CHAPTER IV

CONSOLIDATION OF THE APPROACH: ROLE OF THE BHARAT PARIKRAMA

Experiences gained during Bharat Parikrama (wanderings across India) helped Swami Vivekananda to consolidate his approach to human development.

As Swamiji came into intimate contact with India and her people, as he witnessed the struggles and sufferings of his poor countrymen, as he pondered over the ancient glory of India as also over the depths of degradation to which India had fallen, he came to this conclusion that without the development— the elevation and transformation of man in terms of the life-giving principles of the Vedanta and their practical application in life in terms of Manliness, no real development of man was possible.

Swamiji’s Bharat Parikrama was performed in two phases. Phase one stretched from mid-1888 to mid-1890 when he made expeditions to certain places but returned all the same to the Baranagar monastery. Phase two extended from July 1890 till May(31)1893 when he left for the USA to attend the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago. This chapter dwells on the Bharat Parikrama experiences of Swamiji’s and reflects on the contribution of such experiences towards the consolidation cum enrichment of his approach to human development.

I

Before I dwell on Swamiji’s Bharat Parikrama, it will be useful to say a few words on Swamiji’s days with his brother-monks at the Baranagar monastery.

During his last days at Kashipur, Sri Ramakrishna gave ochre clothes to Narendranath and other disciples making them monks.
Following his Guru’s instruction to look after his brother-monks, Narendranath organized them into a brotherhood in the name of his departed Guru and performed viraja in the third week of January 1887 in confirmation of the sannyasa received from Sri Ramakrishna. While Narendranath gave his brother-monks the monk names which they used to the last day of their lives, he himself at that time assumed the name Vividishananda which he changed to Sachchidananda and finally to Vivekananda on the eve of his departure to the West in 1893.¹

“Naren shall teach mankind”, said Sri Ramakrishna.² In line with his Guru’s instruction, Swamiji’s teaching work began with his brother-monks at the Baranagore monastery. They, as he himself, longed for the Infinite; prayer and meditation came naturally to them. But, will Swamiji, their ‘friend, philosopher and guide’, both by the wish of the Guru and by his natural abilities and talents as a leader, allow them to remain passively absorbed always in prayer and meditation, in the ‘idleness of God’,³ as one might say? No, Swamiji could not do that. With his restless energy (with which he was naturally endowed and which became purposefully unbounded ever since Sri Ramakrishna dedicated him to Shakti or Kali, the Goddess of energy and the Doer of things in the world), he could never allow them to lapse into such passivity of soul. He read to them the great books of human thought, The Imitation of Jesus Christ and the Bhagavad Gita especially, explained to them the evolution of the universal mind and engaged them in the discussion of great philosophical and religious problems.⁴ Broadening the outlook of the brother-monks by making them assimilate the thought-currents of the world was Swamiji’s objective. As one of his biographers put it:

He [Swami Vivekananda] examined with them the histories of different countries and various philosophical systems. Aristotle and Plato, Kant and Hegel, together with Sankaracharya and Buddha, Ramanuja and Madhva, Chaitanya and Nimberka, were thoroughly discussed. The Hindu
philosophical systems of Jnana, Bhakti, Yoga, and Karma, each received a due share of attention, and their apparent contradictions were reconciled in the light of Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings and experiences.5

Swamiji did not ignore the secular education6 of his brother-monks. He did not ignore the ritualistic aspects of worship such as prayer and meditation either, but his greatest emphasis through all this was on the attainment of spiritual consciousness and realization of God (not mere ritualistic worship of Him) by controlling the lower nature. Through that alone, he would untiringly say, man attains his real development and he becomes a real and true human being. Life at the Baranagore monastery was not an easy one. The same biographer we have quoted above goes on to say:

The privations they suffered during this period form a wonderful saga of spiritual discipline. Often there would be no food at all. …They lived for months on boiled rice, salt, and bitter herbs. Not even demons could have stood such hardships. Each had two pieces of loin-cloth, and there were some regular clothes that were worn, by turns, when anyone had to go out. They slept on straw mats spread on the hard floor.7

The hardships and austerities however were not ends in themselves. They were never meant to tell the monks that they were to be ‘pain-hugging, cross-grained’ ascetics thereby. The purpose was to tell them with hard examples from life that life was a struggle for all human beings, not excluding those who left the world to become monks and that they had to negotiate such struggles and conquer them. That was the purpose of development and that purpose was equally applicable to all, be one a monk or a man of the world. Harping on the uses of adversity and the grand objective of development, Swamiji said in course of reminiscing
on the days at the Baranagore monastery: “The more circumstances are against you, the more manifest becomes your inner power”.  

The spirit must remain unvanquished, withering all the obstacles in the way of attainment of the goal. In order to underline their sense of inner strength and independence, Swamiji encouraged his brother-monks (who would otherwise like to depend on him for things – big and small) to go on pilgrimage to holy places of their choice. After all, a wandering monk was as good as flowing water. His mobility and proximity to ‘places of God’ help him keep holy and curtail his dependence on all things and persons except God that is his ultimate Spirit or real Self. Accordingly, and in keeping with his Manliness approach to human development, Swamiji held that they must “have their own experiences. They must break free from the monastery and test their own strength. Their experience of new life will make men of them (emphasis added), absolutely fearless and invincible, and spiritually independent; thus they will become giants”.  

II

The background as stated above needed to be mentioned in order to show how swamiji himself as also his brother-monks (except Ramakrishnanananda who wanted in any case to stay put at the Baranagore monastery to take care of the daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna as also to look after the monastery in the absence of others) began their wanderings. In the first phase of his wanderings (beginning, as already said, in 1888), Swamiji, with no possessions except a staff and begging bowl, covered Varanasi, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan, Hathras and Hrishikesh. Varanasi, the seat of Lord Vishwanath and Goddess Annapurna, had always been very special to the holy men of India. From Buddha to Shankaracharya to Chaitanya – all the prophets visited it and Swamiji followed in their footsteps. His first visit to Varanasi was memorable for two encounters that took place there. The first of these concerned his meeting with Swami Bhaskarananda, a celebrated ascetic of great learning, who annoyed Swamiji with his observation that complete conquest of lust and gold was
not humanly possible. Narendranath himself lived with a man who represented a total antithesis of what Bhaskarananda claimed and therefore stoutly put forth his position before Bhaskarananda that the man who knew what his real nature was could really conquer these two impediments to spiritual progress.

The second episode at Varanasi concerned the chasing of Swamiji by a troop of large monkeys one day. As he began to run away, he heard an old monk calling him aloud and telling him to face the brutes rather than run away. Having taken that advice to heart the moment he faced up to the monkeys, the latter fell back and fled. The lesson stuck with Swamiji the rest of his life. Indeed, it became one of the main planks of his Manliness approach to human development. As he himself said years later in a lecture at New York:

That is a lesson for all life – face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys, the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them. If we are ever to gain freedom, it must be by conquering nature, never by running away. Cowards never win victories. We have to fight fear and troubles and ignorance if we expect them to flee before us.

The experience at Varanasi (or rather its lesson that if man is to be truly made man, if he is to be given strength and fearlessness to face life and its challenges) led Swamiji to two conclusions. One, it impressed upon him the necessity of preaching to one and all the strength-giving message of Vedanta. He felt that the treasures of Vedanta – that each soul, high or law, rich or poor, ignorant or wise, is the manifestation of the Supreme Soul and that the infinite powers of the Supreme stored up in every soul – that a few scholars or a few sadhus meditating in caves or in the depths of forests kept confined to themselves, had to be made over to everybody, particularly the poor and the downtrodden in order to bring strength to them. “Baner Vedantake ghare ante habe” – the Vedanta of forests have to
be brought back to human dwellings’, said Swamiji. And it had to be made practical by teaching everybody, the masses especially, the Vedantic dictum that man in his essence was divine or Brahman Himself and that he had to apply his potential divinity in every work, indeed, in every movement of life. By such Practical Vedanta, reasoned Swamiji, man could be transformed and developed into his best self.

But how could the man who was poor and downtrodden, who did not get to eat two meals a day, who was not sufficiently clothed or sheltered, be given strength and fearlessness and the sense of infinite divinity inherent in him? Swamiji believed that the sannyasins had a positive role to play in bringing about such transformation. The poor and the deprived had to be raised up by service rendered to them so that by being brought up to a level they could benefit from the light of Vedanta. Swamiji felt that all-giving sannyasins had to show the way in this regard. They had to show that by serving the Daridra-Narayanas, the serving ones were really serving their own selves and above all, the Narayana Himself. Was not the same Narayana present in everybody?

Determined to give his brother-disciples the benefit of the realization that dawned on him at Varanasi, Swamiji came back to the Baranagore Math and reasoned with his brother disciples to take to such a mission of life. ‘Realize God not only in prayer, meditation and religious discourses but also in service to Jiva as Shiva’ – this is how Swamiji would appeal to his brother-monks. This idea of Swamiji’s – of applying the ideas of Vedanta to practical life and making man of everybody, especially the poor and the downtrodden masses – however, failed to move his brother-monks. This was a new idea of religion to them and being eager for their own salvation they registered their protest against this new idea of Swamiji’s. To such protest Swamiji’s response was: “Ay, even if you, my brother-monks stand in my way, I will go and preach among the Pariahs in the lowest slums”. 12

Despite his lack of success for the time being with his brother-monks, Swamiji was convinced that the day would come when his brother-monks would subscribe to his man-making and ‘man-serving’ view of
human development. He now resumed his wanderings. After Varanasi, it was Ayodhya, the ancient capital of Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, that he came to. By taking to the Japa (the continuous uttering) of Rama’s name and the begging as well from door to door, Swamiji showed that he was not merely a profound man of knowledge, but also a great bhakta (devotee).

Swamiji’s itinerary took him, next, to Lucknow and Agra. Having seen the beauty of palaces, mosques and gardens at Lucknow and being specially struck by the beauty of the great Taj Mahal at Agra, Swamiji felt proud of the greatness of Indian art and architecture. He felt that the Islamic art and architecture was a vital part of the Indian heritage and that those who denied such status to Islamic art and architecture were unappreciative of the composite nature of Indian civilization and culture.

After all, the Islamic conquest of India was not foreign in the sense the British conquest was because the invading Muslims were Indianized by being absorbed in India. In Swamiji’s view, the indigenization of Muslims had produced a synthesis of Indian culture and that India’s strength lay in her tradition of unity in the midst of diversity.

On his way to Vrindavan, Swamiji experienced an incident which offered him a test of his belief in the Vedanta vis-à-vis the prevalent caste system of India. About two miles yet to reach Vrindavan he saw a man enjoying his smoking pipe on the wayside and asked him for a puff from the same. The man was an untouchable as per the caste system and when he so declared, the Swami shrank from the idea of having a puff from him. After going some distance, Swamiji felt sorry to note that he was yet to go beyond the limitations of caste and colour and appreciate as a good Vedantist the non-duality of the soul. With such contemplation he came back to the so-called untouchable man, called him a brother, and overruling his objection that the ‘holy man’ would be defiled by his touch, smoked from his pipe. “That incident”, observed Swamiji later, “taught me the great lesson that I should not despise anyone, but must think of all as children of the Lord”. Needless to say that that was the true Vedantic spirit and as a Vedantist par excellence, Swamiji could not miss it for long.
Two miraculous incidents happened to Swamiji at Vrindavan. One day Swamiji took the vow that he would not beg for his food from anyone and would resign himself completely to God to see whether any food was ever offered to him by anybody. By noon, he was so hungry that he was about to faint. Yet he somehow managed to trudge along when he had a man approaching him from behind and having offered food to him vanishing from his sight. The incident proved to Swamiji that if one’s resignation to the all-knowing Supreme Spirit was earnest and total, it could not be in vain.

The other incident took place when Swamiji was taking his bath at Radhakunda at Vrindavan. He left his Kaupin, the only piece of loin cloth that he had to wear at that time, on the bank of the tank before he took the dip. Having finished his bath and coming back to the bank he found that the Kaupin was taken away by a monkey, now sitting on a tree. Swamiji took it as an injustice done to him by Shri Radha, the presiding deity of the place and felt so agitated that he resolved to walk into the nearby forest and starve himself to death. As he started to walking towards the jungle, he found a man coming to him with a new ochre cloth and food and pleading with him to accept what he brought with him. Swamiji did. But that was not the only part of his surprise. Upon coming back to the bank he found that the Kaupin was lying on the same place where he had left it before going for the bath. This ‘miraculous’ incident proved to Swamiji that God does not leave an earnest soul in the lurch and that earnestness was a great virtue to be cultivated by all God-aspiring men.

We find Swamiji, next, at the Hathras railway station, on his way to Hardwar. Hungry and tired, he was sitting on a bench in a corner of the railway platform when the assistant station master, Sharatchandra Gupta, immediately realizing that the young monk was no ordinary sannyasin brought him to his quarters and served him with kind hospitality. During his few days’ stay at Hathras, Swamiji patched up the quarrels and ill-feelings among the different factions of the local Bengalis and inspired them instead with the spirit of the Vedanta. As for Sharatchandra Gupta himself, he was so inspired with the fervour of renunciation at the instance
of Swamiji that he entreated Swamiji to accept him as a disciple. Swamiji agreed on two conditions: (a) that the aspiring disciple conquer his ego by begging food from the porters of his own station for the purpose of feeding his proposed guru and himself; and (b) that he accept that God is in everything, making his spiritual progress contingent upon that acceptance. With Sharatchandra complying, Swamiji accepted him as his first-ever disciple.

What kind of guru was Swamiji? That he was, above all, a man overflowing with love and compassion is something that is best described in the words of Sharatchandra Gupta, who having been initiated by Swami Vivekananda, had since come to be known as Swami Sadananda:

Once in our wanderings in the outlying districts of the Himalayas [in Hrishikesh], I fainted with hunger and thirst. The Swami carried me and thus undoubtedly saved me from certain death. On another occasion, like a syce he [Swamiji] led the horse, which someone had kindly lent us for the journey, across a mountain river which was very dangerous to ford because of its swiftness and slippery bottom. He risked his life several times for my sake. How can I described him, friends, except by the word Love, Love, Love! When I was too ill to do anything but stagger along, he carried my personal belonging including my shoes.14

For Swamiji, love, to be true to itself, had to be selfless.

Sadananda had the occasion to be a witness to Swamiji’s fearlessness as well during his wanderings with Swamiji in the Himalayas. He was moving with Swamiji through a jungle when he saw human bones and ochre clothes strewn around in a certain place in the jungle. Pointing at the scene, Swamiji observed that obviously a tiger had devoured a sannyasin at the spot and asked Sadananda if he was afraid. Sadananda promptly replied, “Not with you, Swamiji!” – which showed that Swamiji not merely talked of strength and fearlessness as the
attributes of *man* he always wanted to ‘make’ but that he brought to the fore those attributes by personal examples.

As a guru and as a man, Swamiji, according to Sadananda, was inspiring by all means and, no less, for the grand mission he pursued in life. He quotes the following soul-stirring words of his guru (obviously, uttered to him during *wanderings*) to substantiate his point:

My son, I have a great mission to fulfil. ...I have an injunction from my Guru to carry out this mission. It is nothing less than the regeneration of my motherland. Spirituality has fallen to low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her spirituality.\(^{15}\)

Swamiji uttered the words, ‘India’ and the ‘world’ – regeneration of India and the spread of Indian spiritual thoughts all over the world – in the same breath. Actually, as a Vedantist with firm belief in the two Vedantic principles of the divinity of the soul and the unity of existence, Swamiji’s mission was no less than the regeneration of mankind of which the people of his motherland was a very vital part for him. He was and would remain always in the ultimate analysis a maker of man, a shaper of the development of humanity as much in the East as in the West, as much in India as in the world at large.

Having covered much of North India during the first phase of his wanderings, Swamiji came back or rather had to come back to the Baranagore monastery, as he was struck with malaria at Hrishikesh. He spent about a year in the monastery, keeping himself occupied with the thought of and work towards the regeneration of the motherland. As he pondered over this mission, he noted with pain that the Vedas and the Upanishads – the storehouse of immortal truths – had fallen quite out of vogue in Bengal, the province of his birth, and that the inequitous social customs constituted a drag on the masses. As a means of counteracting the evils that de-vitalised the people, he took upon himself the task of
restoring the Vedas in Bengal. He set the example. With the help of Panini’s grammar, he studied the Vedas himself and taught it to his brother-disciples, thereby broadening their mental horizon and giving them the idea that India was one and indivisible. He also told them in no uncertain terms that the caste system as it prevailed in India was actually a perversion of the system as it originally was and that it had dispirited the masses of India. His views were that the caste system in its original conception was based on Guna and Karma. The Brahmins would teach, the Kshatriyas would defend and protect, the Vaishyas would carry on trade and the Shudras would render menial service to other classes. But the placement of an individual in a category or class was based on his merit and qualification. The system was open and mobile in its original conception, but later on it degenerated into blind adherence to birth and heredity which, in turn, caused the dilution of merit and qualification. This degenerated system was largely responsible for the decline of India and the weakening of the people of India. The Vedas and the Upanishads with their eternal message of the divinity of all souls and the unity of existence had to be preached to counteract the evil influence of oppressive social customs – such was the vein in which Swamiji argued and with such end in view he began the task of restoring the Vedas and the Upanishads in Bengal, inaugurating his enterprise at the Baranagore monastery and at that with his brother-disciples. Indeed, most of the sublime thoughts that Swamiji preached later on to the world had their beginning with his teaching of the same to his brother-monks at the Baranagore Math.

Seized by an urge to resume his North Indian wanderings towards the end of 1889, Swamiji came first to Vaidyanath and thence to Allahabad where he explained to the people the distinction between the eternal religion of the Hindus as explicated in the Vedas and the Upanishads and the social abuses and iniquities of the Hindus which disgraced the eternal religion. He had the occasion also in Allahabad to come across a Muslim saint whose sublime face proved to him that the man was a Paramahamsa and that far more than the rituals of a religion and the social customs associated with a faith, it was the genuineness of
the man practicing a faith that mattered. At Ghazipur which he visited next, he was pained to see the more affluent among the Hindus taking to affectation and Western ways of living. Such people had fallen from the spiritual standards of the Hindu civilization and some of them, in the name of reforming the Hindu society, had taken to violent denunciation of the society. His advice to such people was to take to patient work of mass education and thus to encourage people to bring about reforms on their own. ‘Growth from within’ was his motto—a thought which he developed further as he grew in years.

Swamiji’s chief object in coming to Ghazipur was to meet the great Yogi Pavhari Baba, the “Air-eating Father” who was so-called for the very little food that he took for the sustenance of his body and who, even after being bitten by a cobra, could say “And thou too are Him”. Only a Raja-Yogi of the highest order could maintain such serenity of mind amid disturbing phenomena and having appreciated this, Swamiji was eager to learn Raja-Yoga from Pavhari Baba. As a matter of fact, Swamiji, for all his supposedly monastic detachment was a very soft-natured man who was often overpowered by his love for his brother-disciples. The news of Yogananda’s illness at Allahabad or of Abhedananda’s at Hrishikesh would make him so much worried about their well-being that he would suffer from tremendous mental agonies and restlessness. For him, the teaching of humanity began with the teaching of his brother-monks at the Baranagore monastery and the service of humanity with the service of the same brother-disciples at the said monastery. However, finding himself restless often on account of his living sense of responsibility (which issued from the fact that Guru Ramakrishna had left them to his care), and unable to maintain the monastic detachment the way a Vedantist monk should have been able to maintain, Swamiji thought that the ‘cure’ lay in his learning the Raja-Yoga from Pavhari Baba who, he believed, was the master of that Yoga. It was with such an intention that he approached Pavhari Baba and even thought of having initiation from him—a plan which came to naught because on the eve of the day on which he was to take the initiation, he had a vision of Sri Ramakrishna pleading with him.
not to do any such thing. Having the similar vision of Sri Ramakrishna in the next few days, Swamiji cancelled the plan of initiation from Pavhari Baba for good and realized that “one who had sat at his [Sri Ramakrishna’s] feet and been blessed by him, stood in need of no other spiritual help”. 17

Now, the question is: Did Swamiji, by allowing the thought of initiation from Pavhari Baba to cross his mind, mean to be disloyal to Sri Ramakrishna? The clear-cut answer to this question is that this phenomenon indicated, not any loss of faith on behalf of Swamiji in Sri Ramakrishna but only his aptitude for many-sided knowledge and his tendency to recognize goodness, irrespective of its source.

As for his overpowering love for his brother-monks and other lay but close disciples of Sri Ramakrishna such as the just-expired Balaram Bose, 18 of which even his good friend Pramadadas Mitra of Varanasi was critical, Swamiji’s reply was typical of his universal heart (undoubtedly it is his heart in addition to his brain that made him in the subsequent years one of the greatest champions of humanity that the humanity has ever known) : “We are not dry monks. What! Do you think that because a man is a sannyasi he has no heart!” 18a

Having uttered such words from the depths of his heart, Swamiji came immediately down to Calcutta to be by the side of the bereaved family of the late Balaram Bose. Unfortunately for the Baranagore monastery, Surendranath Mitra, the other financial supporter of the Baranagore Math, died a month later, the exact date being May 25, 1890. In order to save the monastery at this hour of its crisis, Girish Chandra Ghosh stepped into the shoes of Balaram and Surendranath, agreeing to bear the expenses of the monastery.
Having straightened the affairs of the Baranagore monastery, Swamiji resolved on a long pilgrimage to the Himalayas from which, he said, he would not return until “he could develop his spiritual potentiality to such a degree as might enable him to transform a man by a mere touch. With this firm resolve he set out with the blessings of the Holy Mother in July 1890, on an indefinitely long journey.”

Thus began the second phase of Swamiji’s Bharat Parikrama.

**Northern India**

Swamiji came to Varanasi, first, on his way to the Himalayas. That developing his own spiritual potentiality to the highest degree in order to bring about a transformation of fellow human beings was the mission of Swamiji could be seen from an utterance he made at Varanasi: “I am now leaving Kashi [the other name of Varanasi]; and shall not return until I have burst on society like a bomb-shell; and it will follow me like a dog”. This utterance showed how deeply possessed he was of his mission and how supremely confident he was of the success of his mission. Indeed, it did not take him more than a few years to make the every word of his prophetic utterance true: by the time he re-visited Varanasi (after his return from the West), he had made the whole world his field of work and inspired the humanity everywhere with new modes of thought.

From Varanasi, Swamiji came via Ayodhya to Nainital and thence started on foot for Almora en route to Badrikashrama (Badrinath) and Kedarnath. He had nothing, not even a single pice on him, and the same was true for Akhandananda, the brother disciple, who accompanied him on the tour to the Himalayas as per the instruction of the Holy Mother. About fourteen miles yet from Almora in a place called Kakrighat, sitting in meditation under a peepul tree on the bank of the river Kosi, Swamiji had a realization of the oneness of soul and nature and of the oneness of the macrocosm and the microcosm. He realized that just as the individual soul
is encased in the nature of objective body, so the Universal Soul is encased
in the nature of the objective universe. The soul is covered by the nature.
As it is in the case of the individual so it is in the case of the Universal.
The microcosm is built on the same plan as the macrocosm. The man and
the universe are one or, to say the same thing, the man is a universe in
miniature. As Swamiji told Akhandananda about this experience of his:

Oh, Gangadhar [the pre-monastic name of
Akhandananda]! I have just passed through
one of the greatest moments of my life. Here
under this peepul tree one of the greatest
problems of my life has been solved. I have
found the oneness of the macrocosm with the
microcosm. In this microcosm of the body
everything that is there [in the macrocosm],
exists. I have seen the whole universe within
an atom.  

Through this experience, the significance of his Master’s teaching
about the identity of the Jiva and Siva dawned anew on him and what was
an intellectual perception before now became a part of his own living
realization. As a monk-writer puts it:

Master’s words about the identity of the jiva
and Siva, which had appealed so long only to
his intellect, now became living in the flash
light of his own intuition. He now had a clear
grasp of the grand truth, “Divinity of nature”,
which might enable him to reconcile his
inward-bound mind with the injunction of his
Master for serving humanity.

The Kakrighat experience is thus a landmark event in the life of
Swamiji. It re-emphasized to him the greatness of his Master’s teaching
and of the greatness of the mission he had received from the Master: the
man everywhere, whether in the East or in the West, must be awakened to
his true nature and that the suffering of man anywhere and everywhere
must be assuaged through the service rendered to man as God. Through
the Kakrighat experience Swamiji learnt all over again that he was to work for a far greater goal than mere personal salvation through exclusive prayer and meditation and that human development or human deliverance through the awakening and service of man was the goal he was to work for.\textsuperscript{23}

Two incidents happened at Almora which should be specially mentioned for their significance. At about two miles from Almora, exhausted from the tiredness of walking as also from hunger and thirst, Swamiji sank to the ground and almost fainted on the road alongside a Muslim cemetery. With Akhandananda going away to fetch some water for Swamiji, Swamiji’s condition was noted by a Muslim fakir named Zulfikar Ali who was the keeper of the cemetery as noted above. In order to revive Swamiji, the fakir brought him the only food he had in his possession in that desolate area – a cucumber which he asked Swamiji to kindly accept. Swamiji was too weak to do that and he requested the fakir to put the cucumber into his mouth. The fakir pleaded that being a Muslim, he could not do it to a Hindu holy man: “Holy sir, I am a Muslim!” The response that Swamiji gave to the fakir is noteworthy at once for his attitude to Hindu-Muslim relations as also for his Vedantic approach to man in general: “That does not matter at all, are we not all brothers?” That Swamiji spoke these words from the depths of his heart and that he remembered the fakir with heartfelt gratitude could be seen from the fact that when he visited Almora seven years later as the world-famous Vivekananda receiving a grand reception at Almora, he recognized the fakir in the crowd watching him from a distance. The fakir could not recognize him, but he came up to the fakir and having given him some money as a token of his grateful remembrance, Swamiji told his [Swamiji’s] companions how the man had saved his life one day.\textsuperscript{25}

The other incident that left a life-long mark on Swamiji was the news of his sister’s suicide that he received at Almora through a telegram sent from Calcutta. The suicide seemed to be a sequel to the ill-treatment of the young lady at her husband’s house at the Simla locality of Calcutta. The sister was a playmate of Swamiji’s during his childhood and it
shocked him into thinking deeply over the plight of Indian women and the ways of overcoming it. As Sister Nivedita observed, “To one who, years after, saw deep into his personal experience, it seemed that this death had inflicted on the Swami’s heart a wound whose quivering pain never for one moment ceased. And we may, perhaps, venture to trace some part at least of his burning desire for the education and development of Indian women to this sorrow”.26

Swamiji’s plan was to go to Badrikashrama from Almora. The plan had to be cancelled as the government closed the road to Badrinath and Kedarnath on account of a famine in that region. Instead, he came to the sacred Hrishikesh having visited on the way Garhwal, Karnaprayag, Srinagar (U.P.) and Dehra Dun. In Hrishikesh his life was endangered. Long trekking, irregular eating (he lived mostly by begging) and austere life lived during wanderings had now taken their toll on him. He had such high temperature and his pulse beat was so feeble that it seemed that he was going to die. But somehow a sadhu appeared from somewhere and administered a herbal medicine mixed with honey to him which revived him. On gaining back his consciousness Swamiji said that even though he was apparently unconscious he had a trace of consciousness inside that he was not going to die till he had fulfilled the mission that was his to fulfil in the world and that until the fulfilment of the same he was not going to have any rest in life. He had already known that his mission was to teach man his real nature, to elevate man from animality to divinity and to serve the God-in-man, but he was yet “to find out a precise line of action he could follow. For this purpose he wanted to reflect deeply and to know India and her people more intimately”.27

Swamiji now resolved to explore India all alone. Akhandananda was so long with him as were some of his brother-disciples on occasions by virtue of chance-meetings. This time he would have none of them. He must be ‘free’ in his endeavour to know India and her people. He must, to echo the words of the Dhammapada, wander alone, like the rhinoceros fearing nothing and caring nothing for himself and minding only the mission he had in view. His first trip was to Delhi, for ages the capital of
India under numerous dynasties. As he visited the royal sepulchres and palaces, many of them in ruins, the thought came to his mind that all human glory was ephemeral – they came and went – but the spirit alone is permanent and that it is the glory of this eternal human spirit to which every man on earth was the living symbol that he would preach to man everywhere telling him untiringly to awaken to his real nature, ever-shining, ever-free and ever-lasting.

From Delhi Swamiji was off to the historic Rajputana. The native state of Alwar was his first stop at Rajputana. The teacher in him came out gloriously at Alwar – a teacher where liberal and humanistic spirit was plenty in evidence in his dealings with people as also in his teachings on religion. He took food at the house of Muslim admirers, caring nothing for orthodoxy in this regard. He taught the anglicized Maharaja Mangal Singhji of Alwar the meaning and significance of image worship with telling example and characteristic boldness of spirit when the Maharaja expressed his contempt for the worship of images by Hindus. He simply asked the Maharaja’s courtiers to bring down the picture of the Maharaja hanging on the wall and spit on it. And when shock was expressed over it, he simply shot back that since the picture was only a piece of paper there was nothing to be shocked over it. He pointed out to the Maharaja that though the picture of His Highness was only a piece of paper, yet the courtiers thought that there was the Maharaja in it. Likewise, when the Hindus worshipped an image, they did not think it to be a piece of stone or iron but that they imagined it to be God itself. Indeed, the image was only a medium or a symbol that helped a worshipper to concentrate on the deity (the chosen God) that was in his mind. The Maharaja was so impressed by Swamiji’s teaching that he exclaimed that Swamiji had opened his eyes and apologized to Swamiji for the contempt and ignorance he betrayed so long on image worship. In response to the Maharaj’s request that he stay for a few more days at Alwar as the guest of the state, Swamiji agreed to abide by the request only on the condition that “all those poor and illiterate people who often came to him should have the right to see him freely
whenever they desired, even as the rich and those of higher position had”. Swamiji’s was a religion of manliness. Naturally, he detested the idlers who would ask for God’s mercy without exerting themselves for the attainment of truth. Swamiji taught this truth of religion in a hard way to an old man at Alwar who would keep coming to him and pester him with the request that he do something so that God became merciful to him and gave him what he asked for. At this, Swamiji instructed the old man to observe certain disciplines. But the old man would have none of the exertion he was instructed in. Therefore, when he met Swamiji next, Swamiji showed him total indifference. Thereby, Swamiji conveyed the message that God could never have mercy on one who was devoid of exertion. In this view, he who lacks in exertion in manliness, is steeped in Tamas and cannot be religious in Swamiji’s sense of the term. Religion, for him, lay in manliness and manliness alone. That was how Krishna brought about the transformation of an unmanly and lamenting Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra at the beginning of the Pandavas’ war with the Kauravas. Krishna exhorted Arjuna to fulfil himself by the manly performance of the duty proper to him without being unduly burdened by the worries over the consequences or results of action. Taking his cue from Krishna, Swamiji said in elucidation of his religion of manliness the following to his audience at Alwar: “Be strong. Be manly. I have respect even for wicked person so long as he is manly and strong, for his strength will some day make him give up his wickedness, and even renounce all work for selfish ends. It will thus eventually bring him to the truth”. The Manliness approach to religion that Swamiji preached afterwards had its beginning undoubtedly in the encounters he had during his Bharat Parikrama days at Alwar. As he wrote in continuation of such Manliness approach to religion in his letter dated April 30, 1891: “My children, the secret of religion lies not in theories but in practice. To be good and to do good – that is the whole of religion”. ‘To be good’ one had to have faith in one’s own self and ‘to do good’ one had to have ‘strength’ and unselfish service-orientation.
Human development in terms of bringing faith and strength and unselfish service-orientation to man everywhere was the mission of Swamiji and a very important part of that mission was the awakening of the national spirit of his motherland. The national spirit had come down to the bottom level out of the constant preaching by the European historians that weakness or lack of spiritedness or of virile qualities was the cause of the downfall of India over the ages. The Indians must counter such propagandistic interpretation of Indian history by writing “soul-inspiring histories of the land”. They must point out to the world how India in the most ancient past had struck out an independent path of spirituality in its scriptures, the Vedas and Vedanta especially, instructing *man* that he had the infinite strength and power, that he was the Brahman in essence and that *weakness* could never be his true nature. To quote from Swamiji’s message to his audiences at Alwar where he undoubtedly acted as a teacher par excellence inspiring the audiences with every word of his:

> Therefore set yourselves to the task of rescuing our lost and hidden treasures from oblivion. Even as one whose child has been lost does not rest until he has found it, so do you never cease to labour until you have revived the glorious past of India in the consciousness of the people. That will be true national education, and with its advancement a true national spirit will be awakened.\(^{31}\)

It will be a misreading of Swamiji to think that he meant by national education only the reading of the scriptural literature such as the Vedas. His point was to change the mindset of the nation and to reinvigorate it with strength. Strength came from knowledge – sacred as well as scientific-secular. Thus, if strength could be brought to the nation, say, by scientific knowledge of agriculture, Swamiji would welcome it with all his heart. Swamiji had one word of caution. Weakness issued from ignorance. The ignorance of Indian farmers in the form of outmoded
thinking and practices was, undoubtedly, a cause of the weakness or underdevelopment of agriculture in India. No strength, so to say, could be brought to the nation so long as the farmers stuck to their old ways of farming. “We have to learn the science of it”, as Swamiji put it, “and apply that knowledge to the development of agriculture. …and if agriculture is carried on scientifically, then the yield will be more. In that way the farmers will be awakened to their duty; their intellectual faculties will develop; they will be able to learn more and better things; and that which is very necessary for our nation, will be achieved”. 32

Swamiji always believed that education of the masses was the thing that was most necessary for our nation. Educated men had a role to play in the education of masses. If such men went to live in villages and having invited a group of villages to their homes every evening taught them with the help of stories and parables, “then by means of such a national movement”, observed Swamiji at Alwar, “we shall be able to achieve a hundred times more in ten years than we could achieve in a thousand years”. 33

Swamiji outlined at Alwar a role for the monks as well in such a national movement: they had to teach the masses and dispel their ignorance - a role that was developed further by Swamiji in the years that followed. But the point is that such ideas had their beginning in the wandering days of Swamiji’s and therefore they should be placed in the total perspective that unfolded itself as the years went on. According to Swamiji, a true sannyasin must teach, help mankind everywhere and he would do all this in a spirit of dynamism, being always on the move. Accordingly, Swamiji moved from Alwar, after a stay of some seven weeks there, on to Jaipur where in less than two weeks’ time he mastered the great Sanskrit grammarian Panini’s work, Ashtadhyayi. To comments that his feat was amazing, his reply was characteristic of his approach to human development: there is nothing that a human being cannot do; given the heart and soul application, he can make everything possible. To quote the exact words of Swamiji: “If the mind is intensely eager, everything can be accomplished – even mountains can be crumbled into atoms”. 34
Before he set out on his wanderings, Swamiji resolved to transform human beings by his touch. Did he accomplish that at long last at Jaipur? Sardar Hari Singh, the Commander-in-Chief of the state of Jaipur, was a Vedantist. His rapport with Swamiji, notwithstanding, and despite hours of discussion with Swamiji on the subject, he remained unconvinced as to the validity and goodness of image-worship. One evening, they were returning after an evening walk when they had to wait on the road as a procession was passing along the street carrying the image of Lord Krishna and singing the praises of the Lord. In the process of watching the procession, Swamiji suddenly touched Hari Singh and having drawn his attention to the image of Lord Krishna said, “Look there, see the living God!” To continue the story, as described in The Life, “The eyes of the Sardar fell on the image of Lord Krishna, and he stood there transfixed, with tears of ecstasy trickling down his cheeks. When he returned to ordinary consciousness, he exclaimed, “Well, Swamiji that was a revelation to me. What I could not understand after hours of discussion, was easily comprehended through your touch. Truly I saw the Lord in the image of Krishna!”

Ajmer was Swamiji’s next destination. Here, as in Delhi, Swamiji was pleased to note the composite culture of India. He visited the palace of Akbar – the great emperor who, like the great Ashoka reigning nineteen hundred years before him, was a patron of the tolerant cultural ethos of India. He visited the famous Dargah, the burial-place of the noble Muslim Saint, Mainuddin Chisti – a place equally sacred to Hindus and Muslims and as such a symbol of the composite culture of India. And he rounded off his visit to Ajmer with a pilgrimage to the holy temple of Lord Brahma – the only temple in India ever raised in the name of the creator Brahma.

As Swamiji came next to Mount Abu and settled there in a mountain cave, he came to meet in the fullness of time a man who was to be one of his dearest lay disciples ever – Maharaja Ajit Singhji of Khetri. Before discussing the meeting of the two, it will be in order to refer to an incident at Mount Abu. When Swamiji arrived at Alwar in February 1891, one of his earliest welcome-giving hosts was a Maulavi. A similar thing
happened to him at Mount Abu. His earliest encounter at Mount Abu was with a Muslim Vakil or the pleader. The Vakil persuaded Swamiji to come down from the cave and live with him at his bungalow, taking care to tell Swamiji that he would make separate arrangements for food to be taken by Swamiji, lest he, a Hindu sannyasi, should feel ‘polluted’ by the touch of a Muslim. Swamiji accepted the hospitality of the Vakil but brushed aside the idea of separate dining at his house. He would share the food with his Muslim host, even though inter-dining was not the accepted social custom of the time. Now, this very thing was made a point of contention when Munshi Jagmohanlal, Private Secretary of the Maharaja of Khetri, (Maharaja was then resting at his summer residence at Mount Abu) met Swamiji. A conservative in his social views, Munshi Jagmohanlal asked Swamiji how he, a Hindu monk, could live with a Muslim and allow his food to be touched by a Muslim. The answer Swamiji gave is revealing at once of his rejection of all fanaticism, all orthodoxy and of his liberal humanist approach to human beings, irrespective of caste, community and creed. To quote Swamiji:

I am a sannyasi. I am above all your social conventions. I can dine even with a Bhangi [Sweeper]. I am not afraid of God, for He sanctions it; I am not afraid of the scriptures, for they allow it; but I am afraid of your people and your society. You know nothing of God and the scriptures. I see Brahman everywhere, manifest even in the meanest creature. For me there is nothing high or low”. 35

Having heard of such a sannyasin, Maharaja Ajit Singhji of Khetri wanted to meet him right away and having heard of the Maharaja’s eagerness, Swamiji went himself to meet him. The meeting took place at the Maharaja’s summer palace at Mount Abu on the evening of June 4, 1891. At this meeting, the Raja asked Swamiji two questions on the meaning of life and education. The answers that Swamiji gave to these questions are revealing of his approach to and perspective on human
development. Swamiji defined life as “the unfoldment and development of a being under circumstances tending to press it down”. This meant that battle and Life for him were synonymous and hence the exhortation to man to be strong and manly. As for education, he defined it as ideas assimilated in such a way that they become real and vital possessions of one’s consciousness. Education, so to say, was an integral means towards the development of consciousness of man. Everything in Swamiji’s scheme of thought was man-centric. As for Truth, he said that man traveled constantly towards the same One and Absolute Truth, by different paths, but all the while the man’s traveling was always from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth, not from error to truth. The Maharaja of Khetri was so much impressed by the teachings of Swamiji on subjects such as mentioned above that he knelt in reverence before Swamiji and considered himself privileged to have spiritual initiation from Swamiji. Swamiji was his inspiration towards working for the well-being of his country. He also kindled his interest in science. It was at the instance of his guru that the Raja started a laboratory equipped with a telescope and a microscope on the top floor of his palace. On his part, Swamiji loved this disciple for the depth of his feelings towards his guru and the sincerity of his character as a human being. He blessed the Maharaja on his prayer that a son(a would-be heir) be born to him and did the Maharaja a great honour by mentioning him as one of the two persons (the other being Mrs Ole Bull of America) in the world he could depend upon at any time.

At Ajit Singhji’s earnest request, Swamiji spent a little over two and a half months at his palace (from August 7, 1891 until October 27, 1891, to be exact) at Khetri. A part of this he utilized in studying Patanjali’s Mahabhashya (the great commentary) on the Sutras of Panini. He had Pandit Narayandas, the foremost Sanskrit grammarian of his time, available at the Khetri palace to help him with such studies. Swamiji learned so quickly and so comprehensively that a time came soon when the learned Pandit Narayandas had to tell him that he had nothing more to teach him and that, in fact, he too learnt a lot from Swamiji in course of helping Swamiji with studies.
An incident of far-reaching significance that, according to Swamiji, “removed the scales from my eyes”\textsuperscript{38} should be mentioned before we close the account of Swamiji’s experiences at Khetri. Swamiji’s teacher in the incident was a lowly nautch-girl. She was to sing in a musical entertainment to which the Maharaja of Khetri invited Swamiji. Swamiji declined to come, having thought that it would be inappropriate for a sannyasin to attend such a gathering. Deeply hurt at this, the nautch-girl sang with great pathos and feelings a song of Vaishnava saint Surdas which signified that a knower of Brahman should look not at the appearance but at the essence of human beings and things. Having been awakened to the same-sightedness of a knower of Brahman (brahmajna), Swamiji felt that he committed a great wrong by looking down upon the nautch-girl; all human beings, pure and impure, were the same Brahman in essence and that he should never have made the distinctions that he did. Being thus reestablished in his brahmajnan-based approach to human beings, Swamiji “joined the party and with tears in his eyes said to the girl : “Mother, I am guilty. I was about to show you disrespect by refusing to come to this room. But your song awakened my consciousness”.\textsuperscript{39} We are the same Brahman. So, Thou Same-sightedness, look not upon my evil qualities’- the confident faith expressed in the humble song left its impact upon Swamiji for life.\textsuperscript{40} It was Vedanta in a nutshell upon which Swamiji based his concept of human development in terms of awakening the consciousness of man.

**Western India**

From historic Rajputana, Swamiji was off, next, to the Western India. Athirst ever for knowledge and culture of India, he utilised his stay in the city of Ahmedabad in adding to his knowledge of Jainism. In the native state of Limbdi he had an encounter with a degenerate group of sex-worshippers. He saved himself from their clutches with his presence of mind and with the timely help received from Thakore Jaswant Singhji, the Prince of the state. The Thakore Saheb was so impressed with the learning of the young monk that he, according to a biography of the prince,
published in 1896, was the first to moot the idea with Swamiji that he should go to the West to preach Vedanta. Jaswant Singhji later took initiation from Swamiji. Swamiji was equally well-received in the Muslim state of Junagadh, his host at Junagadh being the Dewan or the Prime Minister of the state, Shri Haridas Viharidas Desai. According to C.H. Pandya, the manager of the Dewan’s office, Swamiji was noted at Junagadh for the following qualities: (a) his profound knowledge, (b) simplicity of life, (c) unostentatiousness, (d) catholicity of views on religion, (e) stirring eloquence, (f) proficiency in music, and, above all, (g) his extraordinary personality. At Junagadh as also at Kutch during his stay with the Dewans of the respective states, Swamiji discussed with them the problems relating to agricultural, industrial and economic development of the country and emphasized the point that a solution to the problem lay in the spread of education among the masses. Having visited Patan Somnath whose famous temple was ruined as many as three times, he pondered just not over the greatness that was India in the past but also over the way of restoring that greatness to India. The more he pondered over the problem, the more restless he became to do something for the country.

In Swamiji’s analysis, the country’s downfall was due to the one-sided approach of both the orthodoxy and the reformists. The one was so dogmatic that it refused to see wrong with anything that prevailed in India – the caste system, the sati, the enslavement of women, the indigenous system of education et al. The reformists, on the other hand, were so westernized that they thought that everything in India – its society, economy, polity – needed to be modeled on the lines of the West. The reformists were imitationists while the orthodoxy were conservatives in the most extreme sense of the terms. The two groups fought and in consequence of their petty jealousies, animosity and disharmony, the country sank and suffered degradation.

Swamiji felt that the degradation of the country must be stopped and that the people must be regenerated and uplifted. “The time had come”, Swamiji announced to the Indian Princes and their Prime Ministers who offered their hospitality to him, “for a new order of things” which
must be brought about by a comprehensive approach to the problem along the following lines. As a country India must be raised in the estimation of the civilized world by preaching to them the eternal thoughts and philosophies such as the Vedanta that the ancient Rishis of India had thought out, proving thereby that “India was truly the Mother of Religions, the fountain-head of spirituality, and the cradle of civilization”. Alongside, people, especially in rural areas, must be raised by giving them human excellence, through education, through satisfaction of the basic necessities of life and through a solution of their agricultural, industrial and economic problems.

As a matter of fact, it was with a view to bringing relief to the Indian people or, in the interest of bringing about an improvement in their socio-economic conditions that Swamiji befriended the Maharajas and their prime ministers. These rulers ruled over one-fifth of the country and upon them depended the welfare and the advancement of millions of their subjects. If they could be induced to uphold their Swadharma (self duty) by ruling for the good of the governed and if with such an end of government in view, they could be persuaded to initiate social reforms, improve methods of education and promote charitable institutions in their respective states, Swamiji’s mission of assuaging the misery and sufferings of the people would have been fulfilled, at least in some measure. As Swamiji said, “If I can win over to my cause those in whose power are wealth and the administration of the affairs of thousands, my mission will be accomplished all the sooner; by influencing one Maharaja alone I can indirectly benefit thousands of people”. Thus, it is not any consideration of personal ease or comfort that induced Swamiji to accept invitations towards staying in the palaces of Maharajas. It was rather his hope and belief that his dream of India’s regeneration would be facilitated if he could prevail on the Maharajas to take to their subjects’ welfare that induced Swamiji to reside in palaces. A lot of times however, indeed more often than not, Swamiji as a wandering monk, begged from door to door for his food, slept wherever he could find shelter, and lived as chance dictated. At a personal level, the king’s palace, the poorest man’s hut were
one and same thing to the all-sacrificing sannyasin. But then Swamiji knew that it was futile to talk of a religion to a people whose bellies ached from hunger. Therefore, he rightly thought that before talking religion and spirituality to people, he must somehow see to it that the basic necessities of their lives were satisfied.

At Porebandar, Swamiji was the guest of the Dewan (the Prime Minister) of the state, Pandit Shankar Pandurang. A Vedic scholar, Pandurang asked for the help of Swamiji in translating the Vedas. The more Swamiji studied the Vedas with Pandurang, the more he saw that India was “potentially supreme, glorious beyond words, and rich with its own ancient culture” and the more he saw that, the more the idea became firm in his mind that India must rise again through her spiritual regeneration. Swamiji asserted that having her own spiritual regeneration, India would help the world and humanity at large with spiritual awakening. Thus, India’s spiritual regeneration was eventually to the benefit of the world at large.

Swamiji spent eleven months in Porebandar helping with the translation of the Vedas, finishing his reading of Panini’s *Mahabhashya* and learning French language at the instance of Pandit Shankar Pandurang. A keen administrator and a Sanskrit scholar of importance who had traveled in many countries of Europe, Pandit Pandurang was so impressed with the depth and originality of Swamiji’s ideas during his interactions with the latter at Porebandar that he observed to Swamiji one day, “I have seen in the West that the thoughtful people there are especially eager to know about our Hindu scriptures and *darsana* (metaphysics). If you go to the West and interpret our Vedic tradition you will be doing a great work”. Swamiji said, “It is all right. I am a sannyasin, what is East or West to me? I shall go to the West if it becomes necessary”. To quote *The Life*, “As he came to appreciate better the breadth and originality of Swamiji’s ideas, Pandit Shankar Pandurang said, “Swamiji, I am afraid, you cannot do much in this country. Few will appreciate you here. You ought to go to the West where people will understand you and your worth. Surely you can throw a great light upon Western culture by preaching the Sanatan
Dharma!"[47] Pandurang’s words coincided with Swamiji’s own thought. He felt that by preaching Vedanta in the West, he could bring double benefits to India. First, he could thereby enhance India’s prestige to the West. Second, by earning West’s appreciation of India’s spiritual culture, he could boost the sagging morale and self-confidence of the Indians, particularly Hindus, the overwhelming majority of India’s people. That Swamiji was feeling confident of his power to accomplish such a mission could be seen from a statement he made to his brother-monk Trigunatitananda when the latter, in course of his wanderings, came to Porebandar and met Swamiji by chance. “Sarada” [the pre-monastic name of Trigunatitananda], said Swamiji, “I am beginning to understand to some extent, now, what the Master said of me. Really, there is so much power in me I feel as though I could revolutionize the world”. [48]

It was perhaps at Porebandar itself or may be a little earlier at Junagadh that Swamiji heard for the first time that a Parliament of Religions was going to be held some time in the following year at Chicago. At Khandwa in the Central Provinces[49] which he visited sometime in the later part of June 1892, Swamiji dropped the hint for the first time of his serious intention to be present at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago if help with the passage money would be forthcoming to him. That he was driven by power within to actualize such an intention could be seen from what he said to brother-disciple Abhedananda during the meeting between the two at Bombay when Swamiji came to that city from Khandwa : “Brother, such a great power has grown within me that sometimes I feel that my whole body will burst”. [50] Swamiji stayed in Bombay for two months which however was not of much help to him in terms of finding ways and means of going to America. One side benefit, if it could be said so, of his stay at Bombay was his chance-meeting with Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the compartment of a train from Bombay to Poona. They were on the opposite sides of the Age of Consent Bill which raised the age of consent to 12 from 10 with Swamiji considering the Bill as eminently sensible while Tilak opposing it, being the orthodox he was at that time. Though Swamiji stayed in the
house of Tilak at Poona for eight to ten days, they did not know much of each other. Later on, however, after Swamiji returned from America, they met each other on several occasions during which, it is claimed, Swamiji changed Tilak’s orthodoxy in respect of working only for one section of the nation – the Brahmans of Maharashtra – to working for all sections of the nation. “Swamiji made him understand that if a nation had to be raised, it was not enough to raise only a section of it. The nation will not rise, unless the poor, the miserable, the low are raised. After meeting Swamiji, Tilak worked in various ways for the uplift of the masses”.

To get back to the story of Swamiji’s wanderings, Swamiji moved from Poona to Kolhapur where, in a public lecture, he is said to have made the following two statements. First, he claimed that Buddhism was a rebel child of Hinduism and that Christianity was a far-fetched imitation of Hinduism. He was already making a mental note on the synthesis of religions – a theme which he developed further in his Chicago Addresses. Second, he claimed that in running too much after luxury the Europeans failed to grasp the real significance of religion. It is noteworthy that he did not reject the material necessities of life, he rejected only an excess of them in the form of luxury. This too underlined an approach to human life and religion which he developed more fully during his stay in the West and after his return to India from America. The point in making a reference to such public lecture of Swamiji’s in Kolhapur is that he was already envisaging for himself a tour to America in connection with the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago in 1893 and was making an oratorical preparation of the kind of approach that he was going to use in the West.

From Kolhapur Swamiji came to Belgaum in October 1892 where he announced in explicit terms that the time had come to demonstrate to the country and to the world, the West especially, that Vedanta contained the priceless truth that could be the perennial source of universal inspiration and that if ever he should make the trip to the West, it will be his sacred duty to preach the message of Vedanta to the West. We get an illustration of what kind of use he wanted to make of the life-giving
message of Vedanta towards achieving human development, indeed human excellence, from the following statements as made at Belgaum:

1. Power of mind arises from control of the forces of the body. The idea is to conserve and transform the physical energy into mental and spiritual energy. The great danger lies in spending the forces of the body in wanton and reckless pleasures, and thus losing the retentive faculties of the mind.

2. Whatever you do, devote your whole mind, heart and soul to it. I once met a great sannyasi who would clean his brass cooking vessels, making them shine like gold, with as much care and attention as he bestowed on his worship and meditation.

3. Live a righteous life; think elevating thoughts; be cheerful, but never indulge in pleasures which tax the body or which cause you to repent.

4. Defy death. Apart from the philosophical aspect that the body dies, not soul, we should never consider ourselves so important as to think that the world cannot go on without us!

5. Your business is to concern yourself solely with your duties and responsibilities. Be good yourself and the whole world will appear good to you. You will then see only the good in others. We see in the external world the image that we carry in our hearts. Give up the habit of fault-finding, and you will be surprised to find how those against whom you have a grudge will gradually change their entire attitude towards you. All our mental states are reflected in the conduct of others towards us.

6. Though it is necessary to appear worldly before worldly people, one’s heart should always be given over to the Lord and the mind kept under firm control.

7. Religion results from direct perception. Put in a homely way, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Try to realize religion, otherwise you will gain nothing.

Having given Swamiji’s brilliant expositions of how Vedanta as a philosophy and religion could be put to the use of human development, one cannot but agree with The Life’s observation that “he was like a thunderbolt: he spoke the truth; [and] he spoke boldly.”
In Belgaum too, like he did at Khandwa, Swamiji expressed his intention to sail for America to attend the Parliament of Religions and the offer was immediately made to him to raise subscriptions for the purpose. But Swamiji forestalled such a move by saying that before he made good his vow of visiting Rameswaram in the south, he could not really say yes to such an enterprise.

Swamiji concluded his wanderings in Western India with a trip to Margao in Goa, a Portugese coastal colony where in a seminary, the oldest in Goa, he studied Christian theology from old Latin texts and manuscripts which were unavailable elsewhere in India. Swamiji had already made a thorough study of Koran. Indeed, the man whose sole purpose was the development of fellow men cutting across the boundaries of religion and culture had necessarily to be inclusive in his search for knowledge and theology. Exclusiveness leads in the ultimate analysis to fanaticism, that is, intolerance, in the face of all reason, of all ideas except one’s own. Swamiji’s inclusiveness, as we shall see at the appropriate place, led him to a harmonious construction of Religion as an instrument of human development and made him blaze away at all expressions of dogmatism, bigotry and fanaticism. No wonder that “Wherever the Swami went he was sought after not only by Hindus, but by people of other faiths as well”.

South India

Having covered the Western India, it was Swamiji’s turn now to wander through the South India. Mysore state was his first stop in South India. The Dewan of the Mysore state was so impressed by the breadth and the depth of the young monk’s knowledge of religion that he observed of him, “Here is this young man whose insight exceeds that of any one I have ever known”. The Maharaja of Mysore’s admiration was no less. He made him a state guest and offered him a place to stay in the palace itself.

One day when Swamiji was present in the royal court, the Maharaja asked Swamiji his opinion of his courtiers to which Swamiji said that the courtiers were the same everywhere; they were time-servers first and everything else afterwards. The Maharaja observed that perhaps his
Dewan was different to which Swamiji replied that the Dewans of native states were in the habit of robbing the Maharajas and paying the political agent. Now, Swamiji was speaking out the truth and nothing but the truth as all men of integrity and particularly a sannyasin were supposed to do. Frightened at the truthful integrity of Swamiji, the Maharaja warned him that if he did not mince words in speaking the truth, he ran the risk of being poisoned by someone in his court. The reply that Swamiji gave is reflective of what he expected of all truly developed human beings and as such deserves to be quoted: “What! Do you think an honest sannyasi is afraid of speaking the truth, even though it costs him his very life? Suppose, Your Highness, your son should ask me tomorrow, ‘Swamiji, what do you think of my father? Am I to attribute to you all sorts of virtues which I am quite aware that you do not possess? Shall I speak falsely? Never!” Swamiji meant to say that everything can be sacrificed for the sake of truth, but the truth can never be sacrificed for anything in the world.

The Maharaja was so impressed that he asked Swamiji if he could do anything for him. Swamiji evaded a direct reply but gave the Maharaja an idea of what he wanted to do for the world or what his mission for humanity was. This is best stated in the words of The Life:

He [Swamiji] dwelt on the condition of India. Its great possessions, he said, were philosophical and spiritual: its great needs were of modern scientific ideas and a thorough organic reform. The Maharaja was spell-bound. It was for India, the Swami continued, to give the treasure she possessed to the peoples of the West. He intended going to America himself to preach the gospel of Vedanta. “And what I want”, he added, “is that the West should help us in improving our material condition by providing us with the means of educating our peoples in modern agriculture, industries and other technical sciences”. The Maharaja promised, then and there, the necessary money to defray his traveling expenses; but for reasons best known to himself – one perhaps being his vow to visit Rameswaram first –, the Swami declined the Maharaja’s offer for the
present. But from that day the Maharaja and his Prime Minister regarded him as “the man born for the regeneration of India”. 59

Being a man for the regeneration of India as also of humanity at large by making constructive use of the ‘perennial’ Vedanta, Swamiji enjoyed addressing an assembly of Pandits at Bangalore on the Vedanta. In this assembly, presided over by the Prime Minister of the Mysore state, the others spoke on the aspects of Vedanta and the theories of Vedanta pertaining to those aspects. Swamiji, on the other hand, dwelt on some grand ideas of the Vedanta in its entirety – ideas that he developed and articulated later in the West and India – startling his audience with the originality of his perception and treatment. This assembly in that sense was a precursor of the ‘Paper on Hinduism’ that he presented about a year later at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago.

Never being inclined to stay in any place for more than a few days, 60 Swamiji visited next certain places in Cochin and Travancore States. Apart from his desire to gain first-hand acquaintance of as much of India as possible, he saw for himself the miserable condition of the lower classes in those states ensuing from the tyranny of the higher castes over the lower-caste people. One offshoot of caste-tyranny was conversion to Christianity. As Swamiji put the irony-cum-tyranny of the situation:

To What a ludicrous state are we brought! If a Bhangi comes to anybody as a Bhangi, he would be shunned as the plague; but no sooner does he get a cupful of water poured upon his head with some mutterings of prayers by a Padri, and get a coat on his back, no matter how threadbare, and come into the room of the most orthodox Hindu – I don’t see the man who then dare refuse him a chair and a hearty shake of the hands! Irony can go no further. And come and see what they, the Padris, are doing here in the Dakshin (South). They are converting the lower classes by lakhs; and in Travancore, the most priest-ridden country in India – where every bit of land is owned the Brahmins, and the females, even of the royal
family, hold it as high honour to live in concubinage with the Brahmins – nearly one-fourth has become Christian! ⁶¹

What was the solution to such a situation? Swamiji’s answer was that “we must cease to tyrannise” ⁶² and that ‘man must be brother to man’. ⁶³ That such was the message of Swamiji during his stay (December 13-22, 1892) at Trivandrum, the capital of Travancore, could be seen from at least two incidents as related by Prof. Sundararama Iyer, his host at Trivandrum. To quote him:

I met Swami Vivekananda for the first time at Trivandrum in December 1892, and was privileged to see and know a good deal of him. …He came to me accompanied by his Mohammedan guide. …Almost the first thing he asked me to do was to arrange for his Mohammedan attendant’s meal. This companion was a peon in the Cochin State service. …The Swami had taken almost nothing but a little milk during the two previous days; but it was only after his Mohammedan peon had been provided with food and had taken his leave that he gave any thought to his own needs. ⁶⁴

The message that Swamiji gave to his host through the above statement was that no matter what the faith or the religion of a man was, man must be treated as man. The other incident stated below carried a similar message. This incident took place one evening at the Trivandrum club which showed at once Swamiji’s distaste for rituals connected with the caste system and his concern for man as man. It was the caste practice in South India at that time for a Brahmin to return the salutations of non-Brahmins with a little gesture of the left hand – by raising it a little higher than the right. At the club as noted above, Swamiji watched a Brahmin gentleman, a former Dewan, doing that to a non-Brahmin. Now, the same Brahmin gentleman, on the eve of leaving the club, saluted Swamiji to which Swamiji responded by following the sannyasin’s customary practice
of uttering the name of Narayana. This raised the Brahmin’s ire. To his angry pointer that Swamiji should have acknowledged his salutation by similar salutation, Swamiji gave him the disarming reply that the gentleman should have remembered doing the same to the other gentleman who saluted him earlier. What better way was there than this of teaching a man that man should treat every other man as a brother and as an equal.

Swamiji discounted the theory of purity of races and maintained that the Brahmins were as much a mixed race as the rest of mankind. In his opinion, a Brahmin was a Brahmin in giving freely of his store of knowledge to the rest of the population. Unselfish work in the pursuit of knowledge and in the giving of it to others was the distinguishing mark of a Brahmin. Thus, the task the Brahmins were expected to perform in the prevailing conditions of India was to give education to the suffering millions of India who were sunk in ignorance and thus make men of them.

Referring to the South Indian Brahmins’ practice of treating fish and flesh as forbidden food, he asserted that the need of the nation at that hour was the cultivation of strength and that need perhaps dictated a change in the food habit of the people. After all, eating meat and even beef was the practice among the ancient Brahmins. It is clearly documented in the Uttara Ramcharita. With the introduction and spread of Buddhism that practice fell gradually into disuse with disastrous consequences for India. To quote Swamiji: “The disfavour into which flesh had fallen was one of the chief causes of the gradual decline of the national strength, and of the final overthrow of the national independence of the united ancient Hindu races and states of India.” 65 What was the remedy? The remedy lay in the change in the food habit of the people. As Swamiji said: “The Hindus must freely take to the use of animal food if India was at all to cope with the rest of the world in the present race for power and predominance among the world’s communities, whether within the British Empire, or beyond its limits.” 66

Swamiji meant to say that strength and fearlessness were the two attributes essential for the purpose of human development and that the cultivation of these two qualities was as much necessary for the individual
man to set himself free from the bondage of the senses as it was necessary for India as a nation to deliver itself from the bondage of external political control.

Before closing the account of Swamiji’s visit to Trivandrum, we must quote from one more document – the reminiscences of K. S. Ramaswami Shastri, the son of Prof. Sundararama Iyer, to show what his mission towards the development of humanity meant when it came to the issue of the development of his countrymen in India:

“One day he [Swamiji] said to me and my father: “Practical patriotism means not a mere sentiment or even emotion of love of the motherland but a passion to serve our fellow-countrymen. I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. My whole soul is afire and I am burning with a fierce desire to change such evil conditions. Let no one talk of Karma. If it was their Karma to suffer, it is our Karma to relieve the suffering. If you want to find God, serve man. To reach Narayana you must serve the Daridra Narayanas – the starving millions of India”.”

Swamiji left Trivandrum on December 22, 1892 to reach Kanyakumari in the southern extremity of India on December 24. He stayed at Kanyakumari till December 26, 1892 during which he worshipped the Mother of the Universe manifest as a virgin girl in the temple there. There were two rocks out in the ocean – some two furlongs away from the temple -, indeed the last bit of the land of India. According to the Puranas, on the larger rock out there in the ocean, the Divine Mother performed her Tapasya to win the hand of Shiva, the Great God. Swamiji proposed to sit in meditation on the same rock. Having nothing to pay to the boatman, he swam across the shark-infested waters to arrive at the rock as mentioned.

As he passed into deep meditation, he reflected over the answers to two major questions. The first question that he reflected over was as follows. Why was it that India, once the cradle of nations,
thrown down from the pinnacle of glory to the depths of degradation? The answer that he found was that the root cause for India’s downfall was that she lost her characteristic individuality as represented in the highest spiritual consciousness and humanizing religion that her Rishis had discovered in the ancient past. Religion that once had supplied the life-blood to India’s millions was sapped of its life-giving vitality by the dominance of priesthood, the despotism of the caste system and the social divisions that came as a consequence of these two. What was life-giving before was turned into an instrument for the oppression of the poor masses of India, landing them thereby into abysmal poverty and ignorance. With the vast majority of the people being thus driven into oppression, poverty and ignorance, the nation could not but descend to the depths of degradation.

The other question that he reflected over was: how could India rise again? The answer that Swamiji’s meditation led him to was as follows.

(a) That India can be raised through the restoration of the humanizing religion and the highest spiritual consciousness that had made India once the cradle of the nations and the cradle of the Faith. Religion had to be restored to its rightful place for which a restatement of the culture of Rishis and of the Vedantic spiritual ideal was necessary. Religion, properly used, could be the life-blood again of India’s millions. It could be the most potent of all forces towards raising India again.

(b) That India can be raised through the removal of the ignorance and poverty of the masses of India. The masses of India had to be raised by removing their ignorance through education and by removing their poverty through an improvement in the material condition of the suffering millions.

(c) That India can be raised through the service rendered to the poor and the downtrodden – the Daridra Narayanas – of India. From the moment of his discovery at Kanyakumari that religion that was divorced from the service of humanity, especially the poor and the downtrodden, was dry straw, Swamiji dedicated himself to the service of India, which meant to
him service especially of the outcaste Narayanas, starving Narayanas, oppressed Narayanas, indeed, millions and millions of Narayanas.

(d) That India can be raised through a ‘give and take’ relationship of India with the West. So many persons during Swamiji’s wanderings suggested to him that he go to the West in order to give the West an idea of the spiritual and philosophical treasures of India. Now, Swamiji reached this resolution that he would indeed go to the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago shortly. He would go in the name of India’s millions giving the West the spiritual treasures that the ancient Rishis of India discovered as the ideal of their race and the consummation of their lives and that he would in the process gather from the West the wherewithal with which he would, on his return to India, work for the regeneration of the poor humanity of India.

Swamiji formally concluded his pravrajya at Rameswaram by offering worship to Shiva in the temple there.

In the beginning of 1893 Swamiji came from Rameswaram to Pondicherry where he had an encounter with Hindu conservatism in the form of an argument with a bigoted pandit. Swamiji made the point that the Hindu ideal was best represented in the Vedantic ideal of Oneness, that the priestcraft and the caste system constituted a perversion of such ideal of oneness, that the Vedantic ideal called for the ideal of social equality, that Buddhism was a logical development of Hinduism in seeking to actualize the ideal of equality in the social body, that the time had come for Hinduism to take a critical look at itself and to adjust itself to modern needs and problems and that the educated class of India had a special responsibility to uplift the Shudras or the labouring class by giving them education. The last straw, so far as the bigoted pandit was concerned, was Swamiji’s announcement that he intended to go to the West to tell them about the glories of Hinduism and to learn from them whatever there was to learn of their civilization. The pandit went into a rage, calling Swamiji a wandering beggar who knew nothing. In persistently interjecting ‘never’, ‘never’ to everything that Swamiji said, he claimed that Hinduism was an ever-perfect religion needing no reform whatsoever, that the Westerners
were all Mlechchas and that by crossing the Kalapani or “black water” of the ocean, the wandering beggar-monk would pollute himself as also Hinduism. Having seen dogmatism and bigotry at its worst at the level of a so-called educated man, Swamiji now knew what kind of struggle he had on his hand in regenerating India and in making man free from such evils by giving them the higher principles of religion as also of education.

From Pondicherry Swamiji came to Madras, a city, which represented a perfect contrast to Pondicherry in appreciating the ideals of Hinduism as formulated by him. Madras gave Swamiji a group of youngmen such as Alasinga Perumal and G. G. Narasimbachari who became, first, his admiring listeners and later his dedicated disciples. Then came the elders appreciating his prodigious intellect, profound learning and unbending spirit of renunciation and his exposition of the Vedas and the Vedanta as science.

Madras witnessed the great human side of Swamiji one evening on its seashore when, on seeing the half-starved children of the fishermen working with their mothers, waist-deep in the water, he cried out in agony, ‘O Lord, how long had these miserable creatures, had to bear such misery!’ He could not bear the sight of them. Such was the infinite compassion of Swamiji for the poor and the lowly and Madras could not but be moved.

Madras listened to Swamiji with rapt attention when he said: The time has come for the propagation of our Faith. The time has come for the Hinduism of the Rishis to become dynamic. Shall we stand by whilst alien hands attempt to destroy the fortress of our ancient Faith? Are we satisfied with its impregnability? Shall we remain passive, or shall we become aggressive, as in days of old, preaching unto nations the glory of the Dharma? Shall we remain encased within the narrow confines of our social groups and our provincial consciousness, or shall we branch out into the thought worlds of other peoples, seeking to influence these for the benefit of India? In order to rise again, India must be strong and united, and must focus all its living forces.
Madras now knew and recognized Swamiji for what he was: an ancient Rishi reborn to resurrect the Dharma, to regenerate the humanity that was India and the humanity that lived in the rest of the world with the practical application of the eternal spiritual principles of the Vedanta to life in modern times. Accordingly, Madras honestly felt that Swamiji should be sent to the West for the benefit of India, indeed, of the humanity as a whole. Madras offered to raise subscriptions for the purpose and set about the task, but Swamiji called a halt to its enterprise by expressing his willingness to wait till he knew for certain that his will to go to Chicago was the Divine will as well.

In February 1893 Swamiji came to Hyderabad from Madras. Invited to a meeting with Sir Khurshid Jah, the foremost nobleman and brother-in-law of His Highness the Nizam, Swamiji explained to Sir Khurshid that his purpose in going to Chicago, if he went at all, was not to preach the glory of any personal god of Hinduism but to preach the Eternal Religion to this effect that man in his essence was Absolute Himself and that the Vedanta was the most universal of all religions in this sense that while other religions were based on the life of some person as its founder, the Vedanta was based on the impersonal and eternal principle of the Divinity already in man. He was quick to add that all religions were preaching the truth of the Absolute, that the religious systems were the paths for reaching this truth and that “any one of them, when practiced intensely, was certain to make manifest the Divinity already in man”. Sir Khurshid was so satisfied after this meeting with Swamiji that he immediately offered to help him with one thousand rupees towards his voyage to the West which Swamiji declined, as he had done earlier with his Madrasi disciples and admirers, telling the Nawab that he would let him know if and when he had command from above to make the journey to the West.

Swamiji also gave his first-ever public lecture in India at the Mahaboob College in Hyderabad, the lecture being titled, “My Mission to the West”. In this lecture Swamiji declared that his mission was no less than the regeneration of mankind of which “the regeneration of the
Motherland” occupied him most at the moment. He expressed his firm hope and belief that with the diffusion of spiritual powers of India to the West he would be able to bring benefit to the both.

Back in Madras, Swamiji found that his disciples were already into the task of collecting subscriptions for his passage to America. It was March/April 1893. Around this time, in order that his followers are no longer kept in uncertainty, he prayed to his Master for guidance and found in a dream that the Master walked from the seashore into the ocean, beckoning him to follow. Swamiji now knew that the Divine will indeed wanted him to go to the West for preaching the truth of the Divinity of man. In the wake of his symbolic dream, there came also the ‘go-ahead’ letter from the Holy Mother which made Swamiji announce to his disciples and admirers in Madras that he was now indeed ready to go for work in the West in right earnest. He told them, “If it is the mother’s will that I go, then let me receive the money from the people! Because it is for the people of India that I am going to the West – for the people and the poor!” In pursuance of Swamiji’s instruction, the young followers of him indeed went from door to door, collecting money from the people for the purpose of Swamiji’s passage to America.

IV

Swamiji was all set to sail for America from Madras on May 31, 1893, but then a special messenger came from the Maharaja of Khetri around the middle of April 1893 to take him to Khetri to attend a special function there to celebrate the birth of a son to the Maharaja. About two years previous to this, the Maharaja asked Swamiji for his blessings to this effect and now wanted to celebrate the event with his Guru by his side. In the changed circumstances, Swamiji decided to embark from Bombay. On his way to Khetri, he met at Bombay his brother disciples – Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda. He was now so confident of the Divine will working behind his attending the Parliament of Religions at Chicago that he told Turiyananda, “Haribhai, I am going to America.
Whatever you hear of as happening there [meaning preparations for the Parliament of Religions], is all for this [striking his own chest]. For this [me] alone everything is being arranged”. 74

Having attended the special ceremony at Khetri and having stayed there for about three weeks during which he, at the request of his beloved disciple, the Maharaja of Khetri, assumed or rather reassumed75 the name Vivekananda by which he has since come to be known to the world. On his way back to Bombay for the purpose of embarking for America, he met at Abu Road Swamis Brahmamanda and Turiyananda again. What he said to Turiyananda on this occasion is absolutely important for understanding Vivekananda’s mission and his religion and therefore it is best said in the words in which it is documented in The Life:

He [Swamiji] said, ‘Haribhai, I am still unable to understand anything of your so-called religion’. Then with an expression of deep sorrow on his countenance and intense emotion shaking his body, he placed his hand on his heart and added, ‘But my heart has expanded very much, and I have learnt to feel. Believe me, I feel intensely indeed.’ His voice was choked with feeling; he could say no more. For a time profound silence reigned, and tears rolled down his cheeks”. In telling of this incident Swami Turiyananda was also overcome. ...With a deep sigh he said, “Can you imagine what passed through my mind on hearing the Swami speak thus? ‘Are not these’, I thought, ‘the very words and feelings of Buddha?’ …I could clearly perceive that the sufferings of humanity were pulsating in the heart of Swamiji: his heart was a huge cauldron in which the sufferings of mankind were being made into a healing balm”. 76

The ship left the Bombay harbour on May 31, 1893, with Swamiji on board. Swamiji was now on his way to tell the West of the eternal spirit of man, of the Divinity of man, of the Vedantic principle of man, and of the oneness of mankind, of the need for sympathizing with the poor and
the oppressed of the world and of working for the development of the whole mankind, particularly of its poor and marginalized sections.

V

In the concluding section of this chapter it will be in order to identify some distinguishing features of the Bharat Parikrama experiences of Swamiji’s. First, Swamiji did not undertake it in the traditional motive of gaining punya for himself. Personal salvation was not his motive. It was rather the salvation of man, his deliverance and development as an individual and as a collectivity in the form of a nation and mankind, that he sought. He knew that experience was the greatest teacher in the world and that it was through experiencing of India at first hand that he wanted to shape up his approach to the development of man and humanity in India and the world at large. In order to fulfil his Guru-ordained mission to awaken humanity to a sense of spirituality and to assuage the misery of the humble and the poor, he had to ‘experience’ humanity and he rightly began with humanity as it was in India. To put it in the words of one of his brother-disciples, “He was constantly on the look-out for new experiences at this time, constantly gathering ideas, making contrasts and comparisons, saturating his mind with the religious and social ideas of every province, studying various systems of theology and philosophy, and finding out the inherent worth of all the varied Indian peoples whose life he closely observed”.

It was not that he did not perform the most severe form of spiritual practice. As a matter of fact, during his wanderings at the Himalayas, he sat in a cave above a mountain village at Almora to perform tapasya. But then, “at the very climax of all his spiritual exercises, instead of abiding in the ultimate of personal bliss… he felt the impulse to work, and this, as it were, forced him out of his spiritual practice”. Indeed, referring to such experience during this period of his life, he himself said to Nivedita later, “Nothing in my whole life ever so filled me with the sense of work to be done”. The life of silence and pure monasticism was not for them. He
had a mission to fulfill and the very essence of his nature forced him into
the realization of this line of work.\textsuperscript{79} Intensive sadhana with eyes drawn
inside – ‘idleness of God’,\textsuperscript{80} as Romain Rolland calls it, was not for him.
His was extensive sadhanas “with eyes open” and seeing God in His
“manifest forms” in man everywhere.\textsuperscript{81}

Second, as Swamiji’s ideal was God-in-man, he wanted to test in
his own life during wanderings whether Divine Providence was really at
work. He put this idea to test as many as three times. During his
wanderings, he lived by the ideal of having no thought for the morrow and
as such never carried any food or money on him during his itinerant days.
At times, he took the vow that he would not beg food from anyone and
that he would not eat until the food was offered to him. On one such
occasion at Vrindavan during his wanderings in Northern India, he grew
faint with hunger but kept walking through a forest when he heard a man
calling out to him to say that he had brought food for him. Swamiji’s idea
was to test Providence – and he found that Providence had indeed taken
care of him in the wilderness.

On another occasion, he alighted at a railway station (Tari Ghat) in
U. P. with a parched throat and empty stomach, having been without food
and water from the day before (he did not have money to buy water from
the water-bearer, let alone food), only to be jeered at by a fellow railway
passenger who kept eating his sumptuous meal at the shed of the railway
platform telling Swamiji all along that since he did not make money, he
deserved his starvation. Suddenly, a man (a local sweatmeat vendor)
appeared on the scene with Puris and curry, sweetmeats and cold water
entreating Swamiji to eat the food he brought. The man told Swamiji, to
the utter surprise of the jeering man, that he brought the food being so told
by Lord Rama during his post-lunch nap at his shop.

Once, during his wanderings, Swamiji thought that he should not
be taking food from the poor Indians who offered him their hospitality.
Did not a poor man, in giving food to him, reduce the share of his hungry
children? What did he ever do for them that he would take food from
them? With such thought Swamiji walked into a forest, deciding to drop
dead from starvation and exhaustion. He trudged along the whole day. As
the evening approached in the forest, and as he sank to the ground under a
tree, he saw a tiger approaching and was delighted to think that his body
would be of service, at least, to the tiger. To his utter surprise, he found
that the tiger, instead of pouncing on him, sat at a distance from him and
walked away after a while. The instances such as these revealed to
Swamiji the Divine Providence at work.

Third, he found evidence not only of Divine Providence at work,
he noted the Divine Providence’s most persistent manifestation in man, in
all classes of men. It was from such a perspective that he mixed with all
classes of people – from the Maharajas to the orthodox pandits to the poor
and lowly people, despised by society. He looked upon them all as
Narayanas and as he came face to face with their joys and sorrows, their
hopes and frustrations, he got to know India in her infinite variety and
complexity. He mixed with the Maharajas and their Prime Ministers in
order to awaken care for public weal in their not-so-sympathetic hearts. He
mixed with the pandits to study the various systems of theology and
philosophy in India, to assimilate, as Romain Rolland put it, “all the rivers
of thought scattered and buried in the soil of India”. 82 Thus, followed: his
study of the Sanskrit grammar at Khetri with the foremost grammarian of
the time; his perfecting of his philosophical and Sanskrit studies including;
the Vedas at Porebandar; his completion of his knowledge of Jain and
Muslim cultures at Ahmedabad; and his research on Christian theology in
Goa. And the more he learnt the more he realized that the differences
among the theological and religious systems of India and of the world
were but different ways of understanding the Divinity already in man, that
in that sense differences were more apparent than real and that there
prevailed, despite all apparent diversity, a unity in the world of Indian
ideals.

Fourth, the more he learnt, the more he mixed, and the more he
saw, the more he became an upholder of the unity of India and particularly
of the conscience of India. And this conscience was most evident in his
mixing with and dealing with the lowly people of India. “We have for all
ages been sucking their blood and trampling them under foot.”

observed Swamiji with a heart melting into compassion, and yet what large-heartedness he saw among them. An instance to this effect is best stated in the words of Swamiji himself:

In the course of my wanderings I was in a certain place [Khetri] where people came to me in crowds... and made me talk for three days and nights without giving me a moment's rest. They did not even ask me whether I had eaten. On the third night, when all the visitors had left, a low-caste poor man came up to me and said, “Swamiji, I am much pained to see that you have not had any food for three days. You must be very tired and hungry. Indeed, I have noticed that you have not even taken a glass of water”. ...I asked him, “Can you give me something to eat?” The man said, “Swamiji, my heart is yearning to give you food, but how can you eat Chapaties baked with my hands! If you allow me I shall be most glad to bring flour, lentil and other things, and you may cook them yourself”. At that time, according to the monastic rules, I did not touch fire; so I said to him, “You had better give me the Chapaties cooked by you. I shall gladly take them”. Hearing this, the man shrank in fear, he was a subject of the Maharaja of Khetri and was afraid that if the latter came to hear that he, a cobbler, had given Chapaties to a sannyasi, he would be severely death with and possibly banished from the State. I told him, however, that he need not fear, that the Maharaja would not punish him. He did not believe me; but out of the kindness of his heart, even though he feared the consequences, he bought me the cooked food. ...I shed tears of love and gratitude, and thought, “Thousands of such large-hearted men live in lowly huts, and we despise them as low-castes and untouchables!”

During his wanderings in Central India, Swamiji had many trying experiences. People refused to give him food and shelter and once he had to starve for three days. “It was in this period that he lived with a family of the sweeper caste and saw the priceless worth and potentialities that
could be found among those whom society rejected”. The Life goes on to observe that “It must have been contacts and experiences like this that made him realize the distressing condition of his country, and turned him into the champion of her depressed millions. Poverty and misery he saw on every side, and his heart was overwhelmed with compassion”.

Fifth, with overwhelming compassion, Swamiji once said that “No one but the sufferer knows the pangs of sorrows”. Having passed through the days of suffering during his wanderings and having thus identified himself with the poor and the miserable of India, his resolution therefore at the end of his wanderings, particularly at Kanyakumari, was that his mission to help humanity and his own service to the God-in-humanity must begin with the humanity of India. Bharat Parikrama turned the single-minded monk into a patriotic nation-builder and his first call to this task of nation-building was to the men of renunciation. They must come forward first to set themselves to the task of raising the nation by raising India’s downtrodden masses. “Suppose”, he proposed, “some disinterested sannyasis, bent on doing good to others, go from village to village, disseminating education and seeking in various ways to better the condition of all down to the Chandala [outcaste], through oral teaching, and by means of maps, cameras, globes, and such other accessories – can’t that bring forth good in time? Sixth, Bharat Parikrama had made Swamiji confident that in every town he could “get from ten to fifteen men” to help him in the service of the masses.

Seventh, Bharat Parikrama turned the monk with the single-minded commitment to the welfare of humanity and the development of man everywhere into a world-architect as well. The world is one; the humanity is one. If the poor India could not help him with funds, he had as a Vedantist the right to look to the West for funds. He would give them the Vedanta. He would raise them in spirituality, telling them that the Vedanta was not only for the benefit of India, but also for the good of the West.

Thus, the end-product of Swamiji’s Bharat Parikrama was that it made him confident of himself and of the message that was his to give.
helped him firm up or consolidate his perspective on and approach to human development. He now knew that his task was to regenerate and reconstruct humanity in India and abroad into the spiritual ideal of the divinity of soul and unity of mankind. That spiritual ideal involved man in the progressive conquest of the brutish force of his nature and in the progressive acquisition of true power which is character.

Man must be saved from being a slave of his desire and egotism and reckless pursuit of enjoyment, untempered by any sense of renunciation whatsoever. “What we need now”, as Swamji said “is strong common sense, a public spirit and a philosophy and religion [such as Vedanta] which will make us men. 93

Human development was, for Swamiji, the development of the undaunted and indomitable spirit of man, the asserting by man of his higher nature to this effect that he would never yield to weakness and that he would never allow the senses and the body to dominate him. It is the asserting by man of the truth that within the soul resides all power and that the strength within must be brought to the fore by man in all his actions, particularly in the face of adversity. Strength, as Swamiji was never tired of saying, is life, strength is development and its opposite—weakness—is death and decay.

Man had to be redeemed with the development of conviction or faith in the infinite powers of the soul. Faith, in its turn, was to confer on man strength, enabling him to fight the battles of life fearlessly and serve his fellow-men unselfishly. Man had to be awakened to that sense of entitlement and luminous realization that rightfully belonged in him.

Thus, Swamiji’s freshly consolidated motto at the end of his Bharat Parikrama and at the beginning of his Biswa Parikrama (wanderings over the globe) was: liberation and development of fellow-men in India and abroad. With his approach to human development firmed-up in respect of the life-giving ideas of the Vedanta such as the Divinity of man and the Manliness of man in terms of faith, strength, fearless and service, Swamiji was all set to articulate his approach to human development in the West. And to that, we turn in our next chapter.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For the sake of convenience, I shall refer to him throughout the discussion in this chapter as ‘Swamiji’.
2. Being struck by cancer in his voice, Shri Ramakrishna actually wrote these words on a piece of paper on one of the last few days before he left his mortal frame.
4. Ibid.
6. As Swamiji’s Eastern and Western Disciples observe, besides religion, “history, sociology, literature, art and science received attention”. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.1, P.205.
7. Nikhilananda, P.73.
9. Ibid., P.211.
10. Ibid., P.214. See also *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.1, PP.338-339.
11. ‘I am He’, says the Upanishads. The ‘I’ in this dictum is, of course, not the ego in man. The ‘I’ referred to here is the indwelling spirit that is at once immanent, all-pervading and transcendent.
13. Ibid., P.218.
15. Ibid., P.221.
16. Ibid., P.225.
17. Ibid., P.234.
18. From Ghazipur Swamiji came to Varanasi to stay at the garden house of Pramadababu when he received the news that Balaram Bose, one of the closest lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and a patron of the Baranagore monastery, had died on April 13, 1890. Seeing Swamiji lamenting deeply
over the death of Balaram, Pramadababu commented that a Vedantin monk should not have been so upset over it.


23. As Romain Rolland perceives it, the new message of Swamiji involved an activism of a different type than was known to India traditionally: God-realization not through the ‘idleness of God’ but through the finding of God in the service of man. *The Life of Vivekananda And The Universal Gospel*, P.11.


25. Thanks to the efforts of Mr and Mrs Boshi Sen of Almora, a Vivekananda Resting Hall was erected in July 1971 on the place where the fakir had fed Vivekananda with cucumber.


34. Ibid., 278.
34a. Ibid., P.278.
35. Ibid., P.280.
36. Ibid., P.281.
40. Romain Rolland, op. cit., P.27.
41. Ibid., P.295.
42. Ibid., P.296.
43. Ibid., P.293.
43a. According to a biographer of Swamiji's, Swamiji’s success with the Maharajas such as that of Khetri proved the theoretical and practical soundness of Swamiji’s view in this regard. If Swamiji also expressed the opinion that “of all the ruling princes he had met, he had been most impressed with the capacity, patriotism, energy and foresight of H. H. the Gaekwad of Baroda”, it was because the Gaekwad “advanced the cause of education, started a library movement, established a technical institution and worked for the advance of women and the backward classes. He also established a valuable system of medical relief in the rural districts. The Maharani was an active patron of women’s education”. See Dhar, A Comprehensive Biography, P.320 and 334.
44. Ibid., P.295.
45. Ibid.
46. See A Comprehensive Biography, P. 327.
49. Swamiji came to Central Provinces, at the end of his wanderings through Western India which included places such as Dwaraka, Bhuj, Mandvi, Palitona, Nadiad, Baroda and Mahabaleshwar.
50. Swami Nikhilananda, P.93.
51. In his reminiscences, Tilak wrote as follows: “We reached Poona, and the sannyasin remained with me for eight to ten days. When asked about
his name he only said he was a sannyasin. …At home he would often talk about Advaita philosophy and Vedanta. …There was absolutely no money with him. A deer skin, one or two clothes and a Kamandalu were his only possessions. In his travels someone would provide a railway ticket for the desired station…” Quoted in The Life, vol. 1, PP.306-307.

52. See A Comprehensive Biography, P.345.

53. See The Life, vol. 1, PP.312-316.

54. This statement shows in clear terms that Swamiji made no distinction between so-called sacred and secular. Everything, be that sacred or secular, had to be done with one’s whole mind, heart and soul. Life itself was one long saga of religion, its purpose being the development of one’s own self and the development of others around one’s self. Self and the world, ‘be and make’ is the motto of Swamiji’s concept of human development.


56. Ibid., P.322.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., P.324.

60. It bears pointing out here that in 1890 itself at Bhagalpur, Swamiji’s host Sri Manmathanath Chowdhury proposed to him, “Let us both go to Vrindavan, and depositing three hundred rupees for each of us in the temple of Govindaji we shall have Govindaji’s Prasad for the rest of our lives as food. Thus, without being a burden to anyone, we shall practise devotion day and night in a sequestered spot on the banks of the holy Jamuna!” In 1892, the Thakore Saheb, the Prince of Limbdi, who became his disciple, made this request: “Swamiji, do come with me to Limbdi and remain there for good”. Needless to say that Swamiji declined both the offers. A life of security without any challenges whatever was not for him. He who considered life to be a battle-field to be “faced” always, used to give the polite declining reply to any such offers with the observation that “I have work to do. I cannot rest now.” See The Life, vol. 1, PP.245-246 and P.302. Disinclined to be a guest of anybody for more than a few
Swamiji was also generally unwilling to accept any gift from his hosts. Before he left the Mysore state, the Prime Minister of the state requested Swamiji to accept any gift of his choice, instructing one of his assistants to write a cheque for a thousand rupees. Swamiji, however, refused to accept anything more than a cigar of the price of a rupee only. When the Maharaja of Mysore pressed Swamiji for accepting some gift from him, Swamiji agreed to accept only a non-metallic hookah and that too after much persuasion from the Maharaja. The Prime Minister’s effort to thrust a roll of currency notes into Swamiji’s pocket also came to naught.

62. *Ibid*.
63. *Ibid.*., P.34.
64. See *The Life*, vol. 1, P.330.
66. *Ibid*.
68. In such realization, Swamiji got a confirmation of his Master Shri Ramakrishna’s words that “an empty stomach is no good for religion”. See Swamiji’s letter to Ramakrishnananda, March 19, 1894. *Letter of Swami Vivekananda*, P.97.
70. Swamiji walked all the way from Kanyakumari to Rameswaram, meeting on the way at Madura the Raja of Ramnad who endorsed his idea of going to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, promising to support him financially for the passage to America.
73. *Ibid*., P.379.
75. For, he had used this name before. During his stay in South India, however, he used the name Sachchidananda. The silk robes and turbans
that Swamiji would wear on the occasion of lecturing at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago were also bought for him at Bombay at the order of the Maharaja of Khetri. A first class ticket for the journey by the ship and a handsome purse were the other contributions of the Maharaja to his Guru.

76. Ibid., P.388.
77. Ibid., P.357.
77a. Ibid., P.252.
78. The Master as I Saw Him, P.77.
80. The Universal Gospel, P.12.
82. The Universal Gospel, P.25.
85. The longest time he had to go without food during his wanderings was five days, but that was because of his vow that he would not beg food nor eat anything till he was offered food.

It may also be pointed out here that he covered most of the distances during his wanderings by walking and would avail himself of a railway ticket only at a devotee’s earnest request. See The Life, vol. 1, P.213. See also A Comprehensive Biography, P.321.
86. The Life, vol. 1, P.354.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid., P.389.
89. Ibid., P.354.
90. Nikhilananda, Vivekananda, A Biography, PP.99-100.
91. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.97.
92. Ibid.
93. The Life, vol. 1, P.351.