Understanding
Vivekananda
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VIVEKANANDA

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TO
MY PARENTS
PREFACE

This work is an attempt at analysing the basic thoughts of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) whose inspiring messages and tireless activities shook the foundation of the Hindu society in the last decade of the nineteenth century. An uncompromising Advaitist, Vivekananda has always been a champion of freedom in the truest sense of the term. It is the longing for freedom, which produces, in our mind, the idea of a Being who is absolutely free. A passionate nationalist, Vivekakanda gave a new life to the national movement of India by calling attention of his countrymen to its spiritual basis. The keynote of his philosophy was spiritual unity of the universe. Education, humanism, social regeneration, emancipation of women and nationalist upsurge—all stem from this one basic truth, viz., spiritual unty of the universe. Spirituality is not, however, anything occult or magical but is a matter of direct realization. In the sphere of religion Vivekananda's contribution has been of lasting value. According to him, all the religions from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism mean 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.

I should like to make it clear that this work is not the outcome of any scholarly research: it is mainly an exposition of the basic thoughts of Vivekananda. The papers which have been brought together in this work in an integrated form were published before in different journals or commemoration volumes. My intention has been to collect my scattered thoughts on such an enthralling subject as Vivekananda and to address the lay reader who is keen on assessing the role of Vivekananda in building India.

The stirring call given by Vivekananda at the concluding session of the historic Parliament of Religions at Chicago, in September, 1893, has significant relevance today when we are standing at a critical period of history.
Frustration born out of lowering of standards and distortion of basic human values among other things, is widespread today. The remedy, as pointed out by the Swami, lies in absolute reliance on one's spiritual resources. Said the Swami: "If anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight", "Assimilation and not Destruction", "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension".

Since most of the papers of this work are based on lectures delivered before the public at different periods of time stretching over years, the reader will not fail to notice repetitions and overlappings. I crave the indulgence of the reader for this lapse.

I take this opportunity of recording my grateful regards to Swami Nityaswarupananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, who has been my mentor ever since my student days, in so far as the study of Vivekananda is concerned. I also owe a deep debt of gratitude to Swami Sambuddhananda, Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Lokeswarananda, all senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order for help received in many ways. The idea of bringing out this selection came from Sri Barnik Ray, a modern Bengali poet, but for whose constant encouragement, I would not have ventured the publication of this volume. It is a pleasure to thank him for all the trouble he took. My esteemed friend, Sri Shyamapada Bhattacharya of Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar deserves thanks for undertaking the publication of this work.

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA PARAMAHANSA

Born of Brahmin parents, in February 1836, amidst the utter simplicity of a village of Bengal, Gadadhar Chattopadhyay, later known as Ramakrishna, found himself drawn to a religious life from his boyhood. At the age of twenty he became the chief priest at the temple of Dakshineswar founded by Rani Rashman, a rich lady of Calcutta belonging to an inferior caste. The environment of the temple deeply influenced Ramakrishna’s life and personality. The central temple at Dakshineswar was that of Kali, the Divine Mother. In a separate temple within the same compound there was the image of Krishna, symbolizing divine love and beauty, and each of the twelve temples along the Ganga was adorned by the image of Siva, the Absolute. The awful and yet lovely goddess of the Tantrikas, the divine flute-player of the Vaishnavas, and the self-immersed transcendent Lord of the Saivas lived together before the eyes of Ramakrishna, representing so many ideals of Hindu devotees.

Ramakrishna was no scholar, he had no aristocratic dignity either of birth or wealth, nor did he possess any power or prestige in the conventional sense of the terms. Yet he possessed the power of attracting to himself great intellectuals and leaders of thought of his time—Keshabchandra Sen, Pandit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Pratapchandra Majumdar amongst others. The latter, one of the most devoted followers of Keshabchandra Sen, was struck and bewildered by the influence which Ramakrishna exercised over educated men. “What is there in common between him and me?” he asked, “I, a Europeanised, civilised, self-centered, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I, who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller and a
whole host of European scholars and divines? And it is not
I only, but dozens like me who do the same”. Keshabchandra
felt that Ramakrishna’s source of strength was his spiritual
life which was unique in character: “He worships Shiva,
he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna,
and is a confirmed advocate of Vedantic doctrines . . . He
is an idolator, yet is a faithful and most devoted mediator
of the perfections of the One formless, infinite Deity. His
religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental
insight, his whole nature burns day and night with a
permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling”.2

Ramakrishna was no ordinary priest carrying on the
routine work at the temple of Dakshineswar. He was a
god-intoxicated man. He had a yearning for a direct realisa-
tion of divinity. And the separation between the devotee
and his object of worship became intolerable. One day,
unable to bear the painful separation any longer he resolved
to put an end to his life when suddenly he was blessed with
divine grace. He described the vision in the following
manner: “One day I was torn with intolerable anguish. My
heart seemed to be wrung as a damp cloth might be wrung.
I was racked with pain. A terrible frenzy seized me at the
thought that I might never be granted the blessing of this
Divine vision. I thought if that were so, then enough of
this life. A sword was hanging in the sanctuary of Kali.
My eyes fell upon it and an idea flashed through my brain
like a flash of lightning. ‘The sword! It will help me to end
it’. I rushed up to it, and seized it like a mad man. And
lo the whole scene, doors, windows, the temple itself
vanished . . . It seemed as if nothing existed any more.
Instead I saw an ocean of spirit, boundless, dazzling. In
whatever direction I turned great luminous waves were
rising. They bore down upon me with a loud roar, as if to
swallow me up. In an instant they were upon me. They
broke over me, they engulfed me. I was suffocated. I lost
consciousness and I fell. How I passed that day and the next
I do not know. Round me rolled an ocean of ineffable joy.
And in the depths of my being I was conscious of the
presence of the Divine Mother”.3

Ramakrishna had two spiritual guides in his life—
Bhairavi Brahmani and Tota Puri. Bhairavi, a lady ascetic of Tantriaka school who was born of a Brahmin family of East Bengal, came to know through yogic power that there were three great personages in Bengal to all of whom she was to deliver a certain message. Two such personages she had already met before and the third was Ramakrishna. When Ramakrishna told Bhairavi that people used to call him mad on account of the fact that his actions differed widely from those of the common man, the lady ascetic assured him saying that the state through which Ramakrishna was passing was not a state of insanity but was Mahabhava, an extra-ordinary state of religious ecstasy mentioned in books of Bhakti attended with nineteen external characteristics such as shedding tears, tremor of body, standing of hair on end, perspiration etc.

Ramakrishna practised all the different forms of Tantriaka sadhana and was subsequently attracted towards Vaishnavism. Not only did he practise different forms of Vaishnava sadhana, he even realised the different spiritual experiences as a Christian and also as a Moslem. As a result of his practising all the spiritual exercises mentioned in the sixty-four principal Tantras, Ramakrishna became overwhelmed with divine fervour and used to fall into deep trances; he had direct realisation of numerous gods and goddesses described in the scripture. The Bhairavi was amazed to see that the physical symptoms resulting from Ramakrishna’s ecstatic love for God were analogous to the ecstatic moods of Sri Radha and Sri Chaitanya.

Towards the end of 1864 Ramakrishna came in contact with Tota Puri, an extra-ordinary Vedantic ascetic, a wandering monk whom Ramakrishna accepted as his spiritual guide. Tota Puri taught Ramakrishna to detach his mind from everything earthly and plunge it into the heart of the Atman. In spite of his best efforts Ramakrishna could not cross the realm of name and form nor could he concentrate on the precepts of the Advaita Vedanta. Every time the familiar form of the radiant Mother appeared before him as a living reality. Tota Puri was exasperated and one day he struck the point between Ramakrishna’s eyes with a piece of broken glass and commanded him
sternly to concentrate his mind on that point. Ramakrishna made another attempt and the last barrier disappeared. He was immersed in the depths of nirvikalpa samadhi, indeterminate realisation of the Formless One, wherein subject, object and process of cognition disappeared. The Universe was extinguished.

Ramakrishna had a natural aversion to all kinds of dogmatism and bookishness. The important thing is, he used to say, somehow to cultivate devotion to God and love for him. It is no use reading too many books and storing the mind with detailed opinions and discussions. When one enters an orchard to eat mangoes, he used to say, one must enjoy eating to one’s heart’s content. It is foolish to count leaves and branches on the trees rather than eat the mangoes.

Ramakrishna’s attitude to sadhana had a realistic basis. He used to say that the modern man had hardly sufficient time and energy to go through the elaborate rites and rituals prescribed in the scripture. Thousands of lectures based on the scripture can no more make the slightest impression on worldly people than one can drive a nail into a stone wall or strike through the skin of the crocodile with a sword. It would be wrong to suppose, however, that Ramakrishna discarded religious rites altogether; what he insisted on was simplicity of practice and not meaningless jargons of an unintelligent devotee. As he put it, it is wise to follow the simple but effective attitude of Hanumana—“I do not know the day of the week, the phase of the moon or the position of the stars; I only contemplate Rama”.

One cannot however give up rituals altogether unless one realises God. Ritualistic worship comes to an end when the devotee’s eyes become filled with tears as one repeats Om Rama. It is then that the necessity of repeating rituals or muttering beads is no longer felt. When the fruit appears the blossom drops off. Love of God is the fruit and rituals are the blossom.

Though he was not a scholar in the traditional sense of the term, Ramakrishna’s life is an eloquent testimony to the true spirit of scholasticism. Scholarship does not consist in scanning scriptural texts, its object is not the
book but the man. True scholarship is transformed life and Ramakrishna showed how the life divine could be lived.

The most remarkable feature of Ramakrishna’s teaching is that he never formulated a well-defined and precise type of religion nor did he preach one. He did not form any sect and yet he attracted great intellectuals of diverse faiths. This was because religion was with him a living, dynamic faith. On one occasion on hearing a man singing the verse: “Think of Him and worship Him at every instant of the day”, Ramakrishna stopped the singer and said “you should alter the verse into ‘Pray to Him and worship Him only twice a day!’ Say what you really do. Why tell fibs to the Infinite?” On another occasion Ramakrishna heard a devotee in prayer enumerating all the perfections of the Lord, whereupon he asked: “Why do you give these statistics? Does a son say to his father: ‘O my father, you possess so many houses, so many gardens, so many horses, etc’...? It is natural for a father to put his resources at the disposal of his son. If you think of Him and His gifts as something extra-ordinary, you can never be intimate with Him, you cannot draw near to Him. Do think of Him as your nearest. Then He will reveal Himself to you. Do you not see that if you go into an ecstasy over His attributes, you become an idolator?”

To those who avowedly protest against idolatry and overzealously insist on worshipping the formless God, Ramakrishna’s answers are clear and decisive: “God is with form and without form. Images and other symbols are just as valid as your attributes. And these attributes are not different from idolatry, but are merely hard and petrified forms of it.” “Again,” he said: “You wish to be strict and partial. For myself I have a burning desire to worship the Lord in as many ways as I can; nevertheless, my heart’s desire has never been satisfied. I long to worship with offerings of flowers and fruits, to repeat His Holy name in solitude, to meditate upon Him, to sing His hymns, to dance in the joy of the Lord. Those who believe that God is without form attain Him just as well as those who believe He has form. The only two essentials are faith and self-surrender”.

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These words cannot be said to have fallen from the lips of a commentator of scriptural texts, nor from a theological disputant. They reflect the living certitude of a seer. For, with Ramakrishna words were not ornamental robes hiding the true form of a person but like flowers they blossomed forth from the inmost recess of his soul. As he spoke he lost himself in God, like a bather who dives and reappears dripping after a moment, bringing with him the smell of seaweed, the taste of the salt of the ocean.

Ramakrishna did not dissent from the monistic explanation of the universe. Yet his temperament which was full of feminine tenderness and grace forced him to lay far greater stress on the personal aspect of God. The absolute of the Advaïtin could be realised by only the perfect samadhi. But then the Indeterminate Absolute was not basically different from the Personal God. The two are but different aspects of the same Reality. There may be a distinction without difference which is analogous to distinction between ice and water. Ice is frozen water and when the heat of the sun is applied to ice it melts into water. The sun gives the radiance of knowledge and ice is the concrete product of penetrating devotion. Like the Akasa, Brahman is without any modification. It has become manifold because of Sakti. Again, Brahman is like fire which itself has no colour. The fire appears white if you throw a white substance into it, red if you throw a red. What Brahman is cannot be described; it is beyond words.

Yet Ramakrishna would not allow any dualism between Brahman and Sakti. According to him, He who is Purusha is also Prakriti. He who is Brahman is also Sakti. He is called Purusha or Brahman when He is inactive, that is to say, when He ceases to create, preserve or destroy; and He is called Sakti or Prakriti when He engages in those activities. The Personal and the Impersonal are the same Being in the same way as milk and its whiteness or the diamond and its lustre or the serpent and its undulations. That which is beyond both Kshara and Akshara cannot be described.

Ramakrishna's sayings remind one of the teaching of the Lord Krishna about Purushottama: There are two
Purushas in the world—the Perishable and the Imperishable. All beings are the perishable and the Immutable is called the Imperishable. But, there is another, the Supreme Purusha called the Highest Self, the Immutable Lord who pervades the three worlds and sustains them.

It is reassuring to see that in an age of renaissance and enlightenment, Ramakrishna’s utterances which were a testimony to Supreme Truth went straight into the heart of humanity and helped the seeker after truth in putting an end to all controversy and antagonism that prevailed amongst philosophical and theological systems. Ramakrishna regarded different religious paths as but different ways leading to the same goal. Water is the same no matter whether one uses the term jāl or pani or aqua to describe it. One can reach the roof of a house by scaling a wall or with the help of a ladder or with the help of a rope or by climbing the stairs. But once the roof is reached, the means no longer appear to have any importance.

To Ramakrishna dualism and qualified non-dualism were not sharply opposed and exclusive ways of realization of Truth but rather different steps leading to the same goal. They are not contradictory but rather are complementary, the one to the other. One path may be considered suitable for an individual aspirant of one particular mental make-up while another path may be suitable to a person of a different mental order. For an ordinary devotee, who does not possess much scholarship, the dualistic form of religion with rituals, images and symbols may be useful. The intellectual seeker after Truth can arrive at qualified non-dualism according to his fitness. And the Absolute nondualistic Advaita sadhana is given only to those who have attained fitness of a rare order through the discipline of yoga. It transcends all limits of ratiocination and brings about an identity of the Self and the Absolute. Here again Ramakrishna sounds a note of warning. Man cannot pretend to know which particular path will suit him. It is the Divine Mother who alone knows which particular path will be suitable for her children. A mother who has five children serves different kinds of dishes according to the appetite and capacity of each of her children. But that does not
mean that the mother is partial or indifferent. Similar are the ways of the Divine Mother.

Ramakrishna did not however propose a sort of synthesis of religious systems. Nor did he preach any universal religion as an eclectic form inter-relating the basic elements of different faiths. Religion is not to be likened to a flower vase which contains flowers of different species and colours plucked from various plants. Ramakrishna would not say that there are inklings of Truth in different historical religions. Rather he used to say that every religion is wholly true. For Truth is one and indivisible, and as such it would be improper to say that different religions contained fragments of Truth. Ramakrishna was fully alive to the significance of the force of religion as a dynamic, living faith; religion is for him the very essence of man. Just as a man cannot live without breathing so he cannot live without religion which forms the very bedrock of his existence. Because God is Truth and Truth is God, no fragmentation of Divinity is possible. The example of the chameleon which Ramakrishna loved to cite to his audience is a significant one. Two persons quarrelled over the real colour of a creature which both of them noticed in a garden. One said the creature was red while the other said it was blue. Each pressed his own point and no conclusion was reached. At last they approached the gardener for a solution of the controversy. The gardener who knew the creature for a long time said that it was both red and blue and it had other colours as well for it was a many-coloured chameleon (Bahurupt). From one angle of vision it appeared blue while from another angle it looked red. All the colours were equally true. Ramakrishna looked upon religion in the same way. Different religions are but different approaches to God. He would not say that out of the various colours of the chameleon a new synthetic colour emerged. So he would never say that some sort of a universal religion was the outcome of a synthesis of different religious systems.

Ramakrishna had a firm faith in Advaitism as he had faith in other forms of religion and philosophy. Yet he
had a special fascination for the Personal God. "As a rule", he declared, "the devotee does not long for the realisation of the Impersonal. He is anxious that the whole of his ego should not be effaced in samadhi. The devotee would fain have sufficient individuality left to him to enjoy the Vision Divine as a person. He would fain taste sugar in place of being one with the sugar itself." He did not, however, look upon the phenomenal world as illusion. He spoke of involution and evolution. The world after its dissolution remains involved in God, and God, at the time of creation, evolves as the world. Butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk goes with butter. If the Self exists then the non-self must also exist. To the question how can such a God be known by the ordinary man, Ramakrishna answered that through the company of holy men and repeating the name of God with sincere devotion one can have taste of Divinity. He once prayed to the Mother: "Mother I don't seek knowledge. Here, take Thy knowledge, take Thy ignorance. Give me only pure love for Thy lotus feet".

On one occasion Ramakrishna was heard exclaiming in a state of trance: "Yes, my Holy Mother (Kalî) is none other than the Absolute. She it is to whom the six systems of philosophy with all their learned disquisitions furnish no clue". When, however, a man returns from samadhi, he is thrown back upon the world of reality and perceives the world system as real because he becomes a differentiated ego once more. So long as a man's ego is real, the world is real too. At this stage the question of the Absolute does not arise. God cannot be known by the sense-organs or by this mind, but He can be known by pure mind, the mind that is free from worldly desires. Yet, it is well to bear in mind that one cannot pour four seers of milk into a one-seer pot. We can never know God unless He lets us know Him.

Let us not assume for a moment that there is a note of despair in this utterance of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna gave to humanity a message of hope and a vision which are too precious to be forgotten. Will every human being realise God one day or other? Ramakrishna gave a categorical and affirmative answer to this question, Normally
a man does not keep himself starving throughout the day; some take meal in the morning, some at noontime while some others in the evening. So also God is sure to reveal Himself to every man, may be at different periods of time.

The realisation of God enabled Ramakrishna to evaluate the divinity of man in a measure hitherto unknown. Addressing Narendranath and some other disciples, Ramakrishna said one day: “They talk of mercy to the creatures. How audacious it is to think of showering mercy on the Jiva, who is none other than Siva. One has to regard the creature as God himself and proceed to serve it with a devout heart instead of taking up the pose of doling out mercy.” Certainly it would be sacrilegious to accord a more elevating position to the so-called helper in relation to the toiling mass. The worship of suffering humanity as embodiment of God is in itself a programme of spiritual practice which, if observed with selfless devotion and love, can lead one to the goal of God-realisation. Ramakrishna’s outlook in this respect was far more radical than the Buddhistic or the Christian outlook. Since Buddhism does not believe in worshipping God in any definite form, love of man amounts to a mere code of right conduct while the Christian maxim ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’ does not mean more than what it literally conveys. In the attitude of Ramakrishna, however, ‘Self’ means ‘God’. The Advaita Sadhana prescribes that one should realise one’s own self in others and it is the surest way of removing hatred between man and man and suffusing the entire creation with love.

Men are only outwardly different from one another. They are like pillow-cases, one is white while the other is brown but each one of them contains the same kind of cotton. Some men appear to be ugly while others beautiful; some are good while others are bad but all men are basically manifestations of God.

True religion, far from fostering inaction and escapism transforms all work and service into so many forms of informing spirit. On one occasion when Narendranath had tasted the bliss of nirvikalpa samadhi, the highest realisation, and implored his Master to allow him to remain in
that blissful state indefinitely, Ramakrishna sharply re-
buked him saying: "For shame! How can you ask such 
things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and 
here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an 
ordinary man. This realisation will become so natural to 
you, by the grace of the Mother, that in your normal state 
you will realise the One Divinity in all beings; you will 
bring spiritual consciousness to men and assuage the misery 
of the humble and the poor".¹⁰ History shows how this 
prediction came out true.

According to Ramakrishna, renunciation of the world 
is not an indispensable condition for realising God. A 
householder can realise God provided he can develop the 
amount of concentration and the intensity of love necessary 
for the task. One can remain in the world without being 
of the world. There is nothing wrong in the life of the 
householder as such. The householder who can merge 
himself in the life of God and yet perform the duties of a 
householder in a detached manner is, in a great measure, 
superior to a sannyasin or monk who has renounced the 
world. The householder may have a firm ground to walk 
upon if he spends some time in solitude and attains know-
ledge. Janaka lived in the world after attaining knowledge. 
Ramakrishna used to compare detached householders fit for 
God-realisation to those women who would carry pitchers 
full of water on their heads and yet walk on gossiping, 
taking care all the while that the pitchers might not fall 
on the ground. If one has developed a spirit of absolute 
surrender to God, it does not matter whether one leads the 
life of a householder or not.

Sceptical people might look askance at Ramakrishna's 
experiments with truth. In his own time there were some 
great intellectuals like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and 
Sivanath Sastri who did not see eye to eye with Rama-
krishna in so far as the whole gamut of the spiritual life 
of Ramakrishna was concerned. To Sivanath Sastri's 
suggestion that one loses one's head by thinking too much 
of God, Ramakrishna replied: Can anyone ever become un-
conscious by thinking of Consciousness? God is of the 
nature of Eternity, Purity and Consciousness. Through His
consciousness one becomes conscious of everything; through His intelligence the whole world appears intelligent. There is, of course, a line in a song: 'Divine fervour fills my body and robs me of consciousness'. The consciousness referred to here is the consciousness of the outer world.

It has been a fashion now-a-days to say that we are living in an age of science and we must develop a scientific attitude in all matters relating to men and events. Science has attained an extraordinary prestige in the popular mind and whatever has the semblance of a scientific character commands respect which is almost blind. The modern man's reverence for science is sometimes followed by a corresponding loss of faith and religion. There is a conviction that all valid knowledge can be obtained only through the scientific method. The result of all this has been a blind devotion to logical positivism as the only possible philosophy for the scientist. Logical positivism rejects all metaphysical and religious propositions as meaningless for the simple reason that they cannot be verified by sense experience, actual or possible. If however faith in God is to be rejected, if faith in an order of nature is to be rejected, what earthly reason is there to suppose that only faith in logical positivism cannot be rejected?

It would be futile to assert that science can be all-inclusive. Science represents an attempt to co-ordinate our experience but it is experience of a particular kind. It is only in the field of mechanistic measurement that science can hold its own. But there are other domains of experience where mechanical operation has no entrance. The old teaching of Plato that there must be a resemblance between the knower and the known is too precious to be thrown away. The 'logos' in us must be akin to the 'logos' of things. And this is eminently valid for the understanding of religion. A love-letter may appear meaningless and silly to one who has never fallen in love but that does not justify him in rejecting the value a love-letter has to a lover.

It is time that we called attention to the insight of seers that since truth is one, the cosmos is one, ultimately knowledge also must be one.

It is well to remind ourselves of the lessons of the
Mundaka Upanishad that there are two types of knowledge: one, the supreme, \textit{para} and the other the ordinary, relative, \textit{apara}. All the temporal knowledge—sciences, literature and arts including the knowledge contained in the sacred Vedas was relegated by the Upanishad to the category of the ordinary or \textit{apara} knowledge. That alone is \textit{para} or supreme knowledge which helps destroy spiritual blindness and reveal the ever present spiritual reality behind man and nature. Again, in the Svetasvatara Upanishad we have the unmistakable categorical assertion that not through technological advances but through the knowledge of God alone shall mankind attain peace and happiness.

It is in this field that Sri Ramakrishna has a message of lasting value for the modern man. He stripped religion of its theological and sacerdotal garments and made it co-eval with life. From the artificial domain of theory so long contained in dead point, Ramakrishna rescued religion and gave it a new connotation. He felt that there should be a marriage between the lofty spiritual height and the plains of the phenomenal world. Spirit without matter is empty, matter without spirit is blind. The modern man is groping in the dark because he is lacking in the power of the informing spirit. Ramakrishna restored the lost spirit and thereby made man conscious of his heritage, dignity and responsibility.
UNIVERSAL RELIGION AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

According to the man in the street, the expression "Universal Religion" brings forth a variety of images, namely, that of a bouquet in which various kinds of flowers have been studded or a delicacy in which edible matters of different varieties have been put together or a necklace in which pearls have been collected from different sources. In other words, by "Universal Religion" it is meant a synthesis of the best elements of the different religious systems like Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Hinduism. The purpose of this paper is to show that this is an erroneous notion. Universal Religion is neither the product of ratiocination or discursive understanding nor an amalgam of the vital elements of different religions produced eclectically. For one thing, the universal kept apart from the particulars, is a meaningless abstraction. Universals do not hang in the air but find their meaning and significance in and through the particulars.

Attempts to arrive at a systematic conception of Universal Religion through discursive understanding failed in the past and are bound to fail in the future also. I shall take two instances from history to illustrate the point. Akbar's attempt to establish a Universal Religion acceptable to everybody (Din-i-Ilahi) did not succeed as it was based on unsound reasoning. It is true indeed, that the great Emperor studied with remarkable devotion and sincerity the scriptures of the Hindus, of the Christians, of the Jains and others but failed to notice the basic unity underlying all religious systems. In his over-zealousness, he betrayed an unfair preference of one religious faith to another and earned condemnation from Vincent Smith who ventured to say that the Divine Faith was a monument of Akbar's folly, not of his wisdom. With a view to acquiring a comprehensive account of Christianity, Akbar invited
Christian missionaries from Goa, studied the scriptural texts under their guidance, said his prayers in the chapel and even encouraged the missionaries to convert Hindus and Moslems to Christianity. It is said that Hinduism exercised a deeper influence on the mind of Akbar than any other religion and he adopted the Hindu way of life and took active part in many great Hindu festivals. Jehangir states in his autobiography that his father never for a moment forgot God. Akbar used to say that even when engaged in ordinary duties of the world one should have constant thought of God. One can be god-intoxicated and yet remain in the world. The Emperor used to illustrate his point by referring his audience to the behaviour of the Indian women who would have upon their heads pitchers full of water, laugh and joke among themselves and yet would not allow a drop of water to fall. This will remind you all of a similar illustration given in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. History shows that the Universal Religion propounded by Akbar did not survive and the followers of his path, whose number was not large, failed to ascertain, after Akbar’s death, how exactly the Universal Religion could be made dynamic and fruitful in everybody’s life.

Hegel and his right-wing followers endeavoured to establish a Universal Religion on the basis of certain fundamentals which follow from the fact of man’s consciousness of his own finitude or limitation. It has been said that in order to be fully conscious of his own finitude or limitation a man must transcend his finitude and this inevitably leads one to the awareness of the Absolute which is the ground of all that is. In other words, to be conscious of change one must be changeless. When, for instance, I go to a film show and see a movie picture in quick succession, I as a cogniser do not change, for, had the ‘I’ also changed corresponding to the change in the pictures, my awareness of change would not have been possible. Hegel did not have much difficulty in disproving the contention of his opponent that all human knowledge being relative, it is impossible for us to know God or the Absolute. Hegel’s reply is that the assertion that we know phenomena only
would be meaningless except by an implicit reference to the Infinite. If we knew finite things only it would have been impossible for us to characterise them as finite. The knowledge of a limit involves the transcendence of it. Now, this awareness of a limit and its transcendence are present in very human being. Therefore, religious consciousness is universal.

The Hegelian conception of Universal Religion was repudiated by the Pragmatists and the Intuitionists because it lay too much emphasis on man's intellect alone to the utter neglect of his feeling and will. Religion is man's total reaction to reality and if it fails to satisfy man's thought, emotion and volition in the appropriate manner, it degenerates into meaningless practices and rituals. Hegel's panlogism which is at once a source of strength and weakness of the Hegelian philosophy did not inspire the religious aspirant, for, the Absolute of Hegel which is to be reached through the help of logical categories is like a dark night in which all cows are black. It is a pity that the logical category of identity-in-difference which is Hegel's chief contribution to Logic was not fully utilised by him in dealing with the religious phenomenon. Had Hegel been fully conscious of the lessons of his own logic he would have certainly grasped that the plan of the Universe is identity in difference or unity in diversity and Universal Religion cannot therefore be a substitute for dead uniformity in which all individual differences are obliterated.

It has sometimes been held that the greatest obstacle that prevents us from realizing the ideals of Universal Religion is the radical difference that exists between two religions in regard to their philosophy, mythology and rituals. It seems to me that the differences in this respect are sometimes overdrawn. It is true indeed that a particular religion is rooted in certain traditions, in a philosophy, in mythologies and expressed through certain rituals. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to discover broad principles which are common to all the different religions of the world. It may be said without any fear of contradiction that in spite of differences in the philosophies that underlie the
major religions of the world, viz. Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and others, all agree in one broad principle, viz. a contingentia mundi, because the contingent is not, the necessary Being is. In other words, the relative or the contingent is not self-explanatory. That is the main philosophical theme of all major religions. Some Western scholars point out that there cannot be any area of agreement between Hinduism and Buddhism, for while the former is polytheistic the latter is non-theistic. This seems to be a case of over-simplification. Polytheism is not the appropriate term to characterise Hinduism, for the Hindu does not really worship many Gods but simply envisages God in many forms. Max Muller used the term, ‘henotheism’ to indicate worship of one God in many forms from which only one is worshipped at a time. As we have in the Rig Veda “Truth is one but they call it by many names”.

Much harm has been done by wrong interpretations put on the Baudhda doctrines of Anatta and Nibbana. Buddhism is not materialism nor an offshoot of Logical Positivism or modern Psychology which discovers no soul, no ‘ghost in the machine’ beyond individual psychoses. Something that can say ‘I’ does not remain and that is the state of Enlightenment. The precise nature of this Enlightenment was not discucussed by Buddha for obvious reasons. He refrained from describing the Indescribable. Nibbana and Anatta are correlated to craving. The Pali word ‘Nibbana’ is derived from the negative particles Ni and Vana, which means ‘selfish desire’. The Sanskrit word Nirvana means ‘blowing out’, that is to say, the blowing out of the flame of personal desire. It is a matter of great significance that in Buddhistic religion Sila and Prajna, good conduct and intuitive insight are inseparably united. Whatever may be the value of the method adopted by the Buddha to popularise religion, to look upon religion as a way of life, one thing is certain: the Buddha was convinced that religion has its roots in the deepest inward life of man. When the Buddha announced that his death was fast approaching, Ananda sought instruction from him as regards
the Order, whereupon the Buddha said: "Ananda, be lamps unto yourselves. Be a refuge to yourselves. Seek no outer refuge. Hold fast to the Truth as a lamp and refuge". One can notice clearly how the Vedantic *Aparokshanubhuti* compares with the view of Truth as a lamp and refuge.

Christ's sayings "I and my Father are one", "Love thy neighbour as thyself", might have developed an Advaitic viewpoint if the *rationale* could be discovered. And the same conclusion might be deduced if we knew how to separate the husk from the kernel so far as Islam is concerned. Consider, for instance, the following verse of the Koran (25:63). "And the servants of the Beneficient God are they who walk on the earth in humbleness and when the ignorant address them, they say peace."\(^{11}\)

I do not for a moment suggest that a mere discovery of certain points of agreement or similarity of attitude between one religion and another would lead us to Universal Religion. All that I wish to submit is that toleration must necessarily lead to acceptance and for this the followers of different religious paths must develop a mutual understanding which results in what may be called a confluence of selves.

Vivekananda was perfectly certain that a standard Universal Religion was an impossibility since unity in diversity is the plan of the universe. He never wanted a Hindu to be converted into Christianity or a Moslem to be a Baudhda. One must stick to one's religion and yet feel the underlying bond of unity among all religions. The bond of unity is spiritual, it is timeless, deathless. It is pure consciousness, the Advaitin rightly asserts.

Samkara rightly asserts that consciousness cannot be divided into moments, since all divisions are rendered intelligible only with reference to consciousness. The fact that we can know temporal determination points unmistakably to the truth that we are children of eternity.

Consciousness is in fact distinctionless. Still it appears to be divided owing to the limiting adjuncts such as mind and so on, just as ether appears divided by its connexion
with jars and the like. If, as Samkara rightly urges, the self or consciousness changes with change in ideas there would not be consciousness of the series as a unity. The serial unity is, therefore, entirely different from, and points to, an unchanging conscious principle at the background in which there is no plurality. It follows, clearly, that man, in so far as he knows history cannot be identical with history. The knowledge of a changing reality cannot be possible for a being who is nothing more than a part of the changing reality. In other words, consciousness of change precludes the possibility of change in consciousness.

That consciousness is an unchanging witness is proved by the fact of dreamless sleep. It is but common knowledge that dream-experience and waking experience are fundamentally different. We fail to ascertain the beginning or end of both waking and dream states, for both seem to be uncaused. A cause can connect one event with another belonging to the same time-order and the cause should have to be in the same order as that state, so that any attempt to transcend that state in order to discover the cause thereof would be meaningless. When we compare waking state with dream the soul assumes the position of a witness of the two and no change can be allowed in the witness. Dream is a rival state as real as waking. The two are independent of each other and both have claim to a reality of their own. If it is objected that waking consciousness is never stultified, whereas dream is, the reply will be that as waking consciousness cannot be stultified so long as it continues, so dream is not stultified so long as it is dream. It follows that there is no interval of time between dream and waking although there seems to be such an interval. Strictly speaking, we have there a timeless witness-consciousness. If a time interval is supposed, it would connect dream and waking and would make the two a single continuous stage. But experience does not testify to the continuity between dream-life and waking-life. In fact, waking time is confined to waking and stops with it, dream-time is coeval with dream. The interval between the two is metaphysical. It is pure consciousness with shines in dreamless sleep and witnesses both the dream-experience and waking experi-
ence. Thus consciousness cannot be subject to change because it is witness of change.

It may be argued that such spiritual illumination is given to a few seers only. What happens to the common man who wishes to know the bond of unity on a plane other than the metaphysical? It may be stated in reply that in our everyday life we get a glimpse of the timeless, as for example, when we listen to a song in rapt attention or witness a landscape and appraise its aesthetic value. It is not the individual ego which evaluates the beauty of landscape or transmits itself in a melodious musical performance, but the deeper spirit which transcends the mind-body complex and yet permeates it. What is true of the individual is also true of the Universal. The Universal, as already pointed out, must find its abode in the particular. We have it in one of the verses of the Isha Upanisad: Those who are devoted entirely to the principle of indiscriminate Unity and seek to put away from them the integrity of Brahman, also put away from them knowledge and completeness and enter, as it were, into a greater darkness. Enlightenment comes when one realizes one’s identity with the Universal Self who is both above and below.

As Vivekananda put it, the aspirant progresses from lesser truth to greater truth, from dim light to brighter light. ‘Man has to become divine by realizing the divine, idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps of his spiritual childhood: but on and on he must progress’. The question is how, in what precise manner, should man progress. Rituals of different religions which appear to be mutually antagonistic may help us in the matter if we proceed with sympathy and devotion. Religious signs or symbols are voluntarily chosen and although they are material in some cases, they imply a spiritual meaning and significance. Consider the different physical postures like bowing, kneeling, folding the palms, touching the ears, saluting etc. We accept temples, mosques, churches, certain rivers, crosses as sacred not because what they are in themselves but because they are symbols possessing spiritual meaning. The goal of Universal Religion can be reached
only by realizing that the different religions are expressions of one basic truth, viz the spirit's self-discovery by gradual withdrawal from the non-self. As Vivekananda puts it, "Religion is realization, 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".13

It is possible for man to realize this end, for man is potentially divine. The attitude of the aspirant must be scientific, that is to say, he must cultivate humility and reverence and should not look upon any particular religion as the expression of the final truth. As Vivekananda puts it "If there is ever to be a Universal Religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mahommedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite scope for development. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance, which will recognise diversity in every man and woman and whose whole scope, whose whole force will be centred in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature".14

This precisely is the goal of Universal Religion. It does not aim at destroying one's religion so as to achieve a common standard. It aims at giving man a lift from where he is. "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life; think of it, dream of it; live of that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body be full of that idea and just leave every other idea alone. That is the way to success and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced".15

Universal Religion, then, is not a motley of diverse faiths. It is the recognition of the basic truth of all religious systems of the world. This central truth has been recognised by the scientists of to-day. Heisenberg says: "There is a higher power, not influenced by our wishes, which finally decides and judges. People have used different words at
different times for this central power. They called it spirit or God. There are many ways to this center, even today, and science is only one of them.\textsuperscript{16}

I do not quote Heisenberg with a view to lending additional support to the view set forth here. All that I wish to emphasize is that science and spirituality are not poles asunder. Nor does our journey to the Universal Religion lead us to an ocean without a shore or a shadow play without a plot. Let us remind ourselves of the message of hope given by the Swami: "When there will grow a link of sympathy and regard between both nations by this give-and-take intercourse, there will be then no need for those noisy cries. They will do everything of their own accord. I believe that by this cultivation of religion and the wider diffusion of the Vedanta, both this country and the West will gain enormously. To me the pursuit of politics is a secondary means in comparison with this. I will lay down my life to carry out this belief practically."\textsuperscript{17}

To sum up: the ideal of Universal Religion is not an unattainable ideal. We shall, however, fail to achieve the end if we concentrate on ratiocination only. Let emotional responsiveness and a strong determination be our guide: I am sure the goal is not a far-off divine event.
VIVEKANANDA AND THE RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE VEDANTA AS THE BASIS OF UNIVERSAL RELIGION

I cannot think of a better way of introducing tonight’s subject than by referring you to a story which Swami Vivekananda related before his audience in London. The story, which he picked up from old Persian literature, runs like this: A lover knocked at the door of his beloved, and a voice came from within, ‘Who is there?’ The lover said, ‘It is I, open the door’. The door, however, did not open. The lover was anxious, and came a second time, and knocked at the door again calling, ‘It is I, I am here’. The door was still closed. The third time, the voice asked from within, ‘Who is there?’ And the reply was, ‘Well beloved, I am thou’!, and this time the door opened. This story helps us understand the Vedantic realization of Truth.

What, then, is the theme of the Vedanta? It is, as you all know, one Unconditioned Consciousness, which the sages call the Absolute or Brahman. We cannot describe It by words; nor can we analyse It by thought and logic. One can have a direct experience or anubhava of this Truth if only one follows the path of spiritual discipline. The great truth of the Vedanta is expressed in the dictum: Atman is Brahman; I am Brahman. I do not know of any other philosophy which has proclaimed a greater truth than this. This is a truth which is self-validating. It does not require any proof, because it is the ‘I’; the reality is my inmost self.

The Vedanta has its moorings in the Upanisads. The Upanisadic texts, which describe the nature of Brahman, are, however, astonishingly paradoxical. But these texts, though paradoxical, contain the profoundest truth. Thus, we have in the Upanisads that this great One or Brahman, which is my inmost soul, moves and does not move. He is within you and far away from you at the same time. He
who thinks that he has known Brahman has not really known It, whereas one who thinks he has not known Brahman has definitely known It. You cannot know Brahman through reason; it is through reason alone that you can know It. These are some of the paradoxical statements of the Upanisads. What is the significance of these paradoxical statements? These statements convey the deepest truth that the ultimate Reality or Brahman cannot be grasped through the categories of logic that we ordinarily employ.

If, Reality, as the Vedanta teaches, is one Absolute Consciousness, devoid of all differences, how then can the world of names and forms, the world of multiplicity, which is differentiated and relative, appear at all? To solve this puzzle, the Vedantist has introduced the concept of Maya. Maya is the principle of individuation, the finitizing principle. Now, this doctrine of Maya has very often been misunderstood. Some have interpreted it as meaning that the world is a huge illusion, or that it is like a prolonged dream. An orthodox Vedantist cannot subscribe to this interpretation. According to him, Maya is a necessary conception whose importance lies in our attempt to explain the problem as to how 'One' becomes 'Many'. We may notice three markedly different stages in the doctrine of Maya. The first may be called the cosmological aspect of the doctrine of Maya. Here our problem is this: The scriptural texts describe, in unmistakable terms, that Reality is one all-pervasive, differenceless, Consciousness, and one who fails to realize this truth and looks upon the world of multiplicity as real is doomed to death. But one cannot deny that the world of names and forms does appear, and it has to be explained. One cannot explain it away. What possibly can be the explanation of the phenomenal world, the world of appearance? Since Brahman is all-pervasive, Universal Consciousness, the world cannot have any other basis than Brahman Itself. But Brahman is indeterminate, devoid of all attributes and activities. It cannot create the world in the accepted sense of the term 'creation'. There must, therefore, be some inscrutable power which accounts for the passage from 'One' to 'Many'. Brahman is endowed
with such a power of creating the many out of the one, and this creation passes our comprehension. Brahman, in so far as it is endowed with the creative power of Maya, is called Isvara or God. This creative power or Maya, however, does not affect Brahman, just as the magical powers do not affect a magician. From the cosmological viewpoint, then, Maya is a power or sakti by virtue of which God can create the world of names and forms. This is an explanation of the world-appearance from the empirical or vyavaharika standpoint.

In the second stage, which may be called the logical aspect, the world and Maya are used as almost synonymous expressions. The world is Maya. Here, 'Maya' means something which is indescribable. In the second stage, one critically reflects on the status of the world-appearance in the scheme of reality as a whole. The critical mind is bewildered. He finds that what the scripture teaches is ultimate oneness of Being. This manifold existence can, therefore, only be apparent; it cannot be ultimately real. The manifold world is, strictly speaking, indescribable, anirvacaniya. It is neither real nor unreal. When the Vedantist says that the world is indescribable, he does not really abandon all logic. 'Indescribable' is a technical expression which conveys that, though the world has a status of its own, it cannot be defined either in terms of universal Consciousness or Brahman, or in terms of totally absurd things like 'sky-flower' or 'square-circle'. Since the world is an appearance, since it is a fact, a content of my perception, I cannot explain it away. Nor can I say that it is ultimately real, since my realization of the oneness of Being implies that the world has no separate reality. The Vedantist urges that the real (Sat) is that which can never be cancelled nor contradicted. Evidently, the Self, or Universal Consciousness alone is real, since it is never cancelled. According to him, the unreal (asat) is that which cannot be conceived, that which cannot appear as a content of perception. A 'sky-flower', a 'square-circle', the 'son of a barren woman' are cited as examples of unreality. The world of experience lies mid-way between the two categories. It is not real, because it is cancelled on realization
of one's identity with Brahman. Nor is it absolutely unreal, since it appears. This is what the Vedantist means when he says that the world of names and forms is anirvacaniya or indescribable.

In the third stage, viz. the metaphysical state, wherein one has an attitude of contemplation, one realizes unity of Being or Consciousness. Maya, as a principle of explanation, no longer exists as something having a status alongside Brahman. For, in that case, there would be a metaphysical dualism, which is against the spirit of the Upanisads. The Vedanta teaches that reality is Brahman alone and not Brahman endowed with Maya. The student of logic will at once raise an objection. Maya is a principle which the Vedantist employs to show that the world is false. Now, if this very principle of Maya is unreal, then the falsity of the world cannot be said to have been established. In other words, the world continues to be real. It is, indeed, a formidable objection. But the Vedantist has a ready answer. He points out that since 'world' and 'Maya' are contrary terms and not contradictory, they can be simultaneously negated in Brahman. Let us take, for instance, the case of a table. Now, a cat is not certainly a table, nor is a dog a table. 'Cat' and 'dog' are contrary terms and not contradictory like 'blue' and 'not-blue'. We can safely say that both 'cat' and 'dog' can be simultaneously negated in the locus of a table. The same cannot be done in regard to contradictory terms. Thus, it cannot be said that the table is neither brown nor non-brown. If it is said, 'This man is both living and non-living at the same time', it will be sheer absurdity. But the world and Maya are not two contradictory things. Therefore, denial of Maya does not entail the affirmation of the world. When, therefore, I have the intuitive experience of my oneness with Brahman, I realize that the world is false and also that Maya as a principle is no longer valid. Where the self-luminous Brahman alone shines, there is nothing else to appear.

So far we have an analysis of the doctrine of Maya as the orthodox Vedantist propounds it. Now, let us see if we can find a place for Swami Vivekananda in the galaxy of commentators who followed Sankaracarya. Let us also see
if there is any novelty of approach in Vivekananda's treat-
ment of the problem as to how Brahman is related to the
world.

To Vivekananda, Maya is not a theory, nor a doctrine.
It is, as he used to say, a statement of facts. But, what,
precisely, are the facts stated? Let us enumerate some of
them. It is common experience that man's powers are
limited. We realize our impotence before the vast forces
of nature; we cannot comprehend infinite truth, infinite
intelligence, and infinite love. This limitation of power or
capacity is a fact which nobody can deny. We know that
death is the inevitable end of everything. The great cities
and empires built by men with care and skill, all our
progresses and achievements, our vanities and reforms,
have that one end, death. And yet, people cling to life. We
do not know why we cling to life, when we know that
death is the end. King Yudhisthira was once asked, 'What
is the most surprising thing in this world?' The king
replied, 'Everyday people are dying around us, and yet,
men think that they will never die.' This is Maya. Again,
we see that very often we cannot do good to others, except
through evil. Animals are living upon plants, men upon
animals, and worst of all, upon one another, the strong
upon the weak. This is going on everywhere, and this is
Maya. We are told often that, in the long run, everything
will be good. But, why should good come out of evil? Why
cannot good be done through good? There is no solution
of this problem, and this is Maya. The course of evolution
has not been towards a gradual elimination of evil and
suffering. Rather, as we increase our power to be happy,
we also increase our power to suffer. The more we have
material progress, the more avenues are opened to both
pleasure and pain. This, again, is Maya. There is not
one thing which is absolutely good or absolutely bad. The
very same thing which appears to be good now may appear
to be bad tomorrow. The same thing which is the source
of unhappiness and misery, in one case, may produce
happiness in another. The fire that burns a child may cook
a good meal for a starving man.

Maya, therefore, is not a theory for the explanation
of the world. It is simply a statement of facts as they exist. It implies that the very basis of our being is contradiction; where there is good, there must also be evil; where there is life, death must follow as its shadow; everyone who smiles will have to weep; and so on. We cannot, however, remedy this state of affairs. For, to stop death, we shall have to stop life also. Vivekananda, therefore, presented his own views on Maya in a slightly modified form. He did not say that the world is anirvacaniya: neither real nor unreal. He said that Maya is a positive fact of experience. It means relativity. It means that the totality of our experience is a mixture of being and becoming, of existence and non-existence. Vivekananda did not accept the orthodox Vedantic view that the world of experience is neither real nor unreal. For, he asks, if Maya is totally non-existent from the ultimate viewpoint, how can we look upon it as a creative force? A creative force cannot certainly be absolutely zero.

Now, the question is, What do we gain by this new interpretation of Maya? Vivekananda was fully alive to the social and intellectual conditions of his time. He taught at a time when a wave of materialism swept the country; people of our country preferred to live according to borrowed ideals of western civilization, and there was a supreme contempt for Hindu religion and culture. Vivekananda clearly realized that no purpose would be served by teaching the people, who were immersed in materialism, that the world in which we live, move, and have our being was all illusion. He wanted to ‘deluge the country with spiritual ideals’, for in that lay the salvation of the nation. Vivekananda was not an escapist. He wanted men of courage and strength to rebuild India. And with this end in view, he interpreted ‘Maya’ as power or sakti of Brahman. The concept of Maya as illusion would attract neither the neglected, down-trodden people nor the intellectuals who cared more for foreign ideas and ideals. It is for this reason that Vivekananda did not accept the traditional meaning of the concept of Maya, but offered his own interpretation according to which Maya means power of Brahman; it is the mixture of being and becoming.
What, according to Vivekananda, is the nature of the ultimate Reality or Brahman? To the orthodox Advaitist, Brahman is pure, homogeneous Consciousness, transcendent in nature. It transcends affirmation and negation, space and time, unity and multiplicity; it is devoid of all determinations and differences. Vivekananda did not accept this conception of Brahman as transcendent. He rather preferred the conception of Brahman as immanent. He, however, did not look upon Advaita Vedānta as pantheism. According to Vivekadanda, Being or Sat manifests Itself into the universe, man, and soul. The same divine nature is present in the lowest worm as well as in the highest human being. But Brahman does not manifest Itself equally in all the levels of existence. There is a hierarchy of being. The worm is the lower form, and man is the higher form of manifestation of the Divine.

The Divine is the essence of everything, and this fact offers a basis for morality. The command ‘Love everyone as your own self’ becomes significant on the supposition that oneness of Being pervades the universe. It follows, therefore, that in injuring another, I am injuring myself: in loving another, I am loving myself. The narrow individual ego makes for hatred, jealousy, misery, and other evils. When I transcend this limitation of the ego, I can realize the Truth and put an end to all misery and struggle.

Vivekananda, therefore, speaks of a gradual transformation or evolution of the soul from its limited, finite nature to the infinite Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. He, however, does not use the term ‘evolution’ in the Darwinian sense. In Darwin’s scheme of evolution, we have struggle for existence, and competition. But these are in no way sure and sound ways to progress; they are rather hindrances. Therefore, it is not competition among individuals that explains evolution and progress. It is rather the potential divinity of man that determines the course of progress. We must remember, however, that man never progresses from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to greater truth. In the final stage of spiritual evolution and progress, man realizes himself as Brahman, as universal Consciousness. We are not to
suppose that the finite individual is lost thereby; he rather finds himself integrated with universal Spirit and universal Consciousness; he attains a richer life, and is not swallowed up by an all-engulfing Absolute. While in the orthodox Advaita Vedanta the finite individual as such is a product of Maya, for Vivekananda, the essence of the finite individual is a manifestation of Brahman. Man, therefore, looks forward to the ideal of actualizing his potential divinity. This ideal cannot, however, be reached overnight; it requires infinite patience, unparalleled spiritual discipline or *sadhana*, and a great deal of suffering.

Vivekananda brings a profound message of hope for the individual self. ‘Freedom is the sole condition of spiritual progress’, says he. Freedom is the very essence of all life and existence. Following the teaching of the Upanisads, Vivekananda said, “The question is: What is the universe? From what does it arise? Into what does it go? And the answer is: From freedom it rises, in freedom it rests, and into freedom it melts away. Without this idea of freedom, the very being of man is lost. Everything of this universe, everyone, every man, every planet, every saint, and every sinner, good man and bad, all are pressing on toward one goal, freedom”.

It is this fact of freedom that gave Vivekananda an unshakable faith in the dignity and value of human life. His maxim was, ‘Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in anything else’. That is why he proclaimed, ‘Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am’. Again, Vivekananda said in another context, ‘Buddhism says to men: “Realize that all this is illusion”; the Advaita Vedanta says: “Realize that in illusion is the real”. Nothing in the world is lost, nothing is to be rejected. We may refer to Romain Rolland’s masterly exposition of the Vedanta outlook. He tells us that the normal attitude of an average European may be summed up in the dictum: ‘I am truth’, while the great Vedantist would have for his motto Whitman’s ‘All is truth’.

It follows, therefore, that since Vivekananda looked
upon men as embodiment of Divinity, the meaning and significance of service became clear enough. Why do you help people in distress? Is it out of compassion? Vivekananda hates this idea. He enjoined us to serve people. That is why he used the expression ‘Daridra-Narayan’. Serve people as God.

How, then, are we to attain the ultimate Truth, the truth of the Vedanta? It is not through knowledge, as the orthodox Advaitist would have us believe. Vivekananda would rather say that the realization of Truth is possible through a union of knowledge and devotion. There should be a marriage between knowledge or jñāna and devotion or bhakti. This happy couple alone can lead us to the desired goal. Vivekananda used to say: ‘We want today that bright sun of intellectuality, joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands’.

It is against this background of the teaching of the Vedanta that universal religion is to be understood. ‘Universal religion’ at once raises doubts. How is such a thing possible at all? We have so many different religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, etc. Can we ever think of reducing all of them to one religion? And, besides, why should we have so much concern for religion at all? Russell has pointed out that the sooner we get rid of religion, the better for us, since, religion fosters inaction, superstition, and cowardice. Vivekananda would say, exactly the opposite. Religion is based on fearlessness. “Religion is realization; 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. That is religion.”

When we talk of universal religion, we do not mean that all historical religions are to be rolled into one, nor that they are to be synthesized. That may be a wishful thinking, but it would never be a practical proposition. For, a religion, a particular sectarian religion, has its moorings in the tradition of the people, in their scripture or revealed
texts, in their cultural surroundings. All these contribute to the very life of a particular religion. This is why you cannot put different religions in a lump, and say, ‘Here is my universal religion’. Nor did Vivekananda ever want that impossible synthesis. Synthesis logically implies that some elements are to be rejected and some others to be accepted. But, what exactly are you going to reject in a religion? If you discard some propositions or themes of Hindu religion as obnoxious, certainly the Hindus will resent. And the same happens in regard to other sects, such as Christians, Muslims, or Jains.

Vivekananda used to say that at the back of every religion there are chiefly three things, philosophy, mythology and rituals. All these go to make the warp and woof of a particular religion. They are so inter-woven that, if you discard any of them, you destroy the very spirit of that religion. Vivekananda, therefore, did not want to discard any religion. But, then, what exactly did he want? He said that, if you study different religions, you will realize that variation is the sign of life. Difference is the first sign of thought. It would, therefore, be sheer madness to crush variety, and thus have the greatest common factor of all religions. There is a thread of unity underlying the varieties that we notice in different religions. Realizing this fundamental truth, Vivekananda proclaimed, ‘I do not say that there are too many religions. Rather, I would welcome more religions’. As he said, ‘Sects should multiply so that, at last, there will be as many sects as human beings. Whirlpools and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. It is the clash of thought that awakes thought’. This sounds paradoxical, but it contains a profound truth. Vivekananda would, therefore, say, ‘I am not going to disturb your philosophy, mythology, or rituals. I shall endeavour to find out if there is any fundamental identity running through different religions’. And he did find one. This fundamental truth is no other than universality of Spirit. Forms of religion may be different, but the spirit is the same in all cases. When you go to a river to fetch water, the water assumes the forms of the vessels. So with religion too. The same water we can pour into different
vessels. But that does not matter. For we all drink the same water, only from different vessels. Let each of us drink from his own vessel and allow the rest to drink from theirs. There is plenty for everybody.

When Vivekananda speaks of universal religion, he does not mean that we should only passively tolerate all religious sects. 'Toleration' is a word which he hated most. Toleration is a negative attitude. It debases your soul. It is not, therefore, toleration that is desirable, but acceptance. We must accept the truth of all religions.

Vivekananda never wanted to propagate a religion. He tried to bring home to the mind the truth that underlies all religions. He pointed out that religion ministers to the emotional, mystical, volitional, and intellectual aspects of our nature. The idea of man is to progress harmoniously in all these four directions. To the worker, religion is union between man and humanity; to the mystic, it is union between his lower and higher self; to the lover, union between himself and God who is love; and, to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. The yogin is a person who seeks after any of these kinds of union. The karma-yogin is one who realizes God through disinterested karma or action. His position is that of a giver; he does not ask for anything in return. He who seeks the union through love is called the bhakti-yogin. He is a man of an emotional nature. He wants to love God without any ulterior motive. He feels that God Himself is love. He who seeks mystical union is called the raja-yogin. He who can check undesirable impulses, control his mind, and concentrate on truth is a raja-yogin. Reason is the highest instrument of knowledge we have ever known. But reason has its limitations; it cannot go beyond a definite point. There must be some other instrument to take us beyond, and this instrument is called inspiration. It is reason that develops into inspiration and, therefore, inspiration does not contradict reason, but fulfills it. It is this inspiration which enables the raja-yogin to realize truth. He who seeks this union through philosophy is called the jñana-yogin. He wants to go beyond the visible, sensible world. He wants to enter into the very heart of Reality; he wants to attain freedom
by becoming one with universal Being. To him, Brahman is his own self; the very life of his life, the soul of his soul. Jñana-yoga teaches that man is essentially divine. It shows the real unity of being that each one of us is Brahman Itself.

These are, then, alternative paths to Reality. Choose any one of them according to your mental disposition, and you reach the goal. All these paths lead to the same goal. Each one of us is naturally growing and developing according to his own nature. Each will, in time, come to know the highest truth. Man is his own teacher. You and I cannot teach him, impart any new knowledge to him. This is why Vivekananda used to say, 'I believe in growth, not in reformation'. Religion consists solely of an inner life; and what is needed is a gradual unfolding of this core of inner life. It proceeds from the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses. It must discover its 'true germ' there. To this end, we must put forth our energy. It is open to everybody to attempt this self-education.

For Vivekananda, then, religion means universality of the Spirit. Religion is fully realized, only when the different historical religions have all attained to this universality. The universal Spirit is everywhere; its radiations are infinite and all-pervasive. As we have it in the Upanisads, "As the one fire entering into the universe expresses itself in various forms, even so that One Soul is expressing itself in every soul, and yet is infinitely more besides". 31

Vivekananda has given us two main rules of conduct as steps towards achieving universal religion. The first is, 'Do not destroy' and the second, 'Take man as he stands and from there give him a lift'. The first refers to the utility of constructive actions. It is better to build than to destroy, if you have the capacity to build. Do not hurt anybody's religious feelings and sentiments. The second maxim means that each man is his own master. He can develop his true personality from within himself. Each has to learn for himself. Each has to make himself. All that others can do is to help him in doing so.

The motto of universal religion can only be, 'Whatever exists in this universe is pervaded by the Lord'. We can
cover everything with God. We can see God in everything, in good and evil, in sin and the sinner, in happiness and misery, in life and death. 'If you have a wife', said Vivekananda, 'it does not mean that you are to abandon her, but that you are to see God in her. He is in her, in you, in your child. He is everywhere'.

There are sceptics who say that Vivekananda was a visionary, and gave us a utopian conception of life instead of a practicable programme. We can, however, unhesitatingly say that this is an objection which has no foundation whatsoever. When science asserts that all things are manifestations of one force, we are reminded of the well-known saying of the Taittiriya Upanisad: 'Energize the conscious energy in thee; for energy is Brahman.' Vivekananda was convinced that the teaching of the Vedanta is scientific in the true sense of the term. He said, 'Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. Thus chemistry could not progress further, when it would discover one element out of which all others could be made. Physics would stop, when it would be able to fulfil its services in discovering one energy of which all the others are but manifestations. Thus science of religion would become perfect, when it would discover Him who is the one life in the universe of death. Religion can go no further. This is the goal of all science'.

The first principle of scientific demonstration is that the particular is explained by the universal. Since the Vedanta explains the manifold existence by one universal Spirit, it is scientific to that extent. The second principle is that the explanation of a thing must come from inside and not from outside. The Vedanta satisfies this principle also, inasmuch as it lays emphasis on the potential divinity of man and opens out for him a path leading to the gradual unfolding of his inner being. This fullness of being is an accomplished fact; and we can regain it, only if we follow the path traversed by the great souls.
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AS AN ADVAITIST

In his essay on *Self-reliance* Emerson remarked: A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. Perhaps he had in view a contrast between the little minds of ordinary people and the great minds of Plato, Jesus, Thomas Aquinas and others. Vivekananda may rightly be included in the group of great minds in the sense in which the expression was used by Emerson. Vivekananda never worried himself about the formal consistency of his speeches. Both in India and abroad Vivekananda spoke *extempore*, inspired by ideas and circumstances which made a deep impression on his mind. He hardly cared if his words were consistent with one another. Truth does not consist in juxtaposition of mutually consistent sentences, so Vivekananda believed, but in the spirit of the words uttered.

If we keep in mind the conditions of the times when Vivekananda delivered his addresses and the circumstances which forced him to address his audience in the manner he did, we shall be able to realize why Vivekananda did not evolve a system of philosophy as Kant, Hegel or Sankara did. Nevertheless, Vivekananda called himself an Advaitist and he never deviated from the basic tenets of the Advaita.

According to Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of non-dualism, Brahman, the Indeterminate pure Consciousness, is the only reality: everything else is unreal. Brahman is *Sachhidananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss, and all-pervading. The entire universe consisting of finite beings and nature is, basically, identical with Brahman. In other words, Brahman, which is One without a second, *becomes* many, that is to say, the world of multiplicity. But how can the One which is Indeterminate and unchangeable be changed into that which is changeable and perishable? In order to answer the question the Advaitists take the help of the theory of *Vivartavada* or apparent manifestation. The
entire universe is the apparent manifestation of the Absolute. The celebrated illustration used is that of the illusory appearance of a snake in the locus of a rope. When one sees a snake, under the spell of illusion when there is only a piece of rope, it cannot be said that the rope has been transformed into a snake. The rope is changed into the snake only apparently; when the illusion ceases, the snake disappears. So also is the case with the universe. The Absolute or Brahman does not really change into the universe. When one is in ignorance, one sees the world of multiplicity, where, truly speaking, there is only the Absolute, Brahman, One without a second. Nescience or Maya is the cause of the world-appearance. Maya is not absolute zero; it is neither real nor unreal, it is indescribable, anirvacaniya. Maya is not real because it is cancelled as soon as one realizes one’s identity with Brahman. Nor is it unreal, because the world which is the product of Maya appears and is not absurd like ‘a barren woman’s son’.

Vivekananda did not, however, subscribe to the Advaita view of Maya without any modification. He was fully sensible of the fact that a lack of proper understanding of the implications of the doctrine of Maya as also an indiscriminate use of the doctrine did a lot of harm. Some people argued, if the world is false ab initio, there is no point in saying that it is an apparent manifestation of the Absolute. Few realize that non-dualism can be placed on a firm ground only when the world is first affirmed in the Absolute empirically and subsequently denied transcendentally.

Vivekananda’s aim in propounding the Advaita was not to spin a cobweb of metaphysics with the help of niceties of logical analysis. All that he was keen on emphasizing was the basic truth that the Absolute which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss is the underlying reality of all that is. Vivekananda’s exposition of the Maya doctrine is, therefore, slightly different from the orthodox Advaita view. For him, Maya is the principle of individuation, the finitizing principle. The doctrine of Maya has often been misunderstood. Some have interpreted it as meaning that the world is a huge illusion or that it is like a prolonged dream. An orthodox Vedantist cannot, however, subscribe
to this interpretation. To him Maya is a necessary principle of explanation of the problem as to how the 'one' appears as 'many'.

We may notice three markedly different stages in the development of the doctrine of Maya. The first may be called the cosmological aspect of the doctrine of Maya. Here our problem is this: The scriptural texts state, in unmistakable terms, that Reality is one, all-pervasive, differenceless consciousness, and one who fails to realize this truth and looks upon the world of multiplicity as real is doomed to death. But one cannot deny that the world of names and forms does appear and it has to be explained. One cannot explain it away. What possibly can be the explanation of the phenomenal world, the world of appearance? Since Brahman is all-pervasive, universal Consciousness, the world cannot have any other basis than Brahman Itself. But Brahman is Indeterminate, devoid of all attributes and activities. It cannot create the world in the accepted sense of the term 'creation'. There must, therefore, be some inscrutable power which accounts for the passage from 'One' to 'Many'. Brahman is endowed with such a power of creating the 'many' out of the 'One'. The fact of creation however, cannot be explained with the help of categories of finite experience. Brahman, in so far as It is endowed with the creative power of Maya, is called Isvara or God. This creative power or Maya, however, does not affect Brahman, just as the magical powers do not affect a magician. From the cosmological viewpoint, then, Maya is a power or sakti by virtue of which God creates the world of names and forms. This is an explanation of the world-appearance from the empirical or Vyavaharika standpoint.

In the second stage, which may be called the logical aspect, 'world' and 'Maya' are used as almost synonymous expressions. It is often said, the world is Maya. Here 'Maya' means something which is indescribable. In the second stage one critically reflects on the status of the world appearance in the scheme of reality as a whole. The critical mind is bewildered. It appreciates the teaching of the scriptures that there is an underlying unity of existence: ultimate oneness of being is the reality. This manifold
existence can, therefore, only be apparent: it cannot be ultimately real. The manifold world is, strictly speaking, indescribable, *anirvacaniya*. It is neither real nor unreal. When the Advaitist says that the world is indescribable, he does not abandon all logic. ‘Indescribable’ is a technical expression which implies that, though the world has a status of its own, it cannot be defined either in terms of universal Consciousness or Brahman or in terms of totally absurd things like ‘sky-flower’ or ‘square-circle.’ Since the world is an appearance, since it is a fact, a content of my perception, I cannot explain it away. Nor can I say that the world is real in the ultimate analysis, for as soon as I realize my identity with Brahman or the Universal Consciousness the world ceases to have a separate reality. The Advaitist urges that the real (*Sat*) is that which can never be cancelled or contradicted. Evidently, the self or Universal Consciousness or Brahman alone is real, since it is never cancelled. The Advaitist further urges that the unreal (*asat*) is that which cannot be conceived at all, that which cannot appear as a content of experience. A ‘sky-flower’, a ‘square circle’, ‘the son of a barren woman’ are cited as examples of unreality. The world of experience lies midway between the two categories. It is not real, because it is cancelled on realization of one’s identity with Brahman. Nor is it absolutely unreal, since it appears. This is what the Advaitist means when he says that the world of names and forms is *anirvacaniya* or indescribable.

In the third stage, one looks at the doctrine of Maya in the metaphysical aspect. In this stage one has an attitude of contemplation and one realizes the unity of Being or consciousness. Maya as a principle of explanation no longer exists as something having a status alongside Brahman. For, if we admit the reality of both Brahman and Maya, there would have been a metaphysical dualism, which is against the spirit of the Upanisads. The Vedanta teaches that Reality is Brahman alone and not Brahman-endowed-with-Maya. The student of logic will at once raise an objection here. Maya is a principle which the Vedantist employs to show that the world is false. Now, if this very principle of Maya be unreal, then the falsity of the world
cannot be said to have been established. In other words the world continues to be real. This is indeed a formidable objection. But the Advaitist has a ready answer. He points out that since ‘World’ and ‘Maya’ are two contrary terms and not contradictory, they can be simultaneously negated ni Brahman. The denial of Maya does not entail the affirmation of the world. This might have been so if ‘World’ and ‘Maya’ were contradictory terms like ‘blue’ and ‘non-blue’.

This is how the orthodox Advaitist analysed the doctrine of Maya. Let us now see how Vivekananda attacked the problem. To Vivekananda, Maya is not a theory, not a doctrine. Maya is a statement of facts. What, precisely, are the facts stated? Let us enumerate some of them. It is common knowledge that man’s powers are limited. We realize our impotence before the vast forces of nature, we cannot comprehend infinite truth, infinite intelligence and infinite love. This limitation of power or capacity is a fact which nobody can deny. We know that death is the inevitable end of everything. The great cities and empires built by men with care and skill, all our progress and achievement, our vanities and reforms, have that one end, death. And yet people cling to life. We do not know why we cling to life when we know that death is the end. King Yudhisthira was once asked: ‘What is the most surprising thing in this world?’ The king replied, ‘Everyday people are dying around us and yet men hope that they will never die’. This is Maya. Again we see that very often we cannot do good to others, except through the medium of evil. Animals are living upon plants, men upon animals, and worst of all, upon one another, the strong upon the weak. This is going on everywhere, and this is Maya. We are told often that, in the long run, everything will be good. But why should good come out of evil? Why cannot good be done through good alone? There is no solution of this problem and this is Maya. The course of evolution has not been towards a gradual elimination of evil and suffering. Rather, as we increase our power to be happy, we also increase our power to suffer. The more we have of material progress, the more avenues are opened to both pleasure and
pain. This, again, is Maya. There is not one thing which is absolutely good or absolutely bad. The very same thing which appears to be good now may appear to be bad to-morrow. The same thing which is the source of unhappiness and misery, in one case, may produce happiness in another. The fire that burns a child may cook a good meal for a starving man.

Maya, therefore, is not a theory for the explanation of the world. It is simply a statement of facts as they exist. It implies that the very basis of our being is contradiction: Where there is good, there must also be evil; where there is life, death must follow as its shadow; everyone who smiles will have to weep and so on. We cannot, however, remedy this state of affairs. For, to stop death we shall have to stop life also. Unlike the orthodox Advaitist, Vivekananda did not regard the world as anirvacaniya, neither real nor unreal. He only pointed out that the phenomenal world has a relative existence: apart from Brahman it has no reality of its own. The totally of our experience is a mixture of being and becoming, of existence and non-existence.

Vivekananda was not interested in metaphysical subtleties and speculations about the nature of God and after-life. He gave his countrymen a message of courage and hope that God is latent in the lowliest of us and can be realized if we have zeal and passion for Life Divine, irrespective of the path we choose—the path of knowledge, that of selfless action, or that of devotion. He always presented to his audience the basic principles of Hinduism, stripped of its sacerdotal elements, its perplexing multiplicity of rites and rituals, the irrational conduct of its fanatic votaries. And at the same time the Swami made serious attempts to reconcile the basic truths of the Vedanta with the findings of Western science. The one great task which the Swami set himself was to rouse the down-trodden, the ignorant, the exploited and the lowly. He realized that no purpose would be served by teaching the people of our country, who were immersed in abject poverty and ignorance, that the world in which we live, move and have our being was all illusion. One of the earnest desires of Viveka-
nanda was to ‘deluge the country with spiritual ideals’ for in that lay the salvation of the nation.

The spiritual is not, for the Swami, anything occult or mysterious. Man can be viewed in two aspects, his apparent nature and his real nature. From the transcendental or ultimate point of view, man is identical with Brahman, the Absolute. Man is basically spirit or pure consciousness, not body nor sense organs nor mind merely. To the orthodox Advaitist, Brahman is pure, homogeneous consciousness, transcendent in nature. It transcends affirmation and negation, space and time, unity and multiplicity; it is devoid of all determinations and differences. Vivekananda did not totally accept this conception of transcendent or Impersonal Brahman as the only reasonable conception. Nor did he look upon Advaita Vedanta as pantheism as some western exponents of the Vedanta do. According to Vivekananda, Being or Sat manifests itself into the universe, man and soul. The same divine nature is present in the lowest worm as well as in the highest human being. But Brahman does not manifest itself equally at all the levels of existence. There is a hierarchy of being. The worm is the lower form and man is the higher form of manifestation of the Divine.

The all-pervading character of Brahman or the Absolute was emphasised by Vivekananda in unequivocal terms, and this formed the basis of his nationalism also. “The soil of India is my highest heaven” said the Swami. The entire nation is his God and service to the nation his religion.

For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain Gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything.

According to Vivekananda, material civilisation is not as obstacle to spiritual realization. As he used to say:

We talk foolishly against material civilisation. The grapes are sour. Even taking all that foolishness for granted, in all India there are, say, a hundred thousand really spiritual men and women. Now, for the spiritualisation of these, must three hundred millions be sunk in savagery and starvation? Why
should any starve? How was it possible for the Hindus to have been conquered by the Mohammedans? It was due to the Hindus’ ignorance of material civilisation . . . . . . Material civilisation, nay, 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 priestcraft is to be removed . . . . None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty.  

Let us expound Vivekananda’s conception of God in some detail. Vivekananda’s conception of God is basically the Vedantic conception of God—everything is divine. ‘All this is indeed Brahman.’ But while in Sankara’s view there is a distinction between God and the Absolute, in Vivekananda’s view the distinction is not absolute. God is the Absolute endowed with Māyā, says Sankara, and since the world is eternally negated in Brahman, God as creator of the world is not ultimately real. Hence, from the orthodox point of view, Brahman (Absolute) alone is real, God (Iśvara—qualified or determinate Brahman) is ultimately unreal. Personal God or Iśvara is a living and dynamic reality according to Vivekananda.

The difference between personal and impersonal is this, that the personal is only a man, and the impersonal idea is that He is the angel, the man, the animal, and yet something more which we cannot see, because impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe, and infinitely more besides. As the one fire coming into the world is manifesting itself in so many forms, and yet is infinitely more besides, so is the Impersonal.  

Although the idea of Impersonal God is the highest according to the Swami, yet it is true that the concept of Personal God stands on a better base when strengthened by the concept of Impersonal God. A generalisation ending in the concept of personal God can never be universally acceptable. For, Personal God must necessarily have attributes. He is all-merciful, He is all-good. Our experience, however, shows that this world is a mixture of good and evil. Therefore, the acceptance of Personal God as the ultimate reality entails exclusion of evil and suffering from the domain of the Personal God. This means eventually
acceptance of two realities—Personal God and Personal Devil, the former being the source of everything that is good; the latter, the source of everything that is evil. This metaphysical dualism is not however tenable, for it goes against the teaching of the Upanisads. It follows, therefore, that the idea of Personal God is not a true generalisation. We have to go beyond, to the Impersonal. The Impersonal God is not a relative God. It is the Absolute. It would be wrong to say that it is either good or bad. In fact, it is beyond good and evil.

The Impersonal God is unaffected by the problem of evil, which is a standing difficulty in a theistic conception of reality. According to the Upanisads, good and evil are aspects of the same reality; death and immortality are two sides of the same God. Good and evil belong to the relative world, they are phenomenal. What is good for one may be bad for another. The Swami gave an example to prove his point. The storm that kills my friend, I call evil, but that may have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by killing the bacilli in the air. They call it good, but I call it evil.

The Swami puts the question: What is the effect of accepting such an Impersonal Being as ultimate? What shall we gain by such a conception? He replies: “The Personal God will remain but on a better basis. He has been strengthened by the Impersonal God. We have seen that without the Impersonal the personal cannot remain. If you mean to say there is a Being entirely separate from this universe, who has created this universe just by His will out of nothing, that cannot be proved. Such a state of things cannot be. This universe in its various forms is but the various readings of the same Impersonal, and the Personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to of that Impersonal by the human intellect”.

Vivekananda did not allow the teachings of the Advaita to remain hidden in the scriptures and the monasteries. He urged: “The abstract Advaita must become living, poetic, in everyday life”. The sense of unity in diversity is not a theoretical dogma nor a logical conclusion reached through a chain of reasoning. This must transform my life in a
manner suitable for the realisation of my identity with Brahman on the one hand and my fellow-beings on the other. The worship of suffering humanity as embodiment of God is in itself a programme of spiritual practice which, if observed with selfless devotion and love, can lead one to the goal of self-realisation which is the same as God-realisation. Vivekananda's outlook in this respect was far more radical than the Buddhistic or the Christian outlook. Since Buddhism does not believe in worshipping God in any definite form, love of man amounts to a mere code of right conduct, while the Christian maxim 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' does not mean more than what it literally conveys. In the attitude of Vivekananda 'Self' and 'God' are synonymous expressions. The Advanta Sadhana prescribes that one should realise one's own self in others, and it is the surest way of removing hatred between man and man and suffusing the entire creation with love. Vivekananda was always alert in reminding his audience of the spiritual heritage of man. He said:

When the life blood is strong and pure no disease germ can live in that body. Our life-blood is spirituality. If it flows clear, if it flows strong and pure and vigorous, everything is right; political, social, any other material defects, even the poverty of the land, will all be cured if that blood is pure. For, if the disease germ be thrown out, nothing will be able to enter into the blood.27

Again, said the Swami:

My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession of a few only, hidden, as it were, in monasteries and in forests—to bring them out . . . . I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India.28

The age-old misunderstanding that the Advaita does not provide room for moral endeavour has been ruthlessly criticised by Vivekananda. Said the Swami:

Our boys blithely talk now-a-days that Advaita makes people immoral, because if we are all one and all God, what need of morality will there be at all? In the first place, that is the argument of the brute, who can only be kept down by the whip. In the second place, Advaita and Advaita alone explains morality . . . . what is the reason that I should be
moral? You cannot explain it except when you come to know the truth as given in the *Gita*. "He who sees everyone in himself, and himself in everyone, thus seeing the same God living in all, he, the sage, no more kills the self by the self." Know through Advaita that whosoever you hurt, you hurt yourself, they are all you. Whether you know it or not, through all hands you work, through all feet you move, you are the king enjoying in the palace, you are the beggar leading that miserable existence in the street, you are in the ignorant as well as in the learned, you are in the man who is weak and you are in the strong; know this and be sympathetic. And that is why we must not hurt others. That is why I do not even care whether I have to starve, because there will be millions of mouths eating at the same time, and they are all mine.28

One striking feature of the Advaita that is very often stressed by Vivekananda is its unshakable optimism. The Advaita alone can make man strong and self-reliant, non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure and meditative. By urging that every man is potentially divine, the Advaita gives hope of infinite progress to every man, however degraded and lowly he may be. As a true Advaitist, Vivekananda restored the lost spirit of man and thereby made him conscious of his heritage, dignity and responsibility.
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE GREAT EDUCATOR

According to Swami Vivekananda, education is "the manifestation of perfection already in man", and religion is the innermost core of education. Education is not acquisition of undigested information but a comprehensive training one receives throughout one's life so as to have "live-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas". The aim of education, particularly that of higher education is to make man competent to solve the problems of life. With this end in view, the Swami set forth an ideal method for imparting education.

The human mind has infinite power and potentiality. The more concentrated it is, the more power is brought to bear on a particular subject-matter of study. The chemist in his laboratory concentrates all the energies of his mind on one point and fixes upon it his undivided attention. As a result, he finds the secret. The astronomer concentrates all his energies on the study of movements of heavenly bodies and projects his mind through the telescope on stars, the Sun, the Moon and other bodies so as to achieve his goal. Nature is ready to reveal her secret: we have to learn how to handle her. The cobbler will do his job better if his mind is more concentrated. Likewise, the cook will prepare a better meal if his mind is concentrated. It is necessary that while we learn how to concentrate our mind on a particular object, we should, at the same time, cultivate detachment. That is to say, we should be able to withdraw the mind from one object and place it on another. It is not unintelligent acquisition of facts but concentration of mind which is the most important thing in education.

Faith in the subject-matter of learning is an essential prerequisite of education. And faith emerges only when the student cultivates Brahmacharya, which means chastity in thought, word and deed. If one observes strict Brahmacharya one can master one's object of study quickly and
acquire unfailing memory of what one has already heard but once.

It is essential to teach a child the dignity of the human individual. Many students go astray because they have no faith in themselves. It is Sraddha or faith in one's dignity and power to do good that makes a man noble. He who looks upon himself as powerless, ignoble, sinful and imperfect is a miserable person indeed. He can do neither any good to himself nor any good to the world he lives in. We cannot afford to forget that we are children of Eternity, we are sparks of the Divine Fire. And this faith gives us infinite strength and indomitable energy. India's degeneration has been largely due to the lack of confidence and sense of dignity in her children.

Character is strengthening of the will, and will has infinite power. The character of a man is but the sumtotal of his tendencies and dispositions. Every movement of my body, every idea that occurs in my mind and every deed that I do leaves an impression on my mind. And a man's character is determined by the sumtotal of these impressions. When the tendencies are more or less settled, they form habit. Great care is, therefore, necessary to ensure that a student does not form any bad habits that have formed a part of one's character can be controlled only by cultivating good habits. It is necessary to bear in mind that education does not consist in collection of information but in cultivation of good conduct. Let the student go on doing good deeds, thinking holy thoughts and keeping company of noble souls, he is sure to develop good habits. In moulding the character of a person, good and evil have their parts to play. In most cases, suffering has been a better teacher than happiness. The aim of a student should not, therefore, be avoidance of evil and suffering but conquering evil and suffering through will force.

The type of education can be imparted only when the student lives in communion with Nature. The Mundaka Upanishad speaks of two types of knowledge: one the supreme, para, and the other, ordinary, phenomenal, relative, aparā. All the temporal knowledge, sciences, literature and arts including the knowledge contained in the sacred
Vedas and relegated by the Upanisads to the category of the ordinary or apara knowledge. That alone is para or supreme knowledge which helps destroy spiritual blindness and reveal the ever-present spiritual reality behind man and nature. The story of Satyakama is a case in point. Satyakama attained supreme knowledge when he lived in communion with Nature.

The personal influence of the teacher in imparting education is very great indeed. And that is why the Swami advocates residential institutions of education where students and teachers can live together and have an exchange of ideas. The Swami said, "one should live from his very boyhood with one whose character is like a blazing fire, and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching. In our country the imparting of knowledge has always been through men of renunciation. The charge of imparting knowledge should again fall upon the shoulders of tyagis." One of the reasons why in ancient India the standard of discipline among students was very high was that the teachers did not sell their knowledge: education was free. This fact coupled with the other that the student had to live under the direct supervision of his teacher largely contributed towards making education a comprehensive and fruitful preparation for life as a whole. It is true that the present conditions of India do not permit free education in all stages. Yet, the Swami urged that the teacher should never impart education with any ulterior, selfish motive, for money, name or fame. A teacher's work should be inspired by pure love for mankind as a whole. The teacher should not, however, impart education indiscriminately. He should select his student with care and ascertain his fitness and competence for a particular branch of study. The Swami said, "the true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can teach and none else. The conditions necessary for the taught are purity, a real thirst for knowledge and perseverance." The oft-quoted saying of the Swami, "no one can teach anybody", is perfectly true, though it appears somewhat
paradoxical. As the Swami said: "You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant. All you can do is on the negative side—you can only help. You can take away the obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature; Loosen the soil a little, so that it may come out easily. Put a hedge round it, see that it is not killed by anything, and there your work stops. You cannot do anything else. The rest is a manifestation from within its own nature".\textsuperscript{54}

What the Swami called a psychological approach to education is virtually the heuristic method of the modern educators. In the heuristic method the pupil is looked upon as a discoverer and not as a passive listener of the lecture delivered by his teacher. It is the function of the teacher so to pose problems to be solved that they evoke a spirit of inquiry in the mind of the pupil and help him discover the truth without any bias whatsoever.

What the Swami aimed at was education for life as opposed to education for a profession. As the Swami said: "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. 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 \textit{rishis}."\textsuperscript{55}

Education for life must necessarily be comprehensive in character. With this end in view the Swami laid great stress on physical culture. For the Swami, weakness is the only sin human nature falls victim to. The sin of weakness can be removed by strength,—physical, mental and spiritual. A sound mind necessarily presupposes a sound body. The necessity of physical exercise cannot be over-emphasised in the scheme of education. In course of his conversation with a disciple, the Swami said: "Your must learn to make the physique very strong, and teach the same to others. Don't you find me exercising every day with dumb-bells even now? . . . Body and mind must 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 make them feel this need that education is necessary at the present moment." Again, he said, "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. "You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita". Again, "What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic walls which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean, meeting death face to face."

One is reminded of Plato’s teaching that a sound educational system must give due place to gymnastic and music,—gymnastic for the body and music for the soul. Vedanta is, according to the Swami, a religion of strength and hope, not a religion of weakness and despair. The Swami urged upon his countrymen, time and again, that they had become weak and miserable because they did not apply the teachings of the Vedanta to the individual as well as collective life. Strength was the crying need of the hour in India according to the Swami and he repeatedly urged that what India needed was strength-giving religion and man-making education. The Upanishadic dictum, \textit{Nayamatma bala-hinena labhyah}, this self cannot be realized by the weak, a man devoid of strength, may be taken as the theme on which the Swami harped incessantly.

It is incorrect to say that the Swami over-emphasised the spiritual basis of education to the utter neglect of the need of scientific and technological training. Rather 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." He asked the Christians of America, who were at that time keen on sending out missionaries, as to why they did not try to save the bodies of the famished Indians from starvation. The recurring note in Vivekananda’s plan for the regeneration of India is to remove poverty, unemployment and ignorance, and
start educating the masses so that their lost individuality could be restored.

The Swami was convinced that for the regeneration of India it was necessary that she should take from the Western nations all that was good in their civilization. Four things in particular of Western civilization impressed him deeply and he called pointed attention of his countrymen to those four basic points. In the first place, he was impressed by the Western nation's great concern for the masses. The contrast between the condition of the masses in India and the condition of the masses in the West greatly pained the Swami. Secondly, he was impressed by the highly cultural life led by the women of America and the great esteem in which they were held by the American society. Thirdly, the power of organization of the West made a deep impression on the mind of the Swami. It is for this reason that he advised his countrymen to organize themselves so that rapid social progress could be ensured. Lastly, the material prosperity of the West made the Swami think as to what could be the source of the material progress of the West. He was convinced that the physical, basis of the Western civilization was sufficiently strong and this explains why the West achieved amazing material progress. The Swami urged upon his own countrymen to be adequately sensible of the material values of life. He only insisted that all national activities of India should be centred round the spiritual ideal, since religion formed the core of the national life in India.

Speaking on the importance of technical education the Swami said, "if I can get some unmarried graduates. I may try to send them over to Japan and make arrangements for their technical education there, so that when they come back, they may turn their knowledge to the best account of India". Again, he said, "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 which may develop industries, so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for themselves, and save something against a rainy day." The study of technology should not, however, be one-
sided. It is to be supplemented by the study of Humanities, particularly the Classics. In this connection, the study of Sanskrit occupies a very prominent place according to the Swami. In order to make our students fully acquainted with the spirit of Indian culture, the study of Sanskrit, which is the treasure-house of ancient wisdom, should be made obligatory. It is true that the Swami was in favour of teaching through the medium of the mother tongue of the student, yet he laid great stress on the study of Sanskrit. The gems of spirituality that are stored up in our sacred books and are in the possession of a few fortunate people should be broadcast and made known to everybody. These thoughts and ideas embodying the cultural heritage of India must be taught in the language of the people; at the same time Sanskrit education must be imparted to all, "because the very sound of Sanskrit words gives prestige and a power and a strength to the race."  

In the opinion of the Swami, the great Buddha took a false step when he discouraged the study of the Sanskrit language of the day, as the medium of expression. So far so good. He spoke in the language of the people and the people understood him, thereby the Buddha spread his ideas quickly and made them reach far and wide. This, however, did not spread culture. The Swami said: "Knowledge came but the prestige was not there, culture was not there. It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. You can put a mass of knowledge into the world, but that will not do it much good. There must come culture into the blood... Teach the masses in the vernaculars, give them ideas: they will get information, but something more is necessary, give them culture."  

The Swami was perfectly certain that the only way of raising the condition of the masses in India was to educate them properly, to make them study Sanskrit. The Swami said: "The only way to bring about the levelling of caste, is to appropriate the culture, the education which is the strength of the higher castes. That done, you have what you want". The study of Sanskrit does not only acquaint us with our rich heritage, it restores the faith and confidence in ourselves which is sadly missing today.
Any sound scheme of education must necessarily provide teaching of Fine Arts; otherwise it will be incomplete. According to the Swami the source of greatness of a nation lies chiefly in its art. The case of Japan used to be frequently cited by the Swami as an example of a nation which became great on account of her art. "The very soul of Asia", the Swami said, "is interwoven with art. The Asian never uses a thing unless there be art in it. Don't you know that art is, with us, a part of religion? How great an artist was Shri Ramakrishna himself?" The Swami used to draw the attention of his audience to the artistic drinking vessels, the beautiful Sari, the mud walls and granaries of the Indians. According to the Swami, the ideal of the Westerners of his time was utility, whereas the ideal of India was art. In a mood of lamentation the Swami said: "With the Western education those beautiful ghatis (drinking pots) of ours have been discarded and enamel glasses have usurped their place in our homes: Thus the ideal of utility has been imbibed by us to such an extent as to make it look little short of the ridiculous. Now what we need is the combination of art and utility. Japan has done that very quickly, and so she has advanced by giant strides."

A nation which does not respect the women cannot become great. One of the reasons of India's degeneration was, according to the Swami, utter disrespect of men to "the living images of Shakti". So long as the women of India live in tyrannical conditions and in servile dependence on others, India cannot hope to prosper. That was the prediction of the Swami. Manu says, "Where women are respected, there the gods delight; and where they are not, there all works and efforts come to naught".

The Swami was anxious to put into operation a scheme of education for women which would make them fearless and conscious of their chastity and dignity. If women of our country get the right type of education, they will be able to solve their own problems in their own way. The most sound scheme of education for women is one which teaches women to develop a strong character by force of which they will be prepared to lay down their lives rather
than flinch an inch from their chastity. Women are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother. "She when pleased becomes propitious, and the cause of the freedom of man" (Chandi). With a view to helping our women manifest their spiritual power and potentiality, the Brahman within them, the Swami wanted to establish a women's math which should have a girls' school attached to it. The curricula in the school should be as follows: Religious Scriptures, Literature, Sanskrit, Grammar and rudiments of English. Other subjects such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work and upbringing of children should also be introduced. Worship and meditation shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. Men teachers are to be excluded from this kind of schools. Teaching work should be done by educated widows and Brahmacharinis. The elder Brahmacharinis will take charge of the training of the girl students in Brahmacarya. The guardians of the girls who would receive education in these schools are at liberty to marry their wards after the latter have received five or six years' training in the math. If any of the girls are considered fit for yogic and religious life they will be allowed to stay in the math, taking the vow of celibacy, provided they are permitted by their guardians to do so. These celebrate nuns will, in course of time, be the teachers and preachers of the Math. In towns as well as in villages these nuns will open centres of study and strive for the spread of the right type of female education. If the scheme can be put into operation effectively there is sure to be a reappearance of such ideal characters as Sita, Savitri and Gargi.

It is needless to say that the girl students will observe strict Brahmacharya so long as they remain in the Math as pupils. Spirituality, Self-control and sacrifice should be the motto of the pupils of this Math, and selfless service the vow of their life.

The modern educators rightly emphasise that there should not be any csultainment in educational opportunities for women, but rather a great increase. Nevertheless, it is also admitted today that women's and men's education should not, in general, be identical in all respects. It is
high time that our educators gave servious thought to the education of women as women. And for this purpose the scheme of female education propounded by the Swami would serve as an ideal one. Although men and women are equally competent for academic work and in many cases women have excelled in academic matters in comparison to men, yet women have a special aptitude for and competence in studies relating to home and family. The Swami had justly included such subjects as sewing, culinary art, domestic science, and child care in the curriculum of female education. It is gratifying to note that The University Education Commission of India (1948-49) has recommended such subjects as Home Economics and Home Management, Nursing, and Fine Arts for women's education. It is well to remind the educators of today of what the Commission recommends in this connection: "A well-ordered home helps to make well-ordered men. Many a competent manager of business or of public affairs has become so in part because as a boy he lived in a home that was intelligently and efficiently managed by his mother. Order and efficiency thus became second nature to him. It is doubtful whether many men ever achieve orderly and efficient living whose early home environment was one of confusion and disorder. Probably there would be no quicker way to raise the general standard of economy and efficiency in Indian life than to make women interested and competent in the efficient, economical and convenient planning and management of their homes. A spirit of pioneering, of experiment and research in the planning and management of even a simple home, can add variety and zest to living, as well as economy and convenience, and can stimulate originality and resourcefulness in the children of the home."

It has already been stated that according to the Swami religion is the innermost core of education. The Swami said, "Mind, I do not mean my own or any one else's opinion about religion. Religion is as the rice, and everything else, like the curries. Taking only curries causes indigestion, and so is the case with taking rice alone. . . . What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta,
Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also \textit{Sraddha} and faith in one's own self.\textsuperscript{47} The Swami proposed to impart even secular knowledge through religion. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to have a clear idea of the Swami's conception of religion and how he proposed to introduce religions instruction in educational institutions. \lq\lq Religion\rq\rq, said the Swami, \lq\lq is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man\rq\rq. Again, \lq\lq Religion is the realization of spirit as spirit.\rq\rq \lq\lq Religion lies in being and becoming, in realization...... Do not disturb the faith of any...... Confucius, Moses and Pythagoras; Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, Luther, Calvin and the Sikhs; Theosophy, spiritualism and the like; all these mean only the preaching of the Divine-in-man.\rq\rq\textsuperscript{48}

It is necessary to bear in mind that the Swami did not confine his ideas to the usual expression \lq\lq toleration\rq\rq in relation to all religions views of the world. He went a step further and said that we have to \lq\lq accept\rq\rq all religions as true. This serves as the basis of a universal religion. Said the Swami, \lq\lq we donot only tolerate but accept every religion, and with the Lord's help I am trying to preach it to the whole world. There things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great: (1) conviction of the power of goodness, (2) absence of jealousy and suspicion and (3) helping all who are trying to be and do good.\rq\rq\textsuperscript{49}

That the Swami's conception of religion was not in any way, a form of escapism will be evident from his numerous sayings. Two typical passages may be quoted: \lq\lq The children of the Lord are dying of starvation ...... Worship with water and Tulso leaves alone, and the allowance for His Bhoga (food offerings) be sent in offering food to the Living God who dwells in the persons of the poor—then will His grace descend on everything.\rq\rq\textsuperscript{50} The Swami's address at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, contain the following significant statements: \lq\lq......The crying evil in the East is not religion—they have religion enough—but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats.
They ask us for bread but we give them stones. . . . . I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people."  

It is not through intellectual ratiocination but direct experience that religions truths can be realized. Man has tremendous power of transcending the limits of the senses and those of reason. It is only when the aspirant reaches a region which is beyond senses, words and intellect that he can be sure of reaching the gateway to religion. It is true indeed that religion 'bakes no bread', yet it is religion which gives man infinite strength, indomitable energy, absolute fearlessness and life eternal. Weakness is sin according to the Swami, and this sin can be overcome through religion which fosters fearlessness. Fearlessness is the outcome of the conviction that man is not matter or mere physical body but deathless spirit.

It is in this context that the Swami's scheme of imparting religions education is to be assessed. A pertinent question may arise as to whether it is desirable to provide religions instruction in our educational institutions in view of the fact that India claims to be a secular state. It is well worth considering the relevant articles of the Constitution of India in this connection. Article 25 affirms freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion. Article 26 affirms freedom of establishing religions institutions and managing religions affairs. Article 27 guarantees that public funds raised by taxes shall not be utilised for the benefit of any particular religion. Article 28 affirms freedom of attendance at religions instruction or religions worship in educational institutions established under any endowment or trust which requires that religions instruction shall be imparted in such institution.

The Constitution of India steers a middle course in regard to the question of imparting religions instruction. While religious instruction is banned in State-owned educational institutions it is permitted in other denominational institutions. Religious instruction is, however, to be distinguished from research in or study of comparative religion or philosophy of religion. This kind of research is permit-
ted in State-owned institutions also. To reasons which impelled the makers of the Constitution to prohibit religious instruction in State-owned educational institutions are clear enough. We have in our country followers of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish and other faiths. Since Article 29 guarantees that no citizen of India shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion race etc., the makers of the Constitution found it impossible to provide religious instruction for students professing diverse faiths and studying in the same educational institution.

There is no denying that in the past many atrocities were perpetrated and many corrupt practices sanctified in the name of religion. It is for this reason that some people look upon religion as a reactionary force which fosters a spirit of inaction and unworldliness. The abuse of religion lies at the root of our secular conception of the State.

It will be seen that Swami Vivekananda's conception of religion is not inconsistent with the principles of our Constitution. In the Preamble to our Constitution we have solemnly resolved to secure to all citizens of India, among other things, fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation. It is religion, in the sense used by the Swami, that teaches what constitutes the dignity of the individual. So long as man is looked upon as a physico-chemical apparatus or a mind-body complex, the dignity of the individual cannot be ensured. The sense of dignity arises when man realizes himself as spirit and considers his fellow beings as embodiments of the same spirit. It is perfectly certain that our educators will not think of banning religious education in State-owned schools and colleges when they will grasp the fundamentals of religion as shown by Swami Vivekananda. The Swami was never tired of saying that religion is realization; not talk nor doctrine, neither rituals nor ceremonies, although 'idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of man's spiritual childhood.'

The religion that the Swami wanted to teach was the
religion of the Vedanta and the Upanishads—the religion which looks upon men as “children of immortal bliss”. Vedanta is a religion of strength and hope, not a religion of weakness and despair. By laying stress on the potential divinity of man the Vedanta assures hope of infinite progress to every man, however lowly or fallen he may be. The Vedanta invests the human personality with a sacredness and dignity hitherto unknown.

The religion of the Vedanta cannot, however, be taught with the help of class-room lectures. What is to be banned is certainly a formal preaching of religious dogmas in schools and colleges, for, this will surely throttle the spirit of enquiry in the student and foster fanaticism and bigotry. What is absolutely needed, however, is teaching the fundamentals of religion through conduct and discipline, sadhana. And the right type of teacher can certainly inspire his students to receive spiritual illumination which is not to be confused with formal training in theology. It is to be remembered, therefore, that to be secular is not necessarily to be irreligious or irreverent. Our Constitution lays down that State should not be identified with any particular religious faith, nor should it be partial to any one particular religion. This provides ample scope for religious pursuits of Indian citizens according to their temperament and capacity.

Swami Vivekananda’s insistence on including Sanskrit, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavadgita, the Upanishads and the Vedanta in the curriculum of study is not without significance. A nation cannot grow if it does not strike roots in its past tradition and culture. Yet, at the same time, it should not be a blind follower of the past. Its vision should stretch far and wide so that it can assimilate whatever is good and of lasting value in the civilization and culture of other nations.

The Swami said, “To the Hindu, man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. To him, all the religions, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite.”

Truth is one, the sages describe it in various ways
—this is the central teaching of the Vedantic religion. This religion can well be taught in schools and colleges for in stead of fostering fanaticism and bigotry, the Vedantic religion promotes love, sympathy and understanding among men and emphasies the spiritual oneness of the universe.

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 the Swami’s scheme. 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.”

Again, “Religion is not to be identified with a creed to be believed or an emotion to be felt or a ceremony to be performed. It is a changed life. If religion is a matter of realization it cannot be reached through mere knowledge of the dogmas. It is attained though discipline, training, *sadhana*. It is a law of nature, that everyone should digest his own food. So also every one must see with his own eyes. By the exercise of one’s own will and reason one has to attain spiritual enlightenment.”

It follows, therefore, that the disjunction we have to face today on account of the abuse of religion is not: religion or no religion but, true religion or false religion. Religion cannot be removed from the curriculum of study for it is the very basis of Indian life and thought. Moreover, secular education and spiritual education are not antagonistic to each other. While Radhakrishnan says that religion is the most secular of all pursuits, Vivekananda says that secular education is to be given through religion. Radhakrishnan lays stress on the fact that religion cannot be divorced from life; all life must be infused with the life of spirit—or be meaningless. Vivekananda urges that religion helps a man in gaining confidence in his own self.
Without self-confidence and awareness of the dignity of the human spirit no secular education can be fruitful.

The Swami 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 practicable.

According to the Swami, unity in diversity is the rule of nature and the rule of life. Since religion is dynamic in character, true religion must express unity in diversity. The Swami, therefore, wanted to build a temple of learning, a non-sectarian temple, having only 'Om' as the symbol, a great symbol which no religious sect can discard. The symbol refers to God the creator, the preserver and the destroyer. In this temple the pupils will be taught wherein lies the common bond of union among all religious faiths of the world, leaving aside the different rites and rituals, customs and traditions. At the same time, each sect shall have the liberty to come and preach its doctrines provided others' religious beliefs are not derided and injured. Secondly, the temple of learning should also provide teachers' training so that teachers can learn to go about from door to door teaching religion and giving secular education to our people.

Throughout the ages there have been various methods of uplifting the masses. The Swami's plan for the uplift of the masses is the most constructive, practical and comprehensive. He touched the vital chord in this matter—education. As he said, "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 poor people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education, faith in one's own self, and through faith in one's self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant." Education, like many other values is in the crucible today. We talk of national integration, cultural fellowship, international understanding and similar other values. It is
hardly necessary to reiterate that the Swami’s views on education have a deeper significance today than when they were uttered. The purpose of education is certainly, to liberate the mind of the pupil from the bondage of environment, to remove his cultural isolation and infuse a spirit of enquiry into his mind. But in doing all this, we should take care not to destroy the individuality of the pupil. As the Swami used to say, within every man there is an idea; the external man is only the outward manifestation of this idea within. Likewise, every nation has a corresponding national idea. Our educational schemes should be so planned as not to interfere with the core of spirituality whose embodiment the individual is.

“In India”, said the Swami, “courts and kings touched only a few; the vast mass of the people, from the highest to the lowest, has been left to pursue its own inevitable course, the current of national life flowing at times slow and half-conscious, at others strong and awakened. I stand in awe before the unbroken procession of scores of shining centuries, with here and there a dim link in the chain, only to flare up with the added brilliance in the next, and there she is walking with her own majestic steps,—my motherland,—to fulfil her glorious destiny which no power on earth or in heaven can check—the regeneration of man the brute into man the God.” Let our educators harness all their energy and effort so as to fulfil the cherished goal of the Swami. Until this goal is achieved, the import of the dictum, ‘education is the manifestation of perfection already in man’, will hardly be realised.
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND NATIONAL EDUCATION

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.

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. The Macaulayan pattern of education which was prevalent during the days of Vivekananda aimed at stuffing the heads of young learners with ideas not close to the Indian soil.

The decision, taken in 1835, by the British policymakers to introduce English education in India had a lasting influence on the evolution of modern Indian thought. The introduction of this system of education had two important results. On the one hand, it accelerated the spread of Western ideas and Western outlook on life among the Indians. On the other, by providing a common language and a common cultural background, it offered ample opportunities for the Indians to establish national solidarity. The leaders of the national movement of India who wrote and spoke in English realized, before long, paradoxical charac-
ter of British rule. While the British Government maintained and administered laws which offended the principle of social justice, suppressed all attempts on the part of Indians to spread liberal ideas, refused to enact laws which were urgently required to make room for progress in the Indian society, it introduced a system of education in schools and colleges which inspired the educated Indians to follow the lofty ideals of liberty and justice so ably portrayed in books on History, Philosophy and Literature. British policy-makers expected that the English education, introduced in schools and colleges would produce a group of de-nationalised Indians fit only to be means to an end, viz. serving in the subordinate ranks of administration by reason of their competent knowledge of English. It is true indeed that a great many Hindus 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. Nevertheless, they cannot be said to have received proper education. For, English education, at the beginning, produced only a literate class who put up an insurmountable barrier between themselves and the unlettered masses. The seeds of cultural confusion were sown. Those who imbibed ideas of liberty and justice through English education could not transmit those ideas to the community or the average common man because the two classes were kept asunder. During the first fifty years of English education, a large section of Indians followed Western ideas blindly and imitated 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 community was removed far away from the educated class. The common people could neither accept the new learning nor go back to the past, because traditional system of education was fast disappearing. Vivekananda made untiring efforts to harmonise the traditional values of India with the new values brought about by spread of science and technology. It is in this context that he pleaded strongly for a marriage between Vedanta and Science.
Various methods have been used to raise the masses in different ages and in different countries. Vivekananda's method of uplifting the masses was the most constructive, practical and comprehensive. Education is the vital chord and the Swami touched it and made it living. As he said, "Education, education and 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 poor people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? 'Education' was the answer I got. Through education, 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."^57

What is most significant in the Swami's teaching in this context, is negatively, that education is not the monopoly of a chosen few; positively, that education must be all-pervading, it must not only touch but rejuvenate the masses who have so long been denied the benefit of education. 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.

The Swami regarded the uplift of the masses through proper education as of topmost priority in the programme of national resurgence in India. He was a pioneer in this field, for, we do not find any resolution in the reports of the Indian National Congress to this effect before the passing away of the Swami. Even a staunch prophet of Nationalism like Bepin Chandra Pal did but dimly visualize the significance of uplift of the masses of India in national regeneration. Said he, "Our programme is that we shall so work in the country, so combine the resources of the people, so organise the forces of the nation, so develop the instinct of freedom in the community, that by these means we shall—shall in the imperative—compel the submission to our will of any power that it may set itself against us."^57a

The Swami was strongly in favour of teaching through
the medium of the mother-tongue of the student. Yet, he laid great stress on the study of Sanskrit as an obligatory subject. The gems of spirituality that are stored in our sacred books and are in the possession of a few fortunate people should be broadcast and made known to everybody. "The abstract Advaita must become living, poetic in everyday life."

There is yet another aspect of education on which great stress was laid by the Swami. It is female education. Just as a bird cannot fly with one wing, so a society cannot progress when one of its limbs is paralysed. The Swami was anxious to put into operation a scheme of education for women which would make them fearless and conscious of their chastity and dignity. If women of our country get the right type of education; they will be able to solve their own problems in their own way. The most suitable scheme of education for women is one which teaches women to develop a strong character by the force of which they will be prepared to lay down their lives, if need be, rather than flinch an inch from their chastity. Women are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother. "She when pleased becomes propitious, and the cause of the freedom of man" (Chandi). With a view to helping our women manifest their spiritual power and potentiality, the Brahman within them, the Swami wanted to establish a women's Math which should have a girls' school attached to it. The curricula in the school should be as follows: Religious scriptures, literature, sanskrit, grammar and rudiments of English. Other subjects such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children should also be introduced. Worship and meditation shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. Men teachers are excluded from this kind of schools. Teaching work should be done by educated widows and Brahmacarinis.

Vivekananda was fully aware of the fact that no amount of social reform from outside would bring national regeneration, for there was hardly any urge among the common masses to rejuvenate themselves. Some highly educated people, however, attempted to thrust their own
ideas of social reform on the people in general without any appreciable success. The Swami urged that the people must stand on their own legs; they must reform themselves. All that was needed to bring about this change of outlook was spread of education. The Swami made his position clear when he said “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 kings are gone, where is the new sanction, the new power of the people? Bring it up. Therefore, even for social reform, the first duty is to educate the people, and you will have to wait till that time comes.”

Spiritual unity, according to the Swami, is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the progress of India. As he said, “A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune.” “Religion” and “Universalism of the spirit” are synonymous expressions for Vivekananda. “All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion must be given up. The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and at the same time, have infinite scope for future development. All that was good in the past must be preserved; and the door must be kept open for future additions to the already existing store. Religions must be inclusive and not look down with contempt upon one another because their particular ideals of God are different.”

When the Swami said religion must be the core education he did not refer to any particular historical religion; he had in mind the essential character of religion which is the realization of the Divinity already in man. “Religion lies in being and becoming, in realization.” A revaluation of religious values, stripping religion of its sacerdotal garments and making it co-eval with life itself—these were the chief achievements of the Swami in the field of culture and education. It is religion that gives strength and fearlessness; it is religion that helps a man realize his potential divinity.

To use the language of Rabindranath, religion is not a subject on which the teacher should impart academic ins-
truction; rather, what is needed in this context, is religious inspiration. Using a popular analogy, the Swami said, religion is like rice, our staple food, other things are curries. Taking the one to the neglect of the other would result in indigestion. “Every improvement in India” said the Swami, “requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.”

That an all-round progress of the Motherland was Vivekananda’s prime concern is clearly expressed in the following passage: “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, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything.”

The lofty ideals of national education set forth by Vivekananda were followed up, with remarkable zeal, by Nivedita, Aurobindo and others. Aurobindo regretfully observed: That which Vivekananda realised and strove to develop has not yet materialised. Posterity alone can show whether the vision of Vivekananda will again vitalise the nation and rouse its dormant spirit.
7

GOD IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S PHILOSOPHY

The celebrated ontological proof of Descartes was refuted by Kant on the ground that the proof involved an illegitimate passage from thought to reality: the reality of God was proved from the mere idea of God. Swami Vivekananda was aware of the hazard of proving God with the help of an ontological argument. He therefore, asserted that the best proof of God’s existence lies in the experience (anubhava) a seer has of God. This experience is mystical or supra-logical. The Vedic sage proclaimed: ‘Hear, ye children of immortal bliss, even ye that reside in higher spheres, I have known the Ancient One, the Supreme Person, who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: Knowing Him alone, you shall be saved from death over again.’

According to Swami Vivekananda, this is the best proof a Hindu sage gives about God when he says confidently, ‘I have realized the self; I have seen God’. The Swami, in his younger days, came across such a proof when he met Sri Ramakrishna who answered the Swami’s question, ‘Have you seen God?’ by saying, ‘Yes, I see Him more vividly than I see you, and you can also see Him’.

Direct experience of God is the only positive proof of God’s existence, not only because other proofs leave a gap between the prover and the proved, but because religion is not a dogma with the Hindus, but realization of the potential divinity of man. Since every man is potentially divine, or to put it in a different way, man and God, the individual soul and the Universal Soul are basically identical, no proof of God short of realization of this identity is of any value.

Vivekananda’s conception of God is basically the Vedantic conception of God—everything is divine—‘All this is, indeed, Brahma’. But, while in Sankara’s view, there is a distinction between the Absolute and God, in Vivekananda’s view the distinction is not absolute. God is the Absolute
endowed with Maya, says Sankara, and since the world is eternally negated in Brahman, God as creator of the world is not ultimately real. Hence, from the orthodox point of view, Brahman (Absolute) alone is real, God (Iswara, qualified or determinate Brahman) is ultimately unreal.

Personal God or Isvara is a living and dynamic reality according to Swami Vivekananda. "The difference between personal and impersonal is this, that the personal is only a man and the impersonal idea is that He is the angel, the man, the animal and yet something more which we cannot see, because impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe, and infinitely more besides. As the one fire coming into the world is manifesting itself in so many forms, and yet is infinitely more besides, so is the impersonal".62

Although the idea of Impersonal God is the highest idea according to the Swami, yet it is true that the concept of Personal God stands on a better base when strengthened by the concept of Impersonal God. A generalization ending in the concept of Personal God can never be universally acceptable. For, Personal God must necessarily have attributes. He is all-merciful. He is all-good. Our experience, however, shows that this world is a mixture of good and evil. Therefore, the acceptance of Personal God as the ultimate Reality entails exclusion of evil and suffering from the domain of Personal God. This means, eventually, acceptance of two realities—Personal God and personal devil, the former being the source of everything that is good, the latter the source of everything that is evil. This metaphysical dualism is not, however, tenable. We see, therefore, that the idea of Personal God is not a true generalization. We have to go beyond, to the Impersonal.

The Impersonal God is unaffected by the problem of evil. The problem of evil is the standing difficulty in a theistic conception of reality. If God is all-good and all-merciful, why evil at all in His creation? Again, if God is omnipotent, why can He not remove evil from the world? These are baffling problems.

Once we accept the Impersonal God of the Vedanta as
ultimate, these problems disappear. According to the Upanishads, good and evil are aspects of the same reality; death and immortality are two sides of the same God. Good and evil belong to the relative world, thy are phenomenal. What is good for me may be bad for you. The Swami, therefore, concludes that, like every other thing, there is an evolution in good and evil, too. There is something which in its evolution we call, in one degree, good and in another, evil. The Swami gives an example in support of his conclusion. The storm that kills my friend, I call evil, but that may have saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of people by killing the bacilli in the air. They call it good, but I call it evil.

The impersonal God is not a relative God; It is the Absolute. It would be wrong to say that It is either good or bad. In fact, It is beyond good and evil.

The Swami asks the question: What is the effect of accepting such an Impersonal Being as ultimate? What shall we gain by such a conception? He replies: "The Personal God will remain but on a better basis. He has been strengthened by the Impersonal. We have seen that, without the Impersonal, the Personal cannot remain. If you mean to say there is a Being entirely separate from this universe, who has created this universe just by His will out of nothing, that cannot be proved. Such a state of things cannot be. But if we understand the idea of the Impersonal, then the idea of the Personal can remain there, also. This universe, in its various forms, is but the various readings of the same Impersonal. When we read it with the five senses, we call it the material world. If one of us gets the electrical sense, he will see the universe as something else again. There are various forms of that same Oneness, of which all these various ideas of worlds are but various readings, and the Personal God is the highest reading that can be attained to of that Impersonal by the human intellect."63

It follows, therefore, that the Personal God is not swallowed up by, or dissolved in, the Absolute or Impersonal God. Rather, the Personal God is sustained and strengthened by the Impersonal. We should not, however, hasten to the conclusion that there are two Gods. Reality is one: the Per-
sonal God and the Impersonal God are like ice and water. Ice is frozen water, and when heat is applied to ice, it melts and is transformed into water.

The all-pervading nature of God is the main tune on which the Swami ceaselessly harps. It is not a mere theoretical concept hidden in the scripture, but has to be a living reality. It is with this object in view that the Swami urges that pathway to God is through one’s own self. ‘I am God’—proclaimed the seers of the Upanishads. The all-pervading-ness of God is to be realized gradually through realizing the identity of one’s own self with one’s neighbours, one’s motherland, and finally with the universe as a whole. Once we remember this keynote, it would be easy to follow Vivekananda when he says that the soil of India is his highest heaven. The entire Indian nation is God for Swami Vivekananda and service to the nation is his religion. As the Swami puts it: “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 being from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything”.

The Personal God is a reading (of course the highest reading) of the Impersonal or the Absolute. What does it really mean? According to the Advaita Vedanta the Impersonal God or the Absolute is differenceless Consciousness, one without a second. In the superconscious state of nirvikalpa samadhi the sadhaka realizes his identity with Brahman, his ego is eliminated, and the world of multiplicity vanishes. But how did ‘many’ or multiplicity arise out of the undifferentiated One?. To answer this question, the advaitist introduces the doctrine of Maya. The world of multiplicity is anirvacaninya, indescribable, for it is neither real nor unreal. The world is not real, because world-cognition is sublated in Brahman-consciousness, nor is it unreal, because it appears and is not any thing absurd like the ‘son of a barren woman’.

According to Vivekananda, Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world but a statement of facts as they
exist. What are these facts? First, the very basis of our existence is contradiction; wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep and vice versa.

Death is stalking day and night over this earth of ours but, at the same time, we cherish the fond hope that we shall live eternally. A question was once asked of King Yudhisthira: ‘What is the most wonderful thing on this earth?’ The king replied: ‘Everyday people are dying around us, and yet men think they will never die.’ This is Maya. The increase of knowledge results in increase of misery. The least amount of material prosperity that we enjoy is elsewhere producing equal amount of misery. This is Maya. These are facts which have to be accepted. The question ‘why should it be so’ cannot be answered, because the question itself cannot be logically formulated. It is common knowledge that good cannot always be done through good, but sometimes it has to be done through evil methods. This, again is Maya.

The way in which ‘maya’ is explained by the Swami has a special significance and this will be clear if we remember Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings on allied subjects. In the course of his conversation with Narendranath at Dakshineswar in 1884, Sri Ramakrishna was explaining the tenets of Vaishnava religion and after the discussion was over, he said to himself in a semi-conscious state: “Compassion for creatures! compassion for creatures! Thou fool! An insignificant worm crawling on earth—thou to show compassion to others! Who art thou to show compassion? No, it cannot be. It is not compassion for others, but rather service to man, looking upon him as the veritable manifestation of God”.

On one occasion, when Narendranath tasted the bliss of nirvikalpa samadhi—the highest realization, and implored his Master to allow him to remain in that blissful state indefinitely, Sri Ramakrishna sharply rebuked him saying: “For shame! How can you ask such things? I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to
stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man. This realization will become so natural to you by the grace of the Mother that, in your normal state you will realize the One Divinity in all beings; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor."

Vivekananda realized the blissful state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* and yet he lived on the material plane to carry out the instruction of his Master, to serve man as manifestation of God, to raise the humble and the poor to their full stature.

The world was, for Vivekananda, a reality and not an illusion, since the mission of his life, viz. service of humanity, had to be carried out through the medium of the world. In other words, the world must be there, so that ethical and spiritual endeavours could be fruitful. In order to educate men, to restore their lost individuality, to raise the Indian masses from abject suffering, to rouse the sleeping Indian nation from indefinite slumber, Swami Vivekananda regarded this world of ours as the vehicle through which his mission was to be fulfilled. It is reasonable, therefore, to hold that he did not reject straightforwardly, the world as unreal.

It would, however, be hazardous to conclude that Vivekananda was not a true Advaitist inasmuch as he did not regard the world as false (*mithya*). In orthodox Advaitism, also, the distinction is drawn between the *vyavaharika* (phenomenal) and the *paramarthika* (transcendental). For Swami Vivekananda, the world was real so long as his mission in life was to be fulfilled. After his work was done, the Swami was convinced that he would transcend the material world and merge in the supreme Oneness.

It is stated in the biography of Swami Vivekananda that he practised severe austerities in the springs of *Kashir Bhawani*, and the change that occurred in his mind at that time is indicated in the following words: 'All my patriotism is gone. Everything is gone. Now it is only Mother. I have been very wrong'. Again, the Swami said: 'Since I heard
that divine voice, I have ceased making any more plans. Let these things be as Mother wills.’ The Swami surrendered himself completely to the Divine Mother and was pining for realization of Truth.

In one of his letters from California, in 1900, the Swami wrote: “Bonds are breaking, love dying, work becoming tasteless—the glamour is off life. Now, only the voice of the Master calling—I come, Lord, I come. “Let the dead bury the dead, follow thou Me”—I come, my beloved Lord, I come. Yes, I come. Nirvana is before me. I feel it at times, the same infinite ocean of peace, without a ripple, a breath . . . Oh it is so calm.”

It has already been stated that, in the Swami’s view, Personal God is necessary for the spiritual aspirant; only, it is not ultimate. Since it is difficult for ordinary seekers after Truth to grasp the Indeterminate and Impersonal God straightway, the aspirant passes through worship of Personal God, which is but a support during his spiritual childhood. Once the highest Truth is reached and the Impersonal is realized, it is no more necessary for the sadhaka to come down to worship the Personal God. It follows, therefore, that the Swami aimed at a synthesis of the two great teachings of the Upanishads: ‘Ekamevadvitiyam’—Reality is One without a second, and ‘Sarvam Khalvidam Brahman’—All this is Brahman.

Swami Vivekananda rejected the analogy that there must be a Personal God as creator of the world since a pot implies a potter as its creator. This argument presents an anthropomorphic conception of God which is not logically tenable. Besides, modern science proves that man’s personal comfort, his well-being and material prosperity are the result of man’s exertions, being his conquest of nature, and not God’s favour. There is yet another evil connected with the view that Personal God is ultimate. Tyranny and priestcraft have prevailed wherever people have looked upon Personal God as the supreme Reality without caring to know if there is anything beyond. According to the Swami, priestcraft and tyranny go hand in hand. How did priestcraft originate? Some strong men in old times got people
into their hands and warned them that they would be ruined if they disobeyed the strong men. They presented religion as something otherworldly and God as supernatural. Priests tyrannized people by extorting from them money and demanding various other things from them assuring them that, by obeying the commands of the priests, they would enjoy perfect happiness in heaven.

In repudiating the view put forward by the priests that man's sins will be forgiven and he will enjoy happiness in heaven, the Swami pointed out that man is potentially divine and he is not sinful by nature. The only sin that man can commit is to show weakness. Therefore, the fond hope that he will enjoy happiness in heaven through the help of the priests, in spite of his misdeeds, is based on unreality.

The Swami also attacks the tirade against the conception of Personal God hurled from the Bauddha and Jaina standpoints. According to the Hindus, belief in the law of Karma is foundational. There cannot be a cause without an effect, the present must have had its cause in the past, and will have its effect in the future. The Hindu says that Karma is inert and not spirit; therefore, some caitanya (spirit) is necessary to bring this cause to fruition. If I sow a seed and pour water suitably the seed will grow up into a plant, and no caitanya would be necessary, so argues the Bauddha, and urges that since human souls are caitanya, there is no necessity for a God.

The question that remains to be settled finally is this: How far is it appropriate to use the phrase 'highest reading' in regard to God? Are comparative estimates like 'higher' and 'lower' applicable to the Divine Being who is the supreme Reality? When the Swami used expressions like 'better base' 'highest reading', etc., all that he had in mind was the difference of approach to Reality through ratiocination or discursive reasoning on the one hand, and nirvikalpa samadhi, supreme realization, on the other. The supreme Reality cannot, certainly, be divided into higher and lower, better and worse. An intellectual approach and the intuitive approach to Reality are not, however, antagonistic in
Vivekananda's view. Intuition (anubhava) is the perfection of intellect or ratiocination. Intuition is intellect purified. Hence the problem 'how can the supreme Reality have two contraries, personality and impersonality' disappears, once we remember that the truly Indeterminate can manifest itself in any manner whatsoever. There is no limit to Its expression, nor is It guided by any phenomenal law. To say that the Impersonal cannot become personal is again to determine the Indeterminate which is a futile attempt. To the ordinary man, this is certainly a mystery. This mystery can be solved not through understanding but through love. Said the Swami: "Who can understand the throes of the love of the gopis—the very ideal of love, love that wants nothing, love that even does not care for heaven, love that does not care for anything in this world, or the world to come? . . . And here, through this love of gopis, has been found the only solution of the conflict between the Personal and the Impersonal God . . . We know that it is philosophical to believe in an Impersonal God immanent in the universe, of whom everything is but a manifestation. At the same time, our soul hankers after something concrete, something which we want to grasp, at whose feet we can pour out our soul . . . The only thing that they (gopis) understood was that He was Infinite Love, that was all. A great landmark in the history of religion is here, the ideal of love for love's sake."66
SECULARISM, EDUCATION AND RELIGION

The word "secular" is a much-abused word. Ordinarily, the word has two different meanings: in one sense, it is that which lasts for an indefinite period of time. In the other, it is what has no concern with spiritual matter. In the medieval period the word was used to mean that which belonged to this world and consequently was non-spiritual. Gradually, it came to be used in the wide sense of anything which is distinct from or opposed to, or not connected with religious or ecclesiastical things. It is what is temporal as opposed to the spiritual. Secular education means, for thinkers of this group, a system of training from which definite spiritual or religious teaching has been excluded.

A question has been raised to-day by educationists, sociologists and philosophers as to whether in the present state of Indian society we should impart only secular training to our students in schools, colleges and universities, leaving the spiritual matter to take care of itself. Before we analyse the implications of this problem and assess the value of possible solutions, it is necessary to settle, at the outset, what the aim of education, particularly higher education is. Despite conflicting and controversial answers which are available in the world of learning to-day, one can perhaps point to an area of agreement provided by the Robbins Report and the Kothari Commission Report. The British Government appointed, a few years ago, a Commission on Higher Education which was led by Lord Lionel Robbins. The India Government also appointed, six years ago, an Education Commission headed by Dr. D. S. Kothari who is also the chairman of the University Grants Commission. Let us take the Robbins Report first. This Report says that there is not one single aim of higher education: the aims are many in number. These are: instruction in skills,
suitable to play a part on the division of labour, the promotion of the general powers of the mind so as to produce not mere specialists but cultivated men and women; the advancement of learning through research and the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship. The word “skill” used in this context, should not mislead us. The word is to be taken in a broad sense so as to include the ability to analyse, formulate and examine a problem—be it mathematical or metaphysical. What is of special importance for us in this context is the assertion that the aim of higher education is to produce not mere specialists but cultivated men and women as also to transmit a common culture. I shall elaborate this point a little later after giving an outline of Kothari Commission Report. This report says that the aim of higher education is, among other things, to provide society with competent men and women trained in agriculture, arts, medicine, science and technology and various other professions, who will also be cultivated individuals, imbued with a sense of social purpose . . . the aim of education is also to reduce social and cultural differences, to seek and cultivate new knowledge, to engage vigorously and fearlessly in the pursuit of truth and to interpret old knowledge and beliefs in the light of new needs and discoveries.

It will be seen that the aim of education as stated by the Robbins Report is almost the same as that envisaged in the Kothari Commission Report. What is of primary importance is not so much acquisition of new knowledge as transmission of a common culture and cultivation of abiding values like Truth, Beauty, Goodness and Justice. To achieve this end we have to use certain tools and we have to deal with human materials, which are sensitive as well as unpredictable. By and large, educationists have, hitherto worked on the assumption that all students must conform to a uniform standard of achievement and the norm they have used has enabled them to classify students into good, bad and indifferent types; it is here that the traditional educationists have failed miserably. When we judge the performance of a student we should provide scope
for judging his mental development with reference to others who have a different background, parentage and environment. To put it in another way, we have to study the blossoming forth of a student from within. That is to say, all education must, in the ultimate analysis, be self-education. If, as I have pointed out earlier, the aim of education is to produce cultivated men and women, if the aim is to engage oneself fearlessly and vigorously in the pursuit of truth, education cannot afford to be all too secular in the narrow sense of the term. Moral and spiritual training must be taken as an integral part of education. Two great educationists called our attention to this important fact. Swami Vivekananda pointed out that religion is the core of education. He used to say: give secular education through religion. In his *The Aims of Education* Whitehead says that the essence of education is that it be religious. Religion is man’s total response to the ultimate meaning of existence and education is man’s total preparation for a purposeful, meaningful and effective life. Hence it is that the two are indissolubly related. Vivekananda went a step further and pointed out that the two are two aspects of the same reality. While religion is, according to him, manifestation of the divinity potential in man, education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. When we speak of religious education we must carefully avoid some pitfalls. As Radhakrishnan pointed out, religion cannot be imparted in the form of lessons, which are measured in hourly doses. For aught we know, education in schools and colleges has always been formal: we have hourly lessons, lectures spread over periods, research, debates and discussions and examinations for evaluation of a student’s performance. When we talk of religious education we have a different picture. Religious education is a slow, imperceptible process conditioned by upbringing and environment whereby the total personality of a man is transformed, enriched and becomes graceful and attuned to the Life Divine. It is for this reason that religious education does not mean any formal training in the various doctrines and creeds of historical religions. One has to draw
a distinction between religious education and education about religion. In this connection we have to ask another question. What is the relation of religion to culture? It has already been said that one of the aims of education is to remove cultural differences. Culture is a collective name for the material, social, religious and artistic achievements of human groups including traditions, customs and behaviour patterns. History shows that religion has always played an important role in formulating, interpreting and transmitting the values which are reflected in the culture of a country. As Christopher Dawson puts it: "throughout the greater part of mankind’s history, in all ages and states of society, religion has been the great unifying force in culture. It has been the guardian of tradition, the preserver of the moral law, the educator and the teacher of wisdom. In all ages, the first creative works of a culture are due to a religious inspiration and dedicated to a religious end".67

Let me now go back to the initial question: where should we draw the line of demarcation between the secular and the spiritual? Is it possible, desirable and fruitful to introduce religious instruction in schools and colleges? If we analyse the various articles of the Constitution of India on this subject we shall be in a position to tackle the problem.

Article 28 deals with the question of religious instruction in three different types of educational institutions. Clause (1) lays down: No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds. The prohibition here is absolute. The principle of separation of state and religion is to be rigidly followed. Article 27 permits taxation for the benefit of all religions but not for any particular religion. One might logically argue that in view of what is stated in Art. 27 educational institutions should have provided instruction in all religions rather than in one particular religion alone. But this is not permissible in state-managed, state-owned educational institutions. Art. 28(e2) deals with special types of educational institutions. It says that religious
instructions shall be imparted in those institutions which are founded under any establishment or trust which prescribes religious instruction as obligatory. We may note in passing the incompatibility between the two Articles when they are put to practice. For one thing, a teacher in order to be effective and useful must not only impart formal instruction, he must inspire his students, place before them an ideal which they would strive to reach in order to live a purposeful life. All this presupposes that the teacher must be pure in thought and action, must be spiritually rich and must have a magnetic power through which he can transmit his own experience faithfully and effectively to his students. Suppose that a teacher who has successfully taught the Bhagavat Gita in Benares Hindu University for a number of years, leaves the University and takes over as Professor of a subject at Presidency College, Calcutta, which is a state-owned institution. Now in obedience to Art. 28 of the Constitution, he will have to be religiously neutral in so far as his teachership at Presidency College is concerned. It does not require much logic to show that this is a sheer impossibility. A teacher, worth the name, cannot be an impersonal abstraction. He is a person with a definite outlook on life, with a philosophy of his own. And whenever he teaches he transmits his own ideas into the mind of his pupils, either knowingly or unknowingly. There is yet another type of institutions which are called state-owned denominational schools and colleges. Art. 25 speaks of right to freedom of religion. All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion. This is, however, subject to public order, morality and health. Here is again a lacuna. It follows as a logical corollary from this Article that if a religious practice offends against collective morality, or basic human values, the State will certainly interfere and set things right. In point of fact, the State has interfered in many such cases for instance, in passing Temple Entry Authorization Act and in making untouchability punishable by law. A question is raised as to whether the State has exceeded its jurisdiction in inter-
ferring with the so-called freedom of conscience of a religious group. There are still deeper questions involved here: (a) does the essence of religion consist in certain specific rites and rituals? (b) when the State’s action of interference stems from its anxiety to preserve human values rather than promote a particular religious rite of a group does the State act from a spiritual urge? I answered the first question in great detail elsewhere. I shall not therefore repeat the points here. As to the second question I should like to urge that the State cannot divest itself of the responsibility of educating its citizens. Now education, as Swami Vivekananda pointed out, must be life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. And to achieve this end religious education is obligatory. When Vivekananda said that religion is the innermost core of education, he hastened to add: “Mind I do not mean my own or anybody else’s opinion about religion: the true eternal principles have to be held before the people.”

The crisis of character that we are facing today throughout the world, particularly in India is the outcome of the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. It is necessary to bear in mind that human personality is integral in nature—no dichotomy is possible between myself as engaged in secular pursuits and myself as engaged in spiritual pursuits. The entire life of man is sustained by spiritual energy or is nothing. So also with the world in which we live, move and have our being. There are not two separate worlds—one material and the other spiritual. There is one world and that is spiritual through and through. The purpose of education is not to throw away the material as something which is non-spiritual, rather the purpose is to deify nature, to raise the material world to Divinity. Religion is realization of my oneness with the Supreme, the Satchidananda. This realization gives us strength and fearlessness. These are most essential requirements. As Nivedita said: “It is strength we want, not calm. Calm is only a result. It can be cultivated by practice. But if we have strength as the root then calm, peace and steadfastness cannot fail to be its flower.”68 I said a moment
ago that a false dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual is at the root of our crisis today. He who knows himself to be at one with the whole universe including human beings, animals and the vegetable kingdom cannot hurt anybody, for by hurting others he would hurt himself, nor can he hate anybody, for by hating others he would hate himself, which would contradict the common experience that everybody loves himself. One is reminded how Nivedita removed the dichotomy between the sacred and the secular. As she put it: “There is one form of realization which can be developed in the Thakur Ghar and quite another in the rough-and-tumble of the world. Both, let us remember, are realization. Both are paths hewn through the mind to the knowledge of Brahman. To the Indian alone has been given the boldness that could abolish mental barriers between the sacred and the secular.”

When I say that it is the State’s responsibility to provide adequate opportunities for man-making, character-making and life-building education, I do not minimise the importance of the role that the community, the home and the school have to play. In fact, what is badly needed is a joint effort by all concerned—the State, the community, the home and the educational institution towards fulfilment of the objectives of education.

Granted that religious education is absolutely necessary, the question remains: What would be the method and content of such education? The recommendations of the Radhakrishnan Commission and the Sri Prakasa Committee on Moral and Religious Instruction are that school work should start with silent prayer and that Colleges should provide suitable curricula so that students may have acquaintance with the teachings of saints and seers like Sri Chaitanya, Buddha, Jesus, Nanak, Muhammad, Sri Ramakrishna and others. It has been argued that a school or college cannot afford to be neutral so far as religious teaching is concerned. When you omit a subject, e.g. Religion from the course of study you wrongly suppose that you say nothing about it. What you really recommend is that it deserves to be omitted. You make a value judgment.
The most unfortunate part is that you do not teach this openly and explicitly lest your prescription might evoke criticism. Your action is covert and not overt.

Education Commissions are going on making their recommendations. My question is: have their recommendations made any impact on the teachers and students of today? Perhaps not. Students are going on destroying their temples of learning and all that is connected therewith perhaps because they have not found, so far, anything indestructible on their way. Nor have the teachers succeeded in giving their pupils a proper perspective, a true scale of values. All this has happened because education has so far been much too formal and intellectual. It has been a matter of the head and has not touched the heart, the total personality of the student.
The term "socialism" does not admit of any summary definition. It represents a variety of thoughts and movements. Socialism aims at a social reconstruction by removing all inequalities and exploitation. If we look closely at the society we live in we find strange inequalities—inequality of opportunity, inequality of social status, inequality of wealth, of culture. The overwhelming majority of the people in India are steeped in poverty, squalor, disease and ignorance and a select few live in comfort, luxury, power and position. Thinking people in all ages have tried to solve this problem, the problem relating to the contrast of wealth and poverty, of despotism and degradation. They have recommended curtailment of wants, exaltation of poverty; they have appealed to the people to practise charity, to be kind and sympathetic to the down-trodden, the lowly, the exploited. The socialist does not, however, take the facts of inequality and exploitation as granted and then proceed to iron out differences. Rather, he endeavours to create conditions in which inequalities cannot grow. He points out that the people are poor because the means of production, *viz.*, tools, materials, land etc. are not in his control. They are not able to keep all they produce for themselves. They are forced to sell their labours to others. The socialists think that if the means of production were in the hands of each individual, poverty could have been eliminated.

Marxian socialism is, according to the Marxists, scientific socialism and other types of socialism are utopian. Marxian socialism rests on certain presuppositions. In the first place, it accepts dialectical or historical materialism. Secondly, it accepts class-struggle and dictatorship of the proletariat. Thirdly, it believes that socialism will be achieved, not through reformation or education, but through armed revolution and that revolution is to be led by the pro-
letariat. Fourthly, the centralisation and concentration of production in the capitalistic society will prepare the way for social revolution. The concluding portion of the Manifesto of the Communist Party written by Marx and Engels in 1848 is well worth quoting: “The Communists...... openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”

Vivekananda, in one of his letters written in 1896, declared himself a socialist. “I am a socialist” said he, “not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.” He conceived of an ideal socialistic society in which “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.” Vivekananda was not, however, sure as to the machinery through which this ideal society could be achieved. Analysing the condition of the people of India during the last phase of the nineteenth century, Vivekananda said that as a result of the economic system of the day, the poor were becoming poorer and the rich richer. The nature and extent of exploitation in society that Vivekananda noticed have been expressed thus: “New ideas sprang up and new societies began to be cultivated. One class of men went on manufacturing articles of utility and comfort, either by manual or intellectual labour. A second class took upon themselves the charge of protecting them, and all proceeded to exchange these things. And it so happened that a band of fellows who were very clever undertook to take these things from one place to another and, on the plea of remuneration for this, appropriated the major portion of their profit as their due. One tilled the ground, a second guarded the produce from being robbed, a third took it to another place and a fourth bought it. The cultivator got almost nothing; he who guarded the produce took away as much of it as he could by force; the merchant who brought it to the market took the lion’s share;
and the buyer had to pay out of all proportion for the things and smarted under the burden! The protector came to be known as the king, he who took the commodities from one place to another was the merchant. These two did not produce anything but still snatched away the best part of things and made themselves fat by virtually reaping most of the fruits of the cultivator's toil and labour. The poor fellow who produced all these things had often to go without his meals...."\(^{71}\)

A discerning reader, will not fail to notice the striking similarity between the ideas of Vivekananda as set forth in the above passage and the analysis of the capitalistic system as set forth by the Marxian socialists. The Marxian socialists point out that in a capitalistic society the capitalistic class employs a large number of members of the working class, it pays the labourers their wages, the value of their labour-power. With the help of these wages the labourers renew their labour-power only to be consumed perpetually by the capitalist. The total value of a commodity produced, say in a factory, consists of the value of the materials used, that is to say, fuel, machinery, oil etc. \(\text{plus}\) the new value which the workers have added by their labour. Now the capitalist does not pay for that quantity of labour which is necessary for the maintenance of labour-power of the worker. Thus the working class creates the income of the upper class—the surplus value. The surplus value is appropriated in various ways by the capitalist, the landlord and the capitalist State.

What, exactly, is the nature of socialism that Vivekananda recommended to his countrymen? It is difficult to give a precise answer. 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. Said he: "The individual's life is in the life of the whole, the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole; apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable—this is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is built."\(^{72}\)
By and large, the socialists strive to achieve what is called eradication of economic exploitation by establishing social ownership of the means of production. The source of accumulation of wealth in private hands is the exploitation of labour. The Marxian socialists are militant; they strive to achieve the goal by forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Vivekananda looks at the problem from an entirely different angle. For him, concentration of power, wisdom, wealth as such is not necessarily 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: "Wisdom, knowledge, strength, wealth, prowess and whatever else nature gathers and provides us with are all only for diffusion, when the moment of need is at hand." We suffer because we ignore this noble truth. There is yet another sublime truth which we cannot afford to ignore. "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."

This awakening of society is not, according to Vivekananda, a spontaneous and inevitable happening. It has to be brought by the ceaseless activity of mankind. And for this what is needed is proper education. The socialistic ideas of Vivekananda have their roots in the Advaita view of reality. In the celebrated dictum "That art Thou" we have the essence of Advaita philosophy. Says the Swami: "Thou art one with this Universal Being, and as such, every soul that exists is your soul and everybody that exists, is your body, and in hurting anyone, you hurt yourself, in loving anyone you love yourself. As soon as the current of hatred is thrown outside, whomsoever it hurts, it also hurts
yourself, and if love comes out from you it is bound to come back to you, for I am the universe, this universe is my body. I am the Infinite, only I am not conscious of it now, but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes."  

It is here that the foundation of socialism is to be sought. Since the individual soul is basically identical with the Universal soul or 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 inequalities of various types. The work of the Advaita is therefore, to break down all privileges. Since every man is potentially divine it follows that the same Power, the same Consciousness lies in every one of us. It may be that this power is manifested in different degrees in different persons. We are all possessors of infinite knowledge. I have not perhaps got yet the opportunity to manifest it in a manner done by some one else. Hence the claim to privilege is not justified. According to the Advaita it is wrong to say that one man is born superior to another or that one nation is superior to another. As Vivekananda puts it: "The idea of privilege is the bane of human life. Two forces, as it were, are constantly at work, one making caste and the other breaking caste; in other words, the one making for privilege, the other breaking down privilege. And whenever privilege is broken down, more and more light and progress come to a race. This struggle we see all around us. Of course, there is first the brutal idea of privilege, that of the strong over the weak. There is the privilege of wealth. If a man has more money than another he wants a little privilege over those who have less. There is the still subtler and more powerful privilege of intellect; because one man knows more than others, he claims more privilege. And the last of all and the worst, because the most tyrannical, is the privilege of spirituality. If some persons think they know more of spirituality, of God, they claim a superior privilege over everyone else."
Vivekananda saw, with unerring insight, that the priest, the warrior and the trader, all derived their fortune and position by exploiting the physical labour of the Sudra, the down-trodden. He also realized that it is ‘they who have introduced civilization among us.’ It is, therefore, wrong to call the Sudras base-born. The Swami prophesied what the future of society was going to be like. He said: “Human society is in turn governed by the four castes, the priests, the soldiers, the traders and the labourers. . . . The first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last,—they must have it—none can resist it.”

What is of special importance in this context is that the Sudras will rise retaining their sudrahood. The spread of education among the Sudras will not make them give up their vocation. The cultivator, the fisherman, the claypotter will become more efficient after receiving proper education. The people of the upper class will have to express genuine sympathy for the so-called lowly and down-trodden and at the same time feel themselves as belonging to the same body as that of the Sudras. Through give-and-take the barrier between the two classes will gradually disappear. The Swami said: “The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e., by spreading education among the masses.” Love, and love alone is the cementing force between the elite and the masses. According to the Swami “the power of love is infinitely of greater potency than the power of hatred.” What will be the primary task of the educators? Vivekananda saw through clear insight that what was needed was first of all an upheaval in religion. “Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.” This is because in India religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life. . . . And if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics or society or any other things as your centre, as
the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct.”

There is yet another characteristic feature of Vivekananda’s socialism. The solution of our national problems does not lie in bringing down the higher but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher. “The ideal at one end is the Brahmin and the ideal at the other end is the Chandala, and the whole work is to raise the Chandala up to the Brahmin. Slowly and slowly you find more and more privileges granted to them.”

Liberty is the condition of all growth according to Vivekananda. The bed-rock of his socialism is therefore freedom and not historical determinism. Although Vivekananda’s goal was achievement of a kind of classless society he did not encourage class struggle. “You must take care” said he, “not to set up class-strife between the poor peasants, the labouring people and wealthy classes.” His philosophy was a philosophy of love.
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