalananda who founded an Ashrama in Kalady in 1936 and Swami Tyageesananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda who started a centre of the Mission at Trichur in 1927 deserve special mention.

The Ramakrishna Movement in Kerala entered a new phase in 1936 when Swami Agamananda,<sup>37</sup> a distinguished member of the Ramakrishna Order of Sanyasins founded a Mission Centre at Kalady, the birth place of Jagat Guru Sri

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<sup>37</sup> Born in August 1896 in a Namboothiri family (Pudumana Illam) in Chavara, the original name of Swami Agamananda was Krishnan Nambiathiri. He had his education in Mavelikkara, Trivandrum and Madras and gained mastery in Indian and Western languages and also sciences; took his M.A. Degree in Sanskrit from the Presidency College, Madras; entered family life at the age of 20, but his inclination for asceticism compelled him to leave his family and join the Ramakrishna Order of monks. He received Sanyasa from Swami Nirmalananda, after which he was known as Agamananda. See Swami Agamananda, "Thirinjunokkumbol" (M) in *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, 23 December 1956.

Sankaracharya. A great Sanskrit Scholar, an eloquent exponent of Advaita Vedanta, a talented public speaker and an energetic traveller, Agamananda had devoted his whole life to rejuvenate the Hindu society in Kerala, which was passing through a period of crisis. Even before his conversion to Sanyasa and renunciation, he had already started a programme related to social reform which had become a part of the national movement.

For instance, in the Vaikom Satyagraha movement of 1924-'25,<sup>38</sup> he was an activist. In that struggle, he used his Sanskrit scholarship and oratorical skill to challenge the Brahmin superiority and mobilise public opinion in favour of democratic rights of the common man. By pleading for the depressed classes to get the approach roads to the Vaikom Temple opened, he was giving active support to a movement initiated by the nationalists. Later in the Guruvayoor Satyagraha of 1932 also initiated by the same nationalists, Agamananda played a role by making stirring speeches,<sup>39</sup> especially in the Malabar area for mobilising strong public opinion in

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<sup>38</sup> It was a movement aimed at getting the approach road to the Vaikom Temple opened to the "Avarnas". Organized by T.K. Madhavan, a band of stalwart leaders like K.P. Kesava Menon, K. Kelappan and Mannath Padmanabhan had participated in the movement which received the blessings and support of Gandhiji. See details in A.K. Pillai, *Congressum Keralavum* (M) (Trichur, 1935).

<sup>39</sup> Agamananda as an activist in the Vaikom and Guruvayoor Satyagrah has been referred to by Prof. S. Guptan Nair and Sri Talanadu Chandrasekharan Nair who were in close contact with the Swami. See details in S. Guptan Nair and Talanadu Chandra Sekharan Nair, *Swami Agamananda Smaraka Prabhashanangal* (M), Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram (Kalady, 1996), pp.3-4 & pp.46-50.

favour of the Temple Entry Movement. Thus he had made himself known as a strong advocate of social reform and nationalism before he started a centre of the Ramakrishna Mission at Kalady in 1936.

The idea of starting a centre of the Mission at Kalady was conceived by Swami Agamananda while he was on a visit to the shrine at Kalady in 1927.<sup>40</sup> Despite its importance as a holy place associated with the memory of Sri Sankara, it remained backward in all respects and almost forgotten by all. The idea to start the centre took a firm root in the Swami during his stay in the Belur Math during 1933-34. What prompted him to choose Kalady for starting an Ashrama was the following.

As a Keralite, Agamananda thought it to be his duty to do something to perpetuate the glory of the birth place of Sri Sankara,<sup>41</sup> the exponent of the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta, in the light of which Swami Vivekananda had interpreted Hinduism. So Kalady would be the most suitable place for founding an Ashrama where the Vedanta would be preached and practised and whereby the glory of the place would be kept alive. Thus on the Sankara Jayanthi Day, 20<sup>th</sup> April 1936, the centenary year of Sri Ramakrishna, an ashram under the designation "Advaita

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<sup>40</sup> *Kalady, A Pilgrim Centre*, Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram (Kalady, 1957), p.15.

<sup>41</sup> Swamy Tapasyananda in his Foreword to Swami Ganananda and others (ed.), *Veeravani* (M), Advaita Ashram (Kalady, 1991 edn.), I, p.vii.

Ashram" was founded by him<sup>42</sup> with the active co-operation of Swami Tyageesananda of Trichur centre. It was affiliated with Sri Ramakrishna Math, Belur only in 1941 and afterwards the institution came to be known as Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram. As its designation indicates, the institution stands for the ideals preached by Sri Ramkrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sankaracharya.

Like other centres of the Mission, the Ashrama at Kalady also had to pass through very difficult situations in its early years. It had to struggle through days of absolute poverty when even the necessities of life could not be met. The income during those days was mainly the travelling expenses received by Swami Agamanda during his lecture tours.<sup>43</sup> Therefore it was after passing through years of suffering and privation that the Ashram attained the present status of a well established centre of the Mission.

The activities of the Kalady centre are noted for the emphasis it put on the promotion of indigenous culture through the propagation of Sanskrit and on the education of the tribals. From his wide travels in Kerala and other parts of India,

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<sup>42</sup> It was started on a piece of land (1½ acres) with an old building donated by the late Parayath Govinda Menon. It is situated on the right bank of the River Poorna, amidst picturesque surroundings. See Parayath Bhaskara Menon, *Agamananda Swamikalum Kalady Ashramavum* (M) (Kalady, 1998), pp.4-5.

<sup>43</sup> An excellent speaker, he travelled from place to place in Kerala, delivering lectures in educational institutions, temples (for religious discourses) and on occasions of the inauguration of religious conferences. These lectures covering a variety of subjects are embodied in "Veeravani" in four volumes published by the Advaita Ashram Kalady.

Swami Agamananda became convinced that the main cause of the deplorable condition of the Hindus was their ignorance about their own religion (Sanatana Dharma) and also about the cultural traditions of India. And he recounted in his speeches and writings that the only remedy lay in the proper understanding of the Sanatana Dharma by every Indian, for all other religions are different manifestations of it, and this was possible only if the Indians studied Sanskrit. It was this conviction which led him to start a Sanskrit School in 1937, which was given the name Brahmanandodayam Sanskrit School in honour of Swami Brahmananda. In the Brahmanandodayam English High School which was started in 1947, Sanskrit was introduced as the first language in the curriculum. It was with the very same conviction that he started the Sree Sankara College in 1954 in the village of Kalady and he hoped that the institution would turn out young men moulded by higher ideals.

Again, the starting of a hostel for tribal students which is run on the Gurukula style, with emphasis on character development, religious instruction, national unity and integration has been in the direction of assimilating the tribal youth into the mainstream of national life. At present the Ashrama has grown into a very huge institution having many departments under its control like a publication division, schools, hostels, Sri Ramakrishna Viswakshetra, and a Social Education Library with 7387 books of which 1500 are reference books in Sanskrit. Kalady has

assumed great importance as a pilgrim centre after the foundation of the Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram by Swami Agamananda. Now if it has turned to be the centre of Sanskrit University, the activities and leadership given by him and other Sanyasins of the Mission resulting in an awakening, are responsible for it.

### **Swami Tyageesananda and the Trichur Centre**

A decade before the starting of the Ashrama at Kalady, the Ramakrishna Mission had founded its centre in Trichur in 1927 under the initiative of Swami Tyageesananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda. The main object of starting the Centre was to give practical meaning to Swami Vivekananda's Plan of uplifting the Harijans. In fact Swami's plan was first attempted in Kerala by Swami Tyageesananda at Trichur.<sup>44</sup>

The work related to its foundation may be traced to an incident that happened in 1924. In that year there was a devastating flood in that area of Trichur and the Ramakrishna Mission came forward offering relief to the victims.<sup>45</sup> Swami Tyageesananda who was then the Headmaster of the Vivekodayam High School, Trissur, associated himself with the work of the Mission. Later, though the relief operations were over, Tyageesananda, who was very much inspired by Swami

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<sup>44</sup> Maitrananda, n.9, p.86.

<sup>45</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math, Trissur, A Short Report 1996-97 and 1997-98, p.2.

Vivekananda, and Mahatma Gandhi<sup>46</sup> continued to work for the uplift of the local Harijans. In 1926, this little service at the altar of humanity developed into a primary school. Tyageesananda gave primary importance to the upliftment of Harijans, which he thought could be achieved only by giving them proper education. Therefore, in a backward rural outskirts of Trichur town, he started living with the Harijan girls and boys. They were fed, clothed and maintained and educated by the Swami. The work was started before even Mahatma Gandhi started Harijan Seva. Thus the significance of the Trichur Centre of the Mission is that there, the implementation of Vivekananda's plan preceded the actual foundation of the Ramakrishna Ashram.

Like Nirmalananda, Swami Tyageesananda and his co-workers also had to face tremendous opposition from the upper classes. But unmindful of the social opprobrium and undergoing great hardship, Tyageesananda and his band of assistants carried on. Finally, an Ashram was founded at Puranattukara,<sup>47</sup> together with a small hostel for the Harijan boys. It was affiliated to the Belur Math in 1929. Today the institution stands as a fitting monument to the spiritual eminence,

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

untiring missionary zeal and compassionate heart of the founder Swami. It has developed into a unique educational complex.<sup>48</sup>

The Gurukulam "which is the nucleus of this institution", aims to bring up children in the traditional ideal of Hindu life and conduct and to give them training in self help. A sanskrit coaching class is also run by the Ashram. The Malayalam monthly "Prabuddha Keralam" is published by this Math. The publication department is doing commendable work. The publication of *Swami Vivekananda's Complete Works* in many of the Indian languages including Malayalam in 1963 in connection with Swamiji's Centenary was an epoch making event. A new world of thought had been opened up to those who had not been conversant with English. Consequently the spiritual, patriotic and national ideas of Swamiji have reached a very wide circle of readers.

The Harijan welfare work of the Math deserves special mention. The training and education imparted in the residential and the High School aim at assimilating the Harijan youth thoroughly into the mainstream of society by helping them improve their economic and social condition. The Math has also adopted a colony of the Harijans at Adat near Trichur, where a welfare centre works for the

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<sup>48</sup> The departments conducted by it are: (1) Temple dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna. (2) Gurukulam (Hostel) for boys including orphans and Harijans. (3) Vidyamandiram (School) for boys upto SSLC standard. (4) Charitable dispensary and hospital. (5) Publication department and press. (6) Harijan welfare work. (7) Destitute Relief. (8) Religious activities and (9) Vivekananda Vijnan Bhavan.

material and spiritual well being of the community. The Vivekananda Vijnan Bhavan is a subcentre, a town branch at Poonkunnam, under the control of the Math. The Bhavan with a library and reading room, having 4,850 books and 16 periodicals and dailies<sup>49</sup> is doing considerable service in the promotion of Sanskrit education and cultural activities.

### **The Movement Today**

Of the several centres started in different parts of Kerala, only eight are at present working centres engaged in spiritual, social and humanitarian services and above all in the promotion of national culture. These eight centres are (1) Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trivandrum (2) Ramakrishna Math, Palai (3) Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla (4) Ramakrishna Advaita Ashram, Kalady (5) Ramakrishna Math, Trichur (6) Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, Kozhikode (7) Ramakrishna Math, Quilandy and (8) Ramakrishna Math, Vyttila (Ernakulam). A brief study of the Ashramas of Kalady and Trichur has already been made above. A brief note on the remaining six centres is given below.

#### ***1. Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Trivandrum***

The Ashrama was originally started in 1916 at a place called Nettayam about 9 km from the heart of Trivandrum city. The foundation stone for the construction

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<sup>49</sup> C. Vasudevan, *Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, A Brief Outline*, Sri Ramakrishna Seva Sangham (Koduvayoor, 1990), p.12.

was laid by Swami Brahmananda. Later, the focus of the activities was shifted to the city centre at Sasthamangalam. "Service to every living being as Siva" is the motto of the institution there also.

The Ashrama at Sasthamangalam runs a 293-bed hospital (with 129 free beds for the poor) with all modern facilities and equipments.<sup>50</sup> The present growth of the hospital which is doing very valuable service to the people in and around Trivandrum, is mainly due to the efforts of Swami Tapasyananda and his associates. There is a residential Auxilliary and General Nurse – Mid-wifery Training Centre with 69 trainees. The Rural Health Service Programme sponsored and aided by the Government of India benefitting five villages, is being implemented. Under this scheme, five mini-health centres and a rural health centre are being run.

## **2. Ramakrishna Math, Palai**

This centre which was started in 1930 was a subcentre under the Ramakrishna Math, trichur, for some time and was converted into a fullfledged Math in October 1987. The Math runs a Sanskrit college with 47 students (free for five students) and a free Sanskrit Pathasala with sixty two students, a Library and a students' Home with 12 boys (free for 3).

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

### **3. *Ramakrishna Ashrama, Tiruvalla***

The Ashrama at Tiruvalla which was in existence from almost the beginning of the Mission's activities (1913) in Kerala, suddenly became a live centre and made the most eventful contribution to the Plan of Vivekananda. For the first time in the history of India, boys born in the so-called untouchable castes have been given along with Brahmin boys the Samskaras<sup>51</sup> of an ideal Brahmin and were made qualified to officiate as priests in Hindu temples. This is an epoch making event in the long history of this country and the most revolutionary step to eradicate caste tyranny.

The Ashrama runs a Balawadi and a small Library. Weekly classes are also conducted. A fullfledged temple was constructed recently, where those trained, irrespective of caste are allowed to do pooja.

### **4. *Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, Kozhikode***

This was started in 1937. The Ashram is mainly engaged in imparting secular and spiritual education. A High School, a primary school, both for boys and girls and a Students Home are run by the Ashram. Recently the High School has been upgraded to Plus Two level. An Allopathic dispensary is also run by the Ashram.

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<sup>51</sup> Training in performing pooja in temples.

### **5. *Ramakrishna Math, Quilandy***

Started in 1915, the Math did a lot of relief work during floods and also outbreak of Cholera in the Malabar area, in the early period. It runs a Library and a Reading room. Agricultural activities such as supply of seedlings, pepper cuttings etc. have been undertaken now. Free medical camps with the assistance of the Indian Medical Association, Kerala Branch, are being held every month. For this purpose the coastal villages near the Math, have been adopted.

### **6. *Ramakrishna Math, Vyttila (Ernakulam)***

This is the eighth centre of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission under the control of the Head Quarters Centre at Belur. This centre was opened in 1938 as an Ashram and was not managed by the Belur Math till 1999 when it was taken over and affiliated to Belur. It is situated on the side of NH 47 and is about 4 km from the Railway station Ernakulam South. Apart from the devotional activities, the Math takes special interest in conducting Sanskrit and Yoga classes for the public. Free medical aid is also given daily. A Bala Vihar for children upto the age of 14 is conducted every Sunday for giving rudimentary information on Hinduism, culture and heritage. Discourses by the Swamis of the Ramakrishna Math and also by scholars on occasions like spiritual retreat, form an attractive feature of the activities of this centre.

In all the above centres, religious discourses, celebration of the birth anniversaries of celebrities, Antharyogam (Spiritual Retreats) are being held.

### **Conclusion**

From the above discussion we may arrive at the following conclusion. Kerala constituted one of the regions in India where the teachings of Vivekananda and the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission had an everlasting impact, particularly in relation to nationalism and social change. Fortunately, the early decades of the emergence of nationalism and the founding of the Mission centres coincided each other and the social and cultural activities initiated by these centres strengthened the nationalist sentiments in Kerala. The services of a band of dedicated sanyasins like Swami Nirmalananda, Agamananda, Tyageesananda, Tapasyananda, Niranjanananda, Vimalananda and others were responsible for the Movement to take its deep roots on the soil of Kerala. These Sanyasins were great patriots and nationalists, who through their speeches, writings and humanitarian activities exerted a profound and positive impact on many sections of Kerala society. The Ashrams under their guidance played a crucial role in promoting Ramakrishna Culture in the surroundings by organizing several activities. Among these activities, social reforms found an important place and it had attracted the people from the locality.

The culture of the Ashrams had been something egalitarian and cosmopolitan in which every section of society had been permitted to participate. It was but natural that they became centres where caste formalities and rules were not obliging. The adoption of such practices by the Mission attracted many, particularly the depressed classes to it. The weekly Bhajans and prayers conducted by the Mission also attracted a few groups who participated in such gatherings forgetting the caste grievances. The emphasis on a common brotherhood and the neglect of caste and class barriers of the existing social system by the Mission, directly contributed to the spread of nationalism. It was a cultural break from the traditional path of Indian society and the emergence of new democratic ideas on the basis of philosophical system was made possible instead.

The Mission was not sympathetic to the westernised culture of the colonial masters. It was treated as alien to this land. An outlook attached to indigenous culture was propagated by the Mission. This was evident from the setting up of Sanskrit schools and Gurukulams (Hostels) attached to the Ashrams, where the students were made familiar with higher ideals of Indian culture. Such trends had been responsible to convert the Mission centres into centres of nationalism.

At a time when the nationalist movement was gathering momentum, the activities of the Mission attracted many writers and poets to its ideals. The "Prabuddha Keralam", the oldest living magazine in Malayalam which started its

publication in 1915 enabled such writers and poets to associate themselves with the Mission. Many of them regularly contributed articles to the Magazine which had been propagating the ideas of the Mission. Some of the Sanyasins kept contact with these writers and their families. This sort of contact also spread the Mission's messages among the different sections of the Society. For instance, Swami Nirmalananda and Shylajananda used to frequently visit the family of writers of North Kerala. As early as 1910 poets like Sri Kuttamath Kunjikirishna Kurup had taken keen interest in Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy. His famous drama, "Balagopalam" had bearing on the parables of Sri Ramakrishna. This drama had depicted the poverty of a poor family and the devotion of the mother to the Lord Krishna, but its significance lies in the fact that the description had been a realistic narration of the poverty created by colonial system. The drama had been so popular in Malabar that it was staged in hundreds of places where it attracted thousands of people. Therefore the cause of nationalism, particularly economic nationalism has been caused in rural areas, especially among the poor. Here the parable of Ramakrishna indirectly had been inspiring the people for the cause of nationalism and allying them against colonial administration and culture.

Similarly in the South, Kumaran Asan, the philosopher poet of Kerala was a great admirer of Swami Vivekananda and he has brought into Malayalam poetry the 'Rajayoga' of Swami Vivekananda. In the same way several political activists of

Kerala had been earlier associating with the Mission activities. Among them the name of the great Gandhian and freedom fighter Bodheswaran from Travancore deserves special mention.

In short the movement for eradicating untouchability started by Swami Nirmalananda and continued by Swami Agamananda, the two great activists of the Mission in Kerala, had a direct impact on the intellectuals, social reformers and political activists. The anti-caste movement which received a boost from the Mission strengthened the national movement and the national movement further strengthened the anti-caste movement in Kerala.<sup>52</sup> It may be added that the Mission took humanitarian and charitable activities in a colonial society where they were neglected by the governmental agencies. To sum up, the various centres of the Mission big and small, scattered throughout Kerala, cater to the material, educational, medical, mental, moral, religious and spiritual well being of the society in a silent, yet positive way.

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<sup>52</sup> K.K.N. Kurup, "The Intellectual Movement and Anti-Caste Struggle in Kerala" in *IHC*, Aligarh, 1994.

# IN RETROSPECT

N. Lekshmi Kutty “Vivekanada : A study in national, social and spiritual reconstruction of India ” Thesis. Department of History , University of Calicut, 2002

## CHAPTER VIII

### IN RETROSPECT

As the title of this Thesis indicates, the nineteenth century witnessed a great transformation in India in the form of an awakening or regeneration. A nation in stupor was awakened and rediscovered her self, her potentialities, particularly spiritual which almost remained intact inspite of the incursions of foreign culture. It was the rediscovery of her self which paved the way for her political liberation. The process of rediscovery of her potential within or the process of self-renewal which began with Raja Rammohun Roy, reached its culmination with Swami Vivekananda.

This piece of research attempts at analysing Swamiji's contributions as a patriot and nationalist, as a humanist, social reformer, educationist and above all, his role as the awakener of India's soul. He enunciated a philosophy which aimed at the reconstruction of India. As noted in earlier chapters, the time when Swamiji appeared on the Indian scene, the country needed an energising philosophy. Vedanta which is the core of Indian religion needed a new interpretation which will suit the social and intellectual conditions of his time. Indian social institutions needed a reorientation which would help the country keep united against the challenges of western imperialism. The nation also wanted a new definition of patriotism which would strengthen the emerging national consciosness. This great

vedantin came with a philosophy which would fulfil the need of the time. His socio-political ideas together with his religious thought contributed much to intensity of the on-going process of regeneration.

It was through his letters that his ideas on regeneration found expression to his Indian followers. His conception of the regeneration of India was on three fronts. One, in the spiritual and religious sphere, as Swamiji considered that Religion was the backbone of India. Secondly, the uplift of the poor and the downtrodden by helping them, mobilising the latent capacities of the youth as soldiers in the country's development and raising the status of women, thus enabling them to rouse the Shakti Spirit in them as the catalytic agent in shaping the society for which they should be given education and freedom. Third, the development and utilisation of the country's agricultural and industrial resources so as to have a sound economy to sustain the reconstruction involved in the regeneration of India.

In the first category came the dissemination of scriptural knowledge to one and all irrespective of caste or creed, removal of superstition and unnecessary rituals, whatever may be their scientific basis, but at the same time not tampering with the basic belief in their religion or faith however grotesque they may be and also not to disturb their liberty in thinking. In this, those in the upper strata of society who claim mastery in religious knowledge especially the Brahmins should

offer a helping hand to those below, however poor and "untouchable" they may be. The masses have to be taken up step by step to reach Advaita.

As regards the second category, in the potentiality of the strength in the youth and women lies the possibility of all works to be extended for the welfare of the society. While the youth needs the direction in which they should proceed, women should need the liberty and education to set the society in order. As mothers, it is they who shape society. Preventing them from acquiring education or denying them their liberty due, to act will only adversely affect the interests of the society as a whole. Universal education will to some extent solve this difficulty.

In the third category comes the need to cultivate material sciences, acquisition of technological and industrial knowledge to tap the nation's resources for the development of the country. For, material needshave to be satisfied to the extent necessary, for a balanced living and this should not be confused with philosophical thinking. "Society as a whole should have freedom to shape matters on the above lines to take the country forward".<sup>1</sup>

At the same time he felt that materialism should not lead to mere imitation of the West. Both the orthodoxy and mere imitation of the West, he pointed out, were obstacles which stood in the way of India's progress. Therefore, discovering

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<sup>1</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1979 edn.), Vol. I, p.530-31.

what was best in one's own culture and learning the best from others would be the ideal way. Society's onward march depended upon this synthesis.

It was a revolutionary philosophy that he contributed. A revolutionary is inspired by faith in man; in human history and the whole end of the movement is to establish and preserve the dignity and truth of that history. It is this faith in man which makes one a responsible revolutionary and saves him from iconoclastic frenzy. Swamiji's concepts of nationalism, patriotism, social reform, education and religious thought reflect his faith in man and naturally it served as a beacon light for his compatriots who were groping in darkness, under the influence of colonial culture. Some of these aspects have been traced in this study.

At the outset, he appears to be a bold and powerful exponent of the substance of Hinduism. Of course, it was in defence of Hinduism that he had spoken at the world parliament of Religions in 1893. A reconstruction of Hinduism on the world platform was the need of the hour, in order to remove the misconceptions about Hinduism in the West. The method which he adopted was to reinterpret it in the light of Vedanta, which is above all ritualistic concepts of religion. What is more important is that while defending Hinduism, he stood for the universal aspects of Hinduism and dared to call it "the Mother of all religions." His mission had its desired effect. The forceful manner in which he defended it won recognition for Indian religious thought in the West.

But the religious thought of Swamiji had a secular thrust. What he tried to bring home was qualities like tolerance and sympathy for the differences of opinion, particularly in religion and politics. In fact these were the marked features of Bengal Renaissance. Swamiji's secular ideas like unity in variety, equal respect for all faiths, etc. have contributed to the development of such ideas in Indian politics and other connected areas. What is significant is that his ethos helped to shape the modern Indian constitution with its "secular emphasis" or its pluralistic emphasis. This implied toleration for minority religions such as Islam, Christianity, Jainism and Zoroastrianism.

This study focuses on a very important aspect of Swamiji's thought ie. his sympathy for the poor and his concept of their liberation. It is true that religion and spirituality formed the main focus of his teachings, but he did not attach much importance to formal rituals and ceremonies. Treating religion as a realisation or manifestation of divinity already in man, Swamiji stressed that service of the starving millions is the real worship of the Lord. He firmly believed that no religion or society prospers for long if the people are denied social and economic justice. In his social philosophy he stressed that the ideals of the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God remain empty postulates so long as the poor groan under the misery of hunger and wretchedness. This idea, he had got from his Master Sri. Ramakrishna.

Now the question arises as to how far Swamiji was original in his approach to the question of liberation of the poor. It should be admitted that the inequality that existed in Indian society and the exploitation of the poor by the rich had become a subject of discussion in the writings of early intellectuals of Bengal, including Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. But Vivekananda differed from all of them on the entire question. Firstly, the ideas which he gathered about Indian poverty was first hand. Secondly, while the reactions of these intellectuals in regard to remedy were mild, that of Vivekananda was vehement, strong and radical.<sup>2</sup> Thirdly none of them denounced the causes of inequality. Swamiji on the other hand, never lost an opportunity to condemn in unequivocal terms the abusive and aggressive actions of the upper castes in Hindu Society towards the poor, but at the same time exhorting one and all to help the poor and the needy by sacrificing a little of their comforts for the purpose. Among the nineteenth century reformers, no one had so much sympathy for the poor, no one had taken up the removal of their misery as his life's mission as Swamiji did. We find that his sympathy for the poor and down trodden was one of his most outstanding traits<sup>3</sup> and was the dominant motivating

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapters III and VI of this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> While going through his biography we find that the person who was firm as a rock, strong in all respects, who stood up righteously when slightly provoked and who made light of even insurmountable obstacles, the very same man was moved to tears whenever he remembered the suffering of the common man. Such passionateness of the soul is indeed exceptional. As the guest of a friend who provided him all facilities in U.S.A., Swamiji could not sleep in the room lavishly provided, because he was reminded of the starving and suffering millions in India, steeped in poverty. He spent the whole night shedding tears: (See details in Disciples, n.1, p.439).

force behind many of his activities including his initial visit to America and his founding of the Ramakrishna Mission on his return in 1897.

The poverty of the Indian masses so much pained him that he even wished to be born again and again to serve the poor. In the *Complete Works* a few letters are cited in support of this, of which two are of special mention. One is the letter that he wrote to Prof. Wright and the other, written to Mary Hale. To Prof. Wright he wrote: "I some times wish for a million ages to serve Him through the work, dressed in rags and fed by charity."<sup>4</sup>

After a few years, he wrote to Mary Hale: "May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that. I may worship the only God that exist, the only God I believe in . . . ."<sup>5</sup>

These letters express his intense desire to be reborn, so that he could devote his next life for the liberation of the poor. They also reveal his ideal of the worship of God through the service of the low and the down trodden, which found eloquent expression is one word "*Daridra narayan seva*" a word coined by him. It conveys an idea of the highest type of patriotism to which it is difficult to find a parallel in the history of the world. It was this expression which inspired Gandhiji to initiate his programme of Harijan Seva. Inspired by Swamiji's sublime thoughts, Gandhi

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<sup>4</sup> Letter dtd. 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1893 from Chicago. See details in Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works* (Epistles), Vol. VII, (Calcutta, 1993) p.453.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to Mary Hale, cited in C.W., V, pp.104-105.

also desired to share the sorrows and sufferings of the untouchables, which is revealed in the following passage:

I would rather be torn to pieces than disown my brothers of the suppressed class . . . . I do not want to be reborn, but if I have to be reborn, I should be an "untouchable" so that I may share their sorrows, suffering and the affronts levelled at them in order that I may endeavour to free them from their miserable condition.<sup>6</sup>

In its tone and tenor, this passage resembles Swamiji's letters expressing his desire to be born again just to serve the poor.

Swamiji stood apart from all reformers of the nineteenth century in his emphasis on the masses, the deprived and the underprivileged people of the country. It is true that service to the poor in the belief that in serving them one served God does have antecedents in the Hindu tradition. But Vivekananda's understanding of the Indian problem differed from their's because, as Tapan Ray Chaudhury has pointed out, "he attributed to the underprivileged in India a

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*, Publication Division (New Delhi, 1969), p.25.

centrality in the life and history of the country in a way which has no precedent."<sup>7</sup>

He also believed that in their emancipation lay the liberation of the nation.

Thus it follows that in his programme of national reconstruction, emphasis was on the need of the removal of poverty of the masses. It has been brought forth in this study that Vivekananda was the first to draw the attention of the leaders of India to the social implications of the poverty of the masses. None before him had pointed out that freedom of the people from want of daily bread was the first condition of national regeneration and social growth. His challenge was for regeneration of the country through reawakening the masses. His egalitarian concepts point to this fact.

Swamiji, an astute sociologist believed that remaking of Indian society was a pre-requisite for national liberation. The remaking of Indian society, he considered a means for regeneration which would lead to national liberation. By remaking or reconstruction, he meant to create the awareness among people of their immense potentiality within. He found that people have not yet the conscious knowledge of the existence of this power. There was neither the attempt on their part to organize it into a united action nor had they got the will to do so. He observed "There is also a complete absence of that capacity, that skill, by means of which small incoherent

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<sup>7</sup> Tapan Ray Chaudhury, "Swami Vivekananda's construction of Hinduism" in William Radice (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda and Modernisation of Hinduism*, OUP (Delhi, 1998), p.9.

centres of force are united together, creating inseparable strength as their resultant."<sup>8</sup>

It was in this context that he took up the question of caste for a discussion. This study has given special attention to Swamiji's concept of caste and its impact on Indian nationalists. His perspective of caste was entirely different from that of contemporary social reformers. While the reformers were eager to condemn it, he alone made a thorough study of its origin and its evolution to the present level. On several grounds he objected to the caste system. Firstly, caste excesses and untouchability which were symptoms of a rigid social system, prevented some members of society from developing their full potential. Secondly, this immobile structure divided the Indian people and kept them from acting together as a united nation, especially when the country was facing serious challenges from the colonial West. What was most objectionable to him was the growth of privilege which degraded caste into a "dividing factor." The main consideration behind his quarrel with the concept of privilege was the principle of dignity of man. Thus he argued that caste distinctions and untouchability which were contrary to the principle of the dignity of man were the result of the growth of privilege. It can be seen that Swamiji's quarrel with the caste system centred round two separate yet related issues, one economic and the other religious. Economic related to the grinding poverty of the masses and religious related to priestly privileges. On these two

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<sup>8</sup> C.W. IV, p.440.

grounds a large section was reduced to underprivileged segments in society. He held the higher castes particularly the Brahmins responsible for the existence of such a state of affairs.

A discussion has been made in this study about the real cause of the trouble related to caste and the ways and means suggested by Swamiji for solving it. What is significant about his perception of caste is that though he condemned caste as a "dividing factor" in Indian Society, he was not for destroying or abolishing it. What he objected to was "privilege" attached to it since it was privilege which led to the appropriation of knowledge, power and wealth by the more intelligent castes at the cost of the suffering of millions belonging to the lower castes. According to him the worst feature of caste is that it makes people weak, less gifted in winning the economic competition with other nations and thus becomes the cause of their downfall when powerful foreign forces attack.

At the same time he points out the merits of the caste system. According to him it is caste that has bound a large group of similarly cultured men into a social group, helped them to live a life of co-operation and mutual help in times of trial and also against the invading alien cultures and this kept them away from proselytization. Again, caste represents individuality, variety and diversity. It is based on the doctrine of *Swadharma* or choice of duty in accordance with the inherent tendency. Individuals have their inherent characteristics and so do groups. Further, the caste system of India as formulated in the scriptures, is based on the in

born inequality among human beings. The purpose of the caste system is not to keep down the weak and the powerless but to give them a push to bring out their potent powers.<sup>9</sup> It is a law of spiritual economics and has nothing to do with superiority or inferiority.

Swamiji thus draws our attention to the fact that caste should not be destroyed because its merits outweigh its defects. The suggestions which he makes for solving the caste problem are worthy of note. His ideal was caste without privilege. According to him, to keep any caste vigorous, it must be given the freedom to interact with other caste members as their equals. Secondly, castes must be based on learning and culture alone, and not on the basis of birth or heredity. More than anything else, the need of the hour was sympathy and love towards the neglected castes and practical help to lift them up by the upper privileged castes. It is the duty of the Brahmins therefore to work for the salvation of the rest of mankind in India, he said. In addition to helping the lower to come up by giving them education and equal opportunities, Swamiji suggested other means also. For instance, as a socialist, he considered the sharing of the political power by the Sudras imperative since then only their condition could be improved. A man of prophetic vision, he foresaw the coming of the Sudra Raj. Through this concept Swamiji tried to establish the theory that the social fabric stands on the four fold

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<sup>9</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, "Social Values of Hinduism" in *Parliament of Religions Proceedings Volume* (Calcutta, 1965), p.268.

base of knowledge, prowess, wealth and service. So long, knowledge, prowess and wealth were the prerogatives of the elite and service was relegated to the subordinate position. There have been revolution from time to time on the issue of comparative supremacy of knowledge, prowess and wealth. Time has now come for the supremacy of service. Those who were exploited all the time, those who were havenots and neglected, although it is through their untiring service that knowledge, prowess and wealth flourished, would now come to the forefront. The prophet and historian in Swamiji did not find the need of destroying caste on this ground also.

He was also confident that the rigid walls separating caste from caste would vanish due to economic causes and therefore all the wrath of reformers was misdirected. He advocated industrialisation with the hope that it would give employment to the youth, particularly to those of lower caste which would make them economically independent. Economic independence, he hoped, would establish social mobility.

Swamiji's analysis of the caste system that it became a social institution and not a religious as countered by many, how it can and should be abolished but restored to its original status not as a stratified organization but as one which provides work according to one's aptitude and capacity without any social stigma is worthy of note. True, till the end of the colonial rule in India, caste was a hereditary one, because one followed the profession of one's predecessors. That it

was not because one was born into it is now evident after independence in that people belonging to a particular caste now resort to other items of work, even those formerly undertaken by the so called lower castes. His theory that what is required is to give a helping hand to those who are below and not to force those above to stoop to a lower level is more relevant today. His exhortation to grab the status of a higher caste or its culture is the best way to defeat the ill effects of the caste system perpetuated by a privileged section of the society when power and privilege were in the hands of that caste. In other words, self help is the best help and without putting forth one's own effort, no person or society can progress. This has been made easier now by the help and encouragement given by the authorities. His theory that these castes (really they were divisions only which can be found in all countries) will in turn come to power like a rolling wheel, is coming true. He has said that the topmost who had the privilege of study, because of their intelligence (which was legitimate then) had to give way to the next, the ruling class. Figuratively speaking, he has said they have dug their grave (which the subsequent castes also did). The ruling class had to give way to the trading class and as far as India is concerned, it was the British whose business acumen supported by their colonial instincts brought them to power not only in India, but even in other parts of the world. Now the trading class is being replaced by the lowest class, to which we are witnesses in the present day activities of human beings. This phenomenon is not peculiar to India but is applicable to the other parts of the world too. While in

the case of India the system was rigid, in other areas it was flexible and amenable to changes and reforms. That the lowest class will rule and they too would go down as in the case of the other three, is one of his predictions. As stated earlier, by "grabbing the status" of the higher castes, one in the lower can reach that stage. One can see in the present day activities how, many in the lowest strata of society have come to the highest level by their sheer merit. What we call the Brahmin, the kshatriya, vaisya and shudra castes, are already there in other countries, but in a slightly different form and with sophisticated ways, whereas in India they are practised in an antiquated way. This role of humanity, one section going up while the other comes down appears to be the law of nature, because of the temperamental difference among the people. The role of science has made it easier.

Finally, an evaluation of Vivekananda as a social reformer engages our attention to certain unique aspects of his approach to the question of Social Reconstruction. Swamiji's attempt had been to go deep into the problems, understand the genesis and find remedies in their totality. His contention that if it was necessary to change any social custom, the necessity underlying it should be found out first of all and by altering it the custom will die out of itself, makes him distinct from other social reformers of the time. Swamiji was one who always stressed the need of creating an awareness among the people about the evil customs which stood in the way of social progress. The reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

including Rammohun Roy, looked to legislation to break open the tightly guarded customs of upper caste Hindus. This meant reliance on British agencies for reform of Hindu society, which was a weakening and in the long run ineffective mechanism. Swamiji's ideal was self reform. Connected with this point comes the idea which he always stressed for the betterment of society, the Upanishadic ideal "Uddharedatmanatmanam"<sup>10</sup> which meant "one must raise oneself by one's own exertions." This holds good in all spheres. Whenever he talked the upliftment of women and the masses, he would say: "we must help them to help themselves."<sup>11</sup> Even the principle of socialism, he thought, could be carried out by basing it on this ideal of "Self help." When he defined education as "that which enables a man to stand on his feet,"<sup>12</sup> he had this ideal in his mind.

So, by reform Swamiji meant self reform and not imposing reform by means of a law or by coercive method. According to him when society is constituted by self reformed individuals, then there is no need of social reform. That is the main reason why the Ramakrishna Mission founded by him did not take up any social reform though it took service as its motto. This makes his concept of reform original and revolutionary. In fact he had suggested an effective way of solving society's problems and that makes his message relevant for all time.

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<sup>10</sup> *Bhagavad Gita*, 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> C.W., Vi, p.427.

<sup>12</sup> Talks with Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashram (Calcutta, 1990), p.180.

Of the many facets of Swamiji, the one which had left an indelible impact on Indian nationalism was that of an ardent patriot. He has been called a 'patriot saint' and "patriot-prophet". What is implied in these epithets is that a man of prophetic vision, he combined in himself the fiery national spirit of a patriot and the spirituality of a saint. He exhorted to the people of his country to think of India as one indivisible unit. Nobody has thought of, loved and made attempts to understand India as Swamiji. In every sentence that he spoke or wrote, some aspects or the other of the motherland, such as people, culture, development, education and women's and masses' problems and their welfare can be seen. Sister Nivedita who knew him so intimately has noted that India to him was the air he breathed. She added: "There was one thing, however, deep in the Master's nature that he himself never knew how to adjust. This was the love of his country and the resentment of her suffering."<sup>13</sup>

It is his lectures made from Colombo to Almora – the only lectures he made on Indian soil in reply to the addresses of welcome that were presented to him after his return from the West – which reveal the patriot-saint. In these lectures we come across with his patriotic fervour and the way in which his spiritual ideology shaped his patriotic zeal.

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<sup>13</sup> Sister Nivedita, *The Master As I Saw Him* (Calcutta, 1972), p.86.

The reason why he loved India so much is that India had lit the lamp of spiritual knowledge early in her history and had kept it burning bright and pure through good and evil fortune for the service of the whole world. In fact no person was proud of the glory and culture of India as Swamiji. At the same time no person groaned so much for the downfall, lethargy and oblivion of the people of their own history and culture as Swamiji. His love for Sanskrit was so ardent that the refrain in most of his talks was in Sanskrit language.

It is this patriotism, the pride of being an Indian, a pride in India's cultural heritage, etc. which became a source of inspiration for all freedom fighters of both moderate and extremist schools of nationalism. As a patriot, his contribution was mainly two fold. Firstly, his appearance in the World Parliament of Religions resulted in the resuscitation of the national sense of self-respect. What he could create among Indians was a feeling that India was not certainly face to face with its cultural doom.

Secondly, his concept of nationalism, which was a philosophy of 'action', acted as a catalytic force in shaping the ideology of freedom movement. In fact he revolutionised the concept of patriotism when he said that true patriotism comes out of a real feeling for the masses. In other words patriotism as defined by him meant commitment to the poor. To the young social reformers who were confused by Western ideals, Swamiji's interpretation revealed the true ideal of patriotism. It not

only gave a new direction to the reform movements, but in turn exerted a profound impact on the socio-political ideology of Indian freedom struggle.

It may be noted that Swamiji shunned politics. He repeatedly warned his friends and admirers back home against deriving any political message from his life and work. This is evident from his letters<sup>14</sup> to Swami Akhandananda and Alasinga Perumal. Again he never openly said that British rule should disappear from India. Yet he "made a valient effort to awaken the national spirit which forms the basis of patriotism".<sup>15</sup> His message had a definite role in shaping the Indian nationalist consciousness. The contemporary sources, accounts of newspapers, journals, reminiscences and acknowledgements testify to this fact. One can see from these sources how the early Moderates like Surendranath Banerjee and Gopalakrishna Gokhale were inspired by the patriotic messages of Swamiji. Acknowledging his indebtedness to him, Gandhiji had admitted that his patriotism had become a thousand fold after he went through Swamiji's works. Scholars like R.C. Majumdar and S.L. Mukherjee are of opinion that Gandhi was the ideological successor of Swamiji in many respects. Similarly C.R. Das, the leader of the Swaraj Party was highly indebted to Swamiji in his socialistic views.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> (1) See Vivekananda to Akhandananda, Almora, July 1897, cited in C.W.; VI, p.406.

(2) Vivekananda to Alasinga, 27 September, 1894, cited in C.W.; V, p.416.

<sup>15</sup> V.R. Karandikar, *Ramakrishna – Vivekananda* (Poona, 1991), p.568.

<sup>16</sup> See for details in *Selected Speeches of Subhash Chandra Bose* (Delhi, 1962), p.50.

More important is that a generation of revolutionaries was inspired to violent and self-sacrificing effort through the meaning they read into his words. His lectures collected in the book entitled "*From Colombo to Almora*" came to inspire greatly the youth of India. His words "heaven is nearer through football than through Gita" and "we want men of strong biceps" became the slogans of ardent nationalists of that time. The profound impact which these messages produced on the mind of Subhash Chandra Bose, the great revolutionary freedom fighter, has been expressed in his speeches and writings.<sup>17</sup> He has pointed out that the image of freedom that we come across in Vivekananda was reflected in the realm of politics only after his demise in 1902. And he also adds that it was through the voice of Aurobindo that the younger generation of revolutionaries heard the message of political freedom for the first time.<sup>18</sup> Aurobindo gave his call in the name of Vivekananda.

The emerging group of Bengal Revolutionaries, the "Young Tusks" or terrorists were divided into various factions under the names the "Anusilan Party", "Bengal Volunteers" etc. and they were ideologically tied up with Vivekananda and his movement for the upliftment of the country. For the emancipation of the motherland and her freedom, these youngsters, highly educated and devoted to their

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<sup>17</sup> See details in: (1) Subhash Chandra Bose, *An Indian Pilgrim* (Calcutta, 1948), pp.42-43.

(2) *Netaji Collected Works*, Netaji Research Bureau (Calcutta, 1980), Vol. I, p.37.

<sup>18</sup> Sisir K. Bose and Sugata Bose, ed., *The Essential Writings of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose* (New Delhi, 1997), p.97.

cause even took up the untrodden way of liquidation of the enemies. It is true that the Russo-Japanese War (1905) and the consequent victory of Japan had considerable impact on these young men. But what inspired them most to fight for the country with a self-sacrificing spirit, was definitely the teachings of Vivekananda which for them constituted a gospel of sacrifice for the motherland. In fact they took the vow to be "karmayogins" as defined in the theological debates of Swamiji. Although the terrorist movement was suppressed, it had a considerable impact on Indian national movement. In reality Swamiji through his teachings had kindled the new spirit of dedication, selflessness and sacrifice.

A significant feature of Swamiji's philosophy is its modernity, though it is rooted in age-old Indian tradition. e.g. His educational philosophy. The relevance of his educational concepts which are noted for their "pedagogic soundness" has outlived him by decades. The ideas like "man-making education", "nationally oriented system of education" etc. which he formulated to counter the colonial system of education, left an abiding impact on Indian nationalists like Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore.<sup>19</sup> The national educational policy of independent India has been influenced to a great extent by Swamiji's concepts.

Swamiji was the first reformer who said that educated young men (Sanyasins also) and social workers should go from village to village in the evening

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter V.

with a camera, a globe and some maps telling stories about other nations and thus spreading education among the masses. The impact of this idea can be seen on the educational policy of the government in independent India. The policies of the Indian government during the last fifty five years have helped very much in bringing education to the door step of the children of the lower classes. University Grants Commission is encouraging the higher educational institutions to conduct coaching classes for the students from weaker sections. Funds are allotted for such purposes, scholarships and loans from banks are given to these students. Notebooks, text books etc. are given free of cost to such students. Again, independent India witnessed Adult Education Programme and National Literacy Mission through which education is spreading among peasants and labourers. On all these schemes can be seen the indelible imprint of Swamiji. Swamiji's call for giving equal opportunities and special concessions to lower castes and backward communities has been responded to by the Government of India by its Employment Roster Scheme which provides for appointment in various governmental departments, aided schools and colleges, and even in public industries which has increased chances for the candidates of lower classes.

Swamiji's scheme of education gave equal importance to secular and religious education. Science coupled with Vedanta was his ideal. It is heartening to see that the recommendations of the University Education Commission of India

(1948-49) on the subject of religious education are in accord with Swamiji's scheme. Eg: The Commission say *inter alia*,

We must realise that false religions have brutalised men by their bloody rites and the shrivelling terrors of superstition . . . . The truly religious man is the enemy of the established order, not its spokesman. He is the revolutionary who is opposed to every kind of stagnation and hardening. He is the advocate of the voice which society seeks to stifle; of the ideal to which the world is deaf. Diversity of opinion stimulates thought, enquiry and investigation.<sup>20</sup>

When the question of giving religious education to students at the school and college level is considered, the first and foremost point to be kept in mind is how can the students be made to understand the true meaning of religion. Vivekananda's concept of religion gives us true guidance in this matter. It should be noted that secular education and religious education are not antagonistic to each other. Swamiji urges that religion helps a man gaining confidence in his own self. Without self confidence and awareness of the dignity of human spirit no secular education can be fruitful.

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<sup>20</sup> *Report of the University Education Commission of India (1948-49)*, p.296.

Swamiji had urged that we should have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular in our hands and we must make sure that education is imparted on national lines through national methods as far as practical. These are the days when we talk of national integration, cultural fellowship, international understanding and similar other values. In this context, Swamiji's views on education have a deeper significance today than when they were expressed. The purpose of education certainly is to liberate the mind of man from the bondage of environment, to remove his cultural isolation and infuse a spirit of enquiry into his mind. The "man-making" education as envisaged by Swami Vivekananda aims at fulfilling these objectives. As noted earlier, the educational concepts of Swamiji are revolutionary, at the same time rooted in the age-old tradition. In order to rectify the defects of the present day system, we will have to evolve a system on national lines as indicated by Swamiji.

Swamiji was a connoisseur of culture both Indian and Western. But he believed that the promotion of indigenous culture was a desideratum for any nation to progress. For him, nationalism did not mean merely love for one's motherland stretching from Himalayas to Kanyakumari, but also means that every Indian should love Indian culture, spiritual heritage and scriptures and should feel proud of them. As a great synthesiser between the East and the West he had advocated the need of learning many things from the West, but at the same time, he held that the progressive spirit of the West should be captured without losing our moorings in

the Upanishads and the Gita. Thus we find in him an eagerness to promote indigenous culture, which meant, particularly the promotion of the study of Sanskrit. Swamiji was one who insisted on the study of India's past, for "its future was to take shape from that background". In order to know about India's past and her cultural heritage a knowledge of Sanskrit was necessary. A sound knowledge of Sanskrit, the Vedas and the Puranas was necessary, according to him, not only for the study of the past of India, but also for reconstructing it scientifically. More than one hundred years ago Swamiji had shown the wisdom and courage to state that the history of India written by the Europeans was biased and that Indian history should be written by Indians themselves. As he put it:

... The histories of our country written by English writers cannot but be weakening to our minds, for they tell only about our downfall. How can foreigners who understand very little of our manners and customs or of our religion and philosophy write faithful and unbiased histories of India? Naturally many false notions and wrong inferences have found their way into them. Nevertheless Europeans have shown us how to proceed in making researches into our ancient history. Now it is for us to strike out an independent path of historical research for ourselves, to study the Vedas and the Puranas and the ancient annals of India and from this to make it our life work and discipline to

write accurate sympathetic and soul inspiring histories of land. *It is for Indians to write Indian history.*<sup>21</sup>

The need of studying Sanskrit and ancient Indian scriptures has been convincingly brought in this address which he made to a group of youngmen in Alwar, Rajputana during his tour as a Parivrajaka. What he said more than a century ago, in regard to striking out an independent path of research in history is something to be reckoned with by every student of Indian history.

He advocated the study of Sanskrit on some other grounds also. e.g: though the Indian life is marked by variety and diversity in culture and language, these differences or variations melt away before the unifying power of a common tradition. The ancient Indian scriptures have condemned and forbidden the little quarrels and differences on the ground of religion, race and creed. In order to understand what these scriptures say, Indians must know Sanskrit.

Again, as a patriot and nationalist, Swamiji's penetrating eyes looked for the main cause of the disunity in India and he discovered that when the national body is weakened, then all sorts of disease germs enter into the social, educational and political fields. If religion which is the source of the vigour of Indian national life, is strengthened, then all other aspects of her life will be invigorated. By religion he meant spiritual ideas, which unfortunately in the past had been hidden in the

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<sup>21</sup> Disciples. n. 1, pp.271-72.

monasteries and much more in the Sanskrit language, unknown to the masses of the country. So first of all these spiritual ideas should be brought out in the language of the people. At the same time vigorous attempts must be made to popularise Sanskrit among the masses, for, he believed that knowledge can be given through any language, but what is called culture can be imparted in India only through Sanskrit. Knowledge without culture is only skin deep. So, for raising the masses, these two things – interpretation of the scriptures in the regional languages and at the same time propagation of Sanskrit – are necessary. Further, as a believer in egalitarianism, he interpreted social levelling as levelling up culturally and not as levelling down. He recommended Sanskrit education as a part of his programme of minimising the cultural differences between castes.<sup>22</sup> This, he made clear in his lecture on the "Future of India", delivered at Madras in 1897.

It may also be noted in this connection that one of the last wishes of Swamiji was "founding of a vedic institution to train teachers and preserve ancient Aryan culture and Sanskrit learning".<sup>23</sup> His biographers have recorded that on Swami Premananda's asking Swamiji about the utility of such an institution, he said, "it will kill superstition". From this, it is evident that Swamiji considered the proper

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<sup>22</sup> See details of Swamiji's views on caste and his suggestions for solving the problem of caste in Chapter III.

<sup>23</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1981 edn.), II, p.614.

study of the Vedas a means for removing the superstitions of his countrymen and the removal of superstition a pre-requisite for national awakening.

While discussing the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission in India, special effort has been taken in this study to show as to how its various centres have been engaged in the popularisation of Sanskrit and Indian culture.<sup>24</sup>

Swamiji's advocacy of the promotion of indigenous culture, his role as the defender of Hinduism and the central role that he assigned to the Ramakrishna Order of monks in his plan for national revival have led to the general perception about him as a Hindu revivalist. Tapan Ray Chaudhury points out that "Swami Vivekananda represents the highnoon of a Hindu revival both in popular perception and serious historical literature".<sup>25</sup> Now the question arises as to whether he was a Hindu revivalist. It must be remembered that he had defended Hinduism against the mischievous propaganda which had long presented Hindu faith and practice as forms of extreme barbarism.<sup>26</sup> For that, the philosophy which he preached was not a sectarian philosophy. Instead, he based his interpretation on the Advaita Vedanta which is above all ritualistic concepts of religion. Then, his exposition of Vedanta was not at the cost of other religious faiths. He never attacked other religions to defend Hinduism. Instead, he pointed out the interconnection of different types of

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<sup>24</sup> See details in Chapter VII.

<sup>25</sup> Chaudhury, n.7, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> See a discussion about this in chapter IV.

philosophies bringing together humanity as a whole, not as one sticking to his faith alone. And his attempts to bring Hindus, Muslims and Christians together won plaudits from one and all. The remark of the German Scholar Deussen that in order to understand Vedanta one should "de occidentalize" oneself, as it were to master Indian philosophical system, makes the point clear.<sup>27</sup>

It should also be seen that though he glorified Hinduism in the West, after coming to India, he directed a powerful search light on the religion and society in India – a ruthless and fearless criticism of India's customs and practices. So, while self glorification was his policy abroad, introspection or self examination was his policy at home. He did so only because as he confessed "only a fool will wash his dirty linen in public". Moreover, his criticism of Indian customs and practices, his concept of social change, views on the institution of caste, Shudraraj, Hindu-Muslim unity, synthesis between science and spirituality – all these are inconsistent with the perception of a militant Hindu.

Regarding the question of Hindu orientation of Ramakrishna Mission, it should be noted that by organizing the Ramakrishna Order of monks Swamiji aimed at directing the ascetic spirit of India into useful channels like nation building. Though the Mission had a Hindu Orientation, a study of its ideological pronouncements will reveal that it has been cosmopolitan in its outlook. Again, a

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<sup>27</sup> Deussen as well as Max Muller used to have frequent contacts in London with Swamiji to discuss such matters. See Disciples, n.23, p.129.

study of the humanitarian activities of the Mission over the years indicates that from the very beginning, it "did not discriminate between the different communities of India in its programme of Service".<sup>28</sup> Similarly in his scheme of synthesis between East and West which is one of the basic tenets of Ramakrishna Movement, the emphasis was always on the positive aspect of assimilation, at the same time preserving the national identity.

Coming to the question of revivalism, Swamiji's admiration for Sanskrit, Vedas and Upanishads does not make him a revivalist. These were the strong points of Indian culture which he wanted to revive, for he thought that the neglect of these had attributed to the fall of the nation. So he revived what deserved to be revived – the perennial message of Vedanta proclaiming liberty and equality for one and all – and reviled whatever was puerile and redundant in the Indian tradition without caring for opposition and even slanderous attacks from conservative quarters. Though his concept of upliftment of women was rooted in ancient Indian culture, it was exposed to modernities. His method of reconstruction was thus unique in the sense that he wanted to preserve the past of India by reconstructing it. Thus "preservation by reconstruction" had always been his principle.

It may also be recalled that the defence of indigenous culture and institutions and an introspective study of their strength and past glory which were

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<sup>28</sup> Chaudhury, n.7, p.98.

characteristics of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Indian awakening had actually been forced by historical circumstances created by Western cultural intrusion. The search for identity in indigenous tradition which reached its culmination with Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement should not be mistaken for cultural revivalism, but it actually represented cultural defence.

The above conclusion necessitates an enquiry into a broader aspect of his philosophy – the Universalism or world view of Swamiji. A unique aspect of his philosophy was its universalism and humanism. It is his broad-based synthesis of materialism and spiritualism from which his universalism and humanism follow. He observed that while the West for strengthening its civilization and culture needed the special wisdom, innerstrength, calmness, patience and contentment of Indian life, India for her national reconstruction, on the existing spiritual foundation, needed the technical efficiency, the scientific knowledge, the power of co-ordination and organization of the West.<sup>29</sup> He dreamt of a future society as resulting from a synthesis of the Eastern Value System and scientific achievements of the West. A synthesis of materialism and spiritualism, he considered as a sure means of social progress in India. This point needs a little more elaboration.

Studying the past of India, Swamiji had come to the conclusion that Indian Society in the past was not able to grow due to the bondage of caste system. So the

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<sup>29</sup> Swami Satprakashananda, *Swami Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age*, Vedanta Society of St. Louis (U.S.A., 1978), p.149.

ideal of social liberty should be taken over from the West. This synthesis should consist of the realisation of the Western concept of social equality and democracy and the Indian value system based on the belief in the fundamental divinity of everything. "The bondage of both societies would then be thrown off",<sup>30</sup> according to him.

The universalism of Swamiji was marked by three underlining principles: (1) Love for mankind (2) Stress on unity and harmony, and (3) Inter cultural fellowship. Coming to the first point, it may be noted that on the surface, he was a great patriot, an ardent advocate of national growth. But for him this is a means to an end. For, beneath lies Vivekananda the Universalist and Humanist, whose real mission was for all men, particularly the distressed and the downtrodden, the suppressed and the exploited. His love for India was only a phase of his love for humanity in general. i.e., he was concerned for mankind as a whole and not a particular country or nation. As a Sanyasin, he believed that he was one with the Infinite. In a real and an intense sense he belongs to the whole human race and not to a particular geographical area or a cross section of humanity. Swamiji himself had made it clear in a letter written on September 9, 1895 which said:

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<sup>30</sup> C.W., V, p.47.

I belong as much to India as to the world, no humbug about that .

. . . What country has any special claim on me? Am I a nation's slave?<sup>31</sup>

These words convey the message that his interest was neither national nor international, but universal. And he saw the entire humanity as one. Sister Nivedita has pointed out that when he talked with the imperialist aristocrat or the American millionaire or the exploited and the oppressed, he saw the "divine-within man" in each of them. "But the outflow of his love and courtesy were always for the simple"<sup>32</sup> meaning, his heart bled for the poor, the ignorant and the downtrodden everywhere. It may also be remembered in this context that he wished to be born again and again to serve not the poor of a particular country, but suffering millions of the world whom he regarded as the living gods.

Second aspect of his universalism is its stress on unity and harmony. Swamiji had spoken at the world Parliament of Religions with a global vision. It must be noted that religious bigotry, fanaticism and feuds have caused untold misery to humanity. In fact peace is the special object of religious life. But the trouble starts when the various belief systems lay before society "one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry alike" and insist that "if it does not fit John or

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<sup>31</sup> *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati, 1993 edn.), p.257.

<sup>32</sup> Nivedita, n. 13, 1996 edn., p.219.

Henry, he must go without a coat to cover the body". Such attitudes are deleterious to peace and harmony and encourage fissiparous tendencies among mankind.

Swamiji had stressed the need of having peace in the domain of religion more than in any other field. This could be achieved, he believed, only through unity and harmony among the followers of different religions for which mutual understanding and regard are essential. Mere tolerance is not adequate for the purpose. That is why he said at Chicago that "We not only tolerate, but accept all religions as true". This ideal was based on the teachings of his Master whose concept of harmony of religion was based on the fundamental unity underlying their divergencies. But fellowship or faith can not be achieved by mere eclecticism or by syncretism. Eclecticism seeks unity of religions by combining into a single system their choice features. The religious synthesis achieved by the eclectic method is comely but not natural like a bouquet of flowers. Syncretism stresses the similarities and disregards differences. Sri Ramakrishna sought harmony with the differences, because in his view differences have a deep significance, they fulfil the spiritual needs of different types of worshippers. This is the fundamental principle of Universalism of Swamiji's message. He had stressed the need of recognizing unity in variety.

Coming to the third aspect of his universalism, Swamiji had putforth the idea of reconciling cultural contradictions in order to develop the harmony of nations in an intercultural form with a prospect of expanding world unity. This

idea of harmonisation of values can be seen even in his idea of 'Shudraraj'. It may be recalled that by the term 'Shudraraj' he did not mean to develop a particular class in the form of "dictatorship" of the proletariat as suggested by Marx, but on the contrary, "it meant an essential development of proletariat or Shudra class in harmony of values or qualities and activities of other classes or communities".<sup>33</sup> This type of integrated development of men and communities through harmonisation of values develops the idea of national value or social good. The very same idea he applied to the welfare of the world. Swamiji points out that "each nation has a mission of its own to perform in this harmony of races". And in this kind of harmony of races, Vivekananda finds the importance of the intercommunication of ideas of different religions, cultures and communities with a positive expansion of unity and universality.

In this age of erosion of human values in different fields of modern civilization, there is the global necessity of Organized Peace Movement in a humanistic way – the harmonious development of life and existence with the realisation. We get ideas from his message – idea of expanding peace in the present strife-torn world.

Swamiji was one who dedicated to the cause of Asianness. Asia being the land of all religions of the world, he took great pride in being Asian. He lived and

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<sup>33</sup> S.N. Chathopadhyay (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda: The Global Vision* (Calcutta, 2001) Preface, p.xii.

preached at a time when the myth of cultural superiority of Europe and the propaganda of an "inferior" value system of the East swayed the mind of men. The growth of Orientalism and Oriental studies contributed much to this analysis. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the concepts like "Pax Britannica", the mission of civilisatrice, the "burden of white man", inferiority of socio-political institutions and "oriental despotism" were mooted in a Eurocentric analysis of Asian countries.

But these concepts received a retaliation from thinking men in the East. A retaliation against European cultural superiority initiated by great men like Swami Vivekananda, Sun-yat-Sen and others had a magic spell over the Asian mind. These reformers and nationalists reinterpreted the Asiatic wisdom through European language and upheld national values. If we use the borrowed concept of Hegel in its limited scope, these reformers and nationalists led to an anti-thesis by interpreting the pagan world of Asia. A new concept of Asianism as a result of the outgrowing forces of thesis promoted by Eurocentric approach was formulated by these reformers and nationalists. In India, in fact Swamiji became one of the towering personalities to dedicate for the cause of Asianness. His contribution to the construction of a glorified Asia can be illustrated through the following examples: e.g.

In 1894 Swamiji delivered a lecture on Buddhism in Detroit (U.S.A.) under the title, *Buddhism, the Religion of the Light of Asia* in which he said that Buddha was the first who brought the missionaries into existence. "He came as a savior to

the downtrodden millions of India. They could not understand his philosophy, but they saw the man and his teachings and they followed him".<sup>34</sup> In conclusion, Vivekananda said that Buddhism was the foundation of the Christian religion; that the Catholic church came from Buddhism.

Similarly in his speeches he used to cite the example of the Japanese, where noblemen used to give up their political privilege and power to create the unity of the empire. According to him the reason why Japan had never been subjugated by a foreign power was that "not a single Japanese was a traitor".<sup>35</sup> This he cited to show their patriotism. He had also highly commented on the Japanese industrial enterprise and had even advocated Indian Youth going to Japan to study technology.

Finally Swamiji spoke highly about the contributions of the Arabs – the West Asians, to modern European civilization. He contrasted the scientific culture promoted by Islamic civilizations, especially their encouragement of an enquiry into all aspects of nature without inhibition with "the record of medieval

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<sup>34</sup> Reported in Detroit Tribune, C.W., VII, 1992 edn., pp.429-30.

<sup>35</sup> Disciples, n.20, pp.368-69.

Christianity, its persecution of Galileo and all rational knowledge which might go against Christian dogma as embodied in the Old Testament".<sup>36</sup>

The above instances indicate that the new emerging consciousness of Asia and its freedom from all colonial experiences were the great dream of reformers like Swamiji. Therefore they upheld the values of Asia and its age-old wisdom as a new force for life and its liberation. This dedication and commitment to the value system of one's own motherland is the best example for the awakening of a nation. Swamiji was one of those pioneers who initiated a cultural movement in India. His cultural movement was not of isolation and dogmatism, but one incorporating all wisdom and universality.

In brief, the legacy of Swami Vivekananda in his own lifetime contributed considerably to the reconstruction of Colonial India which led to freedom. At a time when there was so little hope of political freedom, this great prophet and patriot hailed the birth of New India – free, egalitarian and progressive. In fact, he served as a symbol of an awakened nationhood. Hundreds of nationalists were inspired to work for the freedom of their motherland and the spirit of nationalism was brought even among the marginalised sections of Indian society. Several youths were drawn into the cause of freedom and they fought against all sorts of

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<sup>36</sup> Tapan Ray Chaudhuri, "Muslims and Islam in Swamiji's Vision of India" in *Swami Vivekananda, A Hundred years since Chicago. A Commemorative Volume* (Belur, 1994), p.327.

superstitions, ignorance and poverty. An emerging India came through their vision, strife and struggle. As such, the annals of the history of modern India are highly indebted to this great son of India who moved around the world as cyclone and spread the message of humanism, compassion, liberty and harmony.

In conclusion, I would like to add that Swamiji's ideas lie interspersed in his several works touching upon all matters affecting mankind. Of these materials, the *Complete Works* is the best with several unknown to ordinary people. Very few have made any serious attempts to unearth and utilize them for the formation of an egalitarian society. May be, his ideas are yet to be brought to light, explained and commented upon. That there is scope for this, is as clear as daylight. To explore and exploit these mines of knowledge is a desideratum. This research work of mine is a humble attempt in this direction.

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## Glossary

Adhikaravada	:	The method of instructing the people to do certain things without explaining the reason thereof
Advaita	:	Non-duality; a school of vedanta philosophy teaching the oneness of God
Ananda	:	Bliss
Ashrama	:	Hermitage
Atman	:	The Self or Soul
Bhagavad Gita	:	"The Song Divine", A metrical composition containing the sacred dialogues between Lord Krishna and Arjuna
Bhakti	:	Love of God
Brahmacharin	:	A celibate student in the first stage of life
Brahmacharini	:	A woman observing the vow of chastity
Brahman	:	The Absolute; the supreme reality of Vedanta philosophy
Brahmanas	:	The priestly class
Chandala	:	Untouchable
Dharma	:	Righteousness, duty
Divan	:	Prime Minister of the ruler of a Native State
Gargi	:	Gargi Vachaknavi. A vedic teacher mentioned in the Upanishads
Gita	:	Same as Bhagavad Gita

Gunas	:	Usually translated as "qualities" - known as sattva, rajas and tamas. Tamas stands for inertia, rajas for activity and restlessness, and Sattva for balance or wisdom
Guru	:	Preceptor, spiritual teacher
Jati	:	The form of existence fixed by birth
Jiva	:	(Lit; living being). The Individual Soul, which in essence is one with the Universal Soul
Jnana	:	Knowledge of Reality arrived at through reasoning and discrimination
Karma	:	Action and its fruit
Karma Yoga	:	A spiritual discipline mainly discussed in the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i> based upon the unselfish performance of duty
Mahasamadhi	:	Lit., the highest state of God-consciousness; the word generally signifies the death of an illumined person
Mantra	:	Sacred word or inspired word
Math	:	A monastery
Mukti	:	Liberation from the bondage of the world which is goal of spiritual practice
Prakriti	:	Primordial nature
Puja	:	Ritualistic worship
Puranas	:	Books of Hindu mythology
Rig Veda	:	The oldest and the most important of the earliest Indian scriptures, the Vedas
Rishi	:	An illumined seer; a term usually applied to the authors of the Vedic hymns

Sadhana	:	Spiritual or religious discipline
Sakti	:	Power aspect of the Deity in the Hindu conception and worshipped as the Supreme Mother in the Tantric form of worship
Samadhi	:	Ecstasy, trance, communion with God
Sannyasa	:	The monastic life; the last of the four stages of life
Sannyasin	:	One who has left the world and taken on the ochre garb as a symbol of detachment
Siva	:	One of the Hindu Trinity, worshipped as the Supreme by many sects of Hindus in ancient, medieval and modern India
Sri	:	The word is often used as an honorific prefix to the names of deities and eminent persons
Sudra	:	A member of the fourth or labouring caste in Hindu society
Swami	:	Lit; Master; a title of the monks
Swamiji	:	A term of respect by which a Swami is addressed
Vaisya	:	One belonging to the third caste in Hindu society, engaged in agriculture and commerce
Vedas	:	Veda means knowledge. The term 'Vedas' refers to the most ancient scriptures of the Hindus
Vedanta	:	Lit; the end of the Vedas. In actual connotation, the summit of the knowledge reached in the Vedas
Vijay Dasmī	:	The last day - The Day of Victory in a series of festivities commemorating the mythical and symbolic war of the Goddess Durga with the Power of Evil

- Viveka : Discrimination between the real and the unreal
- Upanishads : The well known Hindu scriptures containing the philosophy of the Vedas
- Yoga : Union of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul; the discipline by which such union is effected

## Appendix I

### Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) – A Life Sketch

Narendranath Datta (affectionately called Naren) the later Swami Vivekananda, was born on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1863 in a middle class family in Calcutta. He was the second son (fifth child) of seven children of Viswanath Datta, a flourishing lawyer of philanthropic bent of mind and Bhuvaneshwari Devi, a pious lady whose prayers to God Siva<sup>1</sup> for a son was fruited in the birth of Naren. As a child he was restless and boisterous and the label that could be attached was a "mischievous imp". In the course of a talk with some of his Western devotees who met her after a long time, she half jocularly remarked. "I prayed to Shiva for a son, and he has sent me one of his demons!" resulting in a peal of laughter. He was a precious child too, highly intelligent, not knowing what fear was. His remaining in a meditative mood without moving when his fellow students ran away out of fear on seeing a cobra near them is famous.

As a young man still in his student days, his rationalist attitude made him question everything, which made others think that he was either an agnostic or an atheist. He was neither as his later life proved. Even when he met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time, he asked him whether he had seen God.

Naren's brilliant educational career ended with his taking a degree in second division from the Calcutta University in January 1884. Though not inclined for seeking any job, he made a feeble, unwilling, but vain attempt on one or two occasions, since his father who died, left nothing worth the name for the family's maintenance, because of his generous donation of his earning to the poor people. The family was in great distress, a fall from the top of the mountain of prosperity to

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<sup>1</sup> Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda, A Biography* (New York, 1953), p.1.

the valley of poverty. Yet, destined as he was to become a world leader of a unique kind, where spirituality dominated over materialism, he pursued his spiritual quest with unflinching enthusiasm. He had already heard about a Paramahansa, occasionally in *Samadhi* at Dakshineswar from his teacher Prof. Hastie. With his background of a Brahmasamajist, he contacted Sri Ramakrishna only to become the prime disciple of the latter and to pull India out of the cultural chaos as envisaged by his Master. His spiritual strength despite his young age was remarkable. His qualities of leadership which even the elderly people accepted without demure were excellent. His ability to lead others was prominent. His perspective of the world and India's place therein with Advaita as the ultimate peak of philosophy to be reached, was sharp and clear. His sympathy for the poor suffering people of India goaded him first to tour the country as a *parivrajaka* or wandering monk (1890-1892) contacting the rulers of the native states whom he exhorted to look after their unfortunate subjects. Not satisfied with this, he went to the West (1893), incurring the wrath of the orthodoxy to strive for the economic prosperity of rural poor and to project India's spiritual greatness. Going to America to attend the World Parliament of Religious without any accreditation, he the "uninvited" delegate became the cynosure of the gathering of 7000 delegates and later by the American public in particular and the West in general. Holding aloft the banner of *Sanatana Dharma* and the Advaita philosophy, he exhorted the West to accept the latter without detriment to their own faith. His scathing criticism of the Christians in their own land for their failure to live the life of Christ and still more a scathing one of the orthodoxy of his own religion won the plaudits of the well meaning sections of the society, though the Christian missionary propaganda guided by their Indian counterparts tried to maul his fame. Hundreds of Americans both men and women whose love, affection and generous material help made his heart expand so much as to embrace the entire humanity as one. He could not distinguish between nor could he discriminate against the rich and the poor, the black and the white race, the East

and the West, the Asian or the non-Asian. A true Advaitin, his vision included all without any semblance of differences of any kind. His patriotism made him tour the country again after his return from the West and establish the Ramakrishna Math and Mission (1897) now a world wide organization with 141 branches spread over thirteen countries. He exhorted the Sanyasins to go to the poor, teach them and help them, do relief work in times of calamity without detriment to their spiritual pursuit. In fact the Ramakrishna Mission was founded in order to give practical application to his ideal of a "man-making" religion.

That the elder leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak recognized Swamiji a sadhu, so young in age, is a proof of his divine nature. He was consulted by them on matters affecting the development of the country. His biographers have recorded his meeting with Tilak and the correspondence which followed between the two<sup>2</sup> which indicates that Tilak had great admiration for Swamiji.

That the first industrial pioneer in India J.N. Tata took Swamiji's suggestion of industrial development of India sincerely is something remarkable. That the millionaire financier of America John D. Rockefeller who, when told by Swamiji that the wealth he had accumulated was for the welfare of the public, was Chagrined only to regret later and changed his plan of action conforming to Swamiji's suggestion and resulting in his first large public donation for public welfare puts to shame the present day world leaders who strut on the claim of ability to lead the world in such matters. His appreciation of the works of Art, Literature etc. of other countries and the commonality of all cultures have made him the sole universal man. His greatest sacrifice was his foregoing all comforts and his striving for the common welfare of the entire humanity which made him tour many parts of the world and made him restless too. The strain of both physical

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<sup>2</sup> See for details His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Myavati, 1979 edn.), Vol. I, pp.306-07 and Vol. II, 1981 edn., pp.614-15.

and mental work shattered his health. In a life span of 39 years, he spent twentyone years in childhood and education, four years with Sri Ramakrishna, his Master, two years to found, establish and run the monastery for all the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna (including himself), two years on pilgrimage, three years as *parivrajaka* when he toured the length and breadth of India studying the people and their problems, four years in the West echoing the unity of mankind, the common spiritual goal and the necessity for sacrifice on the part of the rich for the welfare of the poor and the needy, two years again in India organizing the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and spreading its ideals, two years alone for his purpose viz., meditation and practice of spirituality. No such human being has trodden this globe, and whether any such will, one has to wait and see.

## **Appendix II**

### **Biographical Notes**

Swami Vivekananda's activities in India and abroad were associated with his most favoured disciples and admirers who belonged to India and the West as well. These persons who loved India and her culture had helped Swamiji work out his ideas. The following is a biographical sketch of some of them about whom occasional references have been made in this study.

#### **1. J.J. Goodwin**

Mr. J.J. Goodwin a young English man, journalist by profession and a stenographer too, became a close disciple of Swami Vivekananda in 1896 when they met at New York. He gave up his journalistic career and followed swamiji during most of the travels in America and India. Swamiji himself has referred to about Goodwin's accompanying him along with Mr. and Mrs. Seviars<sup>1</sup> stating that through his good offices certain pamphlets had been published. In fact most of the details of the monumental work of the *Complete Works of Vivekananda* could be recorded only through the tremendous and indefatigable efforts of Goodwin who accompanied Swamiji of most of the time and had intimate personal knowledge of the events during his association, for a long period of twentynine months including a period of seventeen months in India from January 1896 to 2nd June 1898 on which date he died of enteric fever at Ootacamund.<sup>2</sup> On hearing the news about

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<sup>1</sup> See letter to Alasinga, cited in C.W.; V, p.123.

<sup>2</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta, 1981). II, p.347.

Goodwin's death Swamiji said that "his right hand had gone" and that "the loss was incalculable."<sup>3</sup>

So much attached and grateful was Swamiji to this young western disciple who was responsible for making available to posterity Swamiji's golden words. But for Goodwin's sincere and dedicated work of so much enormity, India and the world would have known only a portion of Swamiji's work. Goodwin's recording of Swamiji's speeches, talks, conversations, classes etc. based on his personal observation and association of individuals and events could be done because of his tour of India with the latter, when for the first time, Swamiji with his entourage landed at Colombo (then a part of India) on 15th January 1897, after the historic session of the world Parliament of Religions in America.<sup>4</sup> In all the tours of Swamiji in Ceylon and later in India through Ramnad, Madras, Calcutta, Almora, Lahore etc. Goodwin accompanied him with the exception of a small period, when Goodwin had to be at Madras on an assignment, such as running the periodical "Brahmavadin" and covered every minute details of the events.

Swamiji was so much impressed by Goodwin's work that the latter was made a Brahmacharin as proposed in 1896 in a letter to Mr. M.T. Sturdy<sup>5</sup> It may also be noted that Goodwin's skill for taking down lectures, noted for its fastness and accuracy - impressed Swamiji so much that in a letter in March 1898 he expressed his opinion that Tulasi (later Swami Nirmalananda) should learn short hand from Goodwin.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.349.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.169.

<sup>5</sup> C.W. VIII. p.173.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.447.

Goodwin's lengthy letters to Swamiji's foreign disciples and admirers were so packed with facts and minute details about the people and places that his entire reporting can be taken not only as an authentic source material but also as a beautiful piece of literature. Had Goodwin been alive till Swamiji's Samadhi more details of his life and work for the remaining four years would have been added to this wonderful literature.

## 2. Alasinga Perumal

Prof. M.C. Alasinga Perumal of Pachaiappa's college, Madras (now Chennai) was one of the most trusted and close disciples of Swamiji who met him first at Madras in February 1893<sup>7</sup>, when the latter visited the area as a *parivrajaka*, before going to America. He devoted his entire life for Swamiji's sake in his monumental task of reviving India's cultural heritage. Alasinga was one of the few persons who were eager to see Swamiji attend the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and for this purpose a committee was formed and collections made to meet his travel and other expenses. He went to Bombay when Swamiji sailed for his first visit to America and made all arrangements along with other devotees. So also during his second visit to America when Swamiji sailed from Calcutta via Madras he travelled from Madras to Colombo in the ship along with Swamiji. The main correspondence of Swamiji from the west was to Alasinga to whom he used to give instructions and advice and sometimes admonitions too. This South Indian disciple of Swamiji was the first to think of starting a magazine to help voice the latter's ideas in India and abroad. His correspondence with Swamiji inspired him to start the "Brahmavadin" in Sept. 1895, which was to be a scholarly fortnightly to propagate the principles of the Vedanta religion of India. As the editor of the Magazine, he was assisted by J.J. Goodwin for sometime.

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<sup>7</sup> Disciples, n.2, Vol.1, p.363.

On important matters like development of industries, as discussed by Swamiji with J.N. Tata on his journey by ship to Japan, it was to Alasinga and the Raja of Khetri that Swamiji wrote.<sup>8</sup> The letters which Swamiji wrote to him throw much light on his future plans in India, especially on his scheme of national regeneration. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Alasinga was the pivot for carrying out Swamiji's work in India especially when he was in the west. He was also one of the prominent persons who made arrangements for and participated in the several receptions given to Swamiji from Colombo to Almora, when the latter returned in 1897 after his first visit of America. The wonderful relationship that existed between these two great patriots of India" contributed in an exceptional manner to the modern religious awakening of the country."<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Sister Nivedita

Sister Nivedita was the Irish disciple of Vivekananda and one of the most able elucidators of his message. Born in Ireland in 1867, Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble (her original name) started her career as an educationist, who met Swamiji at London, when the latter paid his first visit to England in 1895. Attracted by Swamiji's personality and Philosophical thoughts, she decided to become his disciple and from that moment onwards, was carrying out Swamiji's programme in England with Swami Saradananda, one of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. She came to India in January 1898 in response to Swamiji's call and was a prominent member of his team in all matters. In March 1899 she was initiated as a "*Naishitika Brahmacharin*" meaning life long celibate, and was named "Nivedita" meaning "dedicated" to the cause of India, which she considered as her second motherland.

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<sup>8</sup> Disciples, n.2. p.397.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Sankari Prasad Basu, "Swami Vivekananda and Alasinga Perumal" in A.N. Perumal and others (ed.), *Tamil Nadu - Bengal cultural Relations* (Madras, 1987), p.249.

It may be said that of all the western disciples of Swamiji, Sister Nivedita was the most gifted who had understood the depth of Indian Philosophy and who had dedicated her life in the way in which he had envisaged. During the years of her association with India between 1898 and 1911, she made this country her very own and enriched all aspects of the national life with wholesome thoughts and activities in the spheres of education, religion and politics. Beginning her life as an educator of women in India<sup>10</sup> She extended her educational work especially since her Master's Samadhi in July 1902 to the whole nation. The motive behind it was to awaken the nation to a political fight against the British Raj of India, whose rule in her opinion produced nothing, but "moral degradation and despicable enervation".<sup>11</sup>

As one who passionately longed for India's complete independence, Nivedita was watched with strict vigilance by the then British Administration. In order not to create any embarrassment to the Ramakrishna Mission, she severed her connection with it shortly after Swamiji's Samadhi. However, she remained on good terms with its members. She became more involved in nationalist politics by associating herself with the Swadeshi - Boycott movement which began in Bengal in 1905 following the partition of Bengal.

Nivedita was a prolific writer and her writings bring forth her inner convictions. She undertook lecture tours all over the country and wrote articles in a number of papers and journals like the *Dawn*, *the Bengalee*, *New India*, *the Prabuddha Bharata*, *the Mysore Review*, *the Modern Review*, *the Tribune*, *the English man* and *the Karmayogin* to make the people aware of the anti-Indian policies of the Government. All of her books particularly *Kali the Mother*, *the web*

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<sup>10</sup> In Vivekananda's life time, Nivedita started a school for girls in Calcutta, in November 1898 to promote the cause of national education.

<sup>11</sup> Sankari Prasad Basu (ed.), *Letters of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta, 1982), I, p.447.

*of Indian Life*, the *Hints on National Education and Aggressive Hinduism* were highly popular with the Indian patriots. '*The Master As I Saw Him* (1910) which is her most popular book, is an authoritative document for any study of Swami Vivekananda.

#### **4. Mary Hale**

The entire Hale family (the "holy family" as Swamiji called them) consisting of Mr. George. W. Hale, Mrs. Hale, their two daughters Harriet and Mary and their son Sam, and Mrs. Hale's nieces Isabelle and Harriet Mckinley, was closest of American disciples of Swamiji. It was Mrs. Hale who, when she saw Swamiji sitting exhausted opposite to her house, approached him, gave him all help for stay and food in her house. And it was she who took him to the office of the chairman of the council for selection of delegates to the Parliament and saw that the accreditation was granted to him. Mrs.Hale's act of kindness was unforgettable to Swamiji who continued his contact with the entire family through frequent visits and regular correspondence. He used to call Mrs. Hale as 'Mother' and her daughters and nieces (the four "Hale sisters" as he called them) as his own sisters of the Hale family. Mary Hale, youngest of the lot, was the most prominent and she was very close to Swamiji. Though he used to correspond with all the members of her family conveying his views on religious, philosophical and general matters, it is interesting to note that some of the sublimest thoughts that Swamiji has given to the world, were first given to Mary Hale in letters to her. For instance, his ardent desire "to be born again and again" to serve the poor was first expressed in a letter written to Mary on 9th July 1897.<sup>12</sup> Similarly on serious topics like his belief in an egalitarian society, calling himself a socialist<sup>13</sup>, he wrote first to Mary. So also, he confided to her, his view on British rule - views which he could express publicly in

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<sup>12</sup> Letter cited in C.W., V, pp.135-36.

<sup>13</sup> Letter referred to in Chapter VI of this piece of research.

India or even in America, only at a great risk. Moreover it is to her that he wrote about his personal matters that are of great interest to us today - such things as health, his prospects etc. we know more about Mary than about others due to the fact that we have many more of Swamiji's letters to her than to the others.

Swamiji's letters to Mary and the other Hale sisters are epistolary, both for style and content and their outstanding feature is absolute frankness. They provide us with some authentic materials for the study of the social philosophy of Vivekananda.

### **Mrs. Ole Bull**

Mrs. Ole (Sara) Bull was an American whom Swamiji came into contact in August 1894, when he gave a series of classes on Vedanta Philosophy at the invitation of Sarah Farmer under the auspices of the Greenacre Religious Conference, a broad based religious group at Greenacre where he stayed.<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Bull was the widow of the famous Norwegian Violinist and naturalist. She was a patron of arts and literature, a Philanthropist and had culture and position in society. She along with a few others sponsored a series of lectures on religion and philosophy and used to invite Swamiji to speak. She was one of the closest and staunch supporters of Swamiji during the latter's stay in America. An admirer of Indian Philosophy, she said that literature of India had become a living one to Western minds.<sup>15</sup> She first paid a visit to India in 1898, stayed at Calcutta, visited several places including Almora. Her second visit to India was along with Sister Nivedita (Feb. 1902) whom she assisted in London. In the *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* we come across with a number of letters written by Swamiji to Mrs. Bull, some of them relating to his plan of starting the twin Organization of

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<sup>14</sup> Disciples, n.7, p.509-10.

<sup>15</sup> Disciples, n.2, p.319.

Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In fact Mrs. Bull donated large sums to Belur Math and also for founding an endowment. In addition she used to send money occasionally. Swamiji had great regard for her and used to address her as "Mother". Just as the house of the Hale family was Swamiji's Head Quarters in the Midwest (in U.S.A) the house of Mrs. Bull was his Head Quarter on the East Coast.

#### **6. Capt. and Mrs. James Henry Sevier**

Capt. and Mrs. Sevier of England met Swamiji during the latter's second visit to England from America in July 1896. They were sincere students of Philosophy and religion of all creeds and faiths. They accompanied Swamiji during his return from America in Dec. 1896 and were present in all functions held in honour of Swamiji from Colombo to Almora. They visited several places in India sometimes with Swamiji and sometimes alone. Finally they settled down at Mayavati (Himalayas). It was they who purchased a plot at Mayavati for constructing an Ashram for Ramakrishna Mission. Capt. Sevier died at Almora after a short illness when Swamiji was away during his second visit to America. His body was cremated near the bank of the river passing near the Mayavati Ashram according to Hindu rites, when the Brahmins carried his body and the boys Sang Bhajans and Chanted the Vedas. Mrs. Sevier continued her association with the Mission even after this. They had helped Swamiji in monetary matters also.

#### **7. Prof. John Henry Wright**

Prof. John Henry wright was a Professor of Greek Classics at Harward University. Mrs. Catherine Abbot Sanborn, an American lady of standing, a well known lecturer and author of several books on religion and philosophy, "who was a co-passenger of Swamiji during his journey from Chicago to Boston and with whom he stayed at her request, made arrangements for Swamiji to meet Prof.

Wright.<sup>16</sup> When Swamiji expressed his scepticism about getting admission to the Parliament of Religions, it was Prof. Wright (who had heard about him earlier) who told him "to ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!"<sup>17</sup> The Professor wrote to the Chairman of the Committee for the selection of delegates to accommodate Swamiji. He also provided him with a fare to Chicago. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the Professor appeared to have some misgivings later, after the Parliament was over, about the Veracity of Swamiji's credentials. Swamiji sensing this, sent to the professor all scraps of papers to prove his case, but it was the letter of the Raja of Khetri written to Swamiji that finally put the lid on the affair.

This was evidently due to the indiscriminate attack on Swamiji by both the Indian delegates to the Parliament and the several American news papers reports by all and sundry, Vilifying Swamiji. That the Professor in his heart of hearts had no real grievance is evidenced by the joint letters sent subsequently signed by the Professor. Mrs. Bull and eight other prominent persons of America to Swamiji, when the latter was being given enthusiastic receptions in India after his return, congratulating him on the excellent work done by him in America.

In his letters to Mr. Wright, Swamiji used to address him as "Dear Adhyapakji."

### **8. Ajit Singhji, the Raja of Khetri**

Swamiji during his Parivrajaka days used to visit not only the houses of the poor people, but also the palaces of the native princes with some of whom he used to stay also. During his visit to Rajputana, he came into contact with the young Raja Ajit Singhji of Khetri in Rajputana (Now Rajasthan) who remained not only

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<sup>16</sup> Disciples n.7. p.403.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.405.

as his disciple, but also as his friend and benefactor. Their love towards each other and Raja's respect for Swamiji were so intense that Swamiji at a time when his mother was languishing due to poverty, requested the Raja to assist his mother. Even before this the Raja was helping Swamiji's mother. Both of them used to correspond with each other, when Swamiji was in the west. Some of his letters to the Raja focus on his ideas on the education of the poor and his desire to set in motion a machinery which would bring about an awakening in Indian national life. The Raja's death in an accident, a fall from a tower under construction in Agra, under his supervision was a deadly blow to Swamiji.

### Appendix III

## PEARLS OF WISDOM

From the very date that he (Sri Ramakrishna) was born, has sprung the Satya-yuga. Hence forth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions and everyone down to the Chandala will be a Sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, the literate and the illiterate, Brahmins and Chandalas - he lived to root out all.

(Complete Works, VI, p.335)

. . . It is said that so much looking back to the past is the cause of all India's woes. To me on the contrary, it seems that the opposite is true. So long as they forgot the past, the Hindu nation remained in a state of stupor and as soon as they have begun to look into the past, there is on every side a fresh manifestation of life. It is out of this past that the future has to be moulded, this past will become the future.

(C.W. IV, p.324)

Material Civilization, may even luxury is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread ! Bread ! I do not believe in a God who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven ! Pooh ! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priest craft to be removed . . . . More bread, more opportunity for every thing.

(C.W. IV, p.368)

So, give up being a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote - this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for the time, from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race . . . . All other vain gods are sleeping . . . .

(C.W. III. p.301)

. . . behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that infinite soul. assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul : *uttishthata, Jagrata, Prapya varan nibodhata* - "Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached !" Arise, awake ! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak.

(C.W. III, p.193)

The duty of every aristocracy is to dig its own grave, and the sooner it does so, the better. The more it delays, the more it will fester and the worse death it will die. It is the duty of the Brahmin therefore, to work for the salvation of the rest of mankind in India.

(C.W. III, p.297).

If you teach vedanta to the fisherman, he will say "I am as good a man as you. I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher but I have the same God in me as you have in you." And this is what we want, no privilege for any one, equal chances for all, let every one only be taught that the divine is within and every one will work out his own salvation.

(C.W.III, p.245).

To the non-Brahman caste I say, wait, be not in a hurry. Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmin, because as I have shown, you are suffering from your own fault. Who told you to neglect spirituality and Sanskrit learning? . . . Why do you now fret and fume because somebody else had more brains, more energy more pluck and go, than you? Instead of wasting your energies in vain discussions and quarrels in the news papers, instead of fighting and quarrelling in your own homes - which is sinful - use all your energies in acquiring culture which the Brahmin has and the thing is done.

(C.W. III. pp.29-98)

There is no country in the world without caste. In India, from caste we reach to the point where there is no caste . . . . The plan in India is to make everybody a Brahmin, the Brahmin being the ideal of humanity.

(C.W. V, p.214).

The absolute sameness of condition if that be the aim of ethics, appears to be impossible. That all men should be the same, could never be, however we might try. Men will be born differentiated : some will have more power than others; some will have natural capacities, others not, some will have perfect bodies, others not. We can never stop that . . . . But what can be attained is elimination of privilege. That is really the work before the whole world.

(C.W. I, pp.434-35)

. . . . You will find that in the Vedic or Upanishadic age, Maitreyi, Gargi, and other ladies of reversed memory have taken the place of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman . . . . All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in the future.

(C.W. VII, pp.214-15)

The basis of all systems, social and political rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good.

(C.W. V, p.192).

The more I study History, the more I find the idea (of competition) to be wrong. Some say that if man did not fight with man, he would not progress . . . but I find now that every war has thrown back human progress by fifty years instead of hurrying forward. The day will come when men will study history from a different light and find that competition is neither the cause nor the effect, simply a thing on the way, not necessary to evolution at all.

(C.W. V, p.278).

Asia laid the germs of civilization, Europe developed man and America is developing the woman and the masses.

(C.W. V, p.22).

the Greek sought political liberty. The Hindu has always sought spiritual liberty. Both are one sided . . . Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for.

(C.W. VI, p.86).

Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.

(C.W. V, p.489).

Teach yourselves, teach everyone, his real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

(C.W. III, p.193).

Take man where he stands and from there give him a lift.

(C.W. II, p.382).

Our duty is to encourage every one in his struggle to live upto his own highest ideal and strive at the same to make the ideal as near as possible to the truth.

(C.W. I, p.39).

'Sudden changes cannot be'.

(C.W. III, p.217).

Religion is the idea which is raising the brute unto man and man unto God.

(C.W. V, p.409).

Every nation, every man and every woman must work out their own salvation.

(C.W. IV, p.362).

You must not depend upon any foreign help. Nations like individuals must help themselves. This is real patriotism. If a nation cannot do that, its time has not yet come. It must wait.

(C.W. V, p.108).

This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.

(C.W. IV, p.363).

It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body - to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work! I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.

(C.W. V, p.414).