CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In course of reflecting on the problem of development, a UNESCO document observes:

Development is a value-laden concept, with historical, philosophical and ideological dimensions. When we speak of development, we need to reflect not only on what it is that we wish to develop and how we are to do it, but also towards what we wish the process to lead.¹

This means that any concept of development including the concept of human development has to be thought of in terms of three dimensions of the concept: ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘towards what’. What means the thing we want to develop; how means the way we want to develop that thing; towards what means the goal we want to reach in the process of development or, as the culmination of the process of development. While development could be conceived along a number of lines such as economic growth, modernization, dependency (in terms of its progressive elimination), the alternative perspective of development from below and the neo-liberal view of de-regulated economy, the present research addresses the problem from a perspective neither of State nor of market but of citizen or rather the Man. It illustrates the human dimension of the concept of development by focussing on Swami Vivekananda’s concept of human development in terms of his approaches to the concept.
Vivekananda put Man\(^2\) (‘What’) at the centre of development, having declared that the development of man mattered more than anything else and that the goal (‘Towards what’) of his concept of human development was to enable man to reach his highest nature. As for his approaches (‘How’) to the development of man, the present research work interprets them as Vedantic and Manliness approaches and observes that through such approaches Vivekananda sought to enable man to realize his potential - the perfectability that already lay deposited in him.

Vivekananda is chosen for analysis for a special reason. He is one of the greatest thinkers of modern India and at the same time a bridge-builder between the ancient and the modern, between the classical and the contemporary and between the Eastern tradition and the Western modernity.

A link-up between ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘towards what’ of Swami Vivekananda’s concept of human development has been established by making use of Swamiji’s argument that man is potentially divine, that apparently a body and mind, man, in the essence of his being, is a spirit - a manifestation, as the Advaita theory of the Vedanta puts it, of the all-pervading Absolute Spirit. Being surrounded by materiality all round, man somehow forgets his real nature as divine, and comes to believe erroneously that he is all body and mind, all matter only and enjoyment or physical comforts is the be-all and end-all of his life. Swamiji’s point is that man has to be ‘given back’ his real nature by the awakening of the spirit within him and by making him realize his fullest potential - his divinity - in every movement of life, be that sacred or secular.

According to the interpretation given in this study to Swamiji’s thoughts, man can be made to realize his divine potential through Vedantic and Manliness approaches. The Vedantic approach teaches man his sense of oneness with all beings, especially human beings. It holds that since the same Spirit lives in all human beings, the more man shows his concern for other human beings, through service rendered, especially to the poor and the
downtrodden, seeing the same spirit in all of them, the more he develops himself. Swamiji uses the Vedantic approach to emphasize the service aspect of man which is his own contribution to the Vedantic doctrine of oneness of all human beings. Swamiji added to the Vedantic approach his very own Manliness approach which he built on the Vedantic doctrine of the infinite powers of the Atman lying dormant in all human beings. With his Manliness approach, Swamiji teaches that the more man fights the battles of life or faces the challenges of life with manliness in the form of faith or self-belief and strength born out of conviction in the infinite powers of the Atman lying within him, the more he realizes his potential and the more developed he becomes in the process. This process of unfoldment of the potential powers through Vedantic and Manliness approaches reaches its culmination when man realizes eventually his highest (divine) nature. Thus viewed, the “development of man”, as Swamiji said, “is a return to an original perfection”.

According to Swamiji, ‘Be [yourself] and make [others]’ is the motto of development of human life. ‘To be’ means, in the ultimate analysis, to be the Supreme Being that man in the essence of his being is. The process involves a struggle for man and his gradual unfoldment from being through becoming to the Being, that is, oneness with the Supreme Being. ‘To make’ means helping one’s fellow beings to realize the same potential that one has already realized himself. With such a motto in view, Swamiji opined that religious and educational schemes were worth their names only when they were directed to the development of human beings in the sense of bringing out the divinity and perfectibility that were already in them.

**Rationale**

Human development is an area of thought where Swami Vivekananda stands out as a master thinker and he stands out as a master thinker for just not giving a masterly exposition of his philosophy of human development but for doing as much towards inspiring and motivating human beings—in the East as
well as the West—to take to his idea of human development. Indeed, he worked ceaselessly towards the articulation and the dispersal of his idea of human development in the nine years of his active life from 1893 to 1902, dividing his time almost equally between the West and India. Despite Swamiji’s monumental intellectual work and strenuous practical efforts in the area of human development, no researcher, however, had done any work at the doctoral level, as far as I am aware, on the specifics of Swamiji’s approaches to human development. It is such gap or lacuna research-wise that induced this researcher in the first place to take up the doctoral research on Swami Vivekananda’s approach to human development.

The second rationale for choosing the above topic for research lay in the general run of works on Swami Vivekananda. Most works on Swamiji are in the nature of biographies. While biographies are informative and wide in covering the various events and activities of the subject’s life, they, by their very nature, cannot afford to be too analytical or theoretical. Of course, Sister Nivedita’s *The Master as I saw Him* is an exception as a biography, being the masterly first-hand account of Swamiji’s life by one who had the opportunity of observing Swamiji from the closest quarters, but the striking feature of this distinguished work is the personal impressions and observations of the author and the focus is by no means on the theorizing or analysis of any single concept. The interpretative works can take care of theorizing, but such works on Swamiji (with the exception of Marie Louise Burke’s *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* which is a class by itself by virtue of unearthing so many new facts of Swamiji’s life in the West), bearing in many cases titles such as the Social and Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda are a ‘hold-all’ kind of thing, diffusing their focus on many things rather than concentrating on one. This is where this dissertation comes up with its distinctiveness: it is at once analytical, theoretical and integrative in bringing together the whole gamut of discussions through a single concept of approach to human development.
**Leading Questions**

In order to direct her inquiry as to Swamiji’s approach or rather approaches to human development along meaningful lines, this researcher sought to find the answers to the following leading questions:

1. How were Vivekananda’s approaches to human development formed in the first instance in his early and pre-monastic life? What was the role of his family and the role of his Guru Sri Ramakrishna in such formation?

2. How did his experiences during the Bharat Parikrama help him to consolidate his approaches?

3. How did he articulate his approaches in the West and India?

4. What conclusion or conclusions can we draw from this study of the formation, consolidation and articulation of Swamiji’s approaches as to the significance and continuing relevance of the same?

**Sources**

The materials for answers to the above questions were drawn from the following sources:

(a) Swami Vivekananda’s writings, lectures and letters as compiled in: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vols. 1-9; *Swami Vivekanander Bani O Rachana* [Bengali], vols. 1-10; *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*.

(b) Writings of Sister Nivedita (5 volumes) and her letters (2 volumes).

(c) Biographical works on Swamiji: by Swamiji’s Disciples, Eastern and Western, as also by others.

(d) Reminiscences of Swamiji: by Swamiji’s Admirers, Eastern and Western, as also by others.

(e) Research works on Swami Vivekananda in English and Bengali languages.

(f) Reports on Swami Vivekananda in Indian and Western newspapers.

(g) Commemorative volumes on Swami Vivekananda.
Method

The researcher used a three-fold method in order to analyze systematically the materials collected from the above-mentioned sources.

First, he studied the materials and examined those thoroughly in order to sift the relevant materials from other materials.

Second, having identified the evidences of what she considered to be Swamiji’s approaches, the researcher gave them meaningful interpretation in terms of what she labeled as Swamiji’s Vedantic and Manliness approaches.

Finally, the researcher made an evaluative analysis of Swamiji’s approaches, comparing his approaches with some contemporary theoretical approaches and commenting in the end on the harmonious construction of his approaches as also on the continuing relevance or lasting significance of his approaches.

Chapterization

The chapterization is in the following order.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the design and contents of the dissertation.

Chapters 2 and 3 throw light on the role played by Vivekananda’s family as also by his Guru Sri Ramakrishna in the formation of his approaches to human development. These two chapters argue that the sannyasi tradition of the Dutta family as set by Narendra Nath’s grandfather, his mother’s exhortation to him to ‘be a man, always’, his father’s pleading with him to look upon the poor with sympathy, his own hardships and struggles in the wake of his father’s death plus the mission ordained to him by Guru Sri Ramakrishna to this effect that he work towards ‘bringing spiritual consciousness to Man’ and towards ‘assuaging the misery of the humble and the poor seeing Lord Himself in them’ helped Narendra Nath of the time to develop later as Swami Vivekananda his Vedantic and Manliness approaches to human development.
Chapter 4 shows how his wanderings across India helped him to consolidate his ideas towards the Vedantic and Manliness approaches to human development, facilitating their articulation later in the USA. At the end of his *Bharat Parikrama*, Swamiji’s resolution was two-fold: that *man* had to be redeemed with the development of spirituality in him in the sense of *faith* in the oneness of self and Self and that he had to be taught to apply the inherent infinite powers of his soul—his potential *strength*—to all the movements of life. His other resolution was to go to America, to preach the Advaita Vedanta there and to teach the Americans to be involved, in accordance with the Vedantic doctrine of one existence and one humanity, in caring for the suffering humanity, say, of India. Indeed, Swamiji’s *Bharat Parikrama* launched him on his *Viswa Parikrama*.

Chapter 5 shows to what effect Vivekananda articulated his approaches to human development in America and England. With the Western man being overfull with *rajas*, the emphasis in his teaching in the West was rather on the Vedantic approach. He traveled across the United States and through the select towns of England to tell the *man* in the West that man was not a mere body and mind, that he was a spirit as well, that overwhelming materialism in the form of enjoyment and physical comforts alone could not lead to the fulfilment of man, that the man in the West as also the civilization of the West had to temper their rank materialism with spiritual orientation to this effect that as manifestation of the same Spirit the humanity was one and therefore they had to care for their less fortunate brethren in other parts of the world, giving the latter a share of their abundance.

Swamiji was not an outstanding success in the West in collecting funds for the poor and hapless people of India. He did not charge any fees for teaching Vedanta and spirituality to the Western man. But he continued to give them selflessly during his nearly four years’ stay there, hoping that some day East and West would enter into meaningful ‘give and take’ relationship, with the East teaching them the awakening of the Atman in them and the West
helping the East with scientific and industrial education and technological know-how.

If Swamiji used the Vedantic approach predominantly in the West, seeking the awakening of the Atman within the Western man and inducing him thereby to rise higher and higher in the scale of being and exhorting the West itself to engage in meaningful cooperation with the East, Swamiji used in India, as Chapter 6 shows, his other approach, that is, the Manliness approach. If the Western man was overfull with rajas leading him to gross materialism, the man in India and the country as a whole was steeped in tamas of the worst order. Social tyranny in the form of priestcraft and caste system, a thousand years of political subjugation by foreigners plus overwhelming poverty, hunger and ignorance had the cumulative effect of dehumanizing the Indians, making them lose their faith and strength in themselves. In order to lift the man in India from the morass into which he had fallen and to put him back on the path of development along both the spiritual and material lines, he pursued the Manliness approach and prescribed the Practical Vedanta as the most suitable means of bringing about the harmony between the spiritual and material lines of development for man in India.

With his Practical Vedanta, Swamiji made the point that it was not enough to know merely abstractly the Vedanta to this effect that man was Brahman in essence; it was far more important to apply the infinite powers of the Atman/Brahman to concrete situations of life, to every movement in every work of life, be that spiritual or material. Swamiji firmly held that Practical Vedanta along with man-making education could bring back to man in India faith or belief in self as also strength that he had lost and thus could pave the way for his spiritual regeneration and material success. As Swamiji said of Practical Vedanta:

There must be freshness and vigour of thought behind, to make a virile race. More than
enough to strengthen the whole world exists in the ‘Upanishads’. The Advaita is the eternal mine of strength. But it requires to be ‘applied’. It must be cleared of the incrustation of scholasticism, and then in all its simplicity, beauty and sublimity be taught over the length and breadth of the land and applied even to the minutest details of daily life.

Along with the trinity of man-making religion, man-making education and Practical Vedanta, the other concept that Swami Vivekananda contributed towards the development of man in India was the concept of selfless service to fellow human beings in India. He pleaded that the humanity in India, particularly the poor, the downtrodden and the miserable of India, be served and worshipped as Lord himself. Seeing them as Lord involved Jnana, worshipping them as Lord involved Bhakti and serving them as Lord involved Karma. With service rendered in such a spirit combining Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, the head, heart, and the hand, so to say, the Indians could not only come up individually as great human beings but also collectively as a virile nation, achieving mastery over both the spiritual and material fields.

The concluding chapter of the dissertation shows that Swamiji constructed his Vedantic and Manliness approaches so harmoniously that the one inevitably brought in the other. He exhorted the man in the West to be the ‘captain’ not just of materialism or of material prosperity, but also of his own soul. He exhorted the man in India, ‘dehumanized’ as he was, to be manly again through faith, strength, and compassionate social service born out of a combination of Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, to be the captain, so to say, not just of ‘idle’ spirituality but of heroic actions through a combination of head, heart, and hand. Everywhere – in the West as well as the East - Swamiji’s call was towards the harmonious development of man and to that end Swamiji gave the man in the West and the man in the East what he needed most for his development. Indeed, having discovered the glory of human nature ( going to
the extent of saying that “the development of man is a return to an original perfection”), Swamiji advocated the development of an all-round and complete Man who would make use of the infinite powers of the Atman with such a harmonious combination of head, heart and hand that the individual and collective good, the self-development as also the development of the whole humanity would be achieved thereby.

Evaluative Observations

Was Swami Vivekananda a spiritual visionary or an impractical idealist in defining human development as man’s realization of the infinite potential powers of the soul in all movements of life? He was not. His purpose was practical. He knew fully well that an ideal had to be viable and that it had to be realized in practice. He set up an ideal before human beings and wanted to inspire and motivate them so that they could make progressive efforts towards realizing the ideal. The fulfilment of a seed is in the tree. Seed is the potential and the tree is the realization or fullest development of the seed. It is the same with man. The realization or the fullest development of man lies in the attainment of divinity. Divinity is the original nature of man and as such divinity lies potentially in man. Man must be made to realize this potential. Swamiji wanted to inspire and motivate man to this effect. That was his whole purpose. He used the Vedanta to this purpose, telling one and all ceaselessly that the realization of the divine potential in terms of man’s progressive movement from animality to humanity to divinity constituted the development of man.

Divinity of man is a classic (Vedantic) concept. Swamiji added to this concept his very own—practical and contemporary—Manliness concept in order to inspire man to make the utmost use of the infinite powers that, according to Vedanta, lie potentially in the soul of every human being. Modern Science concurs with this idea when it says that most human beings actually use only a fraction of the powers that lie potentially in them. This proves that Swamiji was not a mere spiritual visionary and that his exhortation to man to use his
potential powers to the fullest was not an abstract speculation or an empty sound without any substance.

Swamiji’s whole purpose in turning the Vedantic approach into the Manliness approach was to build a bridge between the potential and the realizable, between the classical and the contemporary, and between the spiritual and the material. The more we make the movement from the one to the other, the more we realize our potential; the more we elevate and transform ourselves in realizing our potential, the more we develop ourselves as human beings in the journey towards fullness.

Indeed, in the building of the bridge between the classical and the contemporary, in the inspired transformation of the human into the Divine and in the building of the broad generalization that all development including the human development is the realization of the potential lies the continuing relevance and the lasting significance of Swami Vivekananda’s approaches to human development.
NOTES AND REFERENCES


2. In this place as also elsewhere in this dissertation, ‘Man’ is used as a generic term to indicate a human being or human beings in a collective sense and no gender discrimination whatsoever is intended in the use of this term.

3. As Swamiji said: “There is but one basis of well-being – social, political or spiritual – to know that I and my brother are one. This is true for all countries and all people”. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Sixth Edition, 1977), vol. 8, P.350.


6. Swami Ranganathanandaji’s addresses on aspects of Swamiji’s humanism are duly mentioned in the Bibliography of this work. It bears saying here that humanism is related to human development but humanism and approach to human development are not the one and the same thing.

7. Since religion and spirituality could not survive on empty stomachs, Swamiji recommended for India such materialism as took care of the basic necessities of man. Swamiji called for materialism toned down to the requirements of India. To quote him, “hold on to that[spirituality]. Yet, perhaps, some sort of materialism, toned down to our requirements, would be a blessing…” *The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. 3, P.149.