CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I

As we have explained in the preceding chapters, Swami Vivekananda devoted the most vital years of his life to developing and raising man everywhere, as much in the West (America and England) as in India. He used religion to the purpose of development of man, but his was a religion that had a universal ring about it. He meant by religion not any conventional faith or creed but divinity that is the entitlement of every human being born anywhere in the world, that he carries within self from the moment of birth and that he can bring out from within and apply to every movement of life. The entitlement to which Swamiji drew man’s attention was his own nature as a human being. Man is divine in the real or essential nature of his being, proclaimed Swami Vivekananda, and as such, he is free, pure and infinitely powerful. How is it that man as a physical being, with a body and mind conditioned and determined by the external world, is a divine being? Swamiji’s answer is that over and above the body and mind of man, there remains an indwelling spirit, the Atman as it is called in the Advaita Vedanta, which is the same as the Brahman – the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent Soul of all souls. Being the same as Brahman, the Atman of man is holy, pure, free and all-powerful and as such it is “able to direct in a greater or lesser degree, according to state of their development, the movements of our minds and bodies.” Thus it is that man is divine in the essential spiritual nature of his being and that “religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.”
How does religion help man to develop himself into manifesting his divinity? The answer is that it does so by the awakening of the spirit within man. Why has the spirit within to be awakened? Because, being led by his body and mind, man strays into maya and becomes oblivious of the spirit and divinity within. Religion brings man back to his real nature by telling him that his spirit is the real thing and that the seeming reality to which maya leads him is not the Ultimate reality. It tells him that “The soul that reigns within is independent and creates the desire for freedom. If we are not free, how can we hope to make this world [or, for that matter, ourselves] better”? Thus conceived, “human progress is the result of the action of the human spirit. What the world is, and what we ourselves are, are the fruits of the freedom of the spirit.”

Since the Advaita Vedanta provides the metaphysical basis of Swamiji’s views of man and his essential nature as divine, we should make a brief reference to it. The Advaita Vedanta was formulated by the Rishis of India in the ancient times in the caves and forests of India and it remained confined to those places as a philosophy reflecting on the nature of Reality. There is only one Reality – One without a second – this is what the Advaita Vedanta taught as a philosophy. Swamiji turned this philosophy into a religion, using the same for the purpose of human development. He said that man must develop himself to the fullest by realizing the one Reality, that is, by experiencing the identity of his self with the Supreme Self. Religion must help man realize this goal. That is the whole purpose of religion. Having attributed or rather assigned to religion such a developmental role, Swamiji said time and again that religion is realization, that it is being and becoming. To quote him, “Religion is neither talk, nor theory, nor intellectual consent. It is realization in the heart of our hearts; it is touching God; it is feeling, realizing that I am a spirit in relation with the Universal Spirit and all its great manifestations.” According to Swamiji, “actual religion” or religion in the sense of realization brings the human soul in direct sense-contact with the Divine and the result of such contact is always a broadening of the human...
mind enabling it to see oneness everywhere. Of course, man cannot achieve his highest goal of development – his highest manhood and his sense of oneness with the rest of humanity - in one go. He has to engage in constant struggles to regain his real nature – his inherent divinity - clouded as it is often by maya, and only as result of becoming through constant struggles, he finally achieves his real being. Having fixed such an ideal or goal of development, Swamiji was practical enough to observe that “the ideal may be far beyond us. But never mind, keep to the ideal. Let us confess that it is our ideal, but we cannot approach it yet.”

Such a view of man, that is, the view that man achieves his highest development by achieving his real being as a result of his becoming or continuous unfolding through constant struggles as well as the world-view that One alone prevails everywhere flowed from the Advaita philosophy of Vedanta and these two, taken together, constitute what we have termed in this dissertation as Swami Vivekananda’s Vedantic approach to human development. Swamiji explained the Advaita philosophy of Oneness as also the rationale for the Vedantic approach when he said:

We have always heard it preached, “love One another”. What for? The doctrine was preached [by Christianity], but the explanation is here. Why should I love every one? Because they and I are one. …There is this oneness; this solidarity of the whole universe. From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings that ever lived – all have various bodies, but are the one soul.

Through his Vedantic approach, Swami Vivekananda sought to establish three things. First, unlike Rammohun Roy or indeed, the Brahmo Samaj or the Arya Samaj that championed monotheism as the basis of universal humanism, he said that Advaitic monism – various bodies but one
soul – could be the basis of the solidarity of the universe, of human unity, and of human development all over the world. Second, Swamji asserted that man is in his original nature divine and that his true development lies in his knowing or being educated as to his original nature and in returning to his original nature. Third, Swamiji insisted that man must realize his original nature—his divinity—by actualizing it in every movement in every sphere of life—sacred as well as secular, spiritual as well as material. It is not that a sadhu will realize divinity and others will not. All are equally entitled and all are equally obliged to do it.

It is in connection with the third assertion as mentioned above that Vivekananda turned his Vedantic approach into the Manliness approach by saying that manliness consisted in turning the doctrine of Atman—the doctrine that the infinite power of Brahman lies already lodged in the soul of man—into the doctrine that man must struggle always to realize the infinite power of Brahman, his potential divinity, so to say, in the actual situations of life. With faith in self, with faith, that is to say, that he is He with the same boundless strength and energy, he will engage himself in all actions of life heroically. In performing the actions of life as manfully or as heroically and as completely as possible and in living for others through service rendered to them in the spirit of worship to the God, he will not only bring about a development of his individual self but also of the society and the nation he belongs to, indeed, of the humanity as a whole.

Development, thus, is in the ultimate analysis, the realization by man of his potentiality. By actualizing his potential divinity—his real and original nature—in fruitful and heroic actions, man develops himself as also the rest of the humanity, beginning with his own society, his own nation and ending with the elevation or development of the rest of humanity. And in developing himself in this way man ultimately achieves his oneness with the Absolute or the Universal Being whom Vivekananda significantly characterized as “the sum total of all souls”. The more man moves into the universal or elevates his
self into the Self, the greater is his development. Expanding on such thesis of
development of man, as put forward by Vivekananda, we can say that in the
perspective of Vivekananda, all development is the realization of the
potential, of the amoeba into the Buddha, as Vivekananda would say, and
that man’s way of realizing his divine potential is through a combination of
the Vedantic and the Manliness approaches. From the metaphysical to the
empirical, from the spiritual to the practical, from the classical to the
contemporary – that is the transition Swamiji effected or the bridge he built in
terms of the approaches he used to human development.

II

As a Vedantist knowing no geographical boundary, race, religion, language etc., and focusing solely on the spirit of man, Swamiji
directed his efforts towards such all-round development of man as included
his spiritual and material development with the rightful application of the
spirit. Among other Indian thinkers, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo and
Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan bear in many respects resemblances to Swamiji’s
thinking. All three believed, like Vivekananda, in the awakening of the spirit
in man and in the spiritual and moral renewal of the humanity, consequent to
such awakening.

Tagore resembled Vivekananda when he wrote: “Truth is to realize
one’s unity with the entire universe, to merge the individual soul into the
universal soul. Sin is not mere action, but it is an attitude to life which takes
for granted that our goal is finite, that our self is the ultimate truth and that we
are not essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual
existence”. Vivekananda, of course, disliked the word ‘sin’, as for him, man
does not commit a sin, but only moves from lower truth to higher truth. Both
however believed, as did Sri Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan, in the evolutive
manifestation of the Spirit and in the ultimate integration of the spirit of man
into the spirit of the Universal Being.
Mahatma Gandhi had an element of similarity in thought with Vivekananda’s. He wrote: “I believe in Advaita (non-dualism). I believe in the essential unity of man and for that matter of all that lives.”

Vivekananda stood for Atman and Gandhi for Satya. Both however were the same in essence. As Joan V. Bondurant points out, “Satya is derived from the Sanskrit word sat, ‘being’, and its meaning is both truth and essence.”

“In Gandhi’s philosophy”, to quote another scholar, “it [Satya] is the same as the all-pervading Atman of the Upanishadic-Gita tradition.” Gandhi’s individual is not an agitator in the ordinary sense of the term. He comes into politics with the sole purpose of realizing the truth himself and making his adversary realize the same. As such, he is a satyagrahi, a pursuer of truth. Through the steadfast pursuit of truth, Gandhi’s individual raises himself to such a high plane of consciousness that he eventually becomes one with the same all-pervading Atman that Vivekananda talks about. Politics for Gandhi, as religion for Vivekananda, is, to use the words of Michael Oakeshott, “a calling which beckons man to unfold his eternal and infinite self on the temporal and finite plane of thought and action.”

Vivekananda was not a political personality, far less a political agitator, but to the extent he said that ‘God and truth are the only politics in the world’ and Gandhi said that politics cannot be dissociated from truth and god, we find both agreeing on this point that the purpose of all enterprises in life – be that religion or politics – is Self-realization in the sense of the elevation or development of self into the Self.

III

If Vivekananda was seriously exercised over the problem of development of man in India, he was equally concerned about the problem of development of India as a nation. He repeatedly asked Indians to ponder over the question as to why India was repeatedly ravaged and ruled by foreigners over a thousand years and as to how in more contemporary times a handful of Britishers ruled over three hundred million Indians and observed that the
answer lay in the self-belief of the Britishers and in the lack of the same in the Indians. The message that Swamiji wanted to give through his observation was loud and clear. If the Indians ever had to deliver themselves from the bondage of the foreigners, if they ever had to become master and stop being slaves, they had to make men of themselves by cultivating faith in themselves, by believing, so to say, in the infinitely powerful Atman that they all had in themselves. Being fortified with faith, and strength that issued from such faith, the Indians could achieve their goal as individuals and as a nation. Swamiji ceaselessly inspired and exhorted Indians to arise, awake and struggle on till they achieved their self-mastery as individuals and as a nation. To the same end, he urged his countrymen not to weaken themselves by dissipating their energy in quarrelling over trivial questions of caste, race, sects and religions etc., but to stay united and strong and reach their desired goal thereby.

Why did Swamiji give Advaitism to the world? Why did he preach that Advaitism was the last word of religion and thought and that it was the religion of the future enlightened humanity? And after preaching the theory of Advaitism, why did he take pains to propagate practical teaching to man to look upon and behave to mankind as one’s own and to apply the infinite powers of the Atman that lay deposited in him to all the movements and actions of life? Swamiji’s grand objective, no doubt, was to bring about human unity all over the world and to energize mankind with the theoretical and practical aspects of Advaitism. As far as his own motherland was concerned, he saw the need of uniting and energizing the Indians, irrespective of the religious creed they belonged to, on the basis of the Vedantic approach that he shaped out of the theoretical and practical aspects of Advaitism. He pointed out to Hindus and Muslims alike that the beauty of Advaitism lay in this that it never asked them, or, for that matter any man or woman professing any religious faith, to forsake that faith; it only drew their attention to the essential divinity of their nature as human beings – divinity that was inherent in them, and asked them to realize that divinity or, to say the same thing, to translate in every movement of life their potentiality into actuality. To say that
‘human beings are all one in spirit’ and to ask them to actualize this theory in all activities of life as also in their treatment of or behaviour towards one another is the sole objective of Advaitism.

In preaching oneness of all and in asking all to realize it in practice, Advaitism stands for the equality of all beings. Swamiji was candid enough to acknowledge that the concept of equality as an offshoot of Advaitism was “never developed among the Hindus”,¹ ⁶ (in spite of the fact that the Hindus through their ancient Rishis were the first to develop the theory of Advaitism) and that Islam was more advanced than Hinduism in respect of adherence to the norm of equality. Making an eloquent plea for a junction of Hinduism and Islam towards the rise of a future perfect India, Swamiji observed:

My experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone.

Therefore, I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.

I see in my mind’s eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.¹⁷

Faith, strength and unity—Vivekananda gave his fellow Indians ideas on these—in the pursuit of his Vedantic approach. And before he articulated these
to Indians in his electrifying words, he created a sense of pride among Indians with his great performance at the Parliament of religions at Chicago in September 1893. Recognized all over America as the most outstanding speaker of the Parliament, his success not only created a great sense of enthusiasm among his countrymen but also a sense of pride among his countrymen to this effect that ‘we too can do it’. Such a sense could not but excite nationalism among Indians, creating a desire as well among them for political independence from the British. Vivekananda did not use any explicit words inciting the Indians to revolt against the British. But with his Vedantic approach creating faith, strength, unity and pride of Vedantic heritage among Indians and his Manliness approach exhorting Indians to make men of themselves and fight always till the desired end was reached, he definitely provided a spiritual foundation to India’s nationalism.

Given below are some examples of the words Vivekananda used to arouse fellow Indians to manhood which will prove by themselves his contribution to arousing India as a nation:

What we want is strength, so believe in yourselves. We have become weak. …Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your own feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.

What will the ‘muscles of iron, nerves of steel,’ man-making religion and man-making education do to us? Swamiji answers that they will turn the slaves in us into great masters. To quote his words:
And slaves must become great masters! So give up becoming a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote—this, our great Mother India.²¹

If this meant that the Mother India had to be free from the chain of the foreign master, this also meant that the Mother India had to be worshipped through selfless service rendered to her. And she was served best when the poor and miserable among her children were served in the spirit of worship to the Goddess that was Mother India. As Swamiji said, “Bold are my words; and let me repeat that it is the greatest privilege in our life that we are allowed to serve the Lord[Mother India] in all these shapes”.²² “My mission in life”, said Swamiji on another occasion, “is to rouse a struggle in you”²³ and in connection with such an affirmation to Indians, just on how many occasions Swamiji exhorted Indians to “arise, awake and stop not till the desired end is reached”²³a is something that one loses count of. It is clear from the citations given above that Swamiji’s idea of preaching nationalism was to preach it through spiritual ideas. As he himself acknowledged:

In India … politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants—its spirituality. … So every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas.²³b

Vivekananda went to the root of the matter. His stress was on man-making with spiritual ideas or on promoting human development with the help of Vedantic and Manliness approaches. He believed that with spiritual foundation firmly laid, with man and his character formed and with spiritually
sensitive human beings around, nation-building could not remain a distant goal in India. However, as man in India had to reform his persona and character through his own manly efforts with the aid of spiritual ideas, so the nation in India had to regenerate herself in a similar way. She had to rise through her own efforts. This was perfectly in line with Swamiji’s Vedantic and Manliness approaches.

The Vedantic and Manliness approaches that Swamiji preached meant two complementary things: (a) the elimination of the man’s lower self; and (b) man’s increasing self-reliance, his standing on his own feet and struggling always towards raising or developing himself and eventually fulfilling himself in Self-realization. By bringing about changes in Indians’ attitude to life through these two complementary aspects of his Vedantic and Manliness approaches, Swamiji hoped that Indians could make “men” of themselves and do much towards “raising India on her feet again.”

In a passage revealing of Swamiji’s approach towards the raising of India and the Indians, Swamiji observes:

The one thing that is at the root of all evils in India is the condition of the poor. …The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality. …Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings. They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation. (Emphases added).

In continuation, Swamiji put forward the same formula for the rest of humanity:
Every nation, every man, and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature. Our duty is to put ideas into their heads, they will do the rest. 

IV

Swamiji’s emphasis was on arousing the sleeping Brahman within men themselves and not on the state or governmental agencies. Indeed, his preference was for the minimal state and that comes out most clearly in the following statement:

The more of the law in a country, the worse for the country. ... The more of law you make, the more of police and socialism, the more of blackguards there are.

And yet, if he proclaimed himself to be a socialist in one of his letters, it was because he was on the side of the poor in the unequal fight of the rich and the poor. He hoped that socialism might improve the lot of the poor and the downtrodden by abolishing the privileges of the rich and by bringing in, consequently, more equality and less exploitation of the poor. “I am a socialist,” as he made it clear “not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.”

As a matter of fact, to the extent Vivekananda focused on the worth of the individual and said time and again that “liberty is the first condition of growth” and that each individual must grow according to his own nature, he is an individualist and a democrat at that and to the extent he showed his concern for people, especially the poor and the downtrodden, and yearned for
equality for them vis-à-vis the rich, he was a socialist. He did not however go whole hog either with democracy or with socialism.

Swamiji did not have great liking for the Western model of democracy. He believed that the so-called democratic institutions of the West did not really allow people any meaningful say in the running of the government. They were in their real functioning “dominated by a handful of Shylocks[who by virtue of their monopolistic control over wealth and power manipulated the lives of millions of human beings]. All these things that you hear about—constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and Parliament—are but jokes.”

So far as Marxian socialism is concerned, Swamiji differed with it on the following points. First, he used the term ‘Shudra’ for the exploited and held that the exploitation of Shudras must be brought to an end. But the ‘Shudra’ meant for him not just the industrial proletariat but all those who produced wealth by the sweat of their brows. As a matter of fact, his heart bled for all the marginalized people of the society, whom he generically referred to as the poor, the downtrodden and the miserable.

Secondly, he did not agree with Marx as to the means of liberating the toiling masses. For Marx, the means was class struggle; for Vivekananda, the means was spiritual ideas given to the exploited masses and their tormentors. He believed that with such ideas given to them, they would work out their own salvation themselves.

Thirdly, Vivekananda and Marx differed as to the driving force behind historical developments. For Marx, it was mainly the economic factor. For Vivekananda, it was the spiritual factor—man’s ability to move from self to selflessness and to sacrifice his little self in the larger interests of society, nation and humanity. That is why while Marx said that the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle as determined by economic relations of production, Vivekananda said that the history of the world is the history of a few earnest men making utmost sacrifices for the sake of humanity.
Fourthly, Vivekananda had nothing to do with dictatorship of the Proletariat. He considered liberty to be the first condition for the development of man and stood for a combination of the ideas of individual freedom and social equality in a democratic government. For him, the supreme test of a government is its ability to further “the inherent energy and strength” of its people and the capacity of the people “to exert itself for the common good”\(^3\). As a champion of genuine self-government of the people, Vivekananda rejects not only dictatorship but also benign or paternal government. To quote Swamiji:

Even if the kings be of godlike nature as that of Yudhisthira, Ramchandra, Dharmashoka, or Akbar, under whose benign rule the people enjoyed safety and prosperity, and were looked after with proper care by their rulers, the hand of him who is always fed by another gradually loses the power of taking the food to his mouth. His power of self-preservation can never become fully manifest who is always protected in every respect by another. Even the youngest youth remains but a child if he is always looked after as a child by his parents. Being always governed by kings of godlike nature, to whom is left the whole duty of protecting and providing for the people, they can never get any occasion for understanding the principles of self-government. Such a nation, being entirely dependent on the king for everything and never caring to exert itself for the common good or for self-defence, becomes gradually destitute of inherent energy and strength. If this state of dependence and protection continues long, it becomes the cause of the destruction of the nation, and its ruin is not far to seek.\(^3\)

Fifthly, Vivekananda and Marx differed in their views on the state. For Marx, state is an instrument in the hands of a class over another class. He
contemplated a classless society in which the state would wither away. For Vivekananda, the state, utilized though it might be by a dominant class for its own benefit, was not an instrument for exploitation of one class by another. He considered the state to be an agency of the whole society. The society created this agency and gave it power not to concentrate such power in the hands of a handful of people, not to use it perversely in the interest of a section of people but to use it positively for the benefit of the people at large. Vivekananda’s worry was not over the state as such but over the concentration of power in the hands of a small and selfish ruling class. The greater the concentration of and perverse use of power, the greater the number of and use of state regulations in the form of law and police, the greater was the possibility of repression over people and the consequent need on the part of the people to restore the balance by means of a revolution. Vivekananda was exercised not over the class character of the state but over the capacity of the state to bring about the diffusion of power throughout the society as also its capacity to bring strength and well-being to the people. Self-government of the people as also the spiritualization of man and society was his goal. As for the state, he did not think that it could be dispensed with in the foreseeable future.\textsuperscript{34}

Could the state be ever made perfect or ideal? While Marx could not be more dismissive about such a question, Vivekananda came up with his theory of the cycle of human governance in answering this question. He explained it in the following terms: that human society was ruled in turn by four castes, namely, Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra, that the first three castes had already exercised their rule and now it was the turn of the Shudras or labourers to rule, that like the preceding systems, the Shudra system too has its merit and defect - merit in the distribution of physical comforts to all and defect in the lowering of the general culture of society. According to Vivekananda:
If it is possible to form a state 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 last [that is, the Shudra or the labourer] can all be kept intact, minus their evils, \(^{35}\) it will be an ideal state. \(^{36}\)

Having conceived an ideal state in terms of the ideal qualities of the four castes and of their judicious combination, Swamiji was practical enough to observe that the construction of such a state was very difficult, if not impossible, in reality.

Finally, Vivekananda and Marx could not differ more in their conceptions of religion. Marx denounced religion in no uncertain terms when he referred to it as the ‘opium’ of the people, that is to say, an instrument for deceiving the people. Swamiji, on the other hand, viewed religion in the most positive terms. \(^{37}\) “True religion”, as he said, “is positive and not negative, … it does not consist in merely refraining from evil, but in a positive performance of noble deeds. True religion comes not from the teaching of man or the reading of books; it is the awakening of the spirit within us, consequent upon pure and heroic action”. \(^{38}\) What follows from this observation is that Swamiji means by religion not any creedal religion exclusive of other religious creeds but the all-inclusive religion of divinity of all human beings that he derived from the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of One Reality prevailing everywhere. The basic point of this religion is that man is divine in the essential nature of his being, that with the same divinity residing in all human beings, human beings are all equal, that every human being had to look upon and behave to other human beings as one’s own soul, and that every human being had to serve all other human beings in such a spirit. Swamiji affirms that such a concept of religion, being conducive to the development of man in terms of liberty, that is, liberty to realize one’s inherent divinity by the means (Jnana or Karma or Bhakti or Dhyana or a combination of some or all of them) of one’s choice, equality, that is, equality of all human souls, and infinity, that
is, the infinite powers of every human being as Atman, waiting to be realized by him, could not but take man to a higher life or could not but help man rise higher and still higher in the scale of being and, as such, it is most positive.

Is Swamiji too idealistic in his conception of Religion and in his exhortation to each man to realize the One Reality within himself as the infinite Self, and without as the divine oneness of all life? Is not man more brutish than divine? The answer is that Swamiji was fully aware of the base elements in man. How he agonized time and again over some missionaries in America descending to the lowest level in running him down or some of his own countrymen (Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar of Brahmo Samaj, for example,) joining them in the assassination of his character! But Swamiji’s view was that it was better to light a matchstick to dispel darkness than to condemn darkness. As he said, “The ideal may be far away beyond us. But never mind, keep to the ideal. Let us confess that it is our ideal, but we cannot approach it yet”. As one who defined religion as something that lifted man up by focusing on his divinity, Swamiji directed all his efforts and aspirations towards the attainment of perfectibility of humanity. “The development of man”, as he said, “is a return to an original perfection. This perfection must come through the practice of holiness and love” as also through the cultivation of strength. To quote Swamiji:

Do not weaken! …Stand up and be strong! …That is the religion I know. …[There is only] the One without a second. Therefore be not afraid. Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached."

The above quote from Swamiji neatly brings out the Vedantic and Manliness approaches that Swamiji built up on the basis of his concept of religion as divinity of man.
The most compassionate element of Swamiji’s concept of religion is ‘service’ to the poor and the downtrodden. How passionately and earnestly he showed his affinity with the poor and oppressed people of all lands, particularly of his own country and how feelingly he appealed to all to serve the poor and the miserable seeing the Lord Himself in them! In striking contrast to Swamiji’s concern for the poor and the miserable, we see that Nietzsche thought that “these small folk” were not worth bothering about. According to him, “The misfortunes of all these small folk do not together constitute a sum-total, except in the feelings of mighty men”. To Nietzsche, only mighty men mattered and not the small folk. He would let them die off if they could not adjust to the social state because of their weakness or disability and he would rather advise the do-gooders not to bother their heads about “these small folk”. Schopenhauer thought that “want, toil, calamity and frustration” that affected the small folk were nothing extra-ordinary and that those were not something to be concerned about. Even a cursory comparison of Vivekananda with some of these nineteenth century thinkers of the West shows the height of his concern for humanity, particularly, the marginalized humanity. Indeed, only a man of Vivekananda’s passionate concern for humanity could say: “They alone live, who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive”.

V

A champion of the marginalized humanity and of heroic actions towards the development of humanity, Vivekananda used his Vedantic and Manliness approaches with different emphases in the West and India. As Christopher Isherwood observes, “Vivekananda had two messages to deliver; one to the East, the other to the West. In the United States and in England, he preached the universality of religious truth, attacked materialism, and advocated spiritual experiment, as against dogma and tradition. In India, on the other hand, we find that he preferred to stress the ideal of social service.
To each he tried to give what was most lacking”. Vivekananda noted that full of Rajas, the Western man’s whole orientation was towards striving and realizing the mundane goals of life. Rank materialism reigned supreme in the West and man in the West looked upon the acquisition of physical comforts and sensuous enjoyments as the be-all and end-all of life. Vivekananda taught them the Vedantic doctrine of the Atman to give them the message that life was not mere eating and drinking plus going to the religious place of worship on a certain day of the week and perhaps, doing a little good to society by way of condescension. Life was going beyond the little self of ‘lust and gold’, of enjoyments and possessions and reaching for the higher self, indeed, the Self of man.

How can man do that? Swamiji answered that man can do that by going beyond his ephemerality and finding “that divinity which is the real man behind every human being”. That was the principle. The practical way of realizing this principle of the spirit and divinity in man is to shed one’s selfish and narrow view of life and to attain the spirituality of oneness by continuous striving towards selflessness through living for others. As John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest men of America, who in the wake of an encounter with Swami Vivekananda in the mid-1890s took to “living for others” as well, said: “There is more to life than the accumulation of money. Money is only a trust in one’s hands. To use it improperly is a great sin. The best way to prepare for the end of life is to live for others. That is what I am trying to do”.

Swamiji gave the philosophical and scientific explanation of why man must move from the gross to the fine, from the material things into the immaterial in the following terms:

We must inquire into the beyond. This present, this expressed, is only one part of that unexpressed. The sense universe is, as it were only one portion, one bit of that infinite spiritual
universe projected into the plane of sense consciousness. How can this little bit of projection be explained, be understood without knowing that which is beyond? It is said of Socrates that one day while lecturing at Athens, he met a Brahmana who had traveled into Greece, and Socrates told the Brahmana that the greatest study for mankind is man. And the Brahmana sharply retorted, “How can you know man until you know God? This God, this eternally Unknowable, or Absolute, or Infinite, or without name—you may call him by what name you like—is the rationale, the only explanation, the raison d’etre of that which is known and knowable, this present life. Take anything before you, the most material thing—take any one of these most materialistic sciences, such as chemistry or physics, astronomy or biology—study it, push the study forward and forward, and the gross forms will begin to melt and become finer and finer, until they come to a point where you are bound to make a tremendous leap from these material things into the immaterial. The gross melts into the fine, physics into metaphysics, in every department of knowledge.48

Having thus provided the rationale of why the man in the West should go beyond gross materialism into the realm of spirituality and just why he should treat every man as just not his brother but as one with him, Swamiji suggested that as a very important beginning step of movement towards spirituality of oneness, the Western man must temper his materialism with reference to spirituality by sharing and caring and living for other human beings. Obviously, Swamiji was using the Vedantic approach predominantly in the West as a means of inducing the Western man towards a balanced or harmonious development of his material and spiritual self. He was inducing them to take to the Upanishadic dictum of ‘tena tyaktena bhunjitha’(‘enjoy yourself through renunciation’) and thereby lifting them to a higher life or, that he was awakening the spirit within them so that they themselves could,
with the help of the awakened spirit, rise higher and higher in the scale of being.

In India, Swamiji used the Manliness approach. The whole country was enveloped in intense Tamas. Priestcraft and foreign domination for a thousand years had emasculated the country so much that the ordinary people lost all faith in them and all sense of strength in them. Further, they were steeped in poverty, hunger and ignorance. So, the first necessity with regard to the sunken people of India was to lift them from the morass into which they had fallen. To this end, Swamiji’s stand was that if the West required more spiritual civilization, India needed more material. Religion and spirituality ran in the very blood of the Indians and they really needed no further instruction on that count. The only thing that they needed to be told with regard to religion was that mere passive knowledge that they were Brahman in their real nature could not help them unless every man and woman in India asserted their faith in themselves and grew “strong by going to work with energy and skill”. The traditional belief in religion with passivity and all that had to be turned, as Swamiji said, into man-making religion in order to rescue the man in India and to put him back on to the path of self-development.

A similar operation had to be performed on the educational front. Like man-making religion restoring Indians’ faith and strength in themselves, the traditional memory-based education, opined Swamiji, had to be turned into man-making education. Only such education could form the character of men, make them stand on their feet and teach them that the purpose of life is self-realization through struggles against the adverse circumstances life. Swamiji was so keen about bringing such education to the door of every man and woman in India that he warned that mere opening of schools in villages of India “would do no good”, for:

The poverty in India is such, that the poor boys would rather go to help their fathers in the fields, or otherwise try to make a living than come
to the school. Now if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him. There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing Sannyasins in our own country, going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organized as teachers of secular things also, they will go from place to place, from door to door, not only preaching, but teaching also. 51

With man-making religion and man-making education giving life-building, character-making ideas to the people of India, Swamiji believed that the effect would come of themselves: the people would be able to develop manliness and would be in a position to realize the potential that lay in them.

VI

In seeking to develop manliness among Indians, Swamiji did not bother his head about doles or aids from the state or government. His emphasis was on giving people ideas, and motivating them to do it themselves. He did not believe in giving a man a fish to eat for the day; on the contrary, he would teach the man the art of fishing enabling him thereby to provide for himself for the whole life. One may very well see in Swamiji’s view his stand that will-building at the level of the individual is a crucial factor in human development, that will-building leads to capacity-building, that capacity-building results in the realization of the potential and that only in terms of such realization, the true development of man takes place. 52

The second noteworthy point that emerges from Vivekananda’s view is that ‘some sort of materialism toned down to the requirements of the situation in India’ is necessary for the development of man in India. Vivekananda did not have the rigidity of an uncompromising ideologue to say
that spirituality was exclusive of materiality. What mattered to him was the human circumstances. If the human circumstances demanded it, he would have a judicious mix of spirituality and materiality. To quote his critique of those who thought otherwise:

I have considered the matter most carefully and come to the conclusion that of those who profess and talk of religion nowadays in this country, the majority are full of morbidity – crack-brained or fanatic. Without development of an abundance of Rajas, you have hopes neither in this world, nor in the next. 53

Elsewhere, Swamiji observes even more explicitly of the need for materialism of sorts for the development of India and Indians:

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 spiritualization 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. Even the Mohammedans taught them to wear tailor-made clothes. …the Hindus had learnt from the Mohammedans how to eat in a cleanly way without mixing their food with the dust of the streets! Material civilization, 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 raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunity for everybody! 54
The message that Swamiji conveys through the passage quoted above is that the need of the people of India for development underlines the necessity for "practicality" on their part. Indeed, it is through the concept of practicality that Swamiji combines the two apparently exclusive concepts of materiality and spirituality. Marie Louise Burke offers the best comment on Swamiji’s stand on materialism and spirituality:

Can these two types of advancement—spiritual and material—go hand in hand? Swami Vivekananda answered this question with a resounding yes!—not only can, but must. Indeed, his affirmation of man’s innate capacity to achieve richly and harmoniously on every level of human life lay at the very heart of the mission for which he had come.

Swami Vivekananda combined the classical and the contemporary—the Vedantic and Manliness approaches—to enable man to achieve the total development of his being in terms of its material and spiritual dimensions through a judicious use of his head, heart and hand—symbolizing thinking, feeling and doing, respectively. By inspiring man to realize his divine potential through manly efforts in the actual battles of life, swami Vivekananda showed that all development including the human development is the realization of the potential. Indeed, in the inspired transformation of the human into the Divine through the classical Vedanta and the contemporary Manliness approaches and in the building of the broad generalization thereby that all development entails in the last instance the realization of the potential lies the continuing relevance and time-conquering significance of Swami Vivekananda’s approaches to human development.
It would be interesting by way of concluding observations to make a reference to some of the major theories that have come up in the field of development studies since the Second World War and to see where Swami Vivekananda could have stood vis-à-vis those theories.

As for the economic growth theory (prominent in the late 1940s and 1950s), Swamiji could not have been against capital accumulation through savings and investment, but, for him, far more than Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the character of a human being or, to speak of the same thing at the macro level, the national character in terms of faith, strength and manliness in the sense of dynamism and vigorousness of men and women was a far better indicator of development. In any case, growth without redistribution of goods and services to those who needed those most could not mean much to him.

As for the modernization theory (prominent in the late 1950s and 1960s) and its stand that development is modernization, Swamiji was not against modernizing, but he could not have meant by it the blind following or the imitation of Western norms and institutions. As for the other idea of the modernization theory that rich countries should ‘diffuse’ their resources to bring the poor countries up, he was all for it, but his own life experiences taught him that primarily the regeneration and development of a country had to be effected by the people of a country themselves.

As for the dependency theory (prominent in the 1970s) and its stand that development is progressive elimination of dependence of the peripheral countries of the Third World on the core or advanced industrial countries of the West, Swamiji was all for the curtailment or elimination of dependence.
and standing instead on one’s own feet, but his stress, nevertheless, would be on the East-West cooperation at the people-to-people level.

As for the *neo-liberal* theory (prominent in the 1980s) and its stand that de-regulated world economy was the key to the development of the Third World countries, Swamiji would not have recognized market as the principal actor of development; he would instead promote Man as the principal actor, awakening his spirit and manliness and thus setting him to acting as the principal catalyst.

As for the *alternative* theory or perspective on development (prominent in the 1980s) focusing on social factors of development, to the extent it meant development from below and people’s participation at the “grassroots”, Swamiji, with his philosophy of strengthening and empowering the lowest and the marginalized, would have approved of it as he would have also approved of self-help groups working for the development of the poor and the marginalized .As a matter of fact, he would stand neither for the prince(state) nor for the merchant(market) but for society, self-help groups and the Citizen that goes by the name of the ‘Third system’in our times.\(^{57}\)

The theory that development meant the development of the humans came to the fore in a big way in the 1990s. The main proponents of human development theory in our times are UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the scholars such as Paul Streeten,\(^ {58}\) Mahbub-ul-Haq\(^ {59}\) and Amartya Sen.\(^ {60}\) Their basic stand is that development means, first and foremost, satisfying the basic needs of the human beings. A hundred years earlier to the stand taken by these scholars, Swami Vivekananda stood for the elimination of poverty in terms of providing every one with the basic essentials of food, housing, health, education and employment. Being a unifier and being holistic in orientation, Swamiji’s approach however could not be materialistic development alone. Development, for him, could not mean only ‘to have’; it meant for him and much more at that, ‘to be’ as well in terms of the fullest realization of the divine potential inherent in man.
Swamiji’s is a unified approach to human development. It is at once materialistic and spiritualistic as also individualistic and socialistic. Basically, he stood for the empowerment of every individual within a society, which signified for Swamiji, self-empowerment of every individual in terms of faith, strength and manliness or dynamic vigorousness and social justice in terms of providing for the marginalized and the excluded first before providing for others. It is just not the unity of his approach but equally the universality of his concept of human development in terms of the realization of the potential that is embedded in human beings – all human beings, irrespective of race, religion, language, culture, geography or political boundary – that commends itself to us.

Indeed, by any reckoning, Swami Vivekananda stands very high among all who ever contributed to ‘human centered’ thinking on development.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. Ibid., P. 358.

3. Ibid., P. 190.

4. Ibid., PP. 125-126.

5. Ibid., P. 126.

6. Ibid., P. 145. Swamiji’s point was that man must rise higher and higher in the scale of being, eventually reaching the highest point of the scale. See ibid., P. 191.


9. A positive thinker, Swamiji rejected the Christian doctrine of “original sin” and proclaimed that it was a sin to call man a sinner.


12. Anil Baran Ray, Society, Religion and Politics in India (Howrah: Manuscript India, 2001), P. 104. Ray further observes that the larger objective of Gandhiji
was “to awaken the soul as much of the suffering masses as of their tormentors— a philosophy that he pursued in depth in India ever since he landed on the political scene of the country”. *Ibid.* ,P. 99.

13. See *ibid.* ,P. 101.

14. To quote Swamiji’s words as used in his letter dated 27th September, 1894: “I am no politician or political agitator. I care only for the Spirit— when that is right everything will be righted by itself”. This should be read in conjunction with his affirmation as made in his letter of August 1895: “Truth is my God, the universe my country. … I have a truth to teach, I, the child of God”. See *Letters of Vivekananda*, P. 175 and P. 294.


18. In the wake of Swamiji’s spiritual triumph at Chicago, particularly after he came back to India to tell Indians that India had a mission abroad in teaching spirituality to the West, the Indians’ sense of pride in the richness of their spiritual heritage and culture was greatly stimulated.


20. This speech was delivered at Madras on February 14, 1897 and India indeed became independent in fifty years from that time.


23a. In his reply to the welcome given to him by the leading men of Calcutta on February 28, 1897, Swamiji used these words of exhortation to the young
men of Calcutta at least three times in the course of his speech. See Ibid., PP.318-321.

23b. Ibid., P.221.


25. Swamiji put the sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission (formed in May 1897) to performing this task for the benefit of the masses of people.


26a. Ibid.


29. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.3, P.246. Elsewhere, he said: Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress and marriage, and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 4, PP. 368-369.

30. Ibid., P.247.


33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., P.458.

35. The priestly anxiety to keep their knowledge exclusively to themselves, the military disposition to be tyrannical and cruel, the commercial disposition to be overwhelmingly profit-minded and the toiling people’s disposition to be crude and crass in terms of culture represented the respective evils of the rule of the four castes.

37. As Swamiji said, religion was often made to bear the cross of politics. To quote his words: “Now, in my little experience I have collected this knowledge—that for all the devilry that religion is blamed with, religion is not at all in fault: no religion ever persecuted men, no religion ever burnt witches, no religion ever did any of these things. What then incited people to do these things? Politics, but never religion; and if such politics takes the name of religion whose fault is that?” *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 4, p. 125.


42. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 763.


“The great need of India today, which is not the India of fifty years ago, is”, said Swamiji, “to educate the people industrially and socially”. See The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol. 3, P. 469.


