CHAPTER V

ARTICULATION OF THE APPROACH: IN THE WEST

In the discussion that follows in this chapter, I shall show how Swamiji articulated his approach to human development in the West – in the USA and England –, respectively. So far as the USA is concerned, I shall discuss, with reference to the epoch-making Parliament of Religions, held at Chicago, Swamiji’s efforts in three separate sections, namely, efforts during the pre-Parliament period, efforts at the Parliament itself, and efforts during the post-Parliament period.

I

Swami Vivekananda left Bombay on May 31, 1893 to reach Chicago on July 30, 1893. The journey was an “astonishing adventure” on three counts:
- First, Swamiji or for that matter his followers, never knew for certain the exact dates of the sittings of the Parliament.
- Second, Swamiji never carried any credential indicating that he was to represent Hinduism at the Parliament.
- Third, except for the red robe of silk and ochre turban and the ticket for the boat – both purchased for him by the Maharaja of Khetri, Swamiji hardly carried any other clothes, suitable to climate conditions and customs of America.

Swamiji went via Ceylon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Canada. Among his on-the-way observations, noteworthy is the ones he made in his letter to the disciples in Madras. Having seen the Sanskrit manuscripts written in ancient Bengali scripts in certain temples at China and Japan, he was at once elated and dejected. Elated to note the glory and influence of the ancient India on the Far East and dejected equally to see the depths of
degradation to which his country had now fallen. Full of love for his country and anxious to see it rise again, he exhorted his countrymen to be manly again in the following words: “Come, be man! ...Do you love your country? Then come, let us struggle for higher and better things\textsuperscript{5}.

Struggling for higher and better things meant for Swamiji two things. First, rooting out priestcraft and social tyranny of caste system that crushed all humanity “out of you”. Second, it meant being ‘unselfish, thorough-going men’ such as “to struggle unto life and death to bring about a new state of things”. By a “new state of things” Swamiji meant the following:

(a) sympathizing with the poor and providing bread to their hungry mouths;
(b) enlightenment to the people at large; and
(c) struggling unto death to make men of them who had been brought to the level of beasts, by the social tyranny of ages\textsuperscript{6}.

Jamshedji Tata, the great Indian industrialist, was Swamiji’s fellow-passenger on voyage from Japan to Chicago and that he was influenced by Swamiji’s spirit to bring about a new state of things for India could be seen from an interaction between the two as stated below. After his visit to a match factory in Japan, Swamiji told Jamshedji:

\begin{quote}
Why are you importing matches from Japan to India and giving her [Japan] money? You are only getting some commission. If you would start a match factory in India, you would get the profit, many people of your country would be employed, and the money of your country would remain there\textsuperscript{7}.
\end{quote}

Acknowledging the inspiration he had received from Swamiji, Jamshedji wrote some five years later in a letter to Swamiji that in order to give a constructive orientation to India’s scientific talents, he founded a Research Institute of Science for India and that Swamiji’s words had spurred him to do so\textsuperscript{8}.
Swamiji stood the voyage on the whole well. Miss Kate Sanborn, Swamiji’s fellow passenger from Japan, who was returning to her home at a town close to Boston, describes Swamiji in terms which are representative of the appearance and spirit of Swamiji:

Most of all I was impressed by the monk, a magnificent specimen of manhood – six feet two, as handsome as Salvani [a famous Italian actor] at his best, with a loudly, imposing stride, as if he ruled the universe and soft, dark eyes that could flash fire if roused. He spoke better English than I did, was conversant with ancient and modern literature, would quote easily and naturally from Shakespeare or Longfellow and Tennyson, Darwin, Muller, Tyndall; could repeat pages of our Bible, was familiar with and tolerant of all creeds. He was an education, an illumination, a revelation!

A few days after his arrival at Chicago, Swamiji realized the mistake he had committed in coming “unannounced” at Chicago. The organizing authorities of the Columbian Exposition informed Swamiji through its Information Bureau that in the absence of accreditation from some recognized organization and the registration of the accredited representative (the date for which, according to them, was already over), he could not be accepted as a delegate to the Parliament of Religions. This episode pointed to, what Sister Nivedita calls, the ‘unorganizedness’ of Hinduism and naivety of Vivekananda himself in the ways of the world as also the immaturity on the part of his admirers in India. To quote her ‘They [the disciples] thought Vivekananda had only to appear, and he would be given his chance. The Swami himself was as simple …. Nothing could have been more typical of the unorganizedness of Hinduism itself than this going forth of its representative unannounced, and without formal credentials, to enter the strongly guarded doors of the world’s wealth and power.”
The refusal to admit him as a delegate plus difficulties on some other fronts mellowed the rosy ideas that Swamiji had before starting for America. Chicago was expensive. With every day costing him £1, Swamiji’s funds dwindled fast, from £187 he had on arrival to £130 in just about three weeks. Winter was approaching and he had no warm clothing. He had to face hooting in the streets on account of his quaint dress. One day, a man from behind pulled at his turban; another day, a man from behind gave him a push. All this meant that he had to endure disappointment, starvation, cold, hooting and harassment. Would he give up in the face of such difficulties? The answer was a decisive ‘no’. Representing the manhood at its best, Swamiji resolved that he would fight on against odds and impossibilities: “I am determined, and I have a call from Above; I see no way, but His eyes see. And I must stick to my guns, life or death.”

The Parliament, Swamiji was told, was not to ‘open’ till the second week of September 1893. What would he do in Chicago, an expensive city, till then, even if, some chance or the other admitted him as a delegate? Swamiji remembered the invitation Kate Sanborn, his co-passenger in the train from Japan to America, extended to him to spend a few days in her house at Metcalf, a small town in Massachusetts, not far away from Boston and accordingly came over to her place as her guest.

Among the things of note that happened to Swamiji at Metcalf was a visit to women’s prison in the nearby town of Sherborn. The prison was a reformatory operating with the concept of treating the inmates benevolently, reforming them and sending them back to society as its useful members. Swamiji appreciated the idea of the reformatory but as he saw the conditions of the prison in question, he could not but think of the condition of the poor and miserable in India. To quote him, “And, oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help…. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows
showered upon them by a cruel society… and they have forgotten that they too are men.”

How could such state of things in India be removed? Swamiji’s thoughts in answer to this question were on the following lines: First, the religion that teaches that ‘every being is only one’s own self multiplied’ must be restored to its rightful place. Second, the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden have to be sympathized with. Since “no religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism and since no religion on earth treads upon the neck of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism”, the great teachings of Hinduism, duly supplemented with the wonderful sympathy of Buddhism – the logical reformative development of Hinduism – must be given practical application, brushing aside the engines of social tyranny in the shape of pernicious doctrines of Paramarthika and Vyavaharika. In a word, the brain of Hinduism, i.e., Vedanta philosophy, the heart of Buddhism and hand in the sense of combined application of Hinduism and Buddhism was the way out of the rotten state into which the masses of men of India had fallen.

Sitting eight thousand miles away from India and reflecting on the plight of man in India, Swamiji hoped that if “a hundred thousand men and women, fired with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion’s courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden”, could be made to go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of help, of social raising-up or of equality, the land and its people can be delivered.

If the Sherborn reformatory gave Swamiji an occasion to compare the inmates with the poor and sinners of India, the ladies’ club in Boston gave him an opportunity to speak on the condition of child-widows in India. This club and many others in America were helping Ramabai, a Hindu(Maharashtrian) woman-turned- Christian, in her cause for improving the lot of child-widows in India who, according to Ramabai, had to live miserable lives and suffer many indignities in India. Now, the picture the Swamiji presented
of child-widows in India, was, rather positive. Swamiji would be the last person to lower the image of India in a foreign country, however hard he might be chiding his own countrymen urging them to improve their conditions. Swamiji’s approach however displeased greatly the Christian missionaries. Many of them were interested in spreading calumnies against Hindus and India and, with Swamiji’s approach being at variance with that of Ramabai, they naturally could not be pleased with him. The result was that Swamiji’s speech was blacked out in Boston newspapers. “This unpleasant experience”, to quote a biographer of Swamiji, “was an eye-opener for Swamiji, who had now an inkling of the misrepresentation and vilification of his countrymen and their religion and social customs that was being carried on by the Christian missionaries”.

Quite in contrast to the unpleasantness he experienced at the ladies’ club in Boston, Swamiji had a very pleasant encounter with Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University at Annisquam, a small village on the Atlantic coast, some thirty miles north east of Boston, on August 26 and 27, 1893. Professor Wright, vacationing at Annisquam had already heard much about Swamiji from the Sanborns and was pleased to meet and discuss “all manner of subjects for hours on end” with the young monk from India. He was so impressed that he observed that to ask Swamiji for credentials to be chosen delegate to the Parliament of Religions was as ridiculous as to ask the sun about its right to shine. He also volunteered to write a letter to the Chairman of the Committee for the selection of delegates to the Parliament that “Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together”. He also recommended to the Committee that the monk from India be provided appropriate accommodation on his arrival at Chicago. His final act of grace for Swami Vivekananda was his purchasing a railway ticket for Vivekananda’s journey to Chicago and his giving him some money for personal expenses on the way to Chicago.

With Prof. Wright acting as a god-send taking care of Vivekananda’s worries about being a delegate to the Parliament of Religions, Swamiji
delivered “his first public lecture in the Western world” at the little village church in Annisquam on August 27, 1893. In this lecture he made the point emphatically that what the people of India really needed for their development was not religious instruction but industrial education from the West and that America would be doing real good to India if instead of sending out missionaries to train Indians in religion, America sent people who could give Indians industrial education.

The thought of India was, to Swamiji, indeed like the air he breathed, no matter where he was. In America, his thoughts always turned back to his people. Thus, following his talks to the village church at Annisquam during the day on August 27, he met them again in the evening and either in response to some query or on his own, talked to them on a wide variety of subjects including the reason why his people in India degenerated so much. One very important reason was the subjugation of the country by the British and their exploitation of the people of India: “They [The British] have their heels on our necks, they have sucked the last drop of our blood for their own pleasures, they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved by villages and provinces”. Savagery, conquest of other people’s territories and exploitation was the name of British imperialism. “Most hor-r-ible! Even now, they are barely emerging from barbarism”, said Swamiji. Marie Louise Burke gives a most thoughtful observation on Swamiji’s bitter denunciation of the British rule of India:

Swamijis’ heart, one never can forget, was full of unhappiness for the suffering of his motherland, and correspondingly his mind was full of anger against all that contributed to her degradation. In the early days he ascribed a great deal of that degradation to the imperialism of the British, and it was only natural that he would lash out against a people who had ruthlessly crushed those whom
he loved. It is well-known that when Swamiji later met the English people on their home ground he became an ardent admirer of their many noble characteristics, but nonetheless he never changed his opinion of British imperialism nor, for that matter, of any oppression of one people by another. He was a thorough student of world history, and whenever in the story of man’s life he found injustice and inhumanity he never hesitated to point them out in no uncertain terms.25

In the last sentence of the quote given above, lies the clue to Swamiji’s sense of history. Roared he always against injustice and inhumanity perpetrated on man and for that, he did not spare even his own countrymen. He pointed out in no uncertain terms that the tyrannical priests and upper classes of India, long before the British came to India, exploited the poor, the lowly and the downtrodden lower classes of India to the point of draining all strength out of them and thus paved the way for the Mohammedan conquest and the Mohammedan rule of India. To quote Swamiji:

They [the upper classes of India] ground down those poor people for their own wealth, they heard not the voice of distress, they ate from gold and silver when the people cried for bread, and the Mohammedans came upon them slaughtering and killing: slaughtering and killing they overran them.26
What lesson do we draw from such ‘teachings’ of history? Swamiji answers that the general proposition that history lays down is that: “If you grind down the people, you will suffer”. That is the vengeance of history: if you tyrannize over the people, the day will come when you yourselves will be enslaved by others. Thus, the ruling classes of India – the tyrants themselves – became enslaved by the Mohammedans. “By their cruelty they degraded the populace, and when they needed them the common people had no strength to give for their aid. If man cannot believe in the Vengeance of God, he certainly cannot deny the Vengeance of History. And it will come upon the English”. In this connection, Swamiji prophesied that, as the Indian upper classes had to pay the price for their injustice and inhumanity perpetrated upon the poor masses, so the English will have to pay the price of tyranny too by the vengeance that will fall upon them, perhaps in a thousand years, from the Chinaman. “There will be another invasion of the Huns… they will sweep over Europe”, said Swamiji. The tragedy of history, as Swamiji said, is that the tyrants do not know that the price of tyranny is slavery, that the one leads to the other, “that the obverse is tyranny, and the reverse slavery”.

What would Swamiji like to do to fight against the tyranny such as prevailed in the society and polity in India? Swamiji laid down two general propositions as an answer to this question:
(a) ‘Come, be men!’
(b) ‘Then come, let us struggle for higher and better things’.

As regards social tyranny, this involved kicking out “the priests who are always against progress, because they would never mend, their hearts would never become big. They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priestcraft first”. Next, he wanted the rooting out of the tyranny of castes which put an artificial check on a man, a check on his right to grow to the highest level. Man must seek and find the highest level and it was man’s birth right to do so. Comparing the situation in America with that in India, he said that every man born in America “knows that he is a man. Every man born in India knows that he is a slave of society. Now, freedom is
the only condition of growth, take that off, the result is degeneration”. Thus saying, Swamiji went on to observe that “caste is simply a crystallised social institution, which after doing its service is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost individuality”.34

As regards the political tyranny of the British over India, his principle, as he said to Nivedita, was to face the brute, always!35 And that needed a change in the mindset. Mendicancy of the type the Indian National Congress indulged in was not to his liking. His brother quotes him as saying : “Let British bullets pierce my breast; it will shake Europe and America. Then they will understand what Vivekananda is”.36 Swamiji said to his audience in Annisquam that the British government would not dare shoot a monk like him, for that “would be the first nail in their coffin and my death would run through the land like wild fire”.37 Nagendra Nath Gupta quotes Swami Vivekananda telling him, “If it would help the country in any way, I am quite prepared to go to prison”.38 Statements such as these prove that Swamiji was all for the deliverance of his country from the British tyranny through suffering and sacrifice. To quote Gupta, “No one had then heard of Non-cooperation or Civil Disobedience, and yet Vivekananda, who had nothing to do with politics, was standing in the shadow of events still long in coming”.39

Sacrifice of life itself for others, for the country, for humanity without any desire or expectation of reward was a key idea in Vivekananda’s approach to human development. He told his American audience at Annisquam the story of a man whose wife asked him what his God had given him as reward for all the service that he had rendered unto Him for so many years. The man answered that he loved God for love’s sake and kept on working for the love of doing God’s work, not for any reward, material prosperity or recognition. That was Vivekananda’s grand philosophy of life. He was not a trader in religion or for that matter in anything. For him, religion was an end in itself, not the means towards any power, or riches or anything of the sort.
In politics of patriotism, he told his audience at Annisquam, his great model was the Queen of Jhansi who rose in revolt against the British in 1857. Why? Because she led her troops from the front and when overcome by the British, she made the sacrifice of life itself by falling on her sword. “That woman was a goddess”, said Vivekananda, “a Devi”. Manly struggle for higher and better things in defiance of death and suffering and sacrifices that such struggle entailed, were, according to Vivekananda, the highest religion and the highest politics.

From Annisquam Swamiji moved to Salem, Massachusetts, staying there for a week, from August 28 to September 4, 1893 as the guest of Mrs. Kate Tannat Woods. At the invitation of Mrs. Woods’ Thought and Work Club, Swamiji spoke twice in the churches at Salem. The burden of his lectures at Salem was on two counts. First, he corrected the misrepresentations and myths about India such as related to suttee (burnings of Indian widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands), purdah (seclusion of Indian women) and suicidal sacrifice of lives by people under the chariot of Lord Jagannath at Puri. Second, he drove to his audience most emphatically the point that India’s main concern or the need of people of India was not religion but “practicality”, “and it was with the hope of interesting the American people in this great need of suffering, starving millions that, he said, he had come to this country”. He said in elaboration that “the missionaries had fine theories there and started in with good ideas, but had done nothing for the industrial condition of the people. He said [that] Americans, instead of sending out missionaries to train them [the Indians] in religion, would better send some one out to give them industrial education”. These words provoked some members of the Christian clergy present at Swamiji’s lectures to interrupt him during his lecture. Such Christian missionaries obviously thought that they were saving the souls of heathens in India and now finding that Swamiji was standing in their way or in their mission of Christian evangelism in India were obviously greatly irritated with him.
The resulting acrimony opened the eyes of Swamiji to “the more dreary side of America’s religious climate. During the course of the lecture he was interrupted many times and questioned in the most acrimonious manner by two members of the Christian clergy. His replies were courteous and unperturbed; yet this brief and unpleasant encounter surely forewarned him of the powerful he would have to face in the months to come”. 44

Swamiji spoke next at the convention of the American Social Science Association in Saratoga, New York as many as three times on topics such as “The Mohammedan Rule in India” and “The use of Silver in India”. While we have no reports available of Swamiji’s speeches on these topics, we can surmise his views on these issues from his letters as also from his speeches delivered elsewhere. He considered the Mohammedan rule to be better in comparison to the British. The Mohammedans were, for all their faults, assimilated in India and considered this country as their own45 while the British always remained ‘foreigners’ to India. As for their respective legacy, the Mohammedans left behind beautiful palaces and the British ‘mounds of broken brandy bottles’. To quote Swamiji, “India has been conquered again and again for years, and last and worst of all came the Englishmen. You look about India, what has the Hindoo left? Wonderful temples, everywhere. What has the Mohammedan left? Beautiful palaces. What has the Englishman left? Nothing but mounds of broken brandy bottles!”46

As for the “Use of Silver”, Swamiji was probably asked to speak on it by the eminent assembly of social scientists at Saratoga because the silver standard was then a critical issue in American politics. We do not know for certain what Swamiji spoke on the topic on the appointed occasion, but his views on the money question or on the use of silver standard could be got from his letter of November 1, 1896 and we quote the relevant lines: “I do not know all the difficulties about the gold or silver standards (nobody seems to know much as to do that), but this much I see that the gold standard has been making the poor poorer, and the rich richer…. The silver standard will
give the poor a better chance in this unequal fight. I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread”.  

Marie Louise Burke gives a neat summery of what had happened to Vivekananda in the three weeks that he spent at Massachusetts and New York:

Within three weeks Swamiji had, as far as we now know, given eleven lectures and talks. He had, moreover, come into contact with a cross section of American life: he had spoken to the Ramabai Circle; he had met members of the clergy, both friendly and hostile; he had talked to the inmates of a prison, to American clubwomen and even to children; and he had met and gained the respect of some of the leading thinkers and educators of the country. He could not have had a better preparation for all that was to come.

True that Swamiji had excellent preparation during his pre-Parliament days to shake America soon with his addresses at the Parliament, true also that during this period he found ways of getting over his financial difficulties through lectures that fetched spontaneous voluntary contribution from his audience and true, furthermore, that the gloom that had descended on his mind within a few days of his arrival at Chicago, was now over, but all the same, the question remained: was he able to get the help he desired from the American people for their poverty-ridden Indian brethren? The answer was that he found little real, immediate help for his Indian work.
After some three weeks on the East Coast, Vivekananda left for Chicago to arrive at the city on the 8th or 9th September, 1893 and to address two days later the Parliament of Religions where he was now accepted as the respected representative of Hinduism. In order to understand the content and real significance of the message that Swamiji gave at the Parliament of Religions, we must discuss, first, in this section how America was like at the time of his visit to the country in connection with the Parliament. The vastness of the country, the abundance of natural resources, particularly of coal, iron and oil progress made in science and industry plus the political unity established after 1860 made America the richest and potentially the most powerful nation on the earth in the second half of the 19th century. With people working hard for acquiring wealth and with industrialists like Vanderbilt, Carnegie, Rockefeller, Morgan, Gould, Harriman, Stanford, Huntington, Stewart, Swift and Armour and Duke turning America into “a banker’s world of millionaires”, it was only natural that America would like to exhibit to the outside world the great progress she had made in the material sphere. The observance of the quadricentenary of America’s discovery by Christopher Columbus provided her with a befitting occasion to draw the attention of the world and to get its recognition of America as a pre-eminent power of the world. Accordingly, it was decided to hold the Columbian Exposition and organize a huge World’s fair on a scale surpassing anything of the kind the world had seen before. Since the purpose was to get the nations of the world to participate in the Exhibition and the Fair, the preparation was on from 1890 itself. The decision was to hold as many as twenty congresses exhibiting man’s progress in the material spheres such as medicine and surgery, commerce and finance, government and law reform as also in spheres of human thought such as religion. Of the congresses, the Parliament of Religions was by far the most famed. As part of the World’s Columbian
exposition and Fair, with representatives from all the religions of the world, the Parliament was scheduled to hold its session in September 1893 at the Art Institute of Chicago.

The officially stated objectives of the Parliament were as follows: To bring together in conference, for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great Historic Religions of the world. To show to men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various Religions hold and teach in common….

To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each Religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom….

To enquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford to the other Religions of the world….

To discover, from competent men, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially the important questions connected with Temperance, Labor, Education, Wealth and poverty.

To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace". 53

Whatever might have been the officially stated objectives of the Parliament, some of the organizers had religious axes to grind, their unstated objective being to prove through the proposed Parliament the superiority, the uniqueness and even the finality of Christianity as a religion. Reverend John Henry Barrows, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago and the Chairman of the General Committee to oversee the Parliament, for example, otherwise unfailing in his courtesy towards the assembled delegates, nevertheless observed: “We believe that Christianity is to supplant all other religions, because it contains all the truth there is in them and much besides, revealing a redeeming God”. Having thus placed Christianity on a pedestal, Barrows patronizingly observed that since Christianity was ‘light’ and other religions ‘twilight’, “those who have the full light of the Cross should bear brotherly hearts towards all who grope in a dimmer illumination”. 54 In still
another pronouncement, Barrows discarded the pretence of benign patronization to call the religions other than Christianity as false. “Let her [the Truth of Christianity] and falsehood grapple” in the Parliament of Religions, observed Barrows. Marie Louise Burke’s comment on this observation is telling and revealing: “Truth, in this instance, was, of course, Christianity, falsehood, every other faith”.  

Since every other religion was ‘false’, one bishop in America advised the organizers to “make use of the immense gathering to usher in the triumph of his [Jesus Christ’s] truth”. He expectantly asked, “when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow?” (Emphasis added) An even more bigoted section of the Christian Church, the Anglican Church, for example, questioned the very basis of the convening of the Parliament of Religions, and refused to attend it on the ground that the concept of the Parliament of Religions conceded wrongfully equality and parity to other religions. Thus, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in declining the invitation to attend the Parliament, wrote: “The difficulties which I myself feel are not questions of distance and convenience, but rest on the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. (Emphasis added). I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assessing the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims”. (Emphasis added). 

To religions intolerance issuing from bigotry was added the colour prejudice which was prevalent in the America of the day, especially in the Southern states. Only a year before, that is 1892, Mississippi passed its law making it obligatory for the Negroes of the state to pay poll-tax for at least eight months before an election in order to be entitled to vote. Swami Vivekananda himself observed ruefully that the abolition of slavery could not really bring an improvement in the conditions of Negroes or lesson the prejudices of the Whites against them. “Today”, said, Swamiji, “they are the property of nobody. Their lives are of no value; they are burnt alive on mere
pretences. They are shot down without any law for their murderers; for they
are niggars, they are not human beings, they are not even animals…”59

The colour prejudice also found an expression in the anti-Asiatic laws
passed by the American Congress and several state legislatures. The Chinese
Exclusion Act of 1882 passed by the America Congress as also the anti-
Japanese laws passed in 1893 – the very year of the Chicago Parliament – by
the Pacific Coast States were pointers towards the race prejudice prevailing in
America. As a matter of fact, Swami Vivekananda himself was the victim of
racial intolerance in America on several occasions. We have already noted
how in the days preceding the Parliament he was ill-treated on the streets of
Chicago and narrowly escaped being mobbed on the streets of Boston. To
quote one of his biographers, “He had to suffer much also because on account
of his darkish skin, he was taken to be a Negro and he never attempted to save
himself by saying that he was an Oriental. When a friend urged him to
disclose his real identity, he replied, “What! Rise at the expense of another!”60
How beautifully Sister Nivedita expresses Swamiji’s attitude towards his
fellow men, particularly the Negro, when she observes:

His [Swamiji’s] great acumen was yoked to a
marvelous humanity. Never had we dreamt of
such a gospel of hope for the Negro as that with
which he rounded on an American gentleman who
spoke of the African races with contempt. And
when, in the Southern States he was occasionally
taken for “a coloured man”, and turned away from
some doors as such…, he was never known to
deny the imputation. “Would it not have been
refusing my brother?” , he said simply when he
was asked the reason of this silence.61
Side by side with religious bigotry and racial intolerance, materialism was rampant in America at the time Swamiji visited that country. In fact, materialism was the ruling philosophy of life for most Americans with money coming before everything to them. Religion was fine to the extent it provided the means to prosperity in the form of money, health, beauty, or long life. “The bulk of the [American] nation”, as a biographer of Swamiji’s puts it, “had been taught by their faith, which was Calvinistic, that God was behind the businessman, who in seeking his self-interest was bringing about the welfare of all and so contributing to human progress. This particular religions belief, which Swami Vivekananda found to be ingrained in the minds of Americans at large, was reinforced by the speculation of Adam Smith and other classical economists, who taught that the individual could best contribute to the advancement of civilization by devoting himself to money-making”.

And of the money that the Americans were making through their materialistic attitude, a good amount of that – in fact, millions of their dollars – they were spending through their missionaries for converting heathens in Asia and Africa and that too when in their own country only about 46% of the total population belonged to some church or other in Christianity. In the estimate of Vivekananda, a crore and ninety lacs out of a population of six crores and 30 lacs, cared a bit about religion while the rest cared mostly for eating, drinking and making merry. For most Americans, enjoyment was their god. As for American missionaries, evangelism was the name of the game.

The picture that emerged out of the summation of all this, namely, religious bigotry, racial intolerance, materialistic-hedonistic attitude of the Americans and the evangelic spirit of the American missionaries was horrible indeed for Swami Vivekananda. After all, he came to America seeking help for his starving countrymen, giving his Western hosts in the process higher spirituality in the sense of the essence of the being of man. Vivekananda obviously had many hostile forces to contend with in America in the Parliament of Religions and in his lecture tours subsequent to the Parliament
of Religions. Before we discuss in the following sections as to how he did that and how he gave his message across to his audiences, we need to answer one final question in this section: if the American scenario was as bad as presented above, then how was it that the Parliament of Religions came to be held at all and how was it that, with all her limitations, America, nevertheless, listened to Vivekananda respectfully, giving him the credit where he rightfully deserved it? There are two answers to this question. First, there were honourable exceptions in America to the kind of mentality that we have pointed out above, there being many who were actuated by a serious intellectual and spiritual intent. Thus Swamiji’s audiences “generally consisted of liberal-minded people, the intellectual, and even scientists and agnostics, whose minds were open to new thought”. The second answer lay in the authoritative utterances of young and dynamic Vivekananda who spoke before the august assembly and the American people not just as a scholar but more importantly and above all, as a man of realization who experienced every word that he uttered and who carried in his person a message and a mission ordained to him by his Guru.

III

The Parliament of Religions sat in sessions for seventeen days – from September 11 to September 27, 1893. Swami Vivekananda spoke on six of these seventeen days at the full sessions of the Parliament, namely, on the 11th, 15th, 19th, 20th, 26th and 27th day of September. We shall give a brief exposition of Swamiji’s addresses in order to see how he counteracted and ‘corrected’ some of the notions which the Christian clergy and some of the organizers thought would be pushed or established through the Parliament.

As I have pointed out in the earlier section, a predominant motive of the Christian clergy was to proclaim in the loudest possible voice the superiority, uniqueness and finality of the religious truth as upheld by
Christianity and to have every other religion present at the Parliament accept the position of Christianity on all matters of religion. Such parochiality, exclusivity and narrowmindedness were against all that Swami Vivekananda learned and stood for. As we have shown in the previous chapters, he grew up in the liberal religious atmosphere of a learned family; he had his education in English and Sanskrit which gave him a thorough exposure to Western philosophy and Indian philosophy, exposure particularly to the Indian sacred books, the knowledge of which he further perfected through his studies of the ancient texts under the competent teachers during his wander-years; he received his spiritual training under his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, a living embodiment and verification of the ancient shastras (scriptures), a Man of Realization to whom Samadhi was a constant mode of knowledge of the Vedantic Oneness and who taught him through his life “the truth that all religions were one, that they were all paths leadings to the selfsame goal, the selfsame God”. How could a man such as Vivekananda who learnt through the ‘touch’ of his Guru and later realized it by his own strivings the universality of religious truth and the divinity of man not controvert the narrow, parochial and partial view of religion as propagated by a bigoted section of the Christian clergy? His was the mission to provide guidance to mankind with his spiritual wisdom and he could not flinch from it. Did not he know it beforehand and did not he exude his confidence to his brother-monk Turiyananda on the eve of his departure for America that the Parliament of Religions was being convened for his sake, that is, for the message that he was divinely ordained to deliver there for the sake of humanity at large?

Invariably the theme that Vivekananda offered instead to the august assembly of the Religions of the world was the universality of religious truth, that God was in every religion, not in any particular religion to the exclusion of other religions, that purity and holiness could not be the monopoly of any particular religion and that the end of religion could be pursued through the path of any religion. What struck the Assembly most first was his addressing all present as ‘Sisters and Brothers of America’. At the utterance of these
words, the whole assembly – all the seven thousand people present in the Hall of Columbus including some standing in the doorways -rose to their feet and clapped the young monk from India for several minutes. Why did these words evoke such response from the audience? Because those five words were spoken with most earnestness by a man who realized first in his own life that the human beings were all indeed brothers and sisters as children of God. Coming from the depths of Vivekananda’s being these words were indeed the authoritative utterances of a man of Vedantic realization of oneness, not mere ceremonial words spoken on the demand of the occasion.

Having thus forged a sense of kinship with the people listening to him, Vivekananda humbly observed that but for the demons of sectarianism, bigotry and fanaticism drenching the earth with human blood and eating into the vitals of human civilization, human society would have been far more advanced than it was now. In the interest of humanity and civilization therefore, observed Vivekananda, the efforts of all, beginning with the august assembly of religions of the world presently being held at Chicago, should be directed towards bringing an end to all fanaticism, all persecutions, be that of sword or pen, and indeed of all uncharitable feelings between persons irrespective of the faith or sect they belonged to. Having said so, he pointed out how the religion he represented in the Parliament, namely, Hinduism, the most ancient religion of the world, made a beginning in this direction by seeking to give the world two values – tolerance, and the even more positive, universal acceptance. Indeed, it is to these values that the Hindu India showed her adherence to when she offered shelter to the persecuted and refugees of all religions – to the Jews when the Roman tyranny forced them to leave their own country and to the Parsees when the Mohammedan conquerors forced them to flee from their country.

In further elaboration of the theme that no one path should be the one and only or the exclusive path to the realization of God, he pointed out how the Hindu scriptures accepted and even promoted liberal plurality in this regard. He quoted two passages, one from the Shiva Mahima Stotra and the
other from the Gita to substantiate his point. The former said: “As the
different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water
in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different
tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee”.
The Gita (Chapter 4:11) puts the same message across equally clearly, if not
more explicitly, when Lord Krishna says: “Whosoever comes to Me, through
whatever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in
the end leads to Me”.

Through his inaugural address, Swamiji made the counterpoint that all
persons, irrespective of the faiths they belonged to, were wending their way to
the same goal – same self-same God, and thus, it was indefensible to create
uncharitable feelings between them by exclusive claims towards superiority or
finality of any particular path of any particular faith. Exclusivity brings in its
wake parochiality and narrowmindedness which, in turn, inhibit the
development of man. ‘Don’t be dogmatic’, Swamiji would say by way of
injunction, because it is inhuman. By way of making the counter-point,
Swamiji was expounding his new thought as well – new and yet eternal. The
Life as also a biographer of Swamiji observe appropriately: “It was only a
short speech, but it voiced the spirit of the Parliament; its sense of universality
captured the whole assembly and, ere long, thousands outside”.

Romain Rolland expresses it all, particularly Vivekananda’s theme of the universality
of religious thought when he observes:

His [Vivekananda’s] speech was like a tongue of
flame. Among the grey wastes of cold dissertation
it fired the souls of the listening throng… Each of
the other orators had spoken of his God, of the
God of his sect. He – he alone – spoke of all their
Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal
Being.
The speech made by Swamiji on September 15 entitled “Why we disagree”, focused on the reason for uncharitable feelings between men preferring different faiths. The reason, Swamiji said, lay in the mind of man. Each professor of faith lived in the little world of his faith taking this little world as the whole world or the best world and if anybody ever questioned the insularity of his religious outlook, the questioner must be shown the door. Such attitude or little mentality taken to the extreme produced fanaticism. What was the solution? The solution, said Swamiji, lay in breaking down the barriers of our own little selves and in embracing our real Self in the Universal Being.

It is only by embracing the real and the universal in us that we truly develop ourselves as human beings. In fact, this is the theme that Swamiji developed more fully in his presentation before the Parliament on September 19. The presentation was formally titled as the ‘Paper on Hinduism’. By way of explaining the religious ideas of the Hindus, Swamiji was indeed bringing spiritual consciousness to humanity as a whole – a major object of his mission to America. He was teaching human beings everywhere as to how best they could bring about their highest development as human beings by orienting religion to that end.

Hinduism, he acknowledged, was divided into divergent sects and the question was natural to ask if the diverging radii had any point of convergence. In other words, the question was: was there any great central truth to which all the Hindus were agreed? In answering this question, Swamiji turned to the Vedas from which the Hindus received their religion. The Vedas were not any book, authored and produced at a particular time by any particular person or persons. The Vedas were the treasury of spiritual laws discovered by the ancient Rishis (the perfected beings) of India out of their deep meditative reflections. One of their discoveries – startling and yet ‘scientific’ – was that creation was without beginning and end and that there never was a time when there was no creation. How is such a discovery scientific? The question is best answered in the words of Swamiji himself:
Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say that it was in a potential form in God. In that case god is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So god would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.\(^1\)

In the second place, the Vedas discounted the idea of a creator God and, that, again, is a stand which is in accord with science. If God is just and merciful as He is assumed to be, then how is it that He indulges in partiality and creates one man as happy and plentiful and another man as miserable and poor? That brings in the question: how do I come to exist and the further question, who am I? Since the question posed later is more fundamental and helps us answer the first one too, let us take that first. The Vedas soundly reject the idea that I am a body or a mere combination of certain material substances and answer instead that I am a spirit living in a body. The body dies, but I as a spirit never die. I as a spirit or soul never die because as a soul I was never created. Anything that is created also must die. Anything that has a beginning must also have an end. By such law, the body is born and it dies, but the spirit or the soul is neither born nor it dies. It has neither beginning nor end. It is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, being the manifestation of the Universal Soul that goes by the name of god. As the Gita says, being the manifestation of the Universal Soul, the human soul is something that the
sword cannot pierce, fire cannot burn, water cannot melt and air cannot dry. Thus, so far as the soul is concerned, death means for it merely change of centre from one body to another. As the body acquires certain tendencies from heredity, so the soul though its past actions acquires certain tendencies and by the law of affinity finds its new centre in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of these tendencies. That this explanation of the soul finding its locus in a new body is in accord with science is advanced by Swamiji in the following words:

This is in accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So repetitions are necessary to explain the natural habits of a new-born soul. And since they were not obtained in this present life, they must have come down from past lives.72

The above quote provides an answer to the question as to how I come into existence. I come into existence by my past actions and I am happy or miserable by my past actions as well. God is not responsible for my happiness or misery. He does not make me happy or miserable. I myself do it. As my past actions determine my present, so my present actions determine my future. At one stroke, Swamiji demolishes fatalism and makes man the architect of his own fortune, but the question still remains : if my past life determines my present, then how is it that I do not remember anything of my past life? Swamiji answers that my ‘present’ consciousness only represents the surface of the mental ocean of memory, that within the depths of the mental ocean are stored up all the experiences of our past lives and that if we try and struggle, they would come up, making us conscious of our past life. To quote Swamiji:
This is direct and demonstrative evidence. Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered the secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up – try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life.73

If such is the law of causation, if the human soul must go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death, then, is there no escape or hope ever for man to be free from the seemingly endless cycle of causation? In answering this question, Swamiji gives us his exposition of what human nature in reality is. In its very essence, human soul is ever free, unbounded, holy, pure and perfect, but somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter. Being overtaken by maya and by taking the seeming reality as the real or ultimate reality, the soul, the perfect being, comes to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter. Having come under the bondage of matter, men who in their real nature are children of God, who are divinities74 on earth, begin to think of themselves as sheep, though, in the essence of their nature, they are lions. Having thus analysed the human nature, Swamiji exhorted man to come up in fulfilment of his true and real nature. To quote his beautiful words:

Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.75
Thus, Swamiji’s answer is that man need not despair. He can escape from the ‘endless’ prison of cause and effect by knowing his real nature, by knowing himself not as a body but as a soul that is the manifestation of the Universal Soul, by knowing himself, so to say, not as a physical being but as a manifestation of the Perfect Being who is everywhere, who is pure and formless, and who is the Almighty and the All-merciful One. How could man realize his real nature, his divinity? How could he realize his Universal Soul? The answer is that he could do it through psychic control, selfless love, selfless work, and selfless pursuit of knowledge that God is everywhere and in every being. Whatever be the way, be it psychic control or love or work or knowledge, the man must live in this world with his heart always to God – the Universal soul – his real Self, and his hands always to work, conceiving such work as work ordained to him by Him. With such detached and selfless living, man will be like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by it. By such steadfast living, man will gradually become pure and divine and will eventually attain Mukti or freedom from the bonds of imperfection. His Mukti will bring about his oneness with Brahman – the Universal Soul.

What happens on man’s attainment of his own true nature – his perfection, so to say? He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss thereupon. He becomes sat chit ananda – the existence absolute, the knowledge absolute, and the bliss absolute.

Is it possible for man to attain this state and see God in this life itself? Swamiji answers it in the most affirmative way when he says that by stainless purity man can certainly see God and attain oneness with Him: “…this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of his mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life, then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases. He is no more the freak of a terrible law of causation”.

Indeed, the greatest strength of Hinduism lies in its stress on seeing God. Said the Vedic sage: “Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! I have seen
the soul; I have seen God”. Sri Ramakrishna, the great Master of Swamiji, spoke in the similar vein to Swamiji. Thus, in the perspective of Hinduism, God does not lie in theories, dogmas or doctrines. He does not lie in believing, not even in reasoning. He lies in man’s *realizing*, in his being and becoming. As Swamiji asserted:

This is the very centre, the very vital conception of Hinduism. The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. If there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is an all-merciful Universal soul, he will go to Him direct. He must see Him, and that alone can destroy all doubts.  

Since experiencing or seeing God constitutes the heart of Hinduism and since by becoming perfectly pure only, man can see God, Hinduism advises man to engage in constant struggles “to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God, and see god; and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus”.  

Does the oneness that the human soul attains through union with the Universal Soul mean the losing of individuality of the human soul? Swamiji’s answer to such poser is that what the human soul loses in the process is its miserable little prison-individuality and what it gains is infinite universal individuality. To put it in the words of Swamiji:

Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an
unbroken ocean of matter, and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, Soul.  

Throughout his ‘Paper on Hinduism’, Swamiji consistently made the point that science and religion were not antagonistic to each other. Both were striving for the same goal: perfect unity. Chemistry was in search for that one element out of which all others could be made. Physics was in search for that one energy of which all the others are manifestations and the science of religion was searching for that One who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, the one Soul of which all souls are but manifestations. Thus the process is the same in science and religion. In both, it is through “multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached”.  

Swamiji knew that Hinduism was criticized in the West, particularly because of its perceived association with polytheism and idolatry. As regards polytheism, Swamiji observed that the criticism flew from the ignorance of the real situation in the temples of India. The worshippers in temples invariably ascribed all the attributes of God including omnipresence to the images before bowing to them which means that God alone was worshipped, not the images. Honestly speaking, images were kept or imagined in Christian churches as well. If the Catholics did it straightaway, the Protestants did it in terms of mental images that they conjured up in offering prayers. Indeed, it was mighty difficult to think of anything abstract without a mental image. Thus, in thinking of the idea of infinity, people are prone to associate it with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea or in thinking of ‘holiness’ they may associate it with the image of a church, a mosque or a cross. What was important was the realization of God. If the images or idols helped man to realize God, there was nothing objectionable to it. ‘I’ may not need it myself, but for that I should not be condemning those who need it or use it. As a matter of fact, some of the holiest men in India, Sri Ramakrishna, for
example, used images. If using images was such a sin, then could their ‘sin’
ever beget them such holiness?

Swamiji observed that idolatry in India was not as horrible as the West
thought of it. Idolatry was only a means for undeveloped minds to grasp high
spiritual truths. It was neither compulsory nor obligatory for developed souls
to go for idolatry. In fact, according to the Hindu scriptures, idolatry or
external (material) worship represented the lowest stage of the human soul to
grasp and realize the Infinite. Mental prayer was the next stage and the highest
stage was the realization of the Infinite. One could go for the one or the other
according to the stage of development one was in.

Having given the rationale for the idolatry in India, Swamiji put in a
nutshell the great central truth of Hinduism in the words that should be quoted
for its pithiness and beauty: “… the whole religion of the Hindus is centred in
realization. Man is to become divine by realizing the divine. Idols or temples
or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual
childhood; but on and on he must progress”.\(^81\) In other words, Swamiji’s
thesis was that man’s progress or development was invariably associated with
his attainment of divinity. Two points in this thesis, as presented by Swamiji,
should be emphatically noted here. One is his emphasis on man – man
anywhere – becoming divine. He did not say that only Hindu is to become
divine, and not others. His second point was that the grand function of every
religion, just not of Hinduism alone, was to evolve a God out of the material
man. God was in every religion and the more a religion sought to evolve a
God out of the material man, the more it fulfilled itself as a religion. It is in
such a spirit that he approvingly quoted the Lord in his incarnation as Krishna
to the following effect : “I am in every religion as thread through a string of
pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power
raising and purifying humanity, know that I am there”.\(^82\) This quote shows at
once the catholicity of Vivekananda’s views on religion, his extra-ordinarily
liberal approach to religion and his inclusiveness as well. It was his firm view
always that a religion, ideally speaking, should be universal in the following four respects:
(a) in embracing every human being from the lowest to the highest;
(b) in denying any place whatsoever to persecution or intolerance in religion;
(c) in recognizing divinity in every man and woman; and
(d) in aiding humanity to realize its own true, divine nature.\textsuperscript{83}

In giving the Parliament of Religions the essentials of Hinduism, Vivekananda gave to humanity at large a new concept of man and religion: that in his true nature man is nothing but God, that man’s highest development and true fulfilment lie in the realization of his inherent and intrinsic divine nature and that in helping man realize his true nature, religion, in the ultimate analysis, is nothing but realization. Divinity of the humanity which links up the two concepts of divinity and development in respect of humans in a positive and progressive relationship is Vivekananda’s special and peculiar contribution to thoughts on human development. As it is put in The Life, “The doctrine that “Man is to become divine by realizing the divine” [and] “that religion is perfected in us only when it has led us to “Him who is one life in a universe of death, Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world, that One who is the only soul, of which all souls are but delusive manifestations” – may be taken as the two great outstanding truths which, authenticated by the longest and most complex experience in human history, India proclaimed through him to the modern world of the West.\textsuperscript{84}

IV

By way of giving the Parliament of Religions the essentials of Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda was fulfilling his first mission i.e., bringing spiritual consciousness to humanity and exhorting it to realize its true nature as divinity. That he was equally mindful in America of his other mission, i.e., assuaging the sufferings of the poor and the miserable of humanity, especially
of his own country could be seen both from what others observed of him in his early days in America and from his own observations at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Mrs. Wright, wife of Dr John Henry Wright, Professor of Greek History at Harvard University, expressed this aspect of Swami Vivekananda’s mission in America when she reminisced of his early days in America in the following terms: “always his thoughts turned back to his people. He lived to raise them up and make them better and had come this long way in the hope of gaining help to teach them, to be practically more efficient. We hardly knew what he needed; money, if money would do it; tools, advice, new ideas. And for this he was willing to die to-morrow.”

For all his earnestness in this regard, Swamiji had to encounter opposition, especially from the orthodox members of the clergy in America, even before he reached Chicago to address the Parliament of Religions. To quote from The Life, “Certain reactions to the Swami’s first lecture in Salem [Massachusetts, on August 28, 1893], in which he told of India’s urgent need for a technological education, must have served him as an eye-opener to the more dreary side of America’s religious climate.”

That the next few days opened his eyes further to the dreary side of America’s religious culture could be seen from his disappointed, if not embittered, observations at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on the fourth occasion of his address before the Parliament on September 20 that “I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people, and I fully realized how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian land”.

He felt particularly embittered because he found that America, always so eager to send her missionaries to India to “save”, he sarcastically observed, “the soul of the heathen”, hardly cared to do anything at all “to save their bodies from starvation”. Swamiji’s point was that what the starving people needed first was not religion but bread. In fact, it was an insult to a starving people to offer religion and thus in great anguish rather than in condemnation of the West, Swamiji observed to the august assembly at Chicago that when
India needed the bread most, the Christian West did nothing to relieve the sufferings of the starving millions. To quote him:

In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying evil in the East is not religion – they have religion enough – but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out with parched throats.\textsuperscript{91}

One can easily see in such statements the great humanizing thought of Swami Vivekananda. If he had the brain or intellect of a Shankaracharya, he had in even greater measure the universal heart of a Buddha\textsuperscript{92}, overflowing always with sympathy for everybody but empathy especially for the hungry, the poor, the ignorant and the miserable. He used to say that a religion that does not induce man to look after the fellow-man or that does not care for “the widow’s tears or the orphan’s cry”\textsuperscript{93} is no religion. Man must be looked upon as divine and the divine in poor, miserable and the ignorant must be adored and served, most of all. He might or might not have been the first to coin the term ‘Daridra Narayana’, but undoubtedly it is he who was the first to invest the term with a special meaning. That rank materialism and opportunistic considerations with a view to proselytizing without genuine considerations for the development of man was not religion in the proper sense of the term is something that Swamiji kept pointing out throughout his stay in the West, subsequent to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

The Parliament of Religions held its final session on September 27, 1893. In this final session Swamiji gave a summary of all that he stood for. He stood for religious unity but not for religious uniformity. Unity in variety was his goal. Religions were but ways towards reaching the same goal of divinity
of man and man’s oneness with the Divine. Lord was in every religion and religions being ways to reach the same goal, they were all equal, not by the grace of any one of them but by their own right and entitlement.

Likewise, it was the entitlement of each religion to assimilate the spirit of the others and yet develop itself according to its own law of growth.

Thus, Swamiji stood for religious unity, not uniformity, for equality of all religions, not monopoly or assumed superiority of any particular religion, for religious inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, for religious assimilation, not imposition. And the more such positives prevailed in the field of religion, the more there was ‘help and not fight’, ‘assimilation and not destruction’, ‘harmony and peace and not dissension’, the more such religious atmosphere helped in the development of human beings. After all, what was religion if it was not an aid to the development of man in terms of man’s progressive journey towards the attainment of the divinity?

In proclaiming through the Parliament to all the peoples of earth the sovereignty of human nature and in charting out the course of all humans towards the progressive realization or development of divinity, Swami Vivekananda, the unknown wandering monk of India, became a world figure and he came to be known ever since as one who gave to the world the doctrine of the divinity of man. Did America ever learn anything like this before and that too from a ‘despised’ Hindu, or a ‘degraded’ heathen? The answer is best given in the words of Hon’ble Mr. Merwin-Marie Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament of Religions. Being an eyewitness to the eminence of Vivekananda in the Parliament and having called him on that count “the most popular and influential man in the Parliament” and “indeed a prince among men”, Mr. Snell observed:

Intense is the astonished admiration which the personal presence and bearing and language of Paramahamsa Vivekananda have wrung from a public accustomed to think of Hindus – thanks to the fables and half-truths of the missionaries – as ignorant and degraded “heathen”; there is no
doubt that the continued interest is largely due to a genuine hunger for the spiritual truths which India through him has offered to the American people…America thanks India for sending him. 96

Most of the American press and even well-known periodicals echoed the noble sentiment of Merwin-Marie Snell. The New York Herald was the most explicit among them in writing as follows: “He [Vivekananda] is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation”. 97 If such approbation of the West indicated anything it was this that Vivekananda raised the degraded India – the slave of conquerors for the last thousand years – and the despised Hindu immensely in the eyes of the West. And Vivekananda raised India no less in her own eyes. He gave the Indians the belief back in themselves. They now knew that they too could do great things. Apart from restoring their self-belief as a nation, Vivekananda gave back to India her sense of pride in her civilization and culture. The doctrine of divinity of man that Vivekananda offered to the world on behalf of India as the new mantra for the development of man was now recognized all over as the very distinctive contribution of India to the world. No wonder that New York Herald commented on the futurity of sending missionaries by the West to the learned nation that was India. And no wonder that a man, after hearing Vivekananda in the great hall of the Parliament of Religions, came out of the hall and said in amazement, “That man a heathen!” and “we send missionaries to his people! It would be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us”. 98

In the midst of all acclaim, all name and fame, Vivekananda remained the same sannyasi that he always was: he must continue to teach humanity, continue to bring spiritual consciousness to men everywhere and he must continue to work for assuaging the sufferings of the poor, the distressed and despised everywhere, particularly the ones of India; he must do whatever he
can to raise them. In the wake of his grand success at the Parliament of Religions, he was royally treated and feted at the mansion of one of the greatest men of wealth and distinction in America. But far from feeling happy he felt miserable at seeing the contrast between poverty-stricken India and opulent America. Not being able to sleep in his bed of luxury and falling to the floor he cried out in anguish:

O Mother! What do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spend millions of rupees upon their personal comforts! Who will raise the masses in India! Who will give them bread! Show me, O Mother, how can I help them.99

V

Having seen Vivekananda in the Parliament and having been a witness to his ‘culture, eloquence and personality’, 100 America became convinced that India still produced “men at whose feet even the most civilized nations may learn lessons of religion and morality”.101 An American lecture bureau by the name of Slayton Lyceum Lecture Bureau came forward to give expression to such interest of Americans by contracting Vivekananda to an arrangement under which Vivekananda would make a lecture tour of America against the payments to be made to him under the contract. Vivekananda accepted the contract for several reasons.

First, he needed money to keep going in America in the post-Parliament days. Second, he thought that the contract would enable him to go over the length and breadth of America and preach his ideas on spirituality. Third, he thought that it would enable him to correct the American misconceptions about India such as were preached by “hard- shelled” Christians.102
Fourth, he thought that it would enable him to earn money for his educational, religious and philanthropic work in India towards assuaging the misery of the poor in particular and the development of man in general. He went about all this task initially under the contractual arrangement of the lecture bureau, but left it soon as the bureau was financially exploitative to him and made his own arrangement instead to pursue on his own the four objectives as mentioned above.

In the early day of his stay in America – in the days prior to the Parliament – Swamiji did not accept any money for lecturing. In fact, we have it on the testimony of Mrs John Henry Wright, that “his [Vivekananda’s] horrified reluctance to take it [money] haunted us”. But now, there was a change in his method. He was contract-bound to accept money and with a cause to serve in America and India, he accepted it gracefully, though it could by no means be said that he was very good at handling money, if the testimony of Cornelia Conger, the grand-daughter of the Lyons (Mr. John B. Lyon and Mrs Lyon) with whom he stayed at Chicago and whose hospitality he enjoyed for a good many days at Chicago during September to part of November in 1893 was anything to go by. To quote Cornelia:

When he began to give lectures, people offered him money for the work he hoped to do in India. He had no purse. So he used to tie it up in a handkerchief and bring it back – like a proud little boy! – pour it into my grandmother’s lap to keep for him. She made him learn the different coins and to stack them up neatly and count them. She made him write down the amount each time, and she deposited in her bank for him.

“Of all the worries I have ever had”, said Vivekananda, “the greatest had been the care of this money!” However uncomfortable he might have been with the care of money, he had to do it all the same for the sake of the dear mission that he had taken upon himself.
Swamiji signed up the contract with the lecture bureau possibly around the middle of November 1893. But even before that, during almost two months that he had stayed in Chicago, he spent his time lecturing in the city and the towns nearby and by his own account people paid him voluntarily no mean sum on those occasions. To quote from his letter dated October 10, 1893:

I am lecturing about Chicago – and am doing as I think very well – it is ranging from 30 to 80 dollars a lecture and just now I have been so well advertised in Chicago gratis by the Parliament of Religions that it is not advisable to give up this field now …. Yesterday I returned from Streator where I got 87 dollars for a lecture. I have engagements every day this week.

Earlier to this, Swamiji spoke on ‘reincarnation’ at Evanston, a town just north of Chicago, on October 5, 1893. He argued that the body was earthly but the soul was eternal; that reincarnation meant that the soul changed its centre from one body to another, till, with the progressive attainment of perfection, it became one with Brahman – the Soul of all souls; that reincarnation was something logical and scientific in this sense that human beings could not have a present without a past; and that the purpose of religion was to lift humanity up from animality (brutality) to humanity to divinity. Thus, the whole thrust of the theory of reincarnation, Swamiji explained to his American audience, was to release man free from the confines of ‘this life’ on ‘this world’, to put him on the road to infinity and to make him reach eventually that acme of perfection which he termed as divinity. Man is to become divine and he alone has the responsibility and power to do so.

As for Swamiji’s lecture engagements at the Chicago city itself, we know from his own letter dated October 26, 1893 addressed to Prof. John Henry Wright of Harvard University that he was due to speak on Buddhism
on October 27 at the Ladies’ Fortnightly Club at Chicago, that he had decided to “keep in the background” his India project\textsuperscript{110} for the time being, resolving to speak instead on other subjects, and that “I am doing well and expect to do very well in the way of getting money. Of course, I am too green in the business but would soon learn my trade”.\textsuperscript{111}

That alongside earning money for his future work in India, Swamiji was preaching the glory of the civilization, culture and religion of India could be seen from Swamiji’s letter dated 15 November, 1893 addressed to Haridas Viharidas Desai, the Diwan of Junagadh:

> You may not understand why a Sannyasin should be in America, but it was necessary. Because the only claim you have to be recognized by the world is your religion, and good specimens of our religious men are required to be sent abroad to give other nations an idea that India is not dead…[and] that you are not savages.\textsuperscript{112}

That India is not dead, that she is great and glorious by virtue of her Vedantic religion and that Hindus, contrary to the Christian missionary preachings, are not ‘savages’ and that they had given birth to one of the greatest religions and philosophies of the world is something that Swamiji continuously preached in America, with money in modest amount coming to him in the process for the work that he was to undertake later in India towards raising the depressed and marginalized humanity of India.

It will be wrong to infer from this that Swami Vivekananda continued to stay in America for India alone. As a Vedantist interested in the raising of the humanity as a whole, he was equally interested in America, in making the American civilization a better one and in making the American people better human beings. As a matter of fact, he preached certain eternal truths to this end, stressing the fact that these truths were first discovered in the forest hermitages of the ancient Rishis of India and that they were laid down in the
Vedas and Upanishads of India. That the perception of such truths was
dawning upon some Americans, at least, could be seen from the following
observations of Lucy Monroe, the Chicago correspondent of the *Critic*, who,
incidentally, was a sister of Harriet Monroe, the poetess, and who made a
habit of attending Swamiji’s lectures in Chicago:

It [Swamiji exposition of eternal truths] was an outgrowth of the Parliament of Religions, which
opened our eyes to the fact that the philosophy of ancient creeds contains much beauty for the
moderns. When we had once clearly perceived this, our interest in their exponents quickened,
and with characteristic eagerness we set out in pursuit of knowledge. The most available means
of obtaining it, after the close of the Parliament, was through the addresses and lectures of Suami
(sic) Vivekananda, who is still in the city. …His culture, his eloquence, and his fascinating
personality have given us a new idea of Hindu civilization. …At present he contends himself
with enlightening us in regard to his religion and the words of its philosophers. He looks forward to
the time when we shall pass beyond idolatry – now necessary in his opinion to the ignorant
classes, – beyond worship, even, to a knowledge of the presence of God in nature, of the divinity
and responsibility of man. “Work out your own salvation”, he says with the dying Buddha; “I
cannot help you. No man can help you. Help yourself”.¹¹³

Thus, by an intelligent American’s own estimate, Swamiji’s whole
thrust was towards making the humanity a better one, or to put it in terms of
the ultimate goal, a most developed one. He gave the humanity the doctrine of
the divinity and responsibility of men and gave man the philosophy and
aspiration, the great goal as well as the drive towards fulfilling his ultimate
development which was at once his entitlement and his ultimate destination.
This account of Swamiji’s stay in Chicago in the post-Parliament days will remain incomplete without a reference to the mutual regards and affections he and his acquaintances showed for each other. Let us begin with Mr. and Mrs. John B. Lyon in whose home he was lodged just before and during the sessions of the great Parliament of Religions. Swamiji was brought to the house of the Lyons after midnight and as Mrs. Lyon welcomed her guest, she was afraid that some Southerners who already were guests in their house might not like, because of the colour prejudice inherent in them, the idea of staying together with one who was not white by colour. She herself, of course, was well-aware of the Caucasian origin of the Indians and in any case was free from colour prejudice. However, in the morning, as her husband woke up, she expressed her apprehension about the possible reactions and antagonistic feelings of their Southern guests. As Mr. Johnson walked into the library to read his morning paper, he saw that Swamiji was already there which gave them both an opportunity to talk to each other. Mr. Johnson was so impressed by his new guest that he returned to Mrs. Johnson to tell her, “I don’t care a bit, Emily [the pet name of Mrs. Johnson], if all our guests leave! This Indian is the most brilliant and interesting man who has ever been in our home and he shall stay as long as he wishes”.\textsuperscript{114} Mr. Johnson’s granddaughter Cornelia Conger informs us in her “Memoirs” that with such a first meeting between her grandfather and Swami Vivekananda, there “began a warm friendship between them which was later summed up –much to my grandfather’s embarrassment – by having Swami calmly remark to a group of my grandfather’s friends one day at the Chicago club “I believe Mr. Lyon is the most Christlike man I ever met!”\textsuperscript{115}

At times, the conversation between Swamiji and his ‘American mother’ was amusing indeed. Once Swamiji told Mrs. Lyon that he experienced the greatest temptation of his life in America to which she asked him, who the lady was? Swamiji burst out laughing and then explained to Mrs. Lyon that it was not any lady but the organizing capacity of the American people that he found to be so attractive. He stated that having seen
the Americans in action, he appreciated how much could be accomplished by organizing work and that he meant to do the same on his return to India but only by ‘adopting what seemed good to him in the Western World to the best advantages of his own people’.\textsuperscript{117}

Mr. and Mrs. Lyon’s daughter-in-law was a charming young widow, living with her father and mother-in-law. She attended the sessions of Parliament of Religions in the company of her mother-in-law and was so impressed with what Swamiji said at the Parliament that, in order to have a fuller understanding, she began to study Oriental philosophy. She developed the power of holding in her hands the torn shreds of a letter and finding in them the impression of the writer of the letter. When she told Swamiji about this ‘gift’ of hers, he cautioned her never ever to use it except for the good of mankind. Since persons with such ‘gift’ would bring relief from pain, Swamiji advised her never to show off such gift and use it only to bring healing to the suffering humanity.

Cornelia Conger herself was only six years old in 1893 when Swamiji was a guest in her grandfather’s house. Reminiscing of the great man, she wrote in her ‘Memoirs’ that he told her enchanting stories of India, that she would climb into his lap the moment he would come in, demanding of him to tell her another story, and that fascinated as she was by his turban, she would ask him time and again to show her how it could be wrapped around the head. On his part, Swamiji never ignored the child nor felt disturbed by her. He asked her about the lessons she learnt in her school, asked her to show him her books, and pointed out to her on the map where India was. Obviously, apart from his natural affection for the child, he wanted to learn about the American school education, no doubt, with the intention of applying to children’s education in India whatever useful he could find in American education, regretting at the same time that little Indian girls did not have, in general, the chance to have as good an education as the American children had. Having thus reminisced of Swami Vivekananda, Miss Conger observes, “Well, everybody [in the family] loved him. He had a keen sense of humour and was
very easy for all of us to get on with; my whole family was devoted to
him”. On his part, Swamiji observed of the Lyons that they were “one of
the noblest couples I have seen here [Chicago]”.

Like the Lyons, the Hales too were very fond of Swamiji. In fact, in
the middle of November 1893 and thereafter the Hale house became
Swamiji’s headquarters till, of course, the pivot of his activities moved
eastward to the Atlantic Coast. To quote The Life, “The members of the Hale
family looked upon him as an ever-welcome son and brother; and to him they
were like his own”.

Marie Louise Burke relates a touching and revealing incident that took
place in the Lincoln Park that was a block and a half away from the Hale
house on Dearborn Avenue. Swamiji would go to that Park occasionally to sit
in the sun and open air. A young woman with her six year old daughter used
to pass by the place where Swamiji used to sit. One day, obviously trusting
that Swamiji was kind, she asked him if she could leave her daughter with
him and collect her after coming back from her marketing. Swamiji agreed
and henceforth the young lady would leave the child to the care of Swamiji
whenever on her way to the market through the Park, she would find him.
Now, it so happened that after the young girl grew into adulthood, her mother
showed her the photograph of Swamiji which she immediately recognized.
Many years later, when the girl became married, she drifted into spiritual life
showing that touch or a glance of a man of Swamiji’s spiritual eminence
could indeed transform the life of one. Marie Louise Burke’s observation on
this happening is revealing indeed: “How many small happenings such as that
of a mother leaving her child in his charge took place throughout Swamiji’s
visit to America, how many chance contacts he had with people whose lives
were translated by his touch or glance, we can only guess”.

We need not guess, for we know for certain that Swamiji indeed
changed for the better the lives of two celebrities during his stay in Chicago.
One was Madame Emma Calve, the famous opera singer and the other was
John D. Rockefeller, the fabulously wealthy American financier. When
Madame Calve came to see Swamiji, she was emotionally a total wreck. Her relationship with the man she was in love with had just broken down, her daughter suffered a tragic death from fire and she was contemplating suicide herself. She confided to nobody her secret problems and yet as she came into Swamiji’s room, he addressed her in a most affectionate voice and told her, even without looking at her, that he could read the inside of her as effortlessly as he would read an open book and advised her not to dwell upon in silence upon her sorrows but to transmute her emotions into some form of external expression.

Reflecting upon the impact of this meeting with Swamiji upon her life, Madame Calve wrote in her autobiography:

I left him [Swamiji], deeply impressed by his words and his personality. He seemed to have emptied my brain of all feverish complexities and placed there instead his clear and calming thoughts. I became once again vivacious and cheerful, thanks to the effect of his powerful will. He did not use any of the hypnotic or mesmeric influences. It was the strength of his character, the purity and intensity of his purpose that carried conviction.

Grateful to Swamiji for broadening her spiritual horizon, Madame Calve, nevertheless, expressed her nervousness at the idea of individual soul losing its individuality in the eventual oneness achieved through absorption into the Cosmic Soul. Swamiji set at rest her apprehension through a parable that reminds us of the way of teaching of his Master Sri Ramakrishna and deserves to be quoted for its beauty:

One day a drop of water fell into the vast ocean. When it found itself there, it began to weep and complain just as you are doing. The great ocean, laughed at the drop of water. ‘Why do you weep?’ it asked. ‘I do not understand. When you join me,
you join all your brothers and sisters, the other drops of water of which I am made. You become the ocean itself. If you wish to leave me, you have only to rise up on a sunbeam into the clouds. From there you can descend again, little drop of water, a blessing and a benediction to the thirsty earth.\textsuperscript{122a}

As for John D. Rockefeller, a powerful and strong-willed man, he entered the study room of Swamiji only to see that the Indian saint did not care so much as even to look at him. His pride humbled at this, he was crest-fallen when he heard Swamiji tell him the secret source of his wealth and advise him to this effect that he use his money for the good of the people. Greatly annoyed though Rockefeller was, he could not ignore the advice of the Indian sage and within a week of meeting Swamiji he made his first ever big donation towards the financing of a public institution. Later on, by way of explaining the reason behind his magnanimous philanthropies, Rockefeller almost echoed Swami Vivekananda when he said, “There is more to life than the accumulation of money. Money is only a trust in one’s hand. …The best way to prepare for the end of life is to live for others”.\textsuperscript{123}

Another celebrity of the time that Swamiji met in Chicago in 1893 is Robert Green Ingersoll, the eminent agnostic orator, who used to earn five to six hundred dollars a lecture. Ingersoll denounced all religions, for he alleged, they talked about ‘other worlds’ and misled people thereby. His stand was that “this world was all we are sure of” and therefore we ought to ‘make the most of out of this world’. Swamiji’s disagreement with Ingersoll was not on his emphasis on ‘this world’ but on his concept of enjoyment. Living in this world just for the purpose of eating and drinking could not be, Swamiji insisted, the goal of human life. We cannot think of man as we think of animals. Man cannot be confined like animals to birth, growth, mating, death – and nothing more. In all men, there was that divine essence which distinguished man from animals. So, for man, the goal of life was to realize
his divine essence by continuously moving from brutality to humanity and finally reaching his divinity.

There is One Life which is the Life of all lives, one Self which is the Self of all selves. Man must be given the realization of such divine essence of his and given to understand that he lives meaningfully when he lives for others. Are we not all one in the essence of our beings? Therefore, love and compassion for fellow man and raising him through unselfish love or work or knowledge must be the essential goal of human life and human development.

Thus, to Ingersoll’s simile that he wanted to enjoy this world by squeezing all the juice out of the orange of this world, Swamiji put forward the thesis that life was far greater than mere squeezing the orange dry and that, after all, there was a far better way to squeeze the orange of this world than what Ingersoll thought of. To quote Swamiji’s beautiful words:

I know a better way to squeeze the orange of this world than you do; and I get more out of it. I know I cannot die, so I am not in a hurry. I know that there is no fear, so I enjoy the squeezing. I have no duty, no bondage of wife and children and property; so I can love all men and women. Everyone is God to me. Think of the joy of loving man as God! Squeeze your orange this way and get ten thousandfold more out of it.

This passage contains in a nutshell Swamijis’s philosophy of human development. Development of man lies in his going beyond the appearance of things and realizing the essence of this life and this world. Man must become divine, that is, perfect by engaging in “constant struggles” to that end and having become pure and perfect he must help others attain the same perfection through whatever path is suitable to his temperament – the path of love, work, psychic control or knowledge. This is precisely how Swamiji outlined the goal of human development when he said elsewhere:
Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy – by one, or more, or all of these – and be free.

Thus, human emancipation was Swamiji’s goal and his religion was only a means to help man attain his perfection. Swamiji was a *nityasiddha*, that is, one who was perfected right from his birth. He did not need to work for his own salvation. He was already free. But his feeling heart, his love and compassion for man, his desire to see man – man everywhere – reach the acme of his or her development bound him to this world and to work for man and his deliverance or for man’s true development.

That he lived for humanity and that his Guru continued to be with him in the USA in a subtle form urging him to keep working for the fulfilment of his mission towards bringing spiritual awakening to humanity, lest his mind should drift towards merging with Brahman, could be seen from the following intimate revelation that Swamiji made confidentially to his disciple Sarat Chandra Chakravarti:

... Swamiji once told me that one moonlight night when he was on the shore of lake Michigan his mind began to merge in Brahman. Suddenly he saw Sri Ramakrishna and he remembered the work for which he had come to this world, and then his mind came down and again turned towards the fulfilment of his mission.\(^{130}\)

Illuminating is the following comment of Marie Louise Burke:

That fraction of his [Swamiji’s] mind with which he attended to the world ... was informed and illumined by a far larger part that lay quiet and untouched beneath the surface, always absorbed
in God, ready to pour out blessings upon and alter the lives of those who came to him. How often Swamiji verged upon nirvikalpa samadhi, only to be drawn back by Sri Ramakrishna, or by his own love and compassion for man, in order that he might fulfil his mission here, we cannot know; but we can assume that he always lived on the borderline between the relative and the Absolute, as a prophet of his supreme eminence must.\textsuperscript{131}

VI

That despite his great spirituality and his brilliance of mind, Swami Vivekananda was not very worldly-wise was evident from the contract he signed with the Slayton Lecture Bureau. It was a three-year contract which meant that beginning November 1893, he had to lecture for the next three years as he was asked to by the Lecture bureau. A more worldly-wise man would have known that the lecture bureau would want to ‘use’ him as much as it could with a view to making as much profit as it could, and would have signed a contract for a shorter period but being innocent of business deals, Swamiji was taken in by Mr. Slayton and could ‘regain’ his freedom in March 1894 only at a considerable financial loss and at the intervention of his well-meaning friend and admirer, Mr. Thomas Palmer, President of the World’s Fair Commission. We shall refer to this at the appropriate place in the present section after discussing what Swamiji had to say in the mid-Western towns of America as also at the Southern city of Memphis, Tennessee in the period between November 1893 and March 1894.

Swamiji left Chicago on the morning of November 20, 1893. His first step was Madison, Wisconsin where he addressed a gathering on the evening of the same day, emphatically making the point that far from being vile, man was perfect in his real nature and that human life was meant for struggles towards attaining perfection in the life of the Spirit. At Minneapolis, his next stop, he said that divinity existed in each man and that religion was meant to help man manifest the divinity within. Religion that teaches man shop-
keeping – “Oh God, give me this and give me that” is not true religion. Man should love God for love’s sake, not for any material gain. He pointed out with a bit of sarcasm that spending a whole week for earning dollars and then thanking God on the Sunday for the success is a matter of the shop-keeping mentality in religion. A truly religious man, a good Hindu, for example, would earn his money only to give most or at least a good part of it to God in the form of help or service to the poor. “We of the Hindu faith”, said Swamiji, “believe in worshipping God for love’s sake, not for what he gives us”. Claiming that God is love, he asserted that “no nation, no people, no religion has God until it is willing to worship Him for love’s sake. In other words, Swamiji’s message to his American audience was that love was a value in itself and that man to be true man must cultivate that value for its own sake.

From Minneapolis Swamiji traveled two hundred and sixty miles south to Des Moines, the capital city of Iowa where he delivered a number of lectures to make the point that men were all divine in their true nature; that cultivating the divine within should be the supreme goal of man’s life as also the acme of all development for him, that all religions were true and that there being no monopoly of truth in any particular religion, conversion from one religion to another was not conversion but perversion; and that sects were nonsense in refusing to believe in any world outside their own. In short, Swamiji’s message to his Des Moines audience was: Treat conversion as an insult to humanity, ‘tolerate everything but intolerance’, and ‘cultivate the divine within’ to develop truly as human beings.

In Memphis Swamiji gave an exposition of or rather a reiteration of certain values that he considered to be essential for human development. He related a recent experience he had in this connection: “I met with a peculiar incident while on a train leaving the city of Minneapolis. There was a cowboy on the train. He was a rough sort of fellow and a Presbyterian of the blue nose type. He walked up and asked me where I was from. I told him India. ‘What are you?’ he said, ‘Hindoo’, I replied. ‘Then you must go to hell’, he remarked.” This encounter with the Presbyterian cowboy must have
reminded Swamiji of what Robert Ingersoll told him during his meeting with the former: “Fifty years ago, you would have been hanged in this country if you had come to preach. You would have been burnt alive or you would have been stoned out of the villages”. With so much intolerance still prevailing in America of which the Presbyterian cowboy was the latest example, Swamiji felt that his American audience at Memphis should be taught the value of tolerance as also the value of acceptance of other religions to this effect that “there is good in all religions, that all religions are embodiments of man’s inspiration for holiness, and being such, all should be respected”.

In pleading for the universal acceptance of all religions, Swamiji made the further point that religion should, above all, be humane and that its purpose should be to produce good, pure and holy men. It is on this count particularly, that the religion of Hindus, Swamiji contended, is the most humane of all religions. It aims at human perfectibility and gives man the hope as well as the aspiration that such perfection being the original nature of man, it can be attained through the practice of holiness and love. Thus conceived, development of man, as per the perception of Hindu religion, is a return to an original perfection. To quote Swamiji in his most straightforward and beautiful words:

God is not a king sitting away in one corner of the universe to deal out punishment or rewards according to a man’s deeds here on earth, and the time will come when man will know the truth, and stand up and say, ‘I am God’, am life of His life. Why teach that God is far away when our real nature, our immortal principle is God?

Be not deluded by your religion [Christianity] teaching original sin, for the same religion teaches original purity. When Adam fell he fell from purity. Purity is our real nature, and to regain that is the object of all religion. All men are pure; all men are good. Some objections can be raised to them, and you ask why some men are brutes? That man you call a brute is like the diamond in
the dart and dust – brush the dust off and it is a diamond, just as pure as if the dust had never been on it, and we must admit that every soul is a big diamond.\textsuperscript{137}

This is the basic religious truth (that man is perfect in original nature) that Swami Vivekananda taught in America. Swamiji related this basic religious truth to human development when he said that development is always the struggle of the soul\textsuperscript{138} that somehow gets beclouded in the phenomenal world to regain its pure or divine nature. The struggle goes on and on through reincarnation involving the soul to pass from one body to another, until it becomes a perfect spirit, able to do without the limitation of the body. By freeing itself from the bondage of the material body, the soul becomes one with the Universal Soul or the man attains his original pure and divine nature – his highest development, so to say – in the Brahman. From Man to Brahman – from being through becoming (through struggles, so to say,) to Supreme Being – such is the course of development of man, as Swamiji outlined it. In outlining in such a way the course of development of man, Swami Vivekananda relates the divinity of man to reincarnation and responsibility of man. His is no doctrine of fatalism. He does not ever say that God makes a man what he is or he is not. The responsibility is that of man (human being) himself to attain his original pure and perfect nature through constant struggle. Man must do it all by himself, his religion being merely an aid to him, merely providing a discipline or a way to him leading him to the realization of his true divine or perfect nature.

If true human development is for humans to find their true nature, then how is it that humans often go astray? Swamiji’s answer is that either we see things wrong or we draw wrong conclusions from things that we see. He explained it through two parables. Once a cub of a lion fell into the company of sheep and grew up among them, eating grass and bleating like sheep. Once a big lion finding the ‘sheep lion’ in the wrong company seized it and having
brought it before a clear pool of water made it see its true image reflected in
the water. At that instant, the ‘sheep lion’ knew that it was a lion and began to
roar like a lion does. Having said the story, Swamiji observed that man’s true
nature gets beclouded because of wrong perception, wrong thinking or wrong
association and that he who is a lion begins to look upon itself as a sheep or,
to say the same thing, man who is pure and perfect in his true nature begins to
look upon himself as a sinner.

Swamiji’s second parable was that of a few blind men seeing an
elephant. One blind man put his hand on the elephant’s tail to say that it was
like rope. Another put his hand on the elephant’s side to say that it was like a
wall. The third blind touched the elephant on its trunk to say that it was like
snake and the fourth put his hand on the elephant’s ear to say that it was like a
fan. When the blind men began their disputation as to how an elephant was
truly like, a man who had seen the elephant appeared on the scene to tell the
quarrelling blind men that none of them had really seen the elephant. That is
the matter with men. They do not truly see themselves and that is why they
stray away from their true nature and from the true path of their development.

Religion in the true sense of the term is supposed to give us the
realization of our true nature, our true development, so to say. Do we need
variety of religions? The answer is : Why not? After all, they are like little
streams that come down from a thousand mountain sides to merge eventually
into the mighty ocean. Similar is the case with different religions. They all
bring human beings through different ways but eventually to the same ocean
of Brahma, to the same realization of perfect nature. As it is not necessary
that all watches should have the same kind of a spring, so it is not necessary
that all human beings should have the same religion. As Swamiji put it, “And
why should we quarrel? If we all had the same ideas the world would be dead.
… Motion is life. We must have unity and variety. The rose would smell as
sweet by any other name, and it does not matter what your religion is
called”.139
As Swamiji related his thesis on human development to merits of Hinduism, he was asked to explain why with such a religion as Hinduism on their side “your people are not more advanced in civilization than they[the Americans] are”. “Why has it [Hinduism] not elevated them[the Hindus] among the nations of the world?” Swamiji’s quick answer to this question was that advancement in civilization or elevation among the nations of the world was a matter of material prosperity. Material prosperity, as the history of Europe shows it, could well be brought about by physical force.\textsuperscript{140} Religion, on the other hand, is meant to develop a man’s spiritual side. In fact, their religion made the Hindus “most moral in the world”, more considerate of their fellow men’s right, and even those of dumb animals, but they are not materialists”.\textsuperscript{141}

Having defended his people, Swamiji launched into an attack on the ugly side of American materialism, half-sadly but also half-accusingly:

You Americans worship what? The dollar. In the mad rush for gold, you forget the spiritual until you have become a nation of materialists. Even your preachers and churches are tainted with the all-pervading desire. Show me one in history of your people who has led the spiritual lives that those whom I can name at home have done. Where are those who, when death comes, could say, ‘O Brother Death, I welcome thee’. Your religion helps you to build Ferris wheels and Eiffel towers, but does it aid you in the development of your inner lives?”\textsuperscript{142}

True that man’s development demands a development of his inner life – his spiritual side-, but will it not be more balanced for the purpose of development that man should have his outer life, his material side developed, too? Did not Swamiji himself say a while ago in his address at Des Moines, Iowa that his people will never become a strong people unless they throw off gradually the restriction in the form of intellectually dwarfing legislations
imposed on them by the British and “learn to think and choose for themselves”, “govern themselves”, and “protect themselves against the English, who occupy and govern India?”143 This means that Swamiji was aware of the fact that in pursuing the spiritual, a man should not lose sight of the demands of the present and that he should have his religion developing his spiritual side as well as his material lot on earth. As Swamiji himself said:

> I believe that the Hindoo faith has developed the spiritual in its devotees at the expense of the material, and I think that in the Western world the contrary is true. By uniting the materialism of the West with the spiritualism of the East I believe much can be accomplished.144

Thus, while Swamiji was against rank or ugly materialism, he was not against the harmonization of spiritualistic and materialistic approaches to human development, of East and west, so to say.

If Swami Vivekananda was uncharitable at times in his criticism of American materialistic approach to life and development, his purpose was not to cut but to cure, not to hurt but to awaken the Americans to a life of the Spirit. Materialism they had enough; they needed to balance it with a spiritual approach as well to life which Swami Vivekananda sought to infuse in them. And he did it successfully in two respects: in broadening the views of a great many American people, and in obliging them to see things from a different perspective. Side by side with awakening the American humanity to spiritual consciousness, he worked to raise funds for improving the lot of the poor people of India, but there again his thinking was that he should contribute first as much as he could to local charity145 and then retain, whatever remained of the raised funds for using it for his Indian work. With him, the spiritual awakening of the Americans and material aid to charities went hand in hand. His motto was: Give as selflessly as you can and take, if you will, only to give it back in some way or the other.
VII

Was Swamiji taken for what he was? Did America believe to one man that he, the child of God, had a truth to teach the humanity, that he was spending his youth and the most valuable time period of his life in making the Americans, the American civilization and the ‘current’ Christianity in America better than what they were? The highest-minded among the Americans including the ones in clergy appreciated him for what he was and what he sought to do in America, but the conservative Americans and especially the orthodox sections of the clergy assailed him for what they alleged to be his false doctrines preached at the Parliament of Religions, namely, his assertion of the ever-existing creation (or of creation without beginning), his rejection of the Christian doctrine of the original sin of man, and most of all, his rejection of the superiority of Christianity as a religion to all other religions. In the days following the Parliament of Religions at Chicago, when Swamiji kept asserting during his mid-western and southern tours that the conditions in India were not what the Christian missionaries in India were claiming them to be, that they deliberately misrepresented India and that they were doing worth little in India, the orthodox clergy blew their top, seeking to tear down the ‘heathen’ and his benighted country. The thing came to a climax during Swamiji’s lecture tour in Detroit, Michigan where he delivered lectures on two occasions, first, during his stay there from February 13 to February 23, 1894 and the second time during March 9 to March 30, 1894. This period in Detroit, being one of the most important in Swamiji’s American mission, is discussed in some detail in what follows.

“When I came into this country”, observed Swami Vivekananda, “I was surprised to meet so many liberal men and women. But after the Parliament of Religions a great Presbyterian paper came out and gave me the benefit of a seething article.” The seething article Swamiji referred to was
an editorial observation in the Presbyterian Paper Interior to this effect: “While in the Parliament, he [Vivekananda] was here as our guest, but now that it is over we ought to make an attack against him and his false doctrines”. In order to see to what effect the attacks against Swamiji were directed, we must first see what Swamiji had to say in Detroit.

Swamiji’s hostess in Detroit was Mrs. John J. Bagley, the widow of the ex-Governor of Michigan, undoubtedly a great lady of courage and culture. How else she could have offered hospitality to a heathen who was, to say the least, in the eye of a storm or at the centre of a heated controversy? As one of the lady managers at the Chicago World’s Fair, she was already familiar with Vivekananda, admired him for his performance at the Parliament and did not bother about what orthodoxy had to say of Vivekananda. Having received Vivekananda at her house, she also took the responsibility of introducing him to the city of Detroit and its people by throwing a reception in her house in his honour and by having the cream of Detroit society including the representatives of nearly all the religious denominations of the city present at that reception. This reception showed at once the malevolence and benevolence that Vivekananda will be facing in America for all that he did or would do for America. Even before Vivekananda could address one word to the people present at this reception, a lady took it upon herself “to attack and most unkindly denounce him to his face in a house to which she was invited as a guest to meet him”. Was the woman in question one of those whom Vivekananda once, undoubtedly with a bit of sarcasm, called “the very Christian of Christians?” Or, was she one of those awful fanatics whom Vivekananda designated as ‘churchwomen’ and characterized them in the following words:

Those ‘churchwomen’ are awful fanatics. They are under the thumb of the priests there [in America]. Between them and the priests they make hell of earth and make a mess of religion.
Be that as at might, there was truth in Swamiji’s observation “that however a man may conduct himself, there will always be persons who invent the blackest lies about him”. Malevolence and blackest lies notwithstanding, Swamiji carried on for two reasons. Malevolence was somewhat balanced out by the benevolence of friends and admirers who continue to fete him and champion his cause. A more substantial reason is that being the spiritual giant that he was, Swamiji remained unfazed throughout. He never said a single word to the lady who tried to run him down before the other guests at the reception. Moreover, the more opposition, the more ‘black lies’ campaign and the more slanderous assaults that the Christian clergy resorted to against him, the more he brought out the power – the power of the warrior - in him. When the monk is also a warrior, he is easily at his best, because he fights on such occasions not for himself but for his allegedly benighted motherland as also for America that he sought to make better in terms of humaneness and spirituality.

In the first interview that he gave to the press on his arrival in Detroit, Swamiji declared that despite her material decadence, India was great in spirituality, having the oldest religion of the world in Hinduism and in declaring to the world through her religion that religions are but the endeavors of humanity in realizing the infinity of self as also in telling the world through an ancient (200 B.C.) edict of King Ashoka that all people, whatever their faith, should promote the essential moral doctrines of each. In abhorring war as immoral right from the days of Ashoka and in encouraging instead among its people the morality of religion as also mutual respect among all religions, India gained in spirituality but suffered in materiality. Indeed, where other nations advanced in the material sphere by war and bloodshed, India lagged behind in the material sphere due to her disinclination to resort to such things. To quote Swamiji, “Where brute strength and bloodshed has advanced other nations India has deprecated such brutal manifestations and by the law of the survival of the fittest, which applies to nations as well as to individuals, it has fallen behind as a power on the earth in the material sense”. 
Asked how he proposed to infuse the gentle spirit of India into the ever-active, even aggressive mindset of the West, Swamiji answered that the ideal should be the combination of Western manliness and the Indian gentleness and the development of a new type of man combining the energy of the lion with the gentleness of the lamb. His appeal to America in the perspective of such a spirit of combination was for combining her material power with spirituality.156

It was such an approach that Swamiji used in America. It was not by exclusiveness, not by running one down, not by having one at the expense of another but rather by combination, adjustment and harmony that mankind may elevate itself and that a new type of man in a new kind of civilization and culture could be developed. Unfortunately, Swamiji’s opponents and detractors did not have his broadened outlook, his vision, so to say, and not being able to look beyond the tips of their noses, they not only failed to appreciate him but also ran him down as best they could.

The first lecture that Swamiji gave at Detroit on the evening of February 14, 1894 at the Unitarian Church was on the “Manners and Customs in India”. Swamiji made certain basic points here:

(a)That with the Hindu people of India, it was the belief that “all non-self is good and all self is bad.157 Thus, the Hindu builds a home to provide not merely for himself but, more importantly, for the worship of God and for the entertainment of guests. He cooks food, eating it last, so that he can provide for a guest or a hungry stranger who may appear suddenly at his door. Such feeling of non-self extends throughout the length and breadth of India.

(b)That civilization, in the ultimate analysis, is not controlling the elements or the problems of life in the most utilitarian way; the conquest of self and the subservience of the material conditions to the spiritual one are the two greatest marks of civilization as far as its applicability to an individual and a country are concerned. These two conditions of civilization are found in India more than in any other country on earth.158
(c) That though India has suffered in the material sphere due to her philosophy of non-violence and pacifism, propounded by King Ashoka as far back as 260 B.C., and has been in bondage to brutal nations who conquered by force, the Indian spirituality endures for ever, and nothing can take it away from her. There is something Christ-like in the humility of the people of India: even when they are suffering the reverses of fortune, they know that their soul is nevertheless advancing towards the higher spiritual goal.

(d) Being such a country India had no need of Christian missionaries to preach to her people, for:

> theirs is a religion that makes men gentle, sweet, considerate; and affectionate towards all God’s creatures, whether man or beast. Morally, India is head and shoulders above the United States or any other country on the globe. Missionaries would do well to come there and drink of the pure waters, and see what a beautiful influence upon a great community have the lives of multitude of holy men.\(^{159}\)

The last point that Vivekananda made— that India was a moral nation in no need of Christian missionaries—was nothing short of a bombshell that he dropped. Obviously, he was unhappy with the work that the Christian missionaries were doing in India and his disapproval of such work was on the following counts:

(a) That the missionaries’ main objective in India was to convert the people to Christianity. To a man who held that religions were nothing but the endeavours of humanity by different routes to reach the same goal of the infinity of self, conversion was unnecessary and from the point of view of those upon whom it was practiced it was nothing but perpetration of perversion on them.

Perversion it was also to ask the people of all lands and all races to join in the service of a common divine Redeemer, that is, Jesus Christ.\(^{160}\) Why must all people hold the same religious views and accept Christianity? Is not
variety the plan of nature? Variety is on two counts: variety of persons of different natures, intellectually, spiritually and materially, with such persons taking to the beliefs of their choice; and variety of routes through which the same goal, that is, the infinity of self, is reached. “My way”, said Swamiji, “would not be suited perhaps to the temperament of my western neighbour, the same that his route would not commend itself to my disposition and philosophical way of thinking”.  

(b) That the missionaries had no real humanitarian motive in raising the native people. Any help they gave – financial or otherwise – was conditioned on the recipients’ agreement – cajoled or otherwise – to embrace Christianity. The missionary spirit, that is to say, was mercenary and not humanitarian. 

(c) That some missionaries had opened educational institutions to impart education to the poor people of India and that such enterprises did some good to Indians was true, but they could not be called good enough if they also ‘denationalized’ Indian Indians in the process of giving education to them. 

(d) That missionaries coming to India to preach had a vested interest in doing so. It kept the money flowing to them and as professional preachers earning their livelihood, such money enabled them to live comfortable lives along with their wives and children in the company of the white people and never among the natives whom they professed to serve. Thus, when the gap between profession and practice was deliberate, it was nothing short of hypocrisy. 

(e) That, more often than not, the Bible followed the sword and in that sense missionary activity in Oriental countries was nothing but religious colonialism in the wake of political and economic colonialism. 

(f) That the missionaries could not, in any case, achieve spectacular success in converting the Indians. The Indians were generally so sure and happy about their religion that they would not bother about the missionaries preaching against idolatry or whatever other practices that seemed to be superstitious to missionaries. They would even take the material aid from the Christian missionaries but having taken the ‘bait’, they would avoid the ‘hook’.
Having criticized the Christian missionaries and having shown why they were not needed in India, Swamiji made a distinction between “ignorant, hypocritical, or self-deceiving” Christian missionaries and missionaries of Christ. As he said, “We want missionaries of Christ. Let such come to India by the hundreds and thousands. Bring Christ’s life to us and let it permeate the very core of society. Let him be preached in every village and corner of India.” He repeated his reverence for Christ and his missionaries when he said on another occasion, “Send to India missionaries like Francis Xavier, who mingled with the down-trodden people.” Another missionary of Christ Swamiji spoke highly of was Dr. James Long who stood by the people of India in exposing the evils perpetrated in India by indigo planters and courted jail in the process. Swamiji had great admiration indeed for the missionaries who were true servants of Jesus Christ. He objected only to those who vilified the people or spread falsehoods about them. He termed these Christian missionaries that were “blue-nosed” or “hard-shelled”.

There was a real reason why Swami Vivekananda had to expose the Christian missionaries for what they were. They had deliberately misrepresented India and her people to the world causing untold harm to them in the process and Swamiji had to correct the erroneous ideas they gave of his motherland. Their main contention was that India was a land of idolatry, immorality and superstition. As for idolatry, they contended that there were not less than 33,000,000 deities that the Hindus worshipped as divine and that Hinduism was primitive in accepting such combination of what they called idolatry and polytheism.

As for immorality, they contended that infanticide and burning of widows was a common practice in India. As for superstition, they claimed that suicide by jumping beneath the wheels of the chariot of Jagannatha was a superstitious religious practice of the Hindus of India. Reverend Reed Stuart of the Unitarian Church of Detroit, a voice of liberal Christianity, candidly admitted that the books the bigoted Christian missionaries wrote “abounded in illustrations of the car of Juggernaut and the deluded mortals casting
themselves under the wheels; of widows burning themselves upon the burial pyre of their husbands; of devotees torturing themselves in many ways; of aged parents exposed to die of neglect; of mothers flinging their babies into the jaws of hideous crocodiles”. Having given a list of the contents of books written by India-returned missionaries, Reverend Stuart observed that “whatever good there was was all concealed from us.” And that was precisely the reason why Swami Vivekananda had to step in and give the undistorted picture of India before the world.

First, Vivekananda warned people against reading those “10 cent” books about India, which the Americans and Englishmen wrote after coming back from a few weeks’ tour in India. *Songs for the Little Ones at Home* was one such book written by a Christian missionary in India for the ‘edification’ of the young. To quote one of the ‘edifying’ songs of this book:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>See the heathen mother stand</th>
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<tr>
<td>Where the sacred current flows;</td>
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<tr>
<td>With her own maternal hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid the waves her babe she throws.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| Hark! I hear the piteous scream; |
| Frightful monsters seize their prey. |
| Or the dark and bloody stream |
| Bears the struggling child away. |

| Fainter now, and Fainter still, |
| Breaks the cry upon the ear; |
| But the mother’s heart is steel |
| She unmoved that cry can hear. |
It needs no telling that the ‘song’ is about the throwing of a baby by her heartless mother into the jaws of crocodiles. Having described such a pathetic scene, the singing poet, in his anxiety to save the heathens, wrote:

Send, oh send the Bible there,
Let its precepts reach the heart;
She may then her children spare –
Act the tender mother’s part.

Another book of the strain “Send, oh send the Bible there” was entitled *India and its Inhabitants*. Authored by a Mr. Caleb Wright and illustrated with line-drawing, the book (first published in 1858) was full of false, calumnious and sensational information about India. Swamiji regretted that such books ran into editions which meant that it was patronized by a large number of people in America.

Swamiji not only showed the “10 cent” books about India for what they were; he also cited a few that, according to him, gave a true picture of India. One such book was W.W. Hunter’s *Short History of the People of India*. According to Swamiji, Hunter’s book was “almost the only book published in English about India and the religion and customs of the Hindoo people that can be depended upon”. Another book that Swamiji highly prized as giving a true picture of India and of the Indians and that deserved as such to be publicized more was *India and Its Native Princes – Travels in Central India and in the Presidencies of Bombay and Bengal*. This book was a translation of the French *L’Inde des Rajahs*. The original book was authored by Louis Rousselette and was first published in 1876. In this book, Rousselet asks the question: “In there a people in the world more tolerant then this good gentle Hindoo people, who have been so often described to us as cunning, cruel and even bloodthirsty?” and answers it himself by asserting that in spite of the West’s reputation for civilization, the West
could not stand in comparison with India in respect of the culture of
tolerance. He gives an example of what he saw himself in Benares near
the temple of Lord Vishwanath. A Protestant missionary was preaching
there on the errors of Hinduism or paganism, as the missionary
concerned preferred to call it, to the following effect: “You are
idolators! That block of stone which you worship has been taken from
a quarry, it is no better from the stone of my house”. Rousselette
observes that the crowd listened to the missionary without showing the
least hostile feelings towards him and this showed how tolerance ran
deep into the blood stream of the Hindu people of India.

That such books counted for little in the face of the enormity of
missionary propaganda and that the “benighted-heathen” myth had become
ingrained in the nineteenth-century American thinking was witnessed by
Swamiji over and over again during his lecture-tour and that left him no
option but to do his best “to dispel that national fallacy”. In Minneapolis,
one of his American listeners asked him if the Hindu mothers threw their
children to the crocodiles. With sarcastic humour he replied, “Yes, Madam!”
they threw me in, but like your fabled Jonah I got out again”. In Detroit, Swamiji
was asked a similar question and though he thought that the question
was as absurd as asking an American in India whether the Red Indians of
America kept running around in the streets of New York, he still answered it
in his typical half-serious manner that when he was a baby his mother had
taken him to the Ganges, but then he was “such a fat little baby that the
crocodiles refused to swallow me”; and he added facetiously, “whenever I feel
badly about being such a fat monk, I think of how I was saved from the
crocodiles and am comforted”.

However, the myth as to crocodiles being fed with babies was so
deeply ingrained in the American mind, thanks to the missionary propaganda
on it, that even after what Swamiji told them about the absurdity of the thing
they heard about, some of them kept asking why only female babies were
offered to the crocodiles to which Swamiji indignantly replied that probably it
was because they were softer and more tender and could be more easily masticated by the inhabitants of the rivers in the benighted country.”

The second most asked-for question of the benighted country was: Do the people of India kill themselves beneath the wheels of the Juggernaut? Swamiji answered that it was indeed the custom in India to grasp the rope of the car of Lord Jagannath and pull it. Perhaps, on some occasion, a few in the process of drawing the car slipped and were crushed under the wheels of the car and this gave rise to frightened belief in Western countries, no doubt, nurtured and excited by elements hostile to Hinduism and India, that such was the religious frenzy in India on the occasion of the car festival of Lord Jagannath that people took to suicides on such occasions as a matter of course.

The third question that Swamiji’s audience at Detroit asked him was: Do the people of India burn widows in the pyre of their husbands? Swamiji replied that it was a malicious lie to say that people burned widows in India, but in some stray cases the widows burned themselves in the funeral pyre of their husbands voluntarily when they decided to join their husbands in the transformation that had taken place. But when they took such decision, in spite of the urging of priests and holy men not to do so, they were tested as to their fiery resolve by asking them first to put their hands in the flames and only if they still desired to continue with the ordeal, no further opposition was placed in the way of the fulfilment of their desires. Having explained the so-called widow-burning, Swamiji reminded his American audience that it was not the practice however in India to burn witches. The oblique reference was to the burning of witches in Salem in the state of Massachusetts in the U.S.A.

Having explained that India was not really the land of immorality and superstition, Swamiji took up the question of idolatry to say that the Westerners really suffered from a misperception of this practice in India. Hindus worshipped not the idols or images but only God through the symbols of images. And idolatry was really considered to be the lowest stage of worship in India, it being meant only for those people whose mental capacity
was insufficient to grasp abstract ideas. Swamiji also knocked the bottom out of the Christian missionaries’ claim that improvements in social and moral conditions of India were all the product of the self-denying work of the Christian missionaries in India.

Swamiji took on the Christian missionaries on their claim that Hinduism was a primitive religion and proved just why India with her proud possession of a lofty religion such as Hinduism was also the most moral nation on earth. The following were the arguments of Swamiji on behalf of his claim. First, Hinduism was the most liberal religion of the world because it recognized in every human soul the struggle towards freedom and light and termed that struggle as religion, irrespective and independent of creed or dogma. As a religion in this most broad and liberal sense, Hinduism accepted all existing creeds and unlike other religions such as Christianity never sought to convert the people of other Faiths. Second, Hinduism is basically a religion of non-self. It holds that all self is bad and all non-self is good and that by living true to the philosophy of non-self one may attain infinity. The Christian religion is, on the other hand, one of self; egotistical in its aspirations, it holds up promises of reward or threats of punishment. It is egotistical also in asking its practitioners to “do unto others as you would be done by”. As Swamiji exclaimed, “Always self! always self!” was the Christian creed. The golden rule that Christianity teaches its adherents is: ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. The Hindu religion goes further than this golden rule of Christianity and teaches its followers to treat neighbours better than the treatment received from them. By all means, this is impeccable morality and cannot be excelled by any other religion. Third, Hinduism has a far better theory of love of God than Christianity. In Hinduism true love is absolutely unselfish and it asks for nothing in return. In Christianity, on the other hand, as Swamiji put it, “the love of God appears to be based upon a theory of ‘What can I get out of it?’ Finally, as a sort of clinching argument, Swamiji said “I take your Jesus. I take him to my heart as I take all the great and good of all lands and of
all times. But you, will you take my Krishna to your heart? No – you cannot, you dare not – still you are the cultured and I am the heathen”. ¹⁸⁴

Vivekananda reminded the Christian missionaries how they were used to coming over to India and cursing and abusing the Indians, the religion and everything of the Indians and saying, “You idolators, you will go to hell!” The gentle Hindu never returned the compliment. Now that Vivekananda took upon himself to point out where the defects of current Christianity lay, the ministers of the churches felt aggrieved against him, their indignant message in this being that they had the inherent right to criticize, curse and abuse all the heathens of the world but the heathens had no such right.

It is not in anger but in pain and anguish that Vivekananda entreated the ministers of churches to keep in mind one simple fact whenever they criticized Indians: “if all India stands up and takes all the mud that is at the bottom of the Indian Ocean and throws it up against the Western countries, it will not be doing an infinitesimal part of that which you are doing to us. And what for? Did we ever send one missionary to convert anybody in the West? We say to you, “You are welcome to your religion, but allow us to have ours!”¹⁸⁵ Unfortunately, for the heathens, the Christian missionaries would have no consideration for the appeals of the heathens. THEIRS is an aggressive religion, bent upon converting the heathens by force and bloodshed, taking them by the throat and saying: ‘Here, you rascally heathen, you must be converted!’¹⁸⁶ But even then, even with such aggressiveness the success rate of missionaries in conversion, compared to non-aggressive religions such as Buddhism, was insignificant, which proved that aggressiveness did not pay much in the long run. The Arabs were aggressive as were the Romans. While both passed into oblivion, the pacifist Hindu retained his spiritual glory and identity. Aggressiveness, therefore, could not help any individual or for that matter, any nation, retain its glory for long. Indeed, “Everything”, said Swamiji, that has selfishness for its basis, competition for its right hand and enjoyment as its goal, must die sooner or later”.¹⁸⁷
The other characteristic of *current* Christianity was that a religion pronounced by one who had nowhere to lay his head was now preached by people (missionaries) who wallowed in luxury. In substitution of this point, Swamiji pointed out that “the average cost of converting a Hindoo to Christianity is $30,000. …If I should become a Christian I could get a million dollars tomorrow for my school for the poor in India”.

So, what was the cure for the ills of *current* Christianity, indeed, for the ills of Western civilization or for the ills of the Western people’s lives in general? Swamiji’s prescription was: to live meaningfully, the West must go back to Christ, reversing in the process the aggressiveness and the luxury of its life and character. To quote him:

Reverse this if you want to live, reverse this. It is all hypocrisy that I have heard in this country. If this nation is going to live, let it go back to him. You cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time. All this prosperity, all this from Christ! Christ would have denied all such heresies. All prosperity which comes with Mammon is transient, is only for a moment. Real permanence is in Him. If you can join these two, this wonderful prosperity with the ideal of Christ, it is well. (Emphasis added).

The last sentence contains the key to understanding Vivekananda’s approach. He did not mean to be unkind in his criticisms of Christianity or American civilization. Yet if he was critical and at times sternly critical of the aggressive and destructive characteristics of Western civilization, it was because he wanted to save it from destruction by showing the American people the way out of self to God. Selfishness lay in bigotry of *current* Christianity, in the attitude such as ‘Be Christian or be doomed’. Selfishness lay in the dishonesty and cruelty of America’s social and business world. Selfishness lay in the denial of the dictum - He that hath, freely gives to him that hath not - , in the denial, so to say, of an America with double the area of
India and with one-fifth (65,000,000) of the population of India (300,000,000) to give aid to a famished and poor India. Selfishness lay in ‘every man for himself regardless of his brother man’ attitude. Selfishness lay in the ruthless pursuit of the law of the survival of the fittest, in the cut-throat competitiveness and destructiveness of fellow men, so to say. Selfishness lay in living only for one’s own narrow self, or, so to say, in the enjoyment of material things of life and in the insatiable love of gain to that end. Certainly, Jesus Christ could not mean by Christianity selfishness, competition and enjoyment etc. when he asked his followers to “Love thy neighbour as thyself” or when he asked for forgiveness even for enemies who crucified him. This is the kind of imperfections of current Christianity, of Western materialistic civilization and of Western standards of character and life to which Vivekananda drew the attention of his American audiences and of the American people at large when he gave them a call to go back to Christ. And he did it in the most earnest and sincere spirit of a holy man who meant well and who wanted to be outspoken in the interest of truth. To quote his ringing words:

I am a rather plain-spoken man, but I mean well. I want to tell you the truth. I am not here to flatter you; it is not my business. If I wanted to do that I would have opened a fashionable church in Fifth Avenue in New York. You are my children. I want to show you the way out of self to God by pointing out to you your errors, your defects, and your vanities. Therefore you do not hear me praising your current Christianity or your ideals of civilization, or the peculiar forms of character and life that are developed by Western ethical standards.

It would be wrong to think that Vivekananda only criticized America at his Detroit lectures. He duly recorded his appreciation where the appreciation was due. He appreciated the intellect and kindness of the
American women as also the freedom and position enjoyed by them in the American society. He also appreciated the hospitals and charitable institutions of America as also be labour-saving machinery developed in America to ease the problems of life of the poor and the labouring people. He did not however admire the material progress of America, for the all-important reason that it did not make Americans better human beings. Bettering man or developing man for the better was Swamiji’s overwhelming concern. In fact, that is the objective with which he gave America a thorough exposition of his philosophy of non-self that lifted man from his egotistical self to the infinity of self. Vivekanananda was realistic enough to know that it was too much to expect the Americans or the Western men to take at once to that lofty philosophy and live up to it. He, therefore, advised the Western man to make a harmony between his energetic materialistic pursuits and the spiritualistic pursuit of non-self through the gentleness of a Jesus Christ – an ideal that was characteristic of the East. Join these two, as he said, the energy of the lion, typifying the West and the gentleness of the lambs, typifying the East and blossom into a new type of man. Material power was rampant in America but spirituality was lacking and with a view to bringing about a harmony between the two and with the larger goal of bringing to fruition a new type of man that Swami Vivekananda sought to alert America to the most pernicious aspects of her civilization. He alerted so that with such alertness America can get over the minus side of her civilization and rise to a fuller life for man in the fullness of time.

Did the Christian missionaries take Swamiji for what he was? Did they appreciate the fact that he was working for a higher purpose of life? Not, if Swamiji’s letter as written to Alasinga in April 1894 is anything to go by:

Of course, the orthodox clergymen are against me; and seeing that it is not easy to grapple with me, they try to hinder, abuse and vilify me in every way.
“Every way” included employing young women to seduce him, sending notes and letters to Swamiji’s acquaintances telling them that he was not the pure or holy man that they thought him to be. Needless to say that these notes and letters contained all sorts of calumnies against him. With such efforts to besmirch Swamiji’s character failing to produce the desired effect, Swamiji’s enemies went to the length of plotting to do away with him altogether. His coffee was poisoned to that end. As Marie Louise Burke tells us, “It was at a dinner in Detroit that Swamiji, about to drink his coffee, saw by his side the vision of Sri Ramakrishna warning him, “Do not drink – it is poisoned”.  

What did Vivekananda himself have to say on such efforts at his character assassination? To say the least, he took it stoically telling Alasinga in the same letter as quoted above : “My brother, no good thing can be done without obstruction”. In another letter, he set the record straight by writing the following to Alasinga : “If the missionaries tell you that I have ever broken the two great vows of the Sannyasin – chastity and poverty – tell them that they are big liars”. And what did Mrs. Bagley who kept Vivekananda in her house at Detroit as a guest for more than three weeks have to say? To quote from her letter dated June 22, 1894: “I only feel that all who say one word against him are jealous of his greatness and his fine spiritual perceptions. …. He is a strong, noble human being, one who walks with God. He is simple and trustful as a child”. Mrs. Bagley went on to say that Mr. and Mrs. Hale of Chicago whose house had been home to Vivekananda in Chicago felt the same way as she did. “They are Presbyterians … cultivated and refined people, and they admire, respect and love Vivekananda”. Perhaps, Mrs. Bagley gave the most beautiful summing-up of Vivekananda’s work in Detroit when she observed in the same letter:

He has given us in America higher ideas of life than we have ever had before. … He has been a revelation to Christians. ….he has made possible for all of us a diviner and more noble practical life. …Every human being would be made better by knowing him. … I want every one in America
to know Vivekananda, and if India has more such let her send them to us.

While the testimony of people like Mrs. John J. Bagley was proof enough of the spiritually uplifting work that Vivekananda was doing among the Americans, it is necessary to mention here that he earned financially little for the great strain that he had undergone at a personal and intellectual level for doing such work. His lecture tour through the Mid-Western and Southern states of America lasted from November 20, 1893 to March 30, 1894. Severe winters of the Midwest, constant traveling by train from one place to another, not so comfortable accommodations in small-town hotels, and the constant demands of the lecture platforms (12 to 14 lectures a week and some times as many as three lectures a day) exhausted him physically and even intellectually. Obviously, he was overworked and underpaid by the Slayton lecture Bureau. To give one example, at one lecture the returns were $2,500 but his payment was only a paltry sum of $200.\textsuperscript{196} By February 1894, he realized that he had been defrauded by at least $5,000\textsuperscript{196a} by the Slayton Bureau and at the initiative of his Detroit friends, particularly of Honourable Mr. Thomas W. Palmer, he was able to set himself free from the bindings of the lecture bureau in March 1894. Thereafter, he took to his own independent arrangements for the purpose of lecturing in America. It seems from the letter that he wrote to Mrs. Hale on February 22, 1894 that his total earnings from his Detroit engagements from February through March 1894 was $792.\textsuperscript{197}

With such a measly sum earned from several months’ work in America, it was natural that Swamiji wrote on June 20, 1894 to India: “Now lecturing for a year in this country, I could not succeed at all (of course, I have no wants for myself) in my plan of raising some funds for setting up my work”.\textsuperscript{198} This letter shows that while Swamiji held on, despite relative unsuccessfulness, to his purpose of raising funds for his people back home, his major thrust in America was now on the other aspect of his mission, that
is, of “awakening the spiritual consciousness in thousands of hearts” in America.\textsuperscript{199} As Marie Louise Burke observes:

Although the apparent purpose of Swamiji’s tour was to collect funds for India, to spread a true knowledge of her culture and religion, to combat the slander disseminated against her, and to teach religious tolerance, his deeper purpose was to fulfill the divine function of a prophet among the people of the Western world, mingling with as many as possible and blessing all. We in America believe that it was this last which formed the true substance and inner power of his mission to the West, and we believe that America has been divinely favored.\textsuperscript{200}

\textbf{VIII}

Driven by urge to awaken the spiritual consciousness of the American people, Swamiji left Detroit\textsuperscript{201} for New York at the end of March, 1894. ‘Naren will teach mankind’, said Sri Ramakrishna, and true to those words, Swamiji carried on his teaching work among the American people, weary\textsuperscript{202} though he was of speaking practically non-stop from place to place across America. Swamiji stayed in New York for about two weeks at the house of Dr. and Mrs. Egbert Guernsey. Consequently, the Guernseys became greatly devoted to him. Indeed, what the Hales became to Swamiji in Chicago or what the Bagleys became to him in Detroit, the Guernseys became the same to him in New York. During his stay in New York, Swamiji did not deliver any public lecture but attracted a lot of people, namely, the Guernsys, Miss Emma Thursby, the famous singer, Miss Mary Phillips, Mrs. Arthur Smith and Mr. Leon Landberg. These people would stand by him loyally when he would establish the Vedanta Society of New York later to broadcast his ideas on the development of man towards a fuller life. In New York Swamiji also met Miss Helen Gould, a fabulously rich lady, who inherited the enormous fortune of her father Jay Gould. Whether it was she who offered her vast fortune and
herself to Swamiji is difficult to say with certainty but the fact remains that to one such offer of an American lady Swamiji said that he could not accept her offer because he had dedicated his all to the one Lord of his life, Sri Ramakrishna.203

From New York Swamiji came to Northampton, Massachusetts, addressing the audience there over the pseudo-ethnology of the White Anglo-Saxon races and advising them to see in everyman their brother. In his ever-present concern for changing the Western man and his civilization, he rebuked the Americans for their greed for gain, their “national vice, so to say, of luxury-seeking, self-seeking and ‘dollar-caste’ sentiment” that had the pernicious effect of leading them to moral and civil endangerment. The Northampton Daily Herald editorially observed in its issue of April 16, 1894 that the rebuke administered by Vivekananda in his “slow, soft, quiet, unimpassioned musical voice” was only “too just and superbly well-put” and that it went straight to the mark like the “Thou art the man’ of the prophet”.204 Vivekananda taught not merely by his utterances but by his manners and behaviour as well. As Martha Brown Fincke, a student of the Smith college of Northampton, at whose boarding house at Northampton Swamiji put up during his visit to that town, observes of the lesson she drew from Vivekananda’s demeanour:

Early the next morning loud splashings came from the bathroom, and mingling with them a deep voice chanting in an unknown tongue. I believe that a group of us huddled near the door to listen. At breakfast we asked him the meaning of the chant. He replied, “I first put the water on my forehead, then on my breast and each time I chant a prayer for blessings on all creatures”. This struck me forcibly. I was used to a morning prayer, but it was for myself first that I prayed, then for my family. It had never occurred to me to include all mankind in my family and to put them before myself.205
Even at that young age, Martha Brown Fincke perceived in substantial part the essence of Swami Vivekananda’s teaching on human development: reach the non-self by putting the mankind before your own narrow self. Years later, Martha Brown Fincke came to India to find that the gospel that Vivekananda preached was universal and that it truly satisfied the longing of her soul. As she expresses it:

To believe that the Divine is within us, that we are from the very first a part of God, and that this is true of every man, what more can one ask? In receiving this as I have on the soil of India, I feel that I have come Home.\textsuperscript{206}

Marie Louise Burke asks: “Was it not precisely for this – that thousands might more quickly find their way “Home” – that Swamiji felt compelled to continue his travels in America, visiting as many places and talking to as many people as he could?”\textsuperscript{207}

From Northampton to Lynn at Massachusetts is where Swamiji went. Of the two lectures that he gave at Lynn, ‘The Manners and Customs of India’ excited the usual questions from his audience on infanticide, widow-burning and self-killing under the wheels of the juggernaut which gave an opportunity all over again to Swamiji to correct the dark and distorted picture of his country such as was ingrained in the minds of the Americans.

From Lynn Swamiji came to New York via Boston, renewing in Boston his friendship with Prof. John Henry Wright and making new acquaintances as well in Boston. In New York Swamiji spoke twice, first on April 24 at the Waldorf Hotel on ‘India and Hinduism’, a lecture arranged by Mrs. Arthur Smith, a well-known lecturer on Oriental religions, and the second at the home of Miss Mary Phillips, who had turned into an ardent follower of Swamiji’s working subsequently also for the Vedanta Society that Swamiji founded at New York at a later time. On both the occasions, Swamiji took strains in explaining to his American listeners, unappreciative of the
Hindu theory of reincarnation, that reincarnation was nothing but the struggle of the soul to attain individual infinity and that it indicated the journey of the soul towards perfection or that it meant that the soul passed from one body to another, until it had become a perfect spirit, on the attainment of which it was no longer necessary for the soul to be reincarnated. Being perfect or free at long last, the soul no longer needed to put on the limitation of the body.

In between his two lectures at New York, Swamiji wrote a letter\textsuperscript{208} to Miss Isabelle McKindley that, apart from containing some financial information, throws light on his victory over his opponents in India and most importantly, the letter revealed his deep sense of humanity in the concern and regard expressed for his mother and as such we should make a reference to this letter.

First, the letter records that Swamiji received a hundred dollars for his lectures at Lynn, and that tickets at 2 $ each were sold for his lecture at Waldorf hotel, New York.

Second, the letter carries the information that a pamphlet, published from Calcutta, reached Swamiji which contained extracts from the American and the Indian papers, especially the Calcutta papers. These extracts, to quote Swamiji, “call me illustrious, wonderful and all sorts of nonsense but they forward me the gratitude of the whole nation” as also its recognition of him as a bona-fide representative of Hinduism in America. Having mentioned this, Swamiji went on to observe with his usual sense of wit and humour that “once at least in my life the prophet has been honoured in his country”.

Third, having referred to the lies that Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar (who attended the Parliament of Religions at Chicago as the representative of the Brahmo Samaj, Calcutta) was spreading against him in Calcutta – that Vivekananda was living a beastly immoral life in America –, Swamiji observed in this letter that he did not bother about such untruths and calumnies except for one thing: “I have an old mother”.\textsuperscript{209} She has suffered much all her life and in the midst of all she could bear to give me up for the service of God and man – but to have given up the most beloved of her
children – her hope – to live a beastly immoral life in a far distant country – as Mazoomdar\textsuperscript{210} was telling in Calcutta would have simply killed her. But the Lord is great, none can injure His children”.\textsuperscript{210a}

But for such a feeling heart, could anyone carry on the work for the humanity the way Swamiji did? He was so tired of continual lecturing and yet if he carried on his public lecturing in America, it was because of the deep urge within to awaken the American people, indeed, the mankind to spiritual truth.

Swamiji came to Boston from New York on May 6, 1894 and in the next fortnight gave a number of lectures in Boston and Cambridge including the two given respectively at the Radcliffe College (the college for women, associated with Harvard University) and the Harvard University. In some of these lectures he reproached America for its plutocracy, its bad morals and its lack of religion. Having compared India and America in terms of their religious and civilizational mores, he observed:

\begin{quote}
When we are fanatical, we torture ourselves, we throw ourselves under huge cars, we cut our throats, we lie on spiked beds; but when you are fanatical you cut other people’s throats, you torture them by fire and put them on spiked beds!
You take very good care of your own skills!\textsuperscript{211}
\end{quote}

The perceptive ones could easily see that behind the harsh and sarcastic tone of Swamiji’s criticism lay his anxiety to make America less self-oriented and more spirituality-minded. From more self to less self and finally to selflessness was his goal and that was why he criticized America.

As for attitude towards women, he observed that in India the mother instinct in women was most admired and the more a woman grew in age or the older she became the more she was respected. In America, on the other hand, the wife instinct in women as also the beauty and youth of women was most appreciated, with the result that when a woman was past her youth and
beauty, she was in for a hard time. Perhaps, in making this comparison, Swamiji wanted to mean that women should be looked at less in the physical aspect and more in the divine spiritual aspect of their being.

As regards religion, Swamiji observed that it was time that the people of America understood that religion was not talk, not reason, not doctrines, not books and that religion in its true sense began only with the yearning and struggles of the individual soul to realize the Universal Soul. As he said in his lecture at Harvard University:

... a man who is truly religious rises above the petty quarrels of sects or creeds. ... If a man believes that he is a spirit, a soul, and not a body, then he is said to have religion and not till then.212

Swamiji’s objective at Boston, as he himself said, was not to make money213 but to “touch the Brain of America and stir it up”.214 And if in the process of touching and stirring up, he uttered any harsh words, that was done in the best sense of selfless spirituality – to awaken and uplift America. And how tired, if not completely worn out, he was of all this “whirling to and fro”215 – from Detroit to New York to Boston to Northampton to Lynn to Boston to New York to Boston – could be seen from the following letter of his written from Boston on May 11, 1894 and addressed to Mrs. Hale in Chicago:

I think I want some rest. I feel as if I am very much tired and this constant journeyings to and fro have shaken my nerves a little but hope to recoup soon. Last few days I have been suffering from cold and slight fever and lecturing for all that.216
Is not this the exemplification of selfless giving, of spirituality and philosophy of non-self that Swami Vivekananda constantly preached in America? He led by example. And having done that, he earned his very well-deserved rest indeed when he came back to the Hales’ house at Chicago on May 24, 1894, staying there through most of June 1894. But all that was only to recoup – to resume all over again his mission to bring spiritual consciousness to humanity at large.

IX

Before proceeding further with the account of how Swamiji went ahead with articulating his message in America, it would be in order to say a few words as to how he handled an obstacle in the way of his mission in America.

The ‘obstacle’ put in his way had its source in three groups of Swamiji’s enemies:
(a) Christian missionaries in America as also in India;
(b) Brahmo Samajists led by Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar; and
(c) The Theosophists. Of these, the theosophists did not count much in America, but they tried all the same to cry Swamiji down, right from the time Swamiji arrived in America to attend the Parliament of Religions. Having arrived months before the Parliament was due to hold its ‘sessions’, Swamiji was struggling in America with the last few dollars in his pocket and having heard of this, a Theosophist leader commented gleefully: “Now the devil is going to die; God bless us all”. To quote Swamiji:

That was not all. I saw some Theosophists in the Parliament of Religions, and I wanted to talk and mix with them. I remember the looks of scorn which were on their faces, as much as to say, “What business has the worm to be here in the midst of the gods?” After I had got name and fame at the Parliament of Religions, then came
tremendous work for me; but at every turn the
Theosophists tried to cry me down.\textsuperscript{217a}

As regards the Christian missionaries, Swamiji had the following to say of their character-assassination campaign against him:

There is not one black lie imaginable that these latter did not invent against me. They blackened my character from city to city, poor and friendless though I was in a foreign country. They tried to oust me from every house and to make every man who became my friend my enemy.\textsuperscript{218}

As to how Swamiji handled the Christian missionaries spiritually and intellectually is something that we have noted in the previous sections, but the point to be noted here is how they got help from Swamiji’s “worst single enemy” – Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar – and how they sought to obstruct Swamiji’s work in America through their concerted efforts. Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar was completely overtaken by jealousy at the success of Swamiji at the Parliament of Religions. As Swamiji says, “The day the Parliament cheered me, the day I became popular in Chicago, from that day his tone changed; and in an underhand way, he tried to do everything he could to injure me”.\textsuperscript{220} And he was in some position of advantage to carry on his work of injuring Vivekananda. First, he was the head of the Nava-vidhan (New Dispensation) Brahmo Samaj in India. Second, he was the editor of the Unity and Minister, the organ of the Nava-vidhan Brahmo Samaj, which gave him the wherewithal to reach a large number of people in his smear-campaign. Third, he had the occasion to visit America ten years prior to the Parliament of Religions and to make himself known to the Americans through his lectures. Fourth, he had authored a book entitled The Oriental Christ and as a preacher of oriental-flavoured Christianity had enjoyed a reputation in America. With all these advantages on his side, Mazoomdar published a piece
in *Unity and Minister* alleging that Swami Vivekananda was actually a fraudulent monk. He had no authorization from any Hindu organization to represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago and that he committed a flagrant violation of the prohibitions of orthodox Hinduism in respect of crossing the Kalapani (ocean) and eating the Mlechha food (i.e., food of outcasts and foreigners) and that what he preached in America was his personal views that amounted to pseudo-Hinduism.

The Christian missionaries picked up such insinuations from Mazoomdar and saw to it that they found their way into the newspapers such as the *Boston Daily Adventurer* (of May 16, 1894), *Lawrence American* (of May 18, 1894), *Detroit Free Press* (of June 11, 1894) as also in widely read journals and periodicals such as the *Outlook* of June 9, 1894, the intention being to create the impression in America that Vivekananda was, after all, a “fraud”.221 As a matter of fact, everything that was published in India against Vivekananda was picked up with alacrity by Christian missionaries and given widest possible publicity in America and the ‘helping hand’ that Mazoomdar extended to them in this regard was eagerly held by them. Now, what upset swamiji about such concerted efforts to malign him was that it would put his friends in America – Professor John Henry Wright of the Harvard University, the Hales of Chicago, Mrs. John J. Bagley of Detroit and many others – into an embarrassment that they had so long stood by an imposter and a fraud who had no official authorization from any Hindu quarters or organization to represent Hinduism in America or to speak on its behalf. In fact, Swamiji came to America without any ‘credentials’ and it is only at the instance and good offices of Prof. Wright that he could be accepted as a delegate to the Parliament of Religions. In the face of Mazoomdar’s article and the Christian missionaries’ virulent campaign, Swami Vivekananda’s mission in America as also his credibility with his friends in America were in danger and in order to save himself on these counts, he had to swing into ‘damage control’ actions.
As early as April 9, 1894, he wrote to his disciple in Madras, Alasinga, asking him to see to it that a public meeting was organized in Madras with the leading Hindus of the city lending their voices to it and that a resolution was passed in the meeting thanking Vivekananda for the job he did of representing Hinduism in the Parliament and the American people for the cordial welcome they extended to Vivekananda. Swamiji wanted such a resolution to be sent to John Henry Barrows, the chairman of the Parliament of Religions, with the request to publish the resolution in the leading papers of Boston, New York and Chicago as also to Professor Wright, Mr. and Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Bagley. As a matter of fact, Swamiji wanted such a resolution to be sent from Calcutta as well. Both Madras and Calcutta followed Swamiji almost to every word of his suggestion. Madras held its public meeting on April 28, 1894 and Calcutta held its on May 14, 1894 and sent resolutions to persons of Swamiji’s choice.

News of these meetings, particularly of the one held at Madras reached America by the end of August 1894 with the leading newspapers such as the Boston Evening Transcript, the Chicago Interocian, the New York Sun, and the New York Daily Tribune giving full publicity to such news. The effect was tremendous “There could no longer be the slightest doubt in America that, however inconvenient the Swami’s teachings and influence might be to missionary interests, he was a bona-fide and honoured representative of the mainstream of Hinduism at its highest and best”.222

In the wake of the meetings held at Madras and Calcutta, respectively on April 28 and May 11, 1894, there were a number of other meetings held – one in Kumbakonam on August 22, one in Bangalore on August 26, and one more in Calcutta on September 5, 1894, the last one carrying the greatest weight among the subsequently held meetings, for the following reason: “Not only was Calcutta Swamiji’s birthplace, where his life and character were well known, but it was the seat of Mr. Mazoomdar’s opposition; further, many reputable orthodox Brahmin pandits were prominently represented at the
meeting, thereby belying the widely circulated claim that the “Neo-Hinduism of which [Vivekananda] is a representative is not orthodox Hinduism”.223

The point is not how many meetings were held endorsing Vivekananda. Rather it is that Vivekananda had to fight with orthodox and inimical Christians for every inch of his way. And therein lay the significance of his exhortation to his countrymen to this effect that they were “not men as yet”224 and that he wanted to infuse manliness into them energizing them into action. In fact, in a letter written around this time,225 he expressed in the most beautiful words the three goals that he was pursuing simultaneously, namely, human development, national rejuvenation and spiritual elevation of the world. To quote the letter:

… think what has been done within the last year. How, rising from nothing, we have the eyes of the world fixed upon us now. Not only India, but the world outside, is expecting great things of us now. Missionaries or Mazoomdar or foolish officials – none will be able to resist truth and love and sincerity. Are you sincere? Unselfish even unto death? And loving? Then fear not, not even death. Onward, my lads! The whole world requires Light. …. Have faith that you are all, my brave souls, born to do great things! Let not the barks of puppies frighten you – no, not even the thunderbolts of heaven – but stand up and work!226

In another letter written around this time, Swamiji was expressing similar goals. Now that the missionaries, having barked after him a good deal, had stopped and that an obstacle to his mission was effectively smashed, Swamiji was calling upon his followers to “come on to the practical field with tremendous energy; to work, in the fullness of strength!”227 Elaborating on this he said:
If you are my children you will fear nothing, stop at nothing. You will be like lions. We must rouse India and the whole world. … Be true to your mission. So far you have done well, do better and better still, go on and on.\textsuperscript{228}

Swamiji could not give a better mantra for human development. And he led by practical example: he removed a serious obstacle to his mission in America by fighting every inch of the way with the orthodox missionaries, aided and abetted by carpers at home.

\textbf{X}

The summer of 1894 brought about a change in Swamiji’s approach to the American people as also a change in his method of work. As we have seen in section VIII, of the two components of his mission, namely, bringing spiritual consciousness to humanity, and raising the poor and downtrodden humanity in India through funds collected in the USA towards that purpose, he \textit{now} decided to concentrate on the first component in America. He did not give up the second component, but was not an outstanding success on that count. As a man of renunciation, he detested collecting money and if he yet stuck to it till now, it was because of his concern for his future work for his poverty-stricken motherland or because of his concern for the well-being and development of his downtrodden brethren of India. As Swamiji reflected deeply over his \textit{modus operandi} during the summer of 1894, he not only resolved to shelve for the time being his fund-raising mission for India but also decided that he would not stick to the previously pursued method of lecturing from town to town, speaking on subjects like the ‘customs and manners of India’ and that he would \textit{instead} teach in a particular place a select group of earnest listeners intensively the philosophy of India in respect of human development. Accordingly, he attended as a teacher the Greenacre Religious Conferences in the state of Maine for the purpose of religious
discourses to which any teacher with something constructive to say and all men and women with desire to learn were welcome. Having accepted the invitation of Miss Farmer to teach at the Conferences, Swamiji found among his ‘pupils’ earnest souls like Mrs. Ole Bull, Dr. Lewis G. Janes, Miss Emma Thursby and a few others, who being imbued with the spirit imparted to them by Swamiji, remained loyal to his cause throughout. Swamiji taught them every morning under a pine tree which has since been known as the “Swamiji’s Pine”.

The philosophy of human development that Swamiji taught his classes was basically the eternal Advaita Vedanta philosophy of India. The main thrust of this philosophy was the identity of the human self with the Absolute: Shivoham, I am He: “I am neither the body, nor the mind, nor the intellect, nor the ego, nor the mind-stuff. I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute – I am He, I am He”.230 In elaborating on the poetic expression of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy as found in Shankaracharya’s Nirvanashataka or Atmashataka and as quoted above, Swamiji would say: “You and I and everything in the universe are that Absolute, not parts, but the whole. You are the whole of that Absolute”.231 As man is the Absolute in his essence, he must always seek the highest, for in the highest is the Eternal bliss. “If I am to hunt,” said Swamiji, “I will hunt the Rhinoceros. If I am to rob, I will rob the treasury of the King. Seek the highest”.

Swamiji taught his ‘pupils’ not only the Advaita philosophy of human development but Raja-yoga as well – the spiritual practice through which they could realize their ‘self’. Explaining that yoga meant joining with one’s real self, Swamiji observed that one could do this by reaching the depths of one’s inner consciousness through yoga. To quote from the notes kept of Swamiji’s classes in this regard by Miss Emma Thursby:

The question is, how to find our way back to our inner consciousness. We have come out through spirit, soul, mind & body, & now we must go back from body to spirit. First get hold of the air,
then the nervous system, then the mind, then the atma or spirit, but in this effort we must be perfectly sincere in desiring the highest. The law of laws is concentration. First concentrate all the nerve energies of all power lodged in the cells of the body into one force & direct it at will. Then bring the mind, which is thinner matter, into one center. The mind has layer after layer; when the nerve force concentrated is made to pass through the spinal column, one layer of the mind is open. When it is concentrated in one bone [plexus or “lotus”] another part of the world is open. So from world to world it goes until it touches the pineal gland in the center of the brain. This is the seat of conservation of potential energy, the source of both activity and passivity. Start with the idea that we can finish all experience in this world in this incarnation. We must aim to become perfect in this life this very moment. ... Struggle hard and then if you do not succeed, you are not to blame. Let the world praise or blame you. Let all the wealth of the earth come to your feet, or let you be made the poorest on earth, let death come this moment or hundreds of years hence, swerve not from the path you have taken.²³²

Such is the mantra of human development that Swamiji gave at Greenacre. As he expressed it in a letter written from Greenacre to the Hale sisters: “Do not go for glass beads leaving the mine of diamonds! This life is a great chance. What, seekest thou the pleasures of the world? – He is the fountain of all bliss. Seek for the highest, aim at the highest, and you shall reach the highest”.²³³

In short, in enunciating his philosophy of human development in the form of the Advaita Vedantic doctrine that man is the Absolute and that he shall be his own self by seeking for the highest, Swamiji made it plain all over again²³⁴ that man is not a sinner, that his religious growth or progress is not from error to truth but from lower truth or knowledge to higher truth or knowledge, not from evil to good but from good to better and that “the
Kingdom of heaven is already in existence if we will have it, that perfection is already in man if he will see it”. The only thing is that man has to realize his development towards his perfection through struggle and struggle always till the goal is reached.

Greenacre brought about a change in the method of work of Swamiji for certain, but he had to wait for some time more before he could settle down in a place, teaching intensively a select group of students. He still had some lecture invitations he had to attend to. Thus, from Greenacre he passed on to Plymouth, Massachusetts, to honour an invitation from the Free Religious Association of Plymouth, headed by Col. Higginson. Col. Higginson, in an effort to liberalize contemporary religious thought and practice, started under the auspices of the Free Religious Association (first founded by Ralph Waldo Emerson) ‘Sympathy of Religions’ meetings. With the Association representing a tendency away from the conflicting authorities of specific religious systems … to a union as broad as humanity itself, on the ground of common aspiration to know the truth and common efforts to live pure and beneficent lives”, Swamiji was obviously in sympathy with its aims and spoke before it on August 13, 1894, making acquaintance in the process with Dr. Lewis G. Janes, President of the famous Brooklyn Ethical Association, a man who was to stand by Swamiji ever since and whose Brooklyn Association Swamiji would use later on.

Having passed on from Plymouth to Annisquam, the good old seaside village resort which Swamiji had visited a year earlier, Swamiji enjoyed for a few days a relatively carefree life of summer vacationing. Of the numerous anecdotes he enjoyed at Annisquam, one is particularly worthy of mention, as it throws a light on Swamiji’s American mission at this time. A Chinaman, so goes the anecdote, was arrested in America for stealing pork and when the Justice before whom he was presented was about to set him free expressing his belief that a Chinaman did not eat pork and therefore was unlikely to steal it, the Chinaman himself exclaimed: “Oh! Me Melican man now. Me, sir, me steal, me eat pork, me everything”. Swamiji’s own mission in America
(indeed, as everywhere else) was the assertion of goodness of human values over unrestrained greed and that, we surmise, might have been the reason why he so much relished this anecdote and why he since would often use the expression himself ‘Me Melican man’. That Swami Vivekananda was a human awakener first and a human awakener always, that his mission was primarily as well as totally human-spiritual, and that presenting him out of context or in a truncated or isolated fashion or finding political significance in his speeches or sayings was misreading him is nowhere more evident than in a letter that he wrote about this time from America to one of his favourite disciples in Madras:

One thing I find in the books of my speeches and sayings published in Calcutta. Some of them are printed in such a way as to savour of political views; whereas I am no politician or political agitator. I care only for the Spirit – when that is right everything will be righted by itself … So you must warn the Calcutta people that no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings or sayings. … Those who think it very grand to print extracts from those lectures and want to prove that I am a political preacher, to them I say, “Save me from my friends”.

That ‘awakening humanity’ by bringing spiritual consciousness to human beings was Swamiji’s only goal at this time of his stay in America could be seen from two letters he wrote on August 23 and August 28, 1894 respectively. A day before his scheduled lecture on August 24 at Magnolia, a seaside resort in Massachusetts, to where he moved from Annisquam, he wrote to Mrs. Hale that nothing but Spirit, not even India, was on his mind: “My soul is groaning now under the hundred sorts of bondage I am placing on it. Whose India? Who cares? … Only He is…. He is me, I am Him”. In the same strain he wrote in his second letter as mentioned above:
I had a foolish plan in my head unworthy of a Sannyasin [his plan to raise money in America for his Indian work]. I have given it up now. …“I have neither father nor mother nor brothers nor sisters no friends, nor home nor country – a traveller in the way of eternity – asking no other help seeking no other help but God”.239

Yet, as a man of Spirit, Vivekananda knew fully well that his mission to awaken humanity spiritually was actually the mission of India to awaken the world. India, the sleeping spiritual giant, must awake herself, know the source of her own strength and then awaken the world. It was this task of India, that was Swami Vivekananda’s to perform on behalf of India. As he himself proclaimed:

Let us take our stand on one central truth in our religion – the common heritage of the Hindus, the Buddhists and Jains alike – the spirit of man – the Atman of man – the immortal, birthless, all-pervading eternal soul of man. …First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. ‘Be and make’. Let this be our motto. …Manifest the divinity within us, and everything will be arranged around it. …I do not see into the future; nor do I care to see. But one vision I see clear as life before me is that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne – rejuvenated, more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction.240

Swamiji proclaimed further that he would play his part in this mission of awakening humanity, like all great men have done through eternity, by building spiritual bridges over the river of human misery with his heart’s blood so that with the help of such bridges thousands and thousands of the suffering humanity could cross the river. Swamiji declared in a strikingly new
definition of theism that believing in self and working fearlessly with undaunted energy towards making God of man was theism and its opposite – identifying with bodies, and thinking that ‘we are weak, we are low’, as is the wont of foolish people – is atheism. To quote the exact words of Swamiji, “They say, “Have faith in this fellow or that fellow”, but I say, “Have faith in yourself – all power is in you – be conscious and bring it out. …Summon up your all-powerful nature. …This indeed is theism”.

Such was Swamiji’s thoughts on human development when he moved from Magnolia to Boston and having spent some three weeks of lecture engagements there moved to the house of Mrs. Ole Bull at Cambridge, Massachusetts, on the specific invitation of Mrs. Bull. Miss Emma Thursby was instrumental in introducing Swamiji to Mrs. Bull, and ever since as time rolled on, they became greatly drawn to each other in admiration so much so that in course of time Mrs. Bull turned into a mother to Swamiji and her house at Cambridge turned into Swamiji’s headquarters on the East Coast as Mr. and Mrs. Hale’s house at Chicago become the headquarters of Swamiji’s work in the Mid-west. In her personal life, Mrs. Bull was the widow of the famous Norwegian violinist Mr. Ole Bull. She was in her early forties and was a widow for fourteen years when she first met Swamiji. She was a great patron of arts and letters and allowed her Cambridge house to be used liberally as a venue for all sorts of intellectual meeting and social gatherings of importance. It came to her naturally to patronize Swamiji during his stay in America and indeed ever afterwards, as she was greatly attracted to the god-like personality and child-like simplicity of her new son from India.

Apart from allowing Swamiji a quiet and expenses-free stay in her house, Mrs. Bull gave him $ 500 dollars “for”, as Swamiji said, “my work or anything I like”. And the beautiful letter that she wrote to Swamiji in making the presentation of the gift of five hundred dollars shows what a cultured lady she was. Addressing Swamiji she wrote:
You have blessed to higher uses this home of ours by your presence. You have given us the pearl of great price … My husband worked here in this country during a period of some fifty years and gave his best. He would love you and your ideals. …As I believe the work is all one let me think of you as his son and please take the enclosed as a token. Let it be of such use & service as I would gladly make this house whenever you are near us – and in the coming years I shall hope to put a like amount at your disposal asking you only that it may serve you & your people who are our people as well, as you find occasion.245

Having quoted this letter written to Swamiji in October 1894, Marie Louise Burke observes that “This was the beginning of Mrs. Bull’s long and generous service to Swamiji’s work. Nor was she to serve him only with gifts of money, but in many other ways besides, making her house available to his classes, supporting in part some of his disciples, helping his New York work during the next two years. Small gifts she also gave him, such as a mother would give a son”.246

Swami Vivekananda enjoyed his stay at Mrs. Bull’s house at Cambridge from October 2 to October 12, 1894. It was not his lot, however, to enjoy restful days on end. He had an invitation from the Vrooman brothers of Baltimore, Maryland to speak at Baltimore to help the cause of an International University of Religions which the Vrooman brothers wanted to establish in Baltimore. Swami arrived at Baltimore only to be refused admission to as many as four hotels on the ground of his dark skin before he finally found one. Having taken such race prejudice in his stride (he already suffered on this count in the first lap of his lecture tour in the Southern states of the United States such as Tennessee where he was taken for a Negro and despite being pressed to disclose that he was actually an Oriental he refused to say so because it was unthinkable to him to rise at the expense of another race), Swami spoke on three occasions at Baltimore pointing out that the roots of evil in man lay in the selfishness of man and the cure too lay in
making men and women unselfish. Thus, it was his point that not by more speeches or doctrines but by good and unselfish work done for fellow human beings that religions as also civilizations could be brought to a better state. Thus, the great need of the world, as Swamiji saw it, was for more and more of godly men and women”. Swamiji donated the proceeds of his lecture to the cause of the proposed international university, observing that comparative study of religions in a spirit of compassion and equality would be a good step towards making humanity better and it was his hope in this connection that with training under such a university, the missionaries who would come to India would preach ‘better’ Christianity to Indians than the present ‘ignorant’ lot were doing in India.

Another idea that Swamiji touched upon at Baltimore was the idea of America-India cooperation. To quote him: “The main criticism I have to pass on America is that you have too little religion here. In India they have too much. I think the world would be better if some of India’s surplus of religion could be sent over here, while it would be to India’s profit if its people could have some of America’s industrial advancement and civilization”. Swamiji came to Washington from Baltimore and in continuation of his Baltimore message that life is love and that when a man ceases to do good to others, he is dead spiritually, he observed in Washington (on October 28, 1894) that religion was not in books, nor in forms, nor in sects, but in the human heart.

From Washington Swamiji flew on to New York on November 4, 1894 to organize the nucleus of a Vedanta Society in New York which would serve as a permanent centre giving intensive lessons in Vedanta to earnest seekers of the knowledge of that philosophy, thereby saving Swamiji the trouble of lecturing all over the United States. Having established the Vedanta Society at New York, Swamiji now could also hope that the Society would continue to serve the humanity in America even after he was gone from the United States. He, further, hoped that the society so established would, in the
process of disseminating knowledge, earn funds, for the educational institutions that Swamiji wanted to establish in India.

Having organized the nucleus of a Vedanta Society in New York during his stay in the city in November 1894, Swamiji re-joined Mrs. Bull at Cambridge in December 1894 to teach a series of classes that Mrs. Bull had arranged for him there. During his three-week stay at Cambridge from December 5 to 27, 1894 as the guest of Mrs. Bull, Swamiji taught regular classes of admiring listeners such as Miss Sarah J. Farmer, Miss Emma Thursby, Mrs. Florence Adams and of course Mrs. Bull. All of them were seeking a deeper meaning and a richer purpose of life. Swamiji taught the Upanishads, the Gita and Shankara’s books of Realization and with what effect is best known from Mrs. Bull’s own account. Having noted that the dignity, beauty and strength of Swamiji’s own nature found its best expression in the positives of the Vedanta philosophy that Swamiji taught his classes, Mrs. Bull went on to observe that “the interest awakened has been very unusual and the effect is to be deep and permanent with many…. Roman Catholics, Swedenborgians, agnostics, and Episcopalians all paid him the tribute of expressing their best thought; and he has helped students who were bewildered by their course of philosophy at Harvard. …Mr. Vivekananda as a guest and friend has endeared himself to all”.\(^{249}\) Having given those facts of what she considered to be the continuation of the “Greenacre spirit”, Mrs. Bull gives us the acme of her own appreciation of the spirit of Vivekananda when she observes in conclusion that Vivekananda “is so very human”\(^{249a}\) in everything that he does.

Profound and human – that is how Swamiji’s performance at Cambridge should be characterized. Indeed, so profound was his exposition of the Vedanta philosophy that even the members of the Harvard faculty were deeply struck by it and such performance must have paved the way for “his being invited to speak before the Graduate Philosophical School of Harvard in March of 1896 – one of the greatest intellectual honors paid to him in
America – and of his being subsequently offered the Harvard Chair in Eastern Philosophy, a position he was to decline”.250

As for his humaneness, his universal heart touched a new height in the address that he gave on December 17, 1894 on the Indian Womanhood, the crowning ideal of which, as he put it, lay in the Indian motherhood. Much had been preached America on the degraded condition of Indian womanhood. As a matter of fact, on the evening before Swamiji’s talk, Miss Armstrong had maligned Indian women, Indian mothers in particular, by alleging that every year they sacrificed thousands of their babies to propitiate the gods so that the gods would send rain during the dry season. Swamiji did not make any reference to Miss Armstrong’s remark, but pointed out instead that the mother was the pillar of the Hindu home and that she was godliness personified in the unselfishness of her love for her children and the sacrifices she made for other members of the family. To illustrate the love and sacrifices of an Indian mother, Swamiji made a reference to his own mother and what he said in that connection is best expressed in his own words:

The love which my mother gave to me has made me what I am and I owe a debt to her that I can never repay. …I know that before I was born my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I could not do for five minutes even. She did that for two years. I believe whatever religious culture I have I owe to that. It was consciously that my mother brought me into the world to be what I am. Whatever little good impulse I have was given to me by my mother and consciously, not unconsciously…”251

Having dwelt on the motherhood as the finest specimen of Indian Womanhood, Swamiji observed that throughout the history of India many women of India had proved their mettle in several fields of public life and that they had been equal to the men in such fields, if not superior to them in some of these. To quote Swamiji:
Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men, if not superior. In India I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity they have proved that they have as much ability as men, and with this advantage more, that they seldom degenerate; they keep to the moral standard which is innate in their nature, and thus as governors and rulers of their state they prove, at least in India, far superior to men. John Stuart Mill mentions this fact, and even at the present day we see women in India managing vast estates with great ability.\(^{252}\)

Swamiji paid his warmest tribute to women in general, India women in particular, when he referred to the Hindu philosophical conception of the power of the Absolute as \textit{feminine} Sakti To quote his words:

Those who have been studying with me are aware that the central conception of Hindoo philosophy is of the absolute; that is the background of the universe. This absolute being of whom we can predicate nothing has its \textit{powers} spoken of as \textit{she}; that is, the real personal God in India is she. This Sakti of the Brahman is always in the feminine gender.\(^{253}\)

Finally, Swamiji gave his observations on the strengths and weaknesses of three types of civilization that the world had witnessed so far. The Roman type was strong in organization and conquest but weak in the cruelty that their organization and conquest involved. Such type of civilization was in evidence in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The Greek type of civilization, most exemplified in France, was strong in its love for the beautiful but weak in its tendency to be immoral in the pursuit of love for beauty. The third type – the Hindu type – is strong in metaphysics and religiosity but weak in lack
of organization and approach to practical work. The ideal civilization could come only out of a harmonious combination of the Roman’s organization, the Greek’s love for the beautiful and the Hindu’s spiritual religiosity. “Mix these up together and bring in the new civilization”, exhorted Swamiji, observing simultaneously that this was a task which could be done best by women.254

The picture that Swamiji presented of Indian women was so different from that painted by missionaries and other interested elements and his lecture to such effect was so deep, stirring and patriotic that the Cambridge women, led by Mrs. Bull, sent to Swamiji’s mother a picture of Virgin Mary and Child Jesus, accompanied by a letter that paid rich tributes to Swamiji’s mother for the wonderful gift she made to humanity through her son.

From Cambridge conferences that came to an end on December 27, Swamiji came to Brooklyn to address the Brooklyn Ethical Association at the invitation of its President Dr. Lewis G. Janes and to be confronted there by the members of the Ramabai Circle on his idealization of Hindu women. Ramabai, the daughter of a Maratha priest, having been a widow at the age of twenty-four, visited England and later America, becoming a convert to Christianity in the process. During her visit especially to American cities, she claimed that society in India was indescribably cruel to widows in general and child-widows in particular and appealed to American women to come to the rescue of child-widows in India by helping her establish a school for child-widows in India. Thus, Ramabai circles came to be established in different American cities, with such circles raising subscriptions towards the cause espoused by Ramabai. Swami Vivekananda was in full sympathy with all movements for the education of women in India, widows or non-widows, and he himself gave a lecture at Brooklyn, donating the proceeds of the lecture to Sasipada Banerjee who long antedated the work of Ramabai in founding a school for widows at Baranagar, a suburb of Calcutta. Swamiji never had a word of criticism against Ramabai or his circles or the school she had founded for widows at Patna. Nor did he deny that there were some cases of ill-treatment of widows in India. But what he objected to was the propaganda of
the Ramabai circles to this effect that the ill-treatment of widows was an accepted and traditional part of Hindu custom in India. He found such method of exciting the pity and patronage of foreigners as demeaning to the self-respect and pride of Indians. Thus, he found not the cause but the method of Ramabai and her circles as detestable.

It seems that it was a psychological necessity for some American women to be self-righteous and patronizing in their attitude to what they believed to be ‘persecuted’ Hindu women. What they did not understand was that what they thought to be suffering and misery for widows in India was not always or necessarily so. If the widows did not marry, if they led an austere life, it was in many cases out of a desire to live a life of purity and renunciation. With Swami Vivekananda giving a correct interpretation of some of the ‘misunderstood’ customs relating to widows in India, the apprehension grew among the members of the Ramabai Circles that they would be deprived of their patronizing benefactors’ role and that with the ‘persecuted’ image of Hindu widows being repaired by Swami Vivekananda there would be a drop in the subscriptions for Ramabai in America. As Marie Louise Burke observes: “Swamiji was fighting a nation-wide psychological necessity for a sustained belief in the degraded state of the oriental races – a belief which had given sanction to Western imperialism and provided a satisfying glow of self-righteousness and superiority such as little else could”.256

Not being able to match Vivekananda in his eloquence and profundity, the Ramabai Circles, like the missionary circles, took to vilification against Vivekananda. As Swamiji himself observed in a letter to Mrs. Bull: “I am astonished to hear the scandals the Ramabai circles are indulging in about me. Among others, one item is that Mrs. Bagley of the Detroit had to dismiss a servant girl on account of my bad character!!! Don’t you see, Mrs. Bull, that however a man many conduct himself, there will always be persons who invent the blackest lies about him”.257
Swamiji believed in ‘Shraddhaya deyam’ – in giving with respect. Thus, “as long as Western help was characterized by patronage and vilification, Swamiji would have none of it; he would accept only such help for his country or countrymen as was given in sympathy and respect. The type of foreign aid he had in mind was later demonstrated by the lives of those Western men and women who, at his request, devoted themselves to the service of India. Perhaps the most representative of them was Sister Nivedita, who, in serving the Hindus, became a part of their society, and where help never undermined in the slightest the strength of those who received it”.\textsuperscript{258} The man who devoted his life to bringing the humans and nations of this world into a spirit of sympathy with each other expressed such spirit most pithily when he observed: “Instead of sending bushels of abuses, carloads of vituperation and shiploads of condemnations, let an endless stream of love go forth. Let us all be men!”\textsuperscript{259}

XI

The struggle Swamiji was engaged in at Brooklyn was the last one that marked for him the end of a battle-scarred year of 1894. The opposition was aplenty, the difficulties were galore, but he was always up to his challenge, bringing out the best in him and spreading his message towards bringing the man in the West to his spiritual roots. Having spread his message far and wide through considerable platform work in towns and cities across the United States through the months of 1894, he was, at the end of it all, longing for doing his ‘awakening work’ through a different method in 1895. He now preferred settling down to fleeting, intensive class work to extensive platform work, character-building of a chosen band of disciples to lecturing before a new audience every time he fleeted from one place to another. As Swamiji observed in his letter of April 24, 1895: “I did a good deal of platform work in this country last year, and received plenty of applause, but found that …it is the patient upbuilding of character, the intense struggle to \textit{realize} the truth,
which alone will tell in the future of humanity. So this year I am hoping to work along this line – training up to practical Advaita realization a small band of men and women”.

Swamiji was firmly convinced that only the Advaita philosophy that makes man give up his little self for the world can save mankind, be it in East or West and to that task he set himself in the early months of 1895 in New York. Thus, if Swamiji spent his time between his arrival in America in 1893 and the end of 1894 in giving the American people a correct idea of religion, customs and manners of India, collecting some funds in the process towards his human developmental work in India, his resolution at the beginning of 1895 was to lift the humanity everywhere up by giving them the life-giving ideas of Vedanta. As far back as June 1894, in course of reflecting on the problem of uplifting the lower classes of India he wrote in a letter: “The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality”. It was as if in a continuation of the same theme, now extended to whole humanity and turned thereby into his world mission, Swamiji resolved at the beginning of 1895 to implement what he had thought of in June 1894: “They [the whole humanity, the mankind all over the world] are to be given ideas … and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man, every woman, must work out one’s own salvation. Give them ideas – that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallisation comes in the law of nature. Out duty is to put the ideas into their heads, they will do the rest”. “It is this idea”, Swamiji said in continuation, that has been in my mind for a long time. The time had now come for its implementation and to that task of teaching religion – the eternity of soul, and God as the highest and perfect nature of man – that Swamiji set himself in his Vedanta classes in New York which began on 26 January, 1895.

Ancient Vedanta was the traditional and age-old philosophy of India which had as many as three schools of exponents. Advaita Vedanta or Vedantic monism, as championed by Shankara, viewed Reality as One and
indivisible and regarded the universe as a delusion. In its opinion, Brahma alone was the Reality, everything else was unreal. Vishishtadvaita or qualified Vedantic monism, as championed by Ramanuja, viewed Reality as essentially one but qualified nevertheless by the existence of man and the universe as part of the one Reality of an all-pervading Brahma. Dvaita or Vedantic dualism, as championed by Madhva, in contrast to the first two, viewed Reality as dual, with man and the universe constituting an entity with an identity of its own. While Swamiji gave his students all the three versions or rather all the three aspects of the ancient Vedanta, he took care to point out that it would be a misreading of the philosophy of Vedanta to believe that the three interpretations conflicted with each other. He observed that at the beginning of his spiritual realization man begins with dualism, viewing Reality as consisting of two distinct entities of Brahma and the universal. As he advances in his spiritual realization, man views himself and the universe as part of an all-pervading Reality of Brahma. At the final stage of his realization, man perceives himself as one with the Supreme or the Absolute One. Oneness of the Advaita Vedanta was the goal but the other two versions of the Vedanta were also true as stages leading to the final realization. Having thus made his contribution towards the interpretation of the ancient Vedanta, Swamiji made his distinct contribution in another respect: he turned the philosophy of Vedanta into a religion as well by placing man in relation to God, that is, by holding that the One Reality or the all-pervading Supreme Soul of Brahma existed within everyone as human soul. Paramatman was Atman. Divinity existed in every human soul. Man is Brahman in the real essence of his being. Man is essentially divine and it is his sacred charge to manifest his essential divinity in every sphere of life, indeed, in every movement of life.

It is this lesson of Jnana Yoga – that man is essentially divine – that Swamiji administered to the students in his New York classes. And it is with this comprehensive doctrine of the divinity of every man and woman, whatever be the creed he or she belongs to, that Swamiji wanted to do away
with religious narrowness which caused dissension among religious creeds as also between man and man. “My Master used to say”, wrote Swamiji in a letter dated March 21, 1895, “that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc., stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man. We must try to break them down first. They have lost all their good powers and now only stand as baneful influences under whose black magic even the best of us behave like demons. Well, we will have to work hard and must succeed”.

Divinity and its manifestation constituted, for Swamiji, the essence of religion. Like Rousseau who said that man is born free and everywhere he is in chains, Swamiji said that man is born divine and free but comes under the chains or bondage of lust, gold and fame and that he must be free again by cutting off his bondage and regaining his true, divine nature. Man is divine and he is to become divine. That was the whole purpose of religion. Having laid down such a universal purpose of religion, Swamiji gave a neat definition of religion to this effect that “Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man”.

Through such restatement of ancient Vedanta, Swamiji wanted his New York students, indeed, “each individual to realize the One Reality, both within as the immeasurable Self, and without as the divine oneness of all life”. And what followed from such restatement was the re-energizing of all men. Since man was the immeasurable Self and had all the power curled up within himself which he could bring out, he could be self-reliant, standing always on his own feet. Since He alone existed, he need be afraid of nothing. Since He was everywhere and in everything, he need be desirous of nothing and he should remain equally indifferent to pleasure and pain, seeking to go beyond both. Swamiji himself gave a beautiful summery of the truths of the Advaita Vedanta in a letter to Miss Mary Hale written on February 1, 1895: “Life is nothing! Death is a delusion! All this is not, God alone is! Fear not, my soul!”
Apart from teaching the realization of the divinity in everyone through Jnana Yoga or the path of knowledge, Swamiji taught his New York students Raja Yoga or realization through the path of practical spirituality as well. This path, as the *The Life* neatly puts it, involved teaching on “how to acquire inner control of the senses, how to still the mind, how to subordinate sense impulses to reason, in short, how to spiritualize the whole personality”.267 Under the systematic guidance of Swamiji, student understood physical and spiritual exercises and learnt how to overcome physical consciousness, how to establish the equilibrium of body and mind and how to discover divinity within or so to say, to realize the macrocosm within the microcosm. Swamiji was never tired of saying that religion was never a matter of dogma or belief or argumentation but of practice, of experiencing and realization. Through the Raja Yoga exercises administered to them, Swamiji’s New York students knew the truth of this statement. They also knew from Swamiji that greater their adherence was to eight processes involved in the physical and spiritual exercises the greater was their spiritual-human development.267a However, Swamiji cautioned them, these exercises should never be used as a means to the acquirement of occult powers or powers for the sake of mere material gains in the form of power, riches, health and beauty. The *experiencing* of the divinity within was the sole aim for which Raja Yoga should be pursued. That was an end in itself.

Swamiji was a mystic and scientist rolled into one. He was well aware of the anatomical complexities of the nervous system and of its relation to the brain as also of the relation between states of mind and nervous changes. Therefore, his statements about *these* as also his claim that “meditation brought about the extension and development of human faculties and produced supernormal experiences, hithero classified as miraculous phenomena”268 interested a number of noted American physicians and physiologists, the most prominent among them being Professor William James of Harvard University. All in all, Swamiji proved to his New York students as also a section of the American intelligentsia that Raja Yoga indeed
provided the science of religion, that through this way of Vedanta, divinity
within could be experienced by man, that the nucleus of the Cosmos is in each
individual or that one single man contains within himself the whole universe,
and that the Vedantic claim that the Infinity of Self is within the self of each
individual is a well-founded spiritual fact and that the spiritual development
of man should indeed direct him to the realization of this fact, if he is, of
course, inclined by his special tendencies towards the Raja-Yoga way of
realizing himself. ‘To develop each according to his special tendencies’ was
Swamiji’s way of bringing about the development of man and therefore he
would leave the choice to his students as to the method. Everyone was free to
choose according to his special tendencies any of the four paths, namely,
Jnana-Yoga, Raja-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga and Karma-Yoga. As Swamiji said:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to
manifest this Divinity within by controlling
nature, external and internal. Do this either by
work [that is, Karma-Yoga], or worship [that is,
Bhakti-Yoga], or psychic control [that is, Raja-
Yoga], or philosophy [that is, Jnana-Yoga]—by
one or more or all of these—and be free. This is
the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or
rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but
secondary details.\textsuperscript{269}

Did Swami Vivekananda’s students, followers and disciples at New
York come to understand his ideal of divinity of man or his ideal of making
“of man a God”?\textsuperscript{270} Swamiji’s ideal demanded an understanding at two levels :
a) metaphysical and b) empirical. At the metaphysical level, it meant the
realization by the human soul of its own ever-perfect nature. At the empirical
level, it meant standing by the man on his own legs, winning the struggle for
life with strength of character and courage of a lion and a spirit of
philanthropy or compassionate service to fellow-beings.\textsuperscript{271} It seems from the
appreciative observations recorded by some of Swamiji’s students and
followers of New York that they had caught the glimpses of Swamiji’s ideal. Miss Laura Glenn (Sister Devamata in her later years) was one such attendant of Swamiji’s classes. Calling Swamiji a “prophet of infinitude”, she observes of Swamiji’s instruction that “It was as if a gate had swung open and I had passed out on a road leading to limitless attainment”. Author and poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox, who along with her husband made a habit of attending Swamiji’s lecture in New York had the pleasure of observing that Swamiji’s lectures filled them with “new courage, new hope, new strength, new faith, to meet life’s daily vicissitudes” at a time when banks failed, stocks went down and the whole world seemed topsy-turvy. Mrs. Wilcox went on to observe that Vivekananda’s philosophy and religion enabled human beings to face up to the world with an uplifted sense of soul and enlarged vision in an age of stress and strain, it intensified their faith in God, increased their sympathies for other human beings and gave them a confident joy in the thought of other lives to come. As for Miss Josephine MacLeod who remained unwavering in her friendship to Vivekananda till he lived and ever afterwards and who attended his New York classes (and other lectures as well whenever she could) said that ever since the moment of attending Vivekananda’s classes in New York life had a different import for her. “It was as if he made you realize that you were in eternity”. 

XII

By June 18, 1895 Vivekananda moved to Thousand Island Park to conduct a seven-week long course there with twelve of his more earnest students joining him there to receive training from him in more intensive spiritual development. His purpose was “to manufacture a few ‘yogis’ out of the materials of the classes”. Swamiji obviously liked to hope that the ‘yogis’ so trained by him would be good enough to spread his ideas when he would be gone from America and that they would also help grow the nascent Vedanta Society that he founded in New York in November 1894.
Undoubtedly, the seven-weeks at Thousand Island Park were one of the greatest periods in Swamiji’s life. He gave freely and utterly of himself in teaching the earnest souls who attended his classes. And what did he teach them? He expounded the sacred books of India – the Upanishads, the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *Vedanta-Sutras* of Vyasa – and, as Romain Rolland put it, “sought to awaken the heroic energy of the souls placed in his hands [in terms of the themes such as] : “liberty”, “courage”, “charity”, “the sin of self-deprecation” etc.” From the record of immortal words that fell from the lips of Vivekananda as found in Miss Waldo’s *Inspired Talks* as also from the memoirs of Miss Christine Greenstidel (later Sister Christine) and Mrs. Funke, we gather that the great central idea that Swamiji placed before his students was Freedom. Freedom lay in the realization of Oneness with the Brahman. ‘Take your stand always upon the Self and realize yourself (through the way of knowledge or work or love or psychic control); be free and then help others to be free’, he would say. “Azad, Azad, the Free”, he cried”, reminisces Sister Christine and goes on to observe, “We seemed to be in a different world. The end to be attained was Freedom – freedom from the bondage in which maya has caught us, in which maya has enmeshed all mankind”.

In exhorting his students at Thousand Island Park to the effect as mentioned above, Swamiji was asking them to be both spiritual and empirical (in the sense of applying spirituality) in their orientation to life. Having defined Spirit as *Shakti*, the divine energy, and spirituality as attaining oneness with the Spirit, he made it clear to his students that spirituality was always positive, that it always produced men with divine energy, never men with emaciation and weakness. Thus asserting, Swamiji brought about a combination of his ideal of divinity and spirituality at the *metaphysical* and *empirical* levels. Indeed, Swamiji taught his students always a doctrine of
strength. Spineless dependence or merely contemplative god-absorption was never his way. And his way of infusing strength into his students was to give to each what he or she needed most. This is best documented in the words of Sister Christine, a trainee-student herself at Thousand Island Park:

With some, it was an incessant hammering. The severest asceticism was imposed with regard to diet, habits, even clothing and conversation. With others his method was not so easy to understand, for the habit of asceticism was not encouraged. Was it because in this case there was spiritual vanity to be overcome and because good had become a bondage? With one the method was ridicule – loving ridicule – with another it was sternness. We watched the transformation of those who put themselves into line with it. Nor were we ourselves spared. Our pet foibles were gently smiled out of existence. Our conventional ideas underwent a process of education. We were taught to think things through, to reject the false and hold to the true fearlessly, no matter what the cost. 279

He refused to solve our problems for us. Principles he laid down, but we ourselves must find the application. He encouraged no spineless dependence upon him in any form, no bid for sympathy. “Stand upon your feet. You have the power within you!” he thundered. His whole purpose was – not to make things easy for us, but to teach us how to develop our innate strength. “Strength! Strength! He cried, “I preach nothing but strength. That is why I preach the Upanishads”. From men he demanded manliness and from women the corresponding quality for which there is no word. Whatever it is, it is the opposite of self-pity, the enemy of weakness and indulgence. This attitude had the effect of a tonic. Something long dormant was aroused and with it came strength and freedom”. 279a

In elaborating on Swamiji’s teachings, Sister Christine observes further:
In course of these few days [at Thousand Island Park] our ideas were revolutionized, our outlook enormously enlarged, our values changed. It was a re-education. We learned to think clearly and fearlessly. Our conception of spirituality was not only clarified but transcended. Spirituality brings life, power, joy, fire, glow, enthusiasm – all the beautiful and positive things, never inertia, dullness, weakness. … Why have we in the West always associated emaciation and anaemic weakness with spirituality? Looking back upon it now one wonders how one could ever have been so illogical. Spirit is life, shakti, the divine energy.  

All in all, it was Sister Christine’s honest assessment of Swamiji’s teaching at Thousand Island Park that “Whatever degree of realization may or may not have come to us since, one thing we can never forget: We saw the Promised Land. We, too, were taken to the top of Pisgah and the sorrow and trials of this world would have never been quite real since”. And echoing her in similar vein, Mrs. Funke observed, “Oh, the sublime teaching of Vivekananda! … I feel that I shall never be quite the same again for I have caught a glimpse of the Real”.  

Swamiji’s teaching at Thousand Island Park was complementary to what he taught at New York and yet he covered far more extensive and comprehensive ground at Thousand Island Park. At New York he taught mostly Raja Yoga and Jnana-Yoga and at Thousand Island Park he covered, besides these, Bhakti-Yoga and Karma Yoga as well. He had at his heart the total well-being of man – his welfare in every respect – physical and mental, as well as spiritual and therefore he wanted a balanced material-cum-spiritual development of man. In fact, that is exactly what he stated in a letter to the Maharaja of Mysore written from Chicago as far back as 23rd January, 1894. Talking of the developmental needs of man in the West and of man in India, he observed: “My conclusion is that they require more spiritual civilization,
and we, more material”. How could the two – spiritual and material – be combined? His answer was Vedanta – the restatement and re-energizing of Vedanta. He made the abstract Advaita Vedanta practical and living in everyday life by restating it in the form of the divinity of man, by exhorting man – every man everywhere that in his real nature he was Divine Himself – Satchidananda soham – with infinite powers and possibilities waiting to be actualized by him and that he was to actualize such powers and possibilities by turning all his Karma into Karma Yoga, that is, by doing all work as a sacrifice and as an offering to the Lord. Since the Lord alone existed (Om Tat Sat, the kernel of Jnana Yoga) and since He best manifested himself in human beings, man must realize himself through motiveless love (Bhakti Yoga) and self-less work for fellow-human beings (Karma Yoga). And Raja Yoga was there to demonstrate to man that the macrocosm indeed existed in the microcosm. Thus, through the restatement of Vedanta and its re-energizing of humanity through such restatement, Swami Vivekananda sought to bring about a combination of man’s spiritual and material development. ‘Direct your divine energies to your realization, your self and Self-realization and fulfil yourself at the metaphysical and the empirical levels and having been fulfilled yourself, help others to the same’ – was his message to humanity – to East and West alike and here lies the comprehensiveness of Swamiji’s approach to human development. In being, in helping and in marching always ahead and thus in conceiving of the total well-being of man in every respect – physical, mental and spiritual – lies the totality and holistic comprehensiveness of Swami Vivekananda’s approach to human development.

XIII

From the Thousand Island Park in America, Swamiji came over to London via Paris in September 1895. Before I dwell on what exactly he had to say in London, I should like to highlight one or two salient concepts of
discourses towards human development that Swamiji had already emphasized in America and that he continued to emphasize in England as well.

What Swami Vivekananda taught his students at Thousand Island Park could be summed up in two sentences: “Stand upon the Self” and “Stand upon your own feet.” In other words, Swamiji exhorted his students to be spiritual and apply their spirituality or their divine energy to every movement in every sphere of life, spiritual as well as material’. From the most spiritual to the most practical, that is to say, is the course of development that Swamiji chalked out for man, man everywhere. That is a calling which beckons man to unfold his eternal Self – his divinity and infinity – on the finite plane of thought and action. And man is so beckoned because that is his real nature. It is such real nature of man in terms of Vedanta and the restatement and reenergizing of it in terms such as we have laid down in the previous section that Swamiji taught to the Western world during the rest of his stay in the West. Man must realize his own Being, his potential to the fullest without which his development could not be completed.

Vivekananda wrote as early as September 27, 1894 that “I care only for the Spirit – when that is right everything will be righted by itself”. Or, as he wrote elsewhere, “Manifest the divinity within you, and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it”. Such statement provides the basic hypothesis on which he worked on the development of man. Since the elucidation he himself provides of such hypothesis is unsurpassable in its beauty, it will be apposite to quote Swamiji himself by way of providing documentation to Swamiji’s formulation:

Let us take our stand on the one central truth … – the spirit of man – the Atman of man – the immortal, birthless, all-pervading, eternal soul of man… This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought, evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself, makes of man a God.
Any discerning reader could see for himself that what Swamiji wanted man to know for himself and invoke in his actions is the infinite power of the spirit. When the man applies such infinite power to matter, the resultant is material development and when such infinite power focuses upon itself, the resultant spiritual development turns man into God. This shows that development, to Swamiji, irrespective of the sphere of its application, always centred around the invocation of the infinite power of the spirit. It was the one and the same thing. Applied to the sphere of matter, the development was material and applied to the sphere of spirit, the development was spiritual. The magnitude of development in either sphere depended upon the degree of realization of the infinite power of the spirit. Heroic efforts of man involving the application of divine energy was the crucial variable in such a view of development of man.

Swamiji put not only a harmonious construction to the development of man; his was an affirmative and constructive approach as well. As he said, “First, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods. ‘Be and make’. Let this be our motto”.287 This means that, for Swamiji, it is not enough for man to make heroic self efforts alone; such efforts must be directed to other human beings as well, particularly to those who were in need of ‘help’ being given to them. And in giving help to others, the approach must be towards conquering the difficulties in the way; it must always be positive and never negative. To quote Swamiji, “If the room is dark, the constant feeling and repeating of darkness will not take it away, but bring in the light. … Let us say, “We are” and “God is”, and “We are God”. “Shivoham, Shivoham”. And march on”.288 What comes through such harmonious and constructive approach of Swamiji to human development is Swamiji’s assertion that man is the greatest of all beings”, that he is higher than even “the Devas, the angels”, that he is capable of becoming God in the sense of the perfect and Absolute and that of all beings “man alone becomes God”289 in attaining the acme or the highest point of his development.
As a Vedantist viewing Reality as One, Swamiji’s vision was always global, but undoubtedly it had become pronounced in the wake of his “exercises” at Thousand Island Park. As he wrote in his letter dated August 9, 1895:

Doubtless, I do love India. But everyday my sight grows clearer. What is India or England or America to us? We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called man. (Emphasis added). He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree?  

Apart from highlighting the concept of service to man as God, the other important concept that Swamiji threw up in this letter is the concept of Oneness as the basis of well-being of man. To quote his words, “There is but one basis of well-being–social, political or spiritual – to know that I and my brother are one. This is true of all countries and all people”. It was swamiji’s hope and belief that he could impress upon the Western man the concept of the Oneness of all human beings and the concept as well of the infinite power of Atman.

Swamiji had already accomplished this task in America to some extent through exercises undertaken in 1993-1995 – the exercises made through public lectures across the country as also through intensive training of individuals at Thousand Island Park and through publications such as the Raja Yoga. And now he cast his eyes towards England. He had invitations from Miss Henrietta Muller and Mr. E. T. Sturdy in response to which he visited England for eleven weeks between September and November 1895. Of the two weeks – August 24 to September 9 – that Swamiji spent in Paris, an incident took place which gives us an idea of what kind of development Swamiji wanted of man. In Paris he was driven to the suburb by a coachman in a phaeton that belonged to the coachman. Swamiji was much impressed by the calmness and dignity of the coachman and when on enquiry with the man
concerned, he came to know that he was the manager of a big bank of Paris who was now turned into a coachman by the failure of the bank, he exclaimed that that man was a true Vedantist because he had so much power of spirit in him that he remained unmoved in the face of such adversity visiting him. Swamiji’s message was that a truly developed man or a man truly developed in the power of Atman never yields to odds in life. Whether it is happiness or misery, success or failure, victory or defeat, he maintains the steady equanimity of his mind in all circumstances and marches on. Such is the power of mind and soul, such is the empowerment Swamiji wanted man to acquire as a result of the flowering of his development. To quote Swamiji, “This is what I call a Practical Vedantist. This man has understood the essence of Vedanta. Falling from such a high estate to this low condition, he is nonetheless unmoved. Thank God for such power of mind! This man is really a Vedantist”.

It is this message of standing always firmly on one’s legs with faith in one’s power of Atman, maintaining unruffled equanimity of mind in all circumstances, good and bad, and acting with strength and fearlessness – the message, so to say, of developing man into his true manliness – that Swami Vivekananda preached in England, indeed, in the West and later in India. His whole purpose was to teach and inspire man to develop the strength that was already in him – the curled up power or the Kundalini as it is called in Vedanta.

In his first public lecture at London given on October 22, 1895, significantly titled “Self-Knowledge”, Swamiji observed that man had wrongly come to believe that “commercial prosperity”, “bloody wars”, and “religious intolerance” had constituted the civilization. On the contrary, civilization was the manifestation by man of the divinity that was within him. Civilization in the real sense of the term was possible only when man was aware of the Self within – the Self that towered above everything else. Men like Buddha and Jesus gave us this knowledge of the Self and thus constituted a truly great contribution to the civilization of man. In the discussion that
followed the lecture, Swamiji boldly declared that unlike many religious teachers of the day, his purpose was not to preach any sectarian doctrine, but to teach the universal principles of the Vedanta on what man really was in the essence of his being and to let each man apply such principles in life. Swamiji claimed that knowledge of the Self as expounded in the philosophy of Vedanta could serve as a basis to every possible religious system in the world and in propounding such a philosophy, “my teaching is antagonistic to none. I direct my attention to the individual, to make him strong, to teach him that he himself is divine, and I call upon men to make themselves conscious of this divinity within”.295 (Emphases added).

In the second lecture delivered on November 5, 1895, Swamiji explained why he made it his mission to preach Vedanta to mankind. First, Self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of God, of the soul, of man’s own nature, is the highest knowledge that man could aspire after and none gives man that knowledge more than Vedanta. Giving man the knowledge of Vedanta did not of course mean that there should be only one religion for the whole world. That would be “not only impossible but also dangerous”. To quote Swamiji’s note of caution, “If the whole of religious thought was at the same level, it would be death to religious thought; variety was its life”.296

The second reason for preaching Vedanta was that it accommodated and gave a momentum to the development of all four types of men in religion – the active type (the worker); the emotional type (the worshipper), the mystical type (the Yogi), and the philosophical type (the wise). The beauty of Vedanta was that it gave scope to all the different types, making it possible for each type of man to choose what his nature required.296a

The third and the supreme reason for preaching Vedanta was its grand conception of man as the infinitely powerful Atman – a conception which brought immense strength to man and motivated or inspired him to apply his divine energy to every movement in life.

In fact, it was these reasons, particularly the last–mentioned one, that attracted Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble (afterwards named Sister Nivedita
by Swami Vivekananda) to Swamiji. Miss Noble (born 1867), then a young principal of a school in a town (Wimbledon) near London and a leading member of the famous Sesame Club of London, had occasion to hear Swamiji on the Vedanta philosophy in a lecture delivered one Sunday afternoon in November 1895 in the house of Lady Isabel Margesson in London and having been struck by the breadth of Swamiji’s religious culture and the intellectual freshness of his philosophical outlook as also by the fact that “his call was sounded in the name of that which was strongest and finest, and was not in any way dependent on the meaner elements in man”, she addressed Swamiji as “Master” within a few days, towards the end of November, to be exact, just before Swamiji left England to rejoin his work in America.

As Miss Noble pointed out, what impressed Swamiji’s English listeners most was the breadth and all-inclusive nature of his religious and philosophical outlook. He spoke not of faith, but of realization of the infinite power of man, of the strength, manliness, and fearlessness of man. What was the religion for? Swamiji would answer that religion in the first and last instance was for the development of man. Religion brought out the highest nature of man. It began at the point where man ceased to be selfish and it reached its goal with the man achieving the height of selflessness. Swamiji gave a beautiful example to illustrate this point. Ordinarily, a woman who would fly at the bark of a dog would think nothing of her own self and security in facing even a tiger if she found that her baby was in the way of the tiger. That is both fearlessness and sacrifice for the sake of the loved one. That is what religion makes of man. It arouses and invokes the very highest nature of man. Through religion man must know his real nature and then apply this knowledge with boundless compassion to the development of other human beings. Such was the new teaching that Swamiji gave to England, spreading this message the world over in the fullness of time.

England hardly had any occasion before to listen to such ideas of religion for development of man and she was immensely impressed, so much so that the English press, The Standard, for example, hailed Swamiji
as the most interesting Indian figure since the days Rammohun Roy who spoke on an English platform; and the Westminster Gazette\textsuperscript{302} called him “one of the most original men” that England had opportunity to listen to.

Having thus shaken England and having thus laid the foundation of his future work towards preaching Vedanta and thereby fostering the development of man, Swamiji left England for New York on November 27, 1895 to resume his work on the development of man in the USA.

XIV

Swamiji arrived at New York on December 6, 1895 and set himself to work from December 9. His work, that is teaching and preaching work, towards the development of man consisted of two classes\textsuperscript{303} daily to those interested in the exposition of Vedanta as a philosophy and religion as also in teaching of the four Yogas, namely, Bhakti, Karma, Jnana, and Raja. Apart from such classes for which he did not charge any fees, he gave on Sunday afternoons free public lectures. In between his teaching and preaching work he had Miss Waldo\textsuperscript{304} (Sister Haridasi) taking down his dictation–his commentary, so to say, on the Yoga-Sutras (Yoga Aphorisms) of Patanjali, later included in his book, \textit{Raja Yoga}. These apart, he had to write articles on the subject of Bhakti at this time, in the \textit{Brahmavadin}, started in Madras in September 1895 at his instance, by disciples such as Alasinga. Swamiji taught in New York City till February 23, 1896 and left for England on April 15, 1896 to boost the foundation that he had laid there for his Vedanta-based human development work. In between, he taught also at Detroit and Boston in the month of March 1896. This section gives an outline of Swamiji’s teachings in New York and other places in America on the development of man during the above-mentioned phase of his stay in America, along with a brief reference to certain difficulties that he had to encounter during this phase.
Difficulties arose from the following sources. During his absence from the USA to England in the autumn of 1895, Swamiji had put Swami Abhayananda (the former Mme Marie Louise) and Swami Kripananda (the former Leon Landsberg) into the charge of the fledgling New York Vedanta Society. Abhayananda struggled with the charge given to her. She groaned and complained to Swamiji to which Swamiji replied to her in a letter written from England in October 1895 that whatever the difficulties, he would carry on his mission of training individuals up in the USA. “Fight thou on, come what may”, as he said, was his motto in carrying out his mission in the USA, as also elsewhere.

Difficulties for Swamiji also arose from three groups of oppositionists. First, the interested Christian missionaries who wanted Swamiji to preach Christianity as they understood it. Second, the fraudulent elements who wanted to use Swamiji for furthering their interests, offering him first inducements and then threats of physically harming him. To both of these groups Swamiji’s disarming reply was that his only purpose in life was to preach the truth of development of man and to teach man to pursue this truth for its own sake. He made it plain that as one who stood always for such truth, he was not the man to be bought or frightened by the designing elements with axes of their own to grind. The third group of oppositionists to Swamiji was the so-called Free Thinkers, a heterogeneous class of people embracing within its fold atheists, agnostics and materialists who discounted anything that had anything to do with religion. Having been invited to speak before them, Swamiji showed them for what they were. He told them in his brilliant and outspoken manner that civilization did not lie in the art of destroying fellow-men, that, on the contrary, civilization was the manifestation of the divinity within man, that the science of which they boasted so much had no existence apart from the human mind and that the material development of which they bragged so much was nothing but the application of the infinite power of the Atman to matter.
Swamiji had a purpose in thus taming the people who were opposed to his cause. He had to clear the ground before he could lay the serious foundation for his own work – the grand edifice of development and empowerment of man that he wanted to build.

One positive thing about this second season of Swamiji’s work in New York is the appointment of Josiah J. Goodwin, a young Englishman of 25 with several years of journalistic experience, as a stenographer. The New York Vedanta Society made this appointment so that the teachings of Swamiji could be preserved for posterity, almost word by word and it stands to the credit of Goodwin that he made a remarkable job of the work assigned to him. Indeed, but for the efforts of Goodwin, much of Swamiji’s thoughts and words of wisdom would have been lost to posterity. And Goodwin did this job on a payment barely enough to sustain him. The reason was not far to seek. Within weeks of accepting the appointment, Goodwin became a disciple of Swamiji, loving the man as dearly as his work. As he himself said to Swami Saradananda later, “Being poor from childhood, I have gone many places trying to make a living. I have hobnobbed with all kinds of people; they gave me work and a salary, but no one gave me his heart’s love. Then in America I met Swami Vivekananda; then alone could I understand what love was. So, income or no income, I am caught! Never have I found such a noble being as Swami Vivekananda. One is drawn to him as if to one’s very own.”

As for Swamiji’s fundamental teachings in America during this phase, his central concept, as always, was the Divinity of Man, in preaching which incessantly he wanted to infuse a spirit of strength into all men. Religion is worth its name only when it helps man realize his true nature – his divinity. In true religion, there is no such thing as blind faith. To believe blindly is to degenerate human soul. Scientific and constructive religion never says ‘believe’, but ‘see’. See what? See for yourself that you are in your real nature the Absolute Himself, that there is no God above you and that you are God yourself. It is true that one does not ‘see’ God in a day. True that it is a process involving a lot of struggle. But then the question is: is one struggling
to realize the Divine? If the answer is an honest ‘yes’, then that is religion, here and now, in the present life.\textsuperscript{307} Man must struggle to realize his potential divinity, his divine essence. With the self-effort involved in such transition from potentiality to actuality, religion is a question of being and becoming, not believing, a matter not of talk but of realization. Man must realize his divine essence, his true nature. Till he does that he remains a human animal. In discoursing to such effect, Swamiji decisively rejected what he called the “drill business in the temples and churches: Kneel down at a certain time, stand at ease, and all that drill nonsense, all mechanical, with the mind thinking of something else – all this has nothing to do with real religion”\textsuperscript{308}

If man is or is to be divine and God Himself, how can he ask a God outside himself for material things in which is included heaven itself. Decisively rejecting such “shop-keeping” view of religion, Swamiji pointed out that even if there were such a thing as heaven, that could not be fundamentally different from the earth. Perhaps, there was a little less misery or a little more happiness but otherwise heaven and earth were the same. Swamiji derisively observed that the Christian idea of heaven was that it was a place of intensified sensual enjoyment and that idea of enjoyment could not be the idea of God. The Vedantic idea of God and man was that man as the manifestation of God was blissful (ananda) in nature. And the idea of blissfulness demands of man that he go beyond both misery and enjoyment by merging his individual consciousness into universal consciousness or, to say the same thing, by going into the “beyond”. Thus, what is desired of man in religion is not heaven nor enjoyment but an uplifted sense of the soul and the vision. In such a sense religion is both a vision and an inspiration to man to attain divinity.

Could Utilitarianism serve as a rational foundation for ethical and human behaviour? Regretting that this hedonistic doctrine was indeed taken by many at the close of the nineteenth century as a guide to human behaviour and policy, Swamiji pointed out that “Utilitarians stand up and say, “Don’t talk of God and hereafter; we don’t know anything of these things, let us live
happily in this world”. But, there lies a fundamental flaw in this “happiness” argument of the Utilitarians. They do not understand that man can never be happy so long as he is a slave of nature, carrying in his heart the never-ending desire always for something. “When a man is a beggar”, observes Swamiji, “he wants money. When he has money, he wants other things, society; and after that, something else. Never at rest”. This means that happiness that the Utilitarians advocate as the object of life eludes the enjoyment-seeking man for ever. The solution thus lies not in self-seeking enjoyment, not in self but in non-self or in the divinity of Self or in the attainment of oneness of the Self. In Oneness lies our real freedom because we realize our true human nature in the Oneness of Being and Reality. With Utilitarianism, man remains a human animal. Vedanta as a philosophy and religion makes of this human animal a god.

What is it in Vedanta that is not there in other religions? The answer is that Vedanta caters to the needs of all four types of men into which mankind can be categorized and it lets every man develop according to his own nature. The emotional man will realize divinity through devotion to and love of a personal God. The active man will realize his divinity through works and duty. The reflective man will realize his divinity through knowledge. And a psychic man will realize his divinity through control of mind. The beauty of the Vedanta is that a man can retain the faith or the creed he belongs to and yet seek to realize his divine essence through the Vedanta. Divinity is the goal and the Yogas–Bhakti, Karma, Jnana and Raja – are the means of reaching that goal. Swamiji did not say any one of these methods was higher or better than another. He left it to each man to choose for himself the path that suited him best, observing that each, if followed earnestly and practiced assiduously, would result in “the attenuating of the lower self, so that the real higher Self may shine forth”. Illuminating are the following comments of Marie Louise Burke on Swamiji’s approach to human development through the four paths:
While the best path of all was, to his mind, a combination of all four equally perfected, he taught each singly and as complete in itself. He did not in his general teachings recommend any special way; nor did he ask any man or woman to retreat from the world as a necessary means of attaining the highest goal. He did not condemn the world as such, nor did he ignore it as unreal; rather, he deified it, transfigured it. Indeed, when one considers Swamiji’s teachings as a whole during this second season in New York, one finds him marking out a way for the active modern man and woman such as had never been defined before.312

Since Swamiji’s teachings on the four Yogas constituted a very vital part of his teachings in America and since through teachings on each of the yoga, he led man to the goal of the highest development of his being, it will be in order to give a gist of such teachings here.

**Bhakti Yoga**

Bhakti Yoga is the way to God, or to the truth and freedom of Oneness of Self through love. In Bhakti Yoga, the bhakta (the emotional man) takes God as love and seeks to attain union with God through love. He begins with ordinary worship of God through ceremonials and this lower stage of his worship is called Vaidhi Bhakti. At the stage of ordinary worship, the bhakta remains a dualist. He imagines himself to be an entity separate from the Beloved. Gradually, he attains to the stage of Para-Bhakti where he loses all sense of self and becomes one with his Beloved – the object of his worship. As Swamiji puts it:

> We all have to begin as dualists in the religion of love. God is to us a separate Being, and we feel ourselves to be separate beings also. …We all begin with love for ourselves, and the unfair claims of the little self make even love selfish. At
last, however, comes the full blaze of light, in which this little self is seen to have become one with the Infinite. Man himself is transfigured in the presence of this Light of Love, and he realizes at last the beautiful and inspiring truth that Love, the Lover, and the Beloved are One.  

The bhakta reaches the culmination of Advaita, when in loving Him (his Beloved) he perceives that all is He. At this culminating stage, the bhakta sees no distinctions. “He sees not man in man, but beholds his Beloved everywhere. Through every face shines to him his Hari. … Wherever there is beauty or sublimity, to him it is all His… Such, though bitten by a serpent, only say that a messenger came to them from their Beloved”.  

Such men never react in the form of resentment, anger, hatred or jealousy, for through their love, they are always able to see the Reality behind the scenes.

Since Vivekananda’s purpose was to mould man, the emotional man, as far as Bhakti Yoga is concerned, into the state of divinity that he terms as Para or supreme Bhakti, he urges man to rise above fleeting desires after fleshy things of enjoyment, and strive after the divinity only. When one could get God Himself, why should one bother about trivial things of ephemeral existence? He gives two telling examples to make his point clear: “A fool indeed is he who, living on the banks of the Ganga, seeks to dig a little well for water. A fool indeed is the man who, living near a mine of diamonds, spends his life in searching for beads of glass. God is that mine of diamonds. …It is degenerating to think of giving up God, purity, holiness, and spirituality, to go after all this nonsense!”

Having thus exhorted man into the consciousness of divinity that was already within him, Vivekananda went back into his pet theme of infusing strength into man to the following effect:

Be strong and stand up and seek God of Love. This is the highest strength. What power is higher than the power of purity? Love and purity govern the world. This love of God cannot be reached by
the weak; therefore, be not weak, either physically, mentally, morally or spiritually.\textsuperscript{316}

Romain Rolland rightly observed that reading Vivekananda’s exhortations to the effect as quoted above, one can see for himself that what he was really looking for in his teachings and discourses on the Bhakti Yoga was the development of man in terms of the following qualities: Strength, virile reason, constant preoccupation with universal good and the will to arrive.\textsuperscript{317} Such were the conditions for reaching the goal.

**Karma Yoga**

Karma Yoga, as Swamiji explained it to his classes in New York, was the way to divinity through work. Karma Yoga teaches man the secret of work – how to work incessantly and yet remain free from the bondage that work brings upon man. Ordinarily, bondage comes from two sources: (a) from attachment to work, that is, from over-involvement in and excessive anxiety for the results of the work; and (b) from the selfish motive behind the work. As a cure to these evils, he suggested two measures: work always for the Self. ‘Her (Universal Mother’s) work, She knows’, as the Bengali poet Ramprasad put it. ‘She is the worker and I am merely an instrument doing Her work’ should be the attitude to work. Such an attitude to work provides effective antidotes at once to attachment to work and to selfish motives of work. When we do all our work as an offering to the Lord, we can very well say to ourselves: ‘To work we have right, but not to the result thereof’. Moreover, in making our work a means of union with our Self, we rid ourselves not only of the compulsive necessity of working for the selfish interests of our little self but we are also able to maintain our unruffled equanimity in all circumstances of our work. Swami Vivekananda added a new value to the theory of non-attached action when he observed that one must work incessantly, with unruffled equanimity at that, only for the good of others. Working only for the good of others and with such a spirit makes one the
master of the work one performs. All selfish work is slave’s work. By turning our Karma into Yoga, we become at once free and the master of our work. Moreover, in Karma Yoga, the worker honestly feels that by working for others, by helping others, he achieves a sense of union with the Lord or with his higher Self and thus such work is a privilege for him and it could never be an occasion for pitying those for whom the work is done.

We can add to Swamiji’s teachings on Karma Yoga this observation that Karma Yoga is infinitely better than what is referred to in our times as work ethics. In work ethics it is said that we should work honestly because we are paid for the work that we are asked to do. The Karma Yoga, on the other hand, holds that “He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-Yoga”.

A note of caution is in order. For Swamiji, non-attachment never meant indifference to the sufferings of humanity. Many episodes in Swamiji’s life attest to this fact. Romain Rolland mentions one such episode in his celebrated work on the life of Vivekananda. To quote Rolland:

There were many similar episodes. One was his turbulent interview with a devotee who refused to think about a terrible famine to which Central India was a prey (9,00,000 dead). The devotee maintained that it was a matter concerning only the victims’ Karma and was none of his business. Vivekananda went scarlet with anger. The blood rose to his face, his eyes flashed and he thundered against the hard heart of the Pharisee. Turning to his disciples, he exclaimed: “This, this is how our country is being ruined! To what extremes has this doctrine of Karma fallen! Are they men, those who have no pity for men?”
Vivekananda would not have anything to do with the selfishness and hypocrisy masquerading as so-called non-attachment. He would not care for the liberation of one’s self if that did not also lead to the helping of mankind. In conformity with such a stand, he said, “Help men to stand upright, by themselves and to accomplish their Karma Yoga for themselves.” That provides neatly the gist of Vivekananda’s teachings on Karma Yoga: Be a Karma Yogi yourself and help men accomplish their Karma Yoga. That was, as far as Karma Yoga was concerned, Vivekananda’s approach to the uplifting development of man and society.

**Raja Yoga**

Swamiji’s teachings on Raja Yoga aimed at giving his students a direct perception of the Self in their selves. The final perception or Self-realization could come only as a culmination of certain steps — from the essential moral disciplines, through breathing exercises, to mental control, to concentration and deep meditation, and finally to the superconscious state of Samadhi. The steps as mentioned indicate the gradual uplifting of the individual consciousness to the universal consciousness. By controlling nature, external and internal, step-by-step, the individual finally reaches the end of perceiving the Self or as the Vedas say, “Him who is beyond all darkness”. With Raja Yoga the spiritual and the practical go hand in hand. It demonstrate the practical side of the Vedanta philosophy and shows that religion is not mere frothy talk, that it is tangible and demonstrable in giving one the direct perception of what one talks or hear about. As *Boston Evening Transcript* of March 30, 1896 acknowledged with whole-hearted approval:

In discussing Raja-Yoga, the psychological way to union with God, the Swami expanded upon the power to which mind can attain through concentration, both in reference to the physical and spiritual world. …The astronomer uses it in order to discover the mysteries of the skies, the chemist in his laboratory, the professor in his
chair. …This is the one key, the only power – concentration. In the present state of our bodies we are so much distracted, the mind is frittering away its energies upon a hundred sort of things. By scientific control of the forces which work the body this can be done, and its ultimate effect is realization.322

Indeed, Swamiji’s discourses on Raja-Yoga and the book with the similar title323 that he left behind remains ever since its first publication in London in July 1896323a till today an invaluable guide to discover the tremendous powers of the mind and to arrive at Self-realization through such powers.

**Jnana Yoga**

Through his lessons on Jnana-Yoga, Swamiji taught how man could attain Self-realization by means of knowledge. Swamiji asked the question “What is man?” and answered it himself that the “human being is composed first of this external covering, the body, secondly, the finer body, consisting of mind, intellect and egoism. Behind them is the real Self of man”.324 What is this real Self of man? Swamiji answered this question with a beautiful story which should be told in his own words:

A god and a demon went to learn about the Self from a great sage. They studied with him for a long time. At last the sage told them, “You yourselves are the Being you are seeking”. Both of them thought that their bodies were the Self. They went back to their people quite satisfied and said, “We have learned everything; eat, drink and be merry; we are the Self; there is nothing beyond us”. The nature of the demon was ignorant, clouded; so he never enquired any further, but was perfectly contented with the idea that … by the Self was meant the body. The god had a purer nature. He at first committed the mistake of thinking : I, this body, am Brahman : so keep it strong and in health, and well-dressed, and give it
all sorts of enjoyments. But, in a few days, he found that that could not be the meaning of the sage, their master; there must be something higher. So he came back and said, “Sir, did you teach me that this body was the Self? If so, I see all bodies die; the Self cannot die”. The sage said, “Find it out; thou art That”. Then the god thought that it was the mind perhaps, that was the Self. But in a short while he saw that thoughts were so various, now good, again bad; the mind was too changeable to be the Self. He went back to the sage and said, “Sir, I do not think that the mind is the Self; did you mean that?” “No”, replied the sage, “thou art That; find out for yourself”. The god went home and at last found that he was the Self, one without birth or death, whom the sword cannot pierce or the fire burn, whom the air cannot dry or the water melt, the beginningless and endless, the immovable, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being; that it was neither the body nor the mind, but beyond them all. So he was satisfied; but the poor demon did not get the truth, owing to his fondness for the body.

The message that comes through this story of Swamiji’s is that man is divine by nature, that his self is neither the body nor the mind but the Self of all. Now, the question is : if man is divine by nature, if he is pure and holy in his essential nature, then how is it that his divinity gets covered? The answer is that it so happens because man like the demon of the story, on being misled by ignorance and forgetfulness of his real nature, takes his body, his mind as his real Self and thereby gets bound by his senses and enjoyment that senses bring to him. Man becomes a slave, so to say, in the hands of nature. Man has to be set free from such bondage and slavery by being given knowledge as to his real infinite nature. Such knowledge will make man free. Thus, the whole gist of Jnana Yoga lies on two counts : First, man must become conscious of the infinite nature within, following which man’s bondages will burst. Second, there is no such thing as fate. If our previous actions, our Karma in
our previous life has made us what we are, we can, in our present life certainly undo this Karma by the method of Jnana Yoga and achieve self-realization in this life itself by the method of Jnana Yoga.

Swamiji mentions as the pre-requisites of Jnana Yoga the following: the six steps of sensory and mental control, intense desire for freedom; and discrimination between the Real and the unreal. He observes that with preparations on such counts making man pure and light, bondages will fall off by themselves and man will attain to the divinity of his Self-realization or his real infinite nature. Pointing out that in Jnana Yoga man is looked upon as the maker of his own life, Swamiji uses the following beautiful words on the bright future ahead of man through the method of Jnana Yoga: “Every being that is in the universe has the potentiality of transcending the senses and reach God. No life will be a failure. ...A hundred times man will hurt himself, a thousand times he will tumble, but in the end he will realize that he is God”.

XV

A note of optimism such as noted above characterized Swamiji’s teaching of the four yogas. His grand idea was to help man realize the idea of divinity, and to make him strong, fearless and free thereby. As he said, “This is the only way to reach the goal, to tell ourselves and to tell everybody else that we are divine. And as we go on repeating this, strength comes”. He gave his students as also men everywhere living divinity, inspiring them and assisting them to make such divinity the foundation of their everyday living. And he impressed upon them the message that continuous perception of divinity obliged one to perceive “divinity in one’s fellowmen and worship that living divinity through service of all kinds, integrating in such service the essence of Karma, Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja yogas. Spiritual knowledge of divinity of man, of Oneness, so to say, issuing in heroic actions of strength and fearlessness and boundless compassion issuing in selfless love
and service of the fellowmen were to be the combined characteristics of the new man that Swamiji wanted to create.

The new man of Swamiji’s conception would be active and heroic and yet gentle, combining thereby the qualities of the Western man and the Eastern man. As Swamiji put it, “By combining some of the active and heroic elements of the West with calm virtues of the Hindus, there will come a type of man far superior to any that have ever been in this world”. Creation of a new type of man and of a new order of humanity – such is the grand purpose with which Swamiji spent the best years of his life in teaching in the West. And his approach to such grand purpose of developing humanity or man everywhere as much in the West as in the East comes out most expressively in the following lines of his observation: “We may convert every house in the country into a charity asylum, we may fill the land with hospitals, but the misery of man will still continue to exist until man’s character changes”.

Indeed, it is with a view to this goal of changing the character of man in the West (as also in the East, of which we shall have occasion to write more in the next chapter) that Swamiji founded his Vedanta Society in New York and proposed to found one in England – the two major metropolises of the West – to acquaint the English-speaking Western world with his grand mission and to bring about an effective exchange of ideas and ideals between the West and the East.

After he spoke at Harvard Graduate philosophical club before the most distinguished audience of the New world impressing them to this effect that the Advaita Vedanta philosophy of Infinite Oneness can indeed rid man of all sense of manifoldness, dependence and fear as also of all sense of anger, hatred, jealousy and reaction and that it can transfigure human personality in the revelation of Pure Divinity, Swamiji was sounded out for the Chair of Eastern Philosophy at Harvard, followed by a similar offer of the chair of Sanskrit at Columbia University in New York. Swamiji declined both the offers, because he was a sannyasin, but more importantly because, as he said, he, the child of God, had a message to deliver and a truth to teach all
mankind. He worked day and night, bringing himself to total exhaustion,\textsuperscript{333} indeed, nearly to death and yet he wished he had more time to work to usher in a new type of man in a new order of humanity.

\textbf{XVI}

Unmindful of the physical cost involved, Swamiji continued to give himself and his light to humanity in England, in London particularly, where he stayed from mid-April to mid-December 1896 except for a two-month tour of Switzerland from mid-July to mid-September. His central concern in London, as expressed through numerous class lectures, Sunday lectures and private interviews, was to awaken humanity to its divinity and to free man everywhere from the bondage of ignorance – an ideal he expressed beautifully in a letter written to Margaret Elizabeth Noble dated June 7, 1896:

\begin{quote}
My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.\textsuperscript{334}
\end{quote}

This statement of his ideal comprised two parts: (a) preaching to man his divinity and (b) teaching him to manifest his divinity. Preaching to man his divinity involved a call upon man to arouse and awake the god sleeping within him. It is to remind man of the infinite powers of the Atman that lay hidden in him.

But telling man that he was divine could not be the whole solution to the problem of development of man. Indeed, the more substantive part of his ideal involved the problem of \textbf{how} to make man manifest his inherent divinity in \textbf{every movement of life}. Having established the entitlement of man to the consciousness of the Highest in terms of the Vedantic theory of Advaita, Swamiji now taught man how he could look to and behave to all mankind as
his own in all situations of life, brushing aside thereby the so-called distinction between the sacred and the secular. Swamiji termed such use of Vedanta, such giving of practical orientation to Vedanta, as Practical Vedanta. In doing so, Swamiji made Vedanta, the exclusive preserve, since its formulation in ancient times of Brahmans or of reclusive monks, available to masses of people all over the world. And what was a mere theory before was now turned into a thing of everyday use in every movement of life by all people without distinctions of race, colour and creed.

The excellent rationale that Swamiji provided for the Vedanta in general and Practical Vedanta in particular is best stated in his own words:

> The gigantic principles, the scope, the plan of religion were already discovered ages ago when man found the last words, as they are called, of the Vedas – “I am He” – that there is that One in whom this whole universe of matter and mind finds its unity, whom they call God, or Brahman, or Allaha, or Jehovah, or any other name. We cannot go beyond that. The grand principle has been already mapped out for us. Our work lies in filling it in, working it out, applying it to every part of our lives⁴³⁵ (emphases added).

Swamiji meant to say that it was not enough to know merely the truth of the divinity of man; it was even more important and relevant for man to practice the truth. As Swamiji says, “It is practice, work that will bring us up to that [the realization of the truth of divinity of man]. The plan of Vedanta, therefore, is: first, to lay down the principles, map out for us the goal, and then to teach us the method by which to arrive at the goal…”⁴³⁵a And there is nothing other-worldly about Vedanta, its stand being that the man has to realize his divinity “here and now, because the question of this life and that life, of life and death, this world and that world, is merely one of superstition and prejudice. There is no break in time beyond what we make”.⁴³⁵b Thus, as far as Vedanta is concerned, the effort towards the realization of the truth of
divinity of man must begin here and now. Indeed, a man becomes truly man
in being engaged in enterprises and struggles to apply Vedanta to the
minutest details of his life, to every movement in his life and to his relations
with other human beings in society. In a word, according to Swamiji, the
practical pursuit of Vedanta, with the struggle that it involved towards making
the Infinite one with our being every moment of our life, was the grandest and
most glorious that man can make.336

The question might be asked: why Vedanta and why not
Utilitarianism—the socio-political ideology that ruled the Western countries,
particularly around the end of the 19th century? Swamiji’s answer was that
utilitarianism could ensure neither the morality nor the freedom of man. It
was not moral because it was essentially selfish in nature. If happiness is the
only purpose of life, then what prevents a man from ensuring his happiness at
the cost of his neighbour? It is not moral on another count. It thinks of
happiness only of the greatest number, not of all. Utilitarianism cannot ensure
freedom of man either. How can he be free so long as he is a slave to nature in
the form of attachment to ‘gold and lust’? Vedanta is infinitely superior to
utilitarianism on both the counts. Spirituality that Vedanta invokes in man
ensures morality on a far surer ground because such spirituality brings in its
wake the renunciation of self which is the very basis of ethics and morality.
To quote Swamiji, “You have to put yourself last and others before you. The
senses say ‘myself first’. Ethics says: ‘I must hold myself last’”.337 Further, in
helping man rise above the senses, and in helping man, so to say, to renounce
his lower self, Vedanta makes man free in the true sense of the term.

The third reason why Vedanta, according to Swamiji, was preferable
to other modes of thought prevalent in his time was that it ensured strength
to man by telling him that he was no less than the repository of the infinite
power of the Atman. Any thought that weakened humanity was to be forsaken
forthwith and a thought that ensured strength to man was to be embraced
instantaneously and by all means. There must be freshness and vigour of
thought behind to make humanity virile. As a thought, Vedanta has no equal to it in this regard. To quote Swamiji:

More than enough to strengthen the whole world exists in the ‘Upanishads’. The Advaita is the eternal mine of strength. But it requires to be ‘applied.’… even to the minutest detail of daily life.\textsuperscript{338}

Now, the question is: Can the Vedanta – the knowledge that man is one with all other human beings in Spirit and that he himself is the Spirit – be practiced in modern society? The beautiful words in which Swamiji answers this question should be quoted in full to demonstrate its sublimity:

*Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to Truth or die. Societies should be moulded upon truth, and truth has not to adjust itself to society. …That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical.* That is my opinion; and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so; and the sooner, the better. Stand up, men and women, in this spirit, dare to believe in the Truth; dare to practice the Truth! The world requires a few hundred bold men and women. Practise that boldness which dares know the Truth, which dares show the Truth in life, which does not quake before death, nay, welcomes death, makes a man know that he is the Spirit, that in the whole universe nothing can kill him. Then you will be free… Say to your own minds, “I am He, I am He”. Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare, “I am He”. That is the Truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours. Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the death. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached.\textsuperscript{339}
The question: how does one practice Advaita in everyday life and what does its practice accomplish in that life? – needs some further discussion. The word ‘practical’ is ordinarily used with reference to things that we think can be done. Vedanta is practical in the sense that man can realize his potential divinity if he struggles sincerely towards that goal or ideal. This means that in Vedanta the actual has to be elevated to the ideal and that the present life has to be made coincidental with life eternal.

Vedanta is practical in a second sense – in the sense that men in all conditions of life can realize his divinity. No running away from life, no withdrawal to the depths of forests or caves is necessary for such realization.

The divinity of The Self - “Thou are That”- is to be realized and manifested in everyday life. The question is: how? This could be done by any of the yogas as discussed above – Jnana, Karma, Bhakti and Raja or by a combination of some of them or by a synthesis of all of them. But the point is that before engaging in any of these, one has to get one’s perspective clear by seeing the Self in everything or, to say the same thing, by seeing things in their real nature, not as they appear to be. Why do we see things as they appear to be? Because we are enveloped in Maya. Maya springs from our ignorance as to our real nature and leads us to the unreality of looking at things in their appearance. And our ignorance as to our real nature emanates from our selfishness, from our lower self that is mired in desire for enjoyment and from our failure to understand that in unselfishness alone we reach the Self of our selves.

Unfortunately, certain doctrines and points of view encourage such misperception of reality. Utilitarianism, for example, takes the view that happiness in the sense of pleasure alone is the goal of life, forgetting that happiness and misery, pleasure and pain always go hand in hand in this world and we cannot have the one without the other.
Then, there are so-called people of practical wisdom who take the view that we need not bother our heads about things such as religion and metaphysics and that we should instead make the best of this world, living our life fully in it. Unfortunately, such practical people fail to grasp the fact that their desire to live life fully often gets defeated in the face of competitive blows and cruelties that arise from the environment in which human beings live.

Can the material sciences help us master the whole of life? The answer is that no amount of knowledge of the external world could solve the problem of mastering the life.

Can the Design Theory to this effect that an almighty God is the builder of this world solve the problems of existence of man? The answer is in the negative because the Design Theory cannot explain why there exists so many diabolical things in the world built by God, why there exists so much more misery than happiness, and so much more wickedness than good.

Does the failure of so many doctrines, theories and points of view to explain reality mean that there is no hope or way out for man? The Vedanta steps in at this point telling us that “in Vedanta alone we find a rational solution of the problem”. Vedanta calls upon man to see things in their real nature, of perceiving through the divinity within, the divinity everywhere. It was a matter of seeing oneself and the world as Self and as nothing else. This practical side of Vedanta involved man to practice continuously, to struggle continuously, to think, to feel, and to act under all circumstances in the light of the Self. To quote Marie Louise Burke, “Such practice was an affirmation (and a celebration) through service, love and reason of the One Reality; it was an affirmation in which all modes of life were transformed into yogas leading to the realization of the Self”.

Swamiji’s concept of Practical Vedanta involved an assertion of ‘positives’ on several counts.
First, his call for renunciation – giving up – was never in terms of giving up the world we live and work in. His pleading was only in terms of giving up
the unreal element of experience and asserting the real. “It really means”, to quote Swamiji’s own words, “deification of the world – giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us – and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone”. In a word, Swamiji’s call for renunciation meant not running from life but ‘struggling to live on the plane of the spirit in every part of it”. 

Second, renunciation, as Swamiji conceived it, was a positive means towards taking man to freedom. As he said, “First be master of yourself, stand up and be free” in going beyond the slavery of nature and in knowing that “you are beyond the stars, the sun, and the moon. They are like mere bubbles compared with your infinite being. Know that, and you will control both good and evil”. 

Third, knowing that one is the Infinite Being in one’s real nature will bring in one boundless faith in one’s self with positive result for oneself at every level – physical, mental, spiritual. As Swamiji observed:

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power had been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves. …Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak.

In order to enable man to tap the infinite power of the all-powerful Spirit that he in his real nature is, Swamiji advised man to saturate his consciousness with an awareness of his latent power by saying to himself day and night that he was the Spirit all powerful. Out of such repetitive chanting,
“all your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified by the very power of the thought”. ³⁴⁶

Further, out of the thought as referred to above will “come tremendous strength of character, fearlessness in the face of death, discrimination between right and wrong, unwavering moral courage, and a selflessness that scorns all thought of gain. What to fear, what to lose, what to gain if one’s being is centered in the Self”?³⁴⁷ To quote the beautiful words of Swamiji to whom strength was the other name of life and weakness the other name of death:

Strength, therefore, is the one thing needful. Strength is the medicine for the world’s disease. Strength is the medicine which the poor must have when tyrannized over by the rich. Strength is the medicine that the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned. …and nothing gives us such strength as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us so moral as this idea of monism. Nothing makes us work so well at our best and highest as when all the responsibility is thrown upon ourselves.³⁴⁸

Fourth, Advaita Vedanta not only gives us faith, strength and fearlessness and builds up our character, it also supplies the key to social well-being by inducing man to render service to his fellowman. Indeed, it tells man that “any work, whatever its field might be – art, science, education, law, commerce, anything – could be transformed into service and laid at man’s feet, as at the feet of God”.³⁴⁹

Finally, the practice of Advaita Vedanta constitutes a direct path to spiritual liberation. As Swamiji pronounced in his classes on Practical Vedanta:

What is more practical than worshipping here, worshipping you? I see you, feel you, and I know you are God. …The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the
moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him – that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free. This is the most practical of all worship.350

Practical Vedanta represented Swamiji’s call to man to rouse the God sleeping within him; it was a call to man to rouse his infinite nature; and above all, it represented his hope and effort to make the whole of mankind Jivanmuktas – free whilst living.351 Indeed, to create men and women of Advaitic realization was the very crux of Swamiji’s mission – a mission that he sought to accomplish by releasing Advaita Vedanta from the clutches of a few, by freeing it from its abstraction and obfuscating scholasticism and by making it concrete, and by bringing it to the market places of the world and thus making it available to everybody in the world. As he said in his discourses on the Practical Vedanta:

We shall see how this Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation. For if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory of the chosen few. ....The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.352

And true to the purpose of religion as stated above, Swamiji’s discourses on Practical Vedanta were but a means of forging the character of man. As Swamiji said, “It is the patient upbuilding of character, the intense struggle to realize the truth; that and that alone will tell in the future of humanity”.353 Elsewhere, Swamiji explained as to how humanity will be better through the Vedanta-based formation of the character of man. To quote him: “Let everyone do what little he can. If the fisherman thinks that he is the
Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. If the lawyer thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on”.354

Swamiji’s own estimate of his work in England was that it was a roaring success. As he wrote in his letter to the Hale sisters on November 28, 1899:

The work in London has been a roaring success. The English are not so bright as the Americans, but once you touch their heart, it is yours forever. …My ideas about the English have been revolutionized. I now understand why the Lord has blessed them above all other races. They are steady, sincere to the backbone, with great depths of feeling – only with a crust of stoicism on the surface; if that is broken, you have your man.355

On his part, Swamiji presented the best culture of India to England, made England respect India for the richness of her spiritual treasures, set the Eastern and Western worlds on the road to sympathetic relations and cooperation by giving the Western man as also the Eastern man the understanding of the Unity of Man. As Margaret Elizabeth Noble (not yet Nivedita at that time) gave her own estimate of the work of Swamiji in England:

It was the Swami’s “I am God” that came as something always known, only never said before … Yet again, it was the Unity of Man that was the touch needed to rationalise all previous experiences and give logical sanction to the thirst for absolute service never boldly voiced in the past. Some by one gate, some by another, we have all entered into a great heritage and we know it.356

Accompanied by Captain and Mrs. Sevier (who represented two of the finest jewels that Swamiji picked up from England and who would later fulfil
Swamiji’s dream of having a monastery in the Himalayas and thus give shape to his dream of flow of ideas and of men between the East and the West) and followed by J. J. Goodwin (another Englishman whom the Swamiji affectionately called ‘my right hand’ and who did more than anybody else in preserving the writings of Swamiji for the posterity), Swamiji sailed from England for India on December 16, 1896, happy and confident in the belief that his Vedanta-based teachings and work on the development of man in the West had taken root in London and New York and that it was to grow there in time to come.

XVII

Swamiji made his second journey to the West in 1899, leaving Calcutta on June 20, 1899 and arriving at New York on August 28, 1899. Physically unwell as Swamiji was at this time, he took rest till November 7, 1899 at ‘Ridgely Manor’, the country home of his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Francis Leggett at the Catskill mountains in the Hudson River Valley some ninety miles from New York. This time he took his brother-monk, Swami Turiyananda along with him. Turiyananda was to teach the American children at Montclair, a town in New Jersey, some twenty miles from New York City. He was also to teach meditation to all who were interested at the New York Vedanta Society, which was now under the charge of Swami Abhedananda, another brother-monk of Swamiji’s, and which had now a permanent address at a building of its own in New York City. Obviously, in making his second journey to the West, Swamiji had an interest in seeing himself how the work begun at his hands had fared meanwhile in the West. But, for our purpose, the more relevant question is : what approach did he use this time in his teachings and work on the development of man which, by his own admission over and over again, constituted the mission of his life? Was it the same Vedantic approach that he used earlier in his first visit to the West or was it different – if not in kind, at least in emphasis? The answer, as we shall see, is that he
continued to use the Vedantic approach, supplementing it with what he now called his *Manliness* approach.

Swamiji’s Vedantic approach lay in his preaching always the idea that man was the Spirit and that his *real* manhood lay in his knowing that he was divine (that in his real nature he was God Himself) and in acting in life on the basis of such knowledge, or, as, Swamiji put it, in manifesting his divinity in every movement or situation of life. Swamiji continued to use this approach as much in his first visit as in his second, but this time he kept mentioning the Manliness approach as well. As a matter of fact, during his sojourn to the West for the second time, he mentioned it on the ship itself in the following terms: “The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel!”.

What are the elements the Manliness approach of Swamiji is made of? Sister Nivedita who recorded Swamiji as saying that manliness was his new gospel also recorded him as saying that “Fight always. Fight and fight on, though always in defeat. That’s the ideal! That’s the ideal!” This shows that manliness meant to Swamiji taking life as a battle and struggling always in life, regardless of the consequences. In order to actualize such an ideal, one needed faith in one’s self, sacrifice to the point of giving up one’s life for the world, and above all, strength and fearlessness grown from within. Now, if we analyse these elements of Swamiji’s *Manliness* approach we shall see that they spring, more or less, from what was given in the Upanishads. As for fighting or taking life as a battle and struggling always, regardless of the consequences, that ideal is best illustrated in the advices given to Arjuna by Lord Krishna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. And to the extent the Vedanta says that *man* is the Divinity within and that with the infinite power of the Atman within, man can do anything and that he fails only when he does not strive sufficiently to manifest the infinite power, *it* approves of the ‘manliness’ ideal of treating battle and life as synonymous.
As for the ‘manliness ideal’ of having faith in one’s self, it is only a re-statement of the Vedantic stand that self is in reality the Self.

As for the ‘manliness’ ideal of giving up one’s life for the world, it is a re-affirmation of the Vedantic ideal of spirituality which is in the last instance selflessness. As the Upanishadic prayer goes, ‘lead me from the death of selfishness to the immortality of selflessness’.

As for strength and fearlessness – the two vital elements of the “manliness ideal” – that Swamiji almost always used to pronounce together, he had the following to say:

I preach only the Upanishads. If you look, you will find that I have never quoted anything but the Upanishads. And of the Upanishads, it is only that one idea strength. The quintessence of Vedas and Vedanta and all, lies in that word. …Strength and fearlessness. My own ideal is that giant of a saint whom they killed in the Mutiny, and who broke his silence, when stabbed to the heart, to say – ‘And thou also art He!’

If, as the above analysis shows, the two approaches – Vedantic and Manliness – are basically the same, if the latter approach was practically the one that was derived from the former, then why is it that during his voyage to the second journey to the West, Swamiji called the latter approach as his ‘new gospel’? The answer to this question is best given in the words of Marie Louise Burke to the following effect: “This “gospel”, this conviction that in manliness lay the key to all achievement, spiritual and secular alike, was actually not new with Swamiji. Often he had voiced it during his first visit to the West. Yet his experience in India, his heart-broken witnessing of the failure of the Hindu people, sunk in the “virtuousness of death”, to bestir themselves, had no doubt brought this particular aspect of his thought to a sharp, compelling focus.”
Now, let us focus on the contents of some of the class talks and public lectures of Swamiji’s during the second visit. During one of his class talks in New York in November, 1899, Swamiji abruptly stopped talking and withdrew from the class. Asked the reason for it, he said that during his teachings, he felt the surge of unlimited power within him and he felt that he could mould the mind of his listeners anyway he liked. At that instant, he stopped speaking and withdrew as he felt that his philosophy of and approach to human development was to let everybody grow from within and not to disturb anybody’s development by any sort of imposition from outside. Thus, Swamiji’s first proposition of human development was that everyone must be allowed to grow or develop according his or her own natural bent.361

It was Swamiji’s practice to hold question classes or to let his listeners question him on the topics he spoke on. In one such class, after he spoke about divinity residing in everyone and about the perfection and holiness of human soul, an old church-lady, brought up in the Christian tradition of sin and its redemption through the church, asked Swamiji as to how it was that he never spoke of sin and preached only the virtue of man. The reply that Swamiji gave is so beautiful in expression that it should be represented in his own words: “Why do you dwell on the weak side of man’s nature? Don’t you know that the greatest blackguard often has some virtue that is wanting in the saint? There is only one power, and that power manifests both as good and evil. Good and the devil are the same river with the water flowing in opposite directions”.362 Swamiji’s second proposition of human development that follows from this answer of Swamiji’s is that man should never be told that he is weak or that he is a sinner. He must instead he told the men are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Positive thoughts help the development of man. As Brahmachari Gurudas (later, Swami Atulananda, the author of the book With the Swamis in America) observes of the significance of Swamiji’s answer: “Here was hope, here was strength, every man can become divine, by realizing his divinity. Do you see what an immense consolation Swamiji’s teaching was to those that
had searched, but not yet found; those who had knocked but with whom it had yet not been opened? To them, Swamiji came as a Saviour”.363

Having moved to Los Angeles in Southern California in early December 1899, Swamiji delivered as many as eight lectures at the Home of Truth in Los Angeles. Swamiji put forth the thesis in these lectures to this effect that there was but one eternal Religion, that this eternal Religion focused on the divinity of man, that religions or religious creeds were but ways of reaching this central truth of man and that instead of warring with each other, the religions should co-exist peacefully in their realization of the central truth of Religion about the divinity of man. The third proposition of human development that comes out of the Los Angeles series of lectures is that it is better to have an ideal and live up to that ideal than waste human energies in mutual bickerings issuing from unproductive mutually exclusive attitudes.

The sympathetic light in which Swamiji presented man in his lecture, “Hints on Practical Spirituality” delivered at Los Angeles showed every body the way to spirituality which is the sense of oneness of every man with every other man. To quote Swamiji:

All the thieves and the murderers, all the unjust, the weakest, the wickedest, the devils, they are all my Christ! …My salutation goes to the feet of the good, the saintly, and to the feet of the wicked and the devilish! …She, my Saviour, she, whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women! …As I see more of the world, see more of men and women, the conviction grows stronger. Whom shall I blame? Whom shall I praise? Both sides of the shield must be seen.364

The fourth proposition of human development that comes through this lecture of Swamiji’s is this that every man should look upon every other man in the spirit that “Jiva is Shiva”. No man should look upon another man slightly
or do anything to slight a fellow being. None should ever forget the glory of man or, for that matter, the glory of the real nature of man.

In “The Mind and its Powers”, his last public lecture at Los Angeles, delivered on January 8, 1900, Swamiji brought out the great idea behind the science of Yoga in the following words: “The utility of this science is to bring out the perfect man, and not let him wait and wait for ages, just a plaything in the hands of the physical world, like a log of drift-wood carried from wave to wave and tossing about in the ocean. This science wants you to be strong, to take the work in your own hand, instead of living it in the hands of nature, and get beyond this little life. That is the great idea”. Indeed, the idea that man must come out of his little life, his little self and become perfect in this life itself is the greatest idea of human development that we get from Swamiji and this idea constitutes Swamiji’s fifth proposition of human development.

At Pasadena, Swamiji spoke, inter alia, on Christ, Buddha, and the great Teachers of the world. While he spoke admiringly of them as man-gods helping us perceive the abstract God of the universe, he cautioned humankind against blindly following or imitating these great souls, because imitation always thwarted mankind from developing its own character. As he said, a far better option for everyone of us was to make a staunch resolution to the following effect : “If they have been Prophets and children of God, we also are the same. They reached their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now”. This is the sixth proposition of human development that follows from the above submission of Swamiji’s.

Two other topics of Swamiji’s lectures at Pasadena were titled respectively “What brings Success” and “We ourselves”. In the former, he urged man to “get hold of yourself” and in the latter he exhorted every body to “get hold of the Self”. These two ideas in their inter-relatedness constituted the essence of Swamiji’s religion of man-making and provided as well his seventh proposition of human development.

It is the same theme of divinity and self-reliance that Swamiji pursued in his lectures at San Francisco in Northern California in March-April, 1900.
Swamiji’s point was that man can achieve divinity and self-reliance by releasing himself from the bondage of the senses. The problem is that “we all cling to the little things of the senses, even if we are ruined thereby; we forget there are much greater things”. The eighth proposition of human development that follows from this submission of Swamiji at San Francisco is that by establishing complete control over his mind, man can achieve self-reliance, realize fully his own divine power and thereby be free.

XVIII

It is clear from the above analysis that Swamiji’s goal was the development of the whole man by making man free from the bondages of his little self and by making him one with the Self of all. Man must be ‘manly’ and he must be godly. The self must attain to Self. Swamiji’s old approach that man is divine and his ‘new’ approach that man is “manliness” find their convergence in this that the source and goal of manliness of the self lies in the Self. After all, Self is the real man and the actual man (with all the manliness that he can muster) must be measured against this Real man.

Undoubtedly, such a view of the development of man asks man to scale great heights. But must we not fight on to scale the peak? We must, drawing inspiration from the words of Swamiji to the following effect: “All great accomplishments are hard. Nothing worthwhile comes easy. But don’t lower the ideal because it is difficult to attain. Hold the banner of freedom aloft!” Did not Lord Krishna exhort Arjuna to the same effect when he said to him “Stand up and fight”? And in the same vein as that of Lord Krishna to Arjuna, Swami Vivekananda exhorted his listeners – and through them the humanity at large – to be strong and to so act always as to assert the divinity of the Self. To quote his inspiring words:

Stand up and fight … Fight it out, whatever comes. Let the stars move from the spheres! Let
the whole world stand against us! Death means only a change of garment. What of it? Thus fight! You gain nothing by becoming cowards. ...Taking a step backward, you do not avoid any misfortune. You have cried to all the gods in the world. Has misery ceased? The masses in India cry to sixty million gods, and still die like dogs. Where are these gods? ...The Gods come to help you when you have succeeded. So what is the use? Die game. ...This bending the knee to superstitions, this selling yourself to your own mind, does not befit you, my soul. You are infinite, deathless, birthless. Because you are infinite spirit, it does not befit you to be a slave. ...Arise! Awake! Stand up and fight! Die if you must.  

The passage quoted above is an epitome of Swamiji’s Vedantic and Manliness approaches. Having used it to make the Western man spiritual and strong in the sense of enabling him to set himself free from the bondage of what Swamiji called the clinging “to the little things of the senses” and his ability thereby to see the greater things of the Self, Swamiji returned to India via Paris in early December, 1900. To what effect Swamiji worked in his beloved India redeeming the “sunken” man in India in the period between his first and second visits to the West and in the remaining days of his life since he returned from his second visit to the West will be the subject-matter of our analysis in the next chapter.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In a recent article titled “Swami Vivekananda’s Journey through Canada: July 1893” published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* (August 2006, PP471-472), the late Rainer Kossmann provides documentary evidence to claim that Swamiji arrived at Chicago on the evening of 9 August, 1893 and not on July 30, 1893, as previously believed.


3. The second class ticket bought for Swamiji by his Madras disciples was changed to first class at the instance of Maharaja of Khetri with additional payment made for the same.

4. Another instance of how highly Indians were respected in China could be seen from an experience of Swamiji’s visit to Canton during this journey. Swamiji went to visit a Chinese monastery in Canton against the advice of his guide who warned him that foreigners were not allowed to such monasteries. When Swamiji approached the monastery three club-wielding men advanced menacingly towards him. While his companions and the guide ran away, Swamiji told his would-be attackers in Chinese that he was an Indian yogi. It worked like magic. The men fell at his feet and asked for a *kabach* or amulet from him to which prayer Swamiji wrote on a piece of paper *Om*, the most sacred word of the Vedas, and gave it to them and he was most respectfully ushered into the monastery.


9. Except for the fact that he did not have clothes to protect himself from the chill of the weather while crossing the Pacific on the way from Japan to Vancouver, British Columbia, and had to cover himself with cloak and coat etc. lent to him by the ship’s captain. See Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 4th Ed.), PP. 414-415.

10. Miss Sanborn, aged 54, at the time of meeting ‘Swamiji’ was a lecturer and an author with a keen sense of humour. As evidence of her sense of humour, Marie Louise Burke quotes a verse scribbled by her in one of her letters to a group of young women, advising them to the following effect: “Though you’re bright/And though you’re pretty/They’ll not love you/If you’re witty”. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, vol. 1, P. 23.

11. Swamiji stayed for about twelve days at Chicago, after his arrival there.

12. “To commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’s expedition to America, the world’s Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago in 1893. The primary purpose of the exposition was to demonstrate man’s material progress in the nineteenth century. However, to give a comprehensive scope to the Fair, 20 congresses were formed focusing on such issues as women’s progress, the public press, medicine and surgery, commerce and finance, music, government and law reform, economic science, and religion. Of these congresses, the Parliament of Religions was by far the most widely promoted and highly acclaimed”. See Swami Chetanananda, *op. cit.*, PP. 8-9.


19. *Ibid*. Swamiji expressed this noble thought over the problem of development of humanity in India while staying at Metcalf in Massachusetts of the United States.

21. Marie Louise Burke observes that Prof. Wright “knew whereof he spoke. Although his fields were primarily philology, classical archaeology, and Greek history, his range of teaching was by no means confined to these subjects; for his knowledge, as is noted in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, was “encyclopedic”. A formidable scholar, he was well qualified to appreciate Swamiji’s own encyclopedic learning, and his opinion in this respect was one that carried weight”. *New Discoveries*, vol. 1, P.27. To Professor Wright, Swamiji proved to be “a saint and savant combined” and that is the reason why Prof. Wright wrote so warmly, indeed, admiringly of Swami Vivekananda.


37. Mrs. Wright’s note as quoted in S. N. Dhar, P.427.
38. Gupta observes with reference to Vivekananda’s wish for a life in prison for the sake of his country, “He was not bidding for the martyr’s crown, for any sort of pose was utterly foreign to his nature, but his thoughts were undoubtedly tending towards finding redemption for his country through suffering”. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (By His Eastern & Western Admirers), PP.15-16.


41. Like Miss Kate Sanborn, Mrs. Woods was an author and lecturer and the founder of a club called Thought and Work Club. She was fifty-eight when Swamiji was her guest.

42. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.47.


45. Once talking of Mughal Emperor Shah Jehan, for example, he observed to Nivedita that “Shah Jehan would have turned in his grave to hear himself called a ‘foreigner’”. See *The Master as I saw Him, The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, vol.1, Third Edition, September 1982, P.166.

46. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, PP.32-33.


49. One can see this from the two letters that he wrote, one on August 20,1893 and the other on November 2, 1893. In the first, he wrote to his disciple Alasinga Perumal, “Before you get this letter my money would come down to somewhat about £70 or £60. So try your best to send some money”. In the second, also addressed to Alasinga, he wrote : “I am so sorry that a moment’s weakness on my part should cause you so much trouble; I was out of pocket at that time. Since then the Lord sent me friends. …I am now out of want”. See *Letters of Vivekananda*, P.52, P.62, P.64.

50. Swamiji himself acknowledged this fact in his pronouncements later at the Parliament of Religions.
51. We should note in passing that having arrived at Chicago on the evening of the 8th or 9th September and having lost the address of the office of the Parliament’s General Committee, Swamiji had to spend the night in an empty boxcar or goods-wagon at the freight yard of the railway station at Chicago and it is only in the next morning, when after much walking across the street, he sat down worn-out and exhausted on the street-side that Mrs George W. Hale, living on the opposite side of that street, and having noted his distress, came to his rescue and after welcoming him into her house and having refreshed him appropriately took him to the offices of the Parliament of Religions where he was duly registered as a delegate and together with other oriental and occidental delegates to the Parliament of Religions were lodged in the house of a gentleman. Among others present at the Parliament from India were Pratap Chandra Mazoomdar, the representative of the Brahmo Samaj from Calcutta, Nagarkar, also of the Brahmo Samaj from Bombay, Virchand Gandhi, representing Jainism and Jnan Chandra Chakravarti representing Theosophy with Mrs. Annie Besant. Mr. Dharmapala, officially Ceylon’s Buddhist representative, was the General Secretary of the Maha-Bodhi Society in Calcutta.

52. The world had seen the British Exhibition of 1851 (in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Queen Victoria’s reign) and the Paris Exhibition of 1889 in which the Eiffel Tower – the tallest structure of the world at that time – was opened to public view for the first time. The American Exhibition proposed to outdo them.


55. Ibid., P.33.


57. Barrows, PP.24-25.

58. Barrows, PP.20-22.

63. That was the estimate provided by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 14th edition, 22,738b.
64. *Swami Vivekanander Vani O Rachana*, vol.6, P.438.
65. S.N. Dhar, *A Comprehensive Biography*, P.445. Scientists with their assertion that the universe was reducible to atoms and molecules and that all knowledge was based on sense-perception posed a challenge to many Biblical assertions and in effect produced a philosophy of agnosticism as well with the claim that existence of God cannot be known. We will see in the course of our discussion on the submissions of Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions how Vivekananda was satisfying even to the scientists and agnostics. We should add to this list the Transcendalists and the Christian Science people. The former led by Emerson and Thoreau, bore the imprints of Vedanta in their thought while the latter made use of Vedantic terms such as ‘Soham’ to cure people of their diseases.
66. Swamiji also spoke on numerous occasions at the Scientific Section of the Congress, presided over by Hon’ble Merwin-Marie Snell. Greatly impressed by the learning and wisdom of Swamiji, Mr. Snell turned into a friend and admirer of Swamiji’s.
74. In referring to man as divinity on earth, swamiji made a disapproving reference to the claim of Christianity that man was a ‘sinner’ and that only through Christianity he could be redeemed. To quote the forceful and yet beautiful words of Swamiji, “Ye divinities on earth – sinner! It is a sin to call a man so; it is standing libel on human nature”.

75. Ibid., P.11.
76. Ibid., P.13.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., P.14.
80. Ibid., P.15.
81. Ibid., P.16.
82. Ibid., P.18.
83. Ibid., P.19.
84. The Life, vol.1, P.423.
85. To give the measure of India’s poverty and misery in the words of Swamiji himself: “In India, there are 300,000,000 men and women living on an average of a little more than 50 cents a month. I have seen them living for years upon wild flowers. Whenever there was a little famine hundreds of thousands died of starvation”. See the unedited and fuller version of Swamiji’s address as presented at the Parliament of Religions on the 20th September, 1893 in Marie Louise Burke, New Discoveries, vol.1, P.124.
86. The Life., vol.1, P.409.
87. Ibid., P.410.
88. The address was titled, ‘Religion Not the Crying Need of India’.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. It bears saying here that Swamiji regarded Buddha as the greatest man ever born on earth and regarded ‘Buddhism as the fulfilment of Hinduism’ (on the fifth occasion of his address to the Parliament of Religions on 26th September,
1893) in this that Buddha provided the much needed ‘heart’ to the dry intellect of Brahministic Hinduism. According to Swamiji, the Buddhists needed the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins and the Brahmins needed the heart of the Buddhists. According to him, the separation between the Buddhists and the Brahmins was the cause of the downfall of India.


95. It was indeed a new experience for America to hear someone calling humans ‘the children of the Immortal Bliss, exhorting them all to come up as lions, that is, as repository of the infinite power, all stored up within them and waiting to be aroused, and sounding the hopeful note to all humans to this effect that they can indeed go beyond all darkness and all delusion by knowing One who is their true Self.


102. *Ibid.*, letter dated November 2, 1893, P.15. The phrase “hard-shelled” was used by the Americans themselves to designate the more orthodox among their missionaries.

104. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.150. To quote Marie Louise Burke, “Until recently, where Swamiji stayed during the sessions of the Parliament of Religions has been a mystery. …Thanks to Cornelia Conger, granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. John B. Lyon, … we learn that it was they who were his hosts during this period”. It seems that after the Parliament was over, Swamiji continued to stay with the Lyon family at 262 Michigan Avenue till perhaps the middle of November, 1893. Around the middle of November, 1893, he
seemed to have moved to the Hale family as its guest. That he wrote a letter dated November 19, 1893, (to Mrs. T. W. Woods) on stationery bearing the letter head “George W. Hale, 541 Dearborn Avenue, Chicago” indicates the fact of his shifting to the Hale family. See Marie Louise Burke, op.cit., P.175.


107. Letter to Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods, his hostess in Salem, during the days before the Parliament.

108. Streator, nine miles west of Chicago, is a relatively small city.

109. See also New Discoveries, vol.1, P.169.

110. Marie Louise Burke quotes Lucy Monroe, the Chicago correspondent of the Critic, to say that Swamiji’s purpose at that moment of time in America was to interest the Americans in the starting of new industries in India. New Discoveries, vol.1, PP.162-163.


112. Ibid., PP.68-69.

113. The Critic, November 11, 1893, as reproduced in Marie Louise Burke, New Discoveries, vol.1, PP.,162-163.


115. Ibid.

116. Ibid., P.135. Actually, being attracted by Swamiji’s youth, dynamism and personality, quite a few Western women proposed marriage to him. To quote The Life, “One such, an heiress to a fortune, said, “Swami, I offer myself and all my riches at your feet!” His reply was, “Madam, I am a sannyasin; what is marriage to me! To me all women are as my mother!” Verily, everywhere and in all situations of life, he was a sannyasi”. See PP.445-446.

117. Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, P.134. Commenting on this aspect of Swamiji’s observation, The Life observes that “Just as he made every effort to give the American people a true picture of India and Hinduism, so he lost no opportunity to study the methods of the industrial and economic systems of
the West, so that he could apply them later on in definite and practical ways to relieve the wants of his people”. See PP.446-447.
120. *The Life*, vol.1, P.443.
121. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.176.
122a. *Ibid*.
123. Quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.488.
124. I cannot die, because I am the soul immortal.
125. There is no fear for me, because I alone exist; and are we not all one in our essence? So why and what should I be afraid of?
125a. Swamiji was speaking here of the Sannyasi ideal. Not being tied down to family ties and not being attached to any possessions, a sannyasin can extend his love to the whole humanity.
126. Swamiji was speaking here of the essence of man as God.
127. Quoted in *The Life*, P.449.
128. In “constant struggles” to realize himself lay what Swamiji called the ‘manliness’ of man.
129. At the beginning of his discourse on Raja-Yoga. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.1, P.124.
133. Said Swamiji : “I have often been asked in this country if I am going to try to convert the people here. I take this for an insult. I do not believe in this idea of conversion”. *New discoveries*, vol.1, P.203.
134. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.256.

138. Swamiji uses simple simile, profound in meaning, to explain the struggle of the soul: “If you put a simple molecule of air in the bottom of a glass of water it at once begins a struggle to join the infinite atmosphere above. So it is with soul. It is struggling to regain its pure nature and to free itself from this material body. It wants to regain its own infinite expansion”. Swamiji claims that the struggle of the soul is a universal fact, true everywhere and it is as true among Hindus as it is among Christians, Buddhists, Mohammedans, agnostic or priest. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.270.


140. It will be worth recalling Swamiji’s remarks at the Parliament of Religions on September 19, 1893 just before he presented his ‘Paper On Hinduism’: “We who have come from the east have sat here day after day and have been told in a patronizing way that we ought to accept Christianity because Christian nations are the most prosperous. We look about us and we see England the most prosperous Christian nation in the world, with her foot on the neck of 250,000,000 Asiatics. We look back into history and see that the prosperity of Christian Europe began with Spain. Spain’s prosperity began with the invasion of Mexico. Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throat of its fellow men. At such a price the Hindoo will not have prosperity”. “Blood and the sword”, said Swamiji, “are not for the Hindu, where religion is based on the law of Love”. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.112 and P.113.


143. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.213.


145. Indeed, as Marie Louise Burke observed, having lectured for the benefit of one charity-worthy object or another, Vivekananda “rendered them material aid”. *Ibid.*, P.268.

146. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.5, P.93.
147. Marie Louise Burke claims that Swamiji’s ‘Detroit period’ was “almost equal in significance to that of the Parliament of Religions”. *New Discoveries*, vol. 1, P.287.


149. Quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol. 1, P.288.

150. Except for a few days on the second time of his stay in Detroit in March 1894, when Swamiji, at the invitation of Thomas W. Palmer, President of the World’s Fair Commission and formerly United States Senator and Minister of his country to Spain, stayed for nearly a week with Mr. Palmer.

151. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.294.


160. See the call given by Bishop W.F.Ninde as published in the Detroit *Free Press*, dated February 16, 1894 and as reproduced in *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.313.

161. Swamiji’s observation as published in the Detroit *Free Press*, dated February 14, 1894 and as quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.300.


162. Marie Louise Burke makes an appropriate comparison of the approaches of Swamiji and Christian missionaries when she observes: “Swamiji, in the tradition of Hindu monks, accepted the hospitality of rich and poor alike and with equal compassion gave his teachings to both. Quite literally, he saw the same in all – be they Brahmans or outcastes, industrialists or paupers. This was not true, however, of the Christian missionaries who, professing to serve the poor of India, invariably associated themselves with the English
community”. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.376. Referring to the fact that the usual practice among the Christian missionaries coming to India was to “stay among the English-speaking people”, Swamiji observed that one of the consequences of such practice was that “the great heart of India is today absolutely untouched by missionary effort”. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.8, P.216.

162a.*New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.461.


166.*New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.375.


168.*New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.362. Swamiji’s firm opinion of such missionaries was that they did not represent Christ in the true sense of that term and as such they had no right to call themselves Christians. “Let them have the call of Christ. Let them feel from within that they were born for that work”, said Swamiji. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.418.


171. Quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.222.


174.*The Life*, vol.1, P.465.

175.*Ibid.*


177.*New Discoveries*, vol.1, PP.338-339.


180.*Ibid.*, P.367. The more perceiving ones however, as they sit before the idol, shut their eyes and try to think, “I am He; I have neither life nor death; I have neither father nor mother; I am not bound by time or space; I am
Existence infinite, Bliss infinite, and Knowledge infinite; I am He. I am He”. Swamiji spoke to this effect at Detroit on February 21, 1894. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.8, P.210.

181. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.337.


186. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.213.


187a. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.213. Having pointed out the ‘luxury’ involved in preaching Christianity and having pointed out the money he could have made by agreeing to be converted, Swamiji was quick to add the following: “But I prefer to earn the money by hard work, though it seems like the work of a life time to get enough to make a start in the work [in India] I want to do”. See *Ibid.*


189. See *The Life*, vol.1, P.462.

190. *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.368.


197. To quote Swamiji: “I have got 200 $ for the engagements, 175 $ & 117 $ by private lectures & 100 $ as a present from a lady”. With one Mr. Freer donating two hundred dollars, the total came to 792 dollars. See *New Discoveries*, vol.1, P.381.
201. In between his first and second lecture stints at Detroit, he spoke at Ada, Ohio on the ‘Divinity of man’, at Bay City, Michigan on ‘Hinduism’, and at Saginaw, Michigan on ‘The Harmony of Religions’.

202. See Swamiji’s letter to the Hale sisters dated March 15, 1894, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.8, P.302. In the letter Swamiji pleaded that he was not “cyclonic” at all and that ‘to be perfect and to make perfect a few men and women’ was his goal, and that he longed for teaching intensively a few earnest souls so that these select men and women can carry and scatter his ideas broadcast at a later date. We will see that Swamiji would have occasion do this as well in fulfilment of his Guru-ordained Mission of bringing spiritual awakening to humanity but this he will do only a year later in 1895. For the present, he had to carry on with the spreading of his message far and wide.

203. See *New Discoveries*, vol.2, P.23.


205. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, P.141. That those who had eyes to see and ears to hear could not but be struck by his ‘shining light’ was also acknowledged by the *Northampton Daily Herald* in the following eminently quotable words: “To see and hear Swami Vivekananda is an opportunity which no intelligent fair-minded American ought to miss if [he] cares to see a shining light of the very first product of the mental, moral and spiritual culture of a race which reckons its age by thousands, where we count ours by hundreds, and [which] is richly worth the study of every mind”. See *The Life*, vol.1, PP.473-474.


209. Of his mother, Swamiji said elsewhere: “The love which my mother gave me made me what I am and I owe a debt to her that I can never pay. …I know that before I was born, my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I would not do for five minutes even. She did that for two years. I believe that whatever religious culture I have I owe to that. It was consciously that my mother brought me into the world to be what I am. Whatever little good impulse I have was given to me by my mother, and consciously, not unconsciously”. See Marie Louise Burke, New Discoveries, vol.2, P.422.

210. About Mazoomdar, Swamiji had already observed in his letter dated April 9, 1894: “Of course, the orthodox clergymen are against me; and seeing that it is not easy to grapple with me, they try to hinder, abuse and vilify me in every way; and Mazoomdar has come to their help. He must have gone mad with jealousy. He had told them that I was a big fraud and a rogue! And again in Calcutta he is telling them that I am leading a most sinful life in America, specially unchaste”. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.106. One predominant reason for Christian missionaries’ ire against Swamiji was the drop in contributions to the Indian missionary funds in one year by as much as one million pounds following Swamiji’s brilliant success at the Parliament of Religions and his very effective submissions to the American public to this effect that the American missionary activities in India and the huge money spent on that count produced worth little in terms of bringing about the conversion of Indians to Christianity. The Brahma Samajists and the Theosophists were unhappy with Swamiji for similar reason. Swamiji’s rise in America in the aftermath of the Parliament of Religions meant the corresponding decline in their influence in America. Even during the time Parliament was on, Mazoomdar slandered Swamiji to the missionaries in the Parliament, and so prejudiced President Barrows that he did not even speak to Swamiji decently. See The Life, vol.1, P.480.

211. Quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol.2, P.59.
213. It should be noted here that while Swamiji did not make much money in Boston, he, nevertheless, contributed from whatever little earnings he made at Boston towards the benefit of a nursery school (the Tyler-Street Day Nursery) at Boston. At a time when he was himself trying to raise funds for his contemplated work in India, it was undoubtedly an act of self-sacrifice, true to the life of renunciation that he lived and preached.
Letter to Alasinga (No date, but the year mentioned is 1894), The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.5, PP.61-62. See also New Discoveries, vol.2, P.118.

That Swamiji had to do earn money for India in spite of himself could be seen from the following he wrote to Alasinga in his letter of August 20, 1894: “You know the greatest difficulty with me is to keep or even to touch money. It is disgusting and debasing”. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.5, P.42.

“I teach them all Shivoham, Shivoham and they all repeat it – innocent and pure as they are and brave beyond all bounds and so I am happy and glorified”, wrote Swamiji in his letter to Mary Hale, dated July 31, 1894. See The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.6, P.261.

These invaluable notes of Swamiji’s instructions taken by Miss Thursby were long hidden away among her papers at New York Historical Society. Thanks to her painstaking efforts, these were discovered by Marie Louise Burke and put into her New Discoveries, vol.2, PP.145-149.


Swamiji proclaimed it first in the West in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago.

Swamiji’s letter to Miss Sarah Farmer, dated December 29, 1895. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.328. It bears noting here that Swamiji paid so much importance to the work he accomplished at Greenacre (this is the first time ever in America that he taught Vedanta philosophy and the experience gained here greatly helped him to organize such teaching in New York later in the year) that he wrote to Mrs. Bull who had offered to contribute to his Indian Fund to the following effect: “I sincerely believe that you ought to turn all your help to Miss Farmer’s Greenacre work this year. India can wait as she is waiting centuries and an immediate work at hand should always have the preference”. See New Discoveries, vol.2, P.158.
237. Letter to Alasinga, September 17, 1894, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.5, P.46, and *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, PP.175-176. Swamiji made a similar observation a year later in his letter dated September 9, 1895 (vol.5, P.96). “I do not believe in any politics. God and truth are the only politics in the world, everything else is trash”.
241a. *Ibid*.
242. See *New Discoveries*, vol.2, P.234.
243. Indeed, persons like Professor William James, Thomas W. Higginson and Josiah Royce visited frequently Mrs. Bull’s house and it was undoubtedly during his stay at Mrs. Bull’s house that Swamiji met William James. It is possible that on one of such occasions, Professor James, a noted philosopher of his time, had the privilege of seeing Swamiji plunged into samadhi.
244. *New Discoveries*, vol.2, P.188.
245. Quoted in *New Discoveries*, vol.2, PP.189-190.
248. *Ibid*.
249a. *Ibid*.
250. *New Discoveries*, vol.2, P.237. Obviously, being a sannyasin with a mission to transform humanity all over the world, Swamiji could not tie
himself down to a particular position in any institution, however attractive, honourable and paying it might have been from a materialistic point of view.

251. Swamiji’s address as compiled in New Discoveries, vol.2, P.422.
252. Ibid, P.238.

255. Non-understanding of customs of Hindu widows(e.g. their not re-marrying ,and their fasting, etc.) led to statements such as “widows are not allowed to marry again, and are left to starve and drudge”. See New Discoveries, vol.2, P.278. Marie Louise Burke goes on to observe appreciatively that “Traditionally, the Hindu widow, rich or poor, young or old, divested herself of jewelry, donned coarse cloth and cut her hair. Nunlike, she subsisted on plain fare, slept on a hard bed, and did not join in the secular festivities of the family”. Behind such self-mortification was the confirmed belief that moral and spiritual values could not otherwise be acquired. For such self-mortification however the widows in India earned the affection and respect of their parents and in-laws. See Ibid., P.322.
256. Ibid., P.303.
259. Ibid, P.313.
261a. Ibid.
262. Ibid.

263. Though it is certain that the Vedanta classes in New York continued till the beginning of June 1895, the reports as to its beginning are conflicting as to the date. Miss Sarah Ellen Waldo, who attended these classes and became one of the foremost disciples of Swamiji in the United States, in course of reminiscing about the same, wrote in the Prabuddha Bharata, January 1906
that “the classes began in February 1895, and lasted until June”. See Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, op.cit, P.116. Miss Josephine MacLeod puts the date as January 29, 1895. See Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda, P.228. Marie Louise Burke, the great Vivekananda researcher, puts the date as January 28, 1895. See New Discoveries, vol.2, P.344. I have taken Marie Louise Burke’s date in preference to the other two, because the other two were citing the date from their memory while Burke selected January 28, 1895 as the date after painstaking research on the thing.

264. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.263.


266. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.251.


267a. Such physical and spiritual exercises involved eight processes. The first was yama. This involved the control of the physical nature – a control which necessitated the practice of morality such as ahimsa or non-injury, truthfulness (absolute integrity in thought, word and deed), non-covetousness, purity and disinterestedness, and brahmacharya or chastity. Perfect chastity involved the lifting of the most powerful force in the body from the Muladhara – the lowest centre of the Kundalini – to the highest, that is, the top of the brain. With the Ojas so stored up in the brain, the most powerful force in the body is transmuted into the spiritual energy. The second of these processes – called Niyama – involved the discipline of not allowing the mind to wander. The third – called Asana – is the physical posture that a practitioner assumes during his exercises. The fourth – called pranayama – involves a practitioner in the exercise of control of the breath, both in its inward and outward functions. The fifth – Pratyahara – is the indrawing of the organs from their objects. The sixth – Dharana – is the fixing of the mind to the object of thought. The seventh – Dhyana – involves a practitioner in deep meditation which, in turn, leads to the eighth, that is, Samadhi on the
complete absorption of self into Self – a state in which the Divine and the human become one. Followed properly, these processes lead to spiritual development.


269. ‘Introduction to *Raja-Yoga*,’ a book which Swamiji finished writing in June 1895, through dictation to Miss S. E. Waldo (afterwards Sister Haridasi). Apart from attracting the attention of American physiologists such as William James, the book roused the enthusiasm of Tolstoy. See Romain Rolland, *op.cit.*, P.89. *Raja-Yoga* is included in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.1 and the passage quoted above figures on P.124 of this Volume.

270. This is how Swamiji himself expressed his ideal in a letter dated February 1, 1895 addressed to Mary Hale. See *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, P.252.


273. These observations, first published in the *New York American* of May 26, 1907, are reproduced in *The Life*, vol.2, PP.10-11.


274. The course was conducted in a cottage that belonged to Miss Dutcher, one of Swamiji’s students at New York.

275. These were his own words, as used in a letter dated April 25, 1895 to Mrs. Bull. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.6, P.306. Swamiji initiated two of this group of students into sannyasa and made five of the attending ladies Brahmacharinis. The two initiated into sannyasa were Marie Louise, named Abhayananda and Leon Landsberg, named Kripananda, after sannyasa.


276a. *Inspired Talks* is included in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.7.


279a. Ibid., PP.195-196.
280. Ibid., P.170.
281. Ibid., P.164.
282. Ibid., P.252.
283. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, P.140.
283a. Love is of three sorts – one demands, but gives nothing; the second is exchange; and third is love without thought of return, love that gives and gives always without ever expecting any return. This third sort of love for the Lord is the highest love in which there is no ‘I’, Only ‘Thou’. Only this is Bhakti Yoga. As in Bhakti Yoga the little ‘I’ disappears and only ‘Thou’ remains, so in Jnana Yoga, there is only the highest all-pervasive ‘I’ – the ‘I’ that is Brahma or Shiva. Thus, in the ultimate analysis, as Swamiji observes in the Inspired Talks, “Extreme love and the highest knowledge are one”. Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.7, P.9.
So far as Karma-Yoga involves doing work for the Self, it too becomes in its import one with the Jnana Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. Swamiji’s approach was ‘To each his own’, i.e., one has to choose the path that suits one the best and achieve one’s highest development by adhering to that path. His mission was to “bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate”.

See Letters of Swami Vivekananda, (Letter of 24th January, 1894), P.75. As for Swamiji’s stand that “Religion is Oneness” and that “each may choose the path that suits him best”, see his letter dated 10th June, 1898, addressed to Mohammed Sarafraj Hussain of Naini Tal, undoubtedly one of the very best that Swamiji had ever written.

284. Development of man, to be comprehensive, must cover his material aspect as also his spiritual aspect. There must be creative harmony between both the aspects. Swamiji’s approach covers both the aspects and as such it is more comprehensive than most others which, in focusing upon only material, suffer from the limited conceptualization of a complex issue.
286 a. *Ibid*.
287. *Ibid*.
288. *Ibid*.
291. *Ibid*.
292. *Raja Yoga*, published in July 1895, transformed many Americans, with the soul-stirring power that every passage of the book generated. Even the eminent psychologist Prof. William James of the Harvard University was so much impressed with the book that he came to meet Swamiji at his residence in New York. In his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Prof. James paid his tribute to Swamiji as a paragon of Vedantists. Swami Vivekananda himself said of his work in America, “I have planted a seed in this country; it is already a plant, and I expect it to be a tree very soon….“ See his letter dated July 9, 1895 addressed to Raja of Khetri in *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, P.293.
293. See *New Discoveries*, vol.3, P.205.
294. As Sister Christine, one of the most prized ‘acquisitions’ of Vivekananda in the West, most appropriately observed, “From men he demanded manliness and from women the corresponding quality for which there is no word. Whatever it is, it is the opposite of self-pity, the enemy of weakness and indulgence”. Sister Christine goes on to observe that Swami’s teaching “had the effect of a tonic. Something long dormant was aroused and with it came strength and freedom”. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, PP.195-196.
296a. *Ibid*.
298. Selfishness encompasses hedonism of the eat-drink-and-be-merry type and ‘let me enjoy, it does not matter if the others go to hell’ type of attitude. It signifies, so to say, worship of money, of things, and of short-term happiness.


300. Marie Louise Burke offers the following quotable observations on Swamiji’s approach: “He [the Western man] had come to the dead-end of all external attempts to discover the ultimate reality of himself, his God, his universe. There was no other way but to seek within; no other path to take but the inward path the ancient Vedic Aryans had found millennia before and had cleared and charted. It was a way completely foreign to Western thought as a whole. One of Swamiji’s primary tasks as a World Teacher was to present the ancient Vedantic truths and ancient Vedantic paths in the cultural idioms of the modern West and in such a way that everyone from a philosopher to a child would find them natural, comprehensible, and applicable. The time was ripe; but the task nevertheless was one that only a Prophet could achieve – and a Prophet, moreover, of gigantic intellect.” *New Discoveries*, vol.3, P.296. We find a corroboration of such observation in Swamiji’s letter to Alasinga [17th February, 1896, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.5, PP.104-105]: “To put the Hindu ideas into English, and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds – is a task only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living - poetic- in everyday life. …That is my life’s work”. No one had attempted such a work earlier with the sole purpose of bringing about the highest development of man. And herein lay the uniqueness of Swamiji and of his approach to human development.


303. Swamiji’s students in these classes included doctors, lawyers, professional men and society ladies.

304. Miss Sarah Ellen Waldo, an earnest student of Swamiji’s at Thousand Island Park, who preserved for posterity the invaluable record of Swamiji’s instruction at Thousand Island Park in the *Inspired Talks* and who turned into an earnest and unfailing disciple of Swamiji, lived at Brooklyn, but came to New York everyday to take care of Swamiji’s house-keeping including cooking for Swamiji, indeed, to act as the all-round secretary for Swamiji.

305. In *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.7, PP.487-488, it has been mentioned that the letter was addressed to Alasinga Perumal. It has now been proved by Marie Louise Burke that the letter was written to Swami Abhayananda in response to the difficulties that she said she had to face in carrying on the mission of Swamiji in New York during the absence of Swamiji from the New York. See Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries*, vol.3, P.326.


308. Unpublished and Unedited Transcript of Swamiji’s lecture, as delivered on January 20, 1896. See Appendix A of *New Discoveries*, vol.3, P.552.


The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel, P.229. Swamiji sounded a similar note of warning about fanatics. As he said, “One must first know how to work without attachment, then he will not be a fanatic. …If there were no fanaticism in the world, it would make much more progress than it does now. …It is a retarding element. …When you have avoided fanaticism, then alone will you work well.” How relevant is Swamiji’s comment in the context of widely prevalent fanaticism that we are witnessing in our times! See The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, vol.1, P.79.

321. Quoted in Romain Rolland, footnote 2, P.231.


323a. As a matter of fact, the year 1896 saw three of Swamiji’s great works published: Karma Yoga in America in February 1896, Raja Yoga in London in July 1896, and Bhakti Yoga in Madras in September 1896. Publication of these great works plus Swamiji’s accomplishments in the West in the year 1896 lead Marie Louise Burke to cite 1896 as the most fruitful year of Swamiji’s work in the West. New Discoveries, vol.3, P.386.


327a. As Swamiji himself said to Swami Turiyananda, “Do you think I only lecture? I know, I give tangible living spirituality to them, and they know they receive it”. See Spiritual Talks, Calcutta : Advaita Ashrama, 1955, PP.200-201.

327b. ‘As for they receiving it’, Sister Devamata (then Laura Glenn) says the following of the teachings of Swamiji in New York in 1895-1896. “That [Swamiji’s teachings and message] had become the foundation of our daily
living, the stimulus that urged us onward”. See *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, P.124. “He influenced us to better living and brotherly kindness to all men”, said Helen P. Huntington of the impact of Swamiji’s classes on the lives of Americans. See *The Life*, vol.2, P.139.


330. His exchange plan envisaged the Indians going to West to teach them the Indian ideas of philosophy and religions and Americans coming to India to give Indians training in science, industry and technology.

331. Candid was the acknowledgement of Reverend C. C. Everett, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School: “We occidentals busy ourselves with the manifold. We can, however, have no understanding of the manifold, if we have no sense of the One in which the manifold exists. The reality of the One is the truth which the East may well teach us; and we owe a debt of gratitude to Vivekananda that he has taught this lesson so effectively”. Quoted in *The Life*, vol.2, P.76. Equally candid was the acknowledgement of Professor William James of Harvard who, addressed Swamiji as “Master” and deferentially spoke of him as the “paragon of Vedantists” for having extolled above all, “the energies of man”. See *The Life*, vol.2, P.92. “[Vivekananda] is an honour to humanity”, observed William James, which is undoubtedly a neat summation of all that Vivekananda did for the development of humanity. See Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries*, vol.4, P.98.

332. Swamiji’s letter to Alasinga dated August 1895 in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol.5, P.93. As for the offer of Harvard, the following comment of Marie Louise Burke is illuminating: “Harvard, in short, had decided that it wanted Swamiji for its own – forever. A higher honor than this could not have been paid by the academic world of America. But Swamiji was a sannyasin; he could not bind himself to a secular institution, and he had, moreover, work to do and a message to give in the open world. Thus he refused”. Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries*, vol.4, P.90.
333. To quote *The Life*, vol.2, P.83 : “The strain of the years of his Sadhana in the East and teaching in the West had been too much for him. His friends who knew that he had given himself wholly and unstintedly for the good of those who made his message the gospel of their lives, could not help seeing the cost to his body. As Mrs. Funke had noted in Detroit [in March, 1896], it was even then to be seen that he was not long for this world”. He himself wrote in his letter of March 23, 1896 from Boston to Alasinga Perumal, “I am afraid I have worked too much; my nerves are almost shattered by this long continued work”. The giving of his message was, for him, literally the giving of his life’s blood.


343. *New Discoveries*, vol.4, P.376.


347. *New Discoveries*, vol.4, P.461.


358. Ibid., P.127.
363. Ibid.