It was Swami Vivekananda's firm belief that the set goal of all religion is liberation, which has a sense of exaltation, a sense of freedom and victory over the world, over evil and death. He put forth the concept of jīvanmuktī - i.e. liberation in life itself as one kindling hope and light in the hopeless and darkened lives of mankind. According to his view, when the sense of the falsity of the world has taken a firm hold on the mind, which has then no thoughts of worldly things it becomes still. The mind bereft of all other thoughts gradually becomes absorbed into the real self. The man who has awakened to his real self, the real doer, knower and enjoyer, the conviction of the truth of his Supreme Reality always remains uppermost in his subconscious and he spontaneously experiences the unchanging self of imperishable bliss all compact even when alive in this world itself. He is a jīvanmukta and this state of liberation in life is jīvanmuktī. Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa was one such jīvanmukta. The Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad says, "When all desires occupying his heart fall off entirely, then indeed does the mortal became immortal and realize Brahman even here". The mark of the liberated in life or jīvanmukta is that he knows the Supreme Reality and to know Supreme Reality is verily to be the Reality itself.

1. Brhadāraṇyaka Upanishad. 4.4.7.
Jīvanmuktī is freedom from the bondage of the limitations of the body both gross and subtle. But this in no way makes a jīvanmukta a dead man, for on the other hand he is with the body, sthulā and sūkṣma, but freed from the bondage of the limitations of both for he transcends them. The fact that he is freed can be seen in his very attitude towards life and in life, because, for him life is the cosmic dynamics which puts up not merely this life but the endless forms of being and expression.

One who has attained jīvanmuktī fuses his body with the world of objects, and both with the 'sat' aspect of the real, wherein all that exists finds its ultimate locus. And by this he feels no need or necessity in consciousness to treat his body as having a being different from the rest, for the essential attitude of a jīvanmukta is that he recognises no individual body as distinguished from the cosmic body and this invariably leads to his attitude of non-distinctness of his individual self from the universal. Supporting this the Kena Upanīṣad says, "For one who realizes it here there is true life. For one who does not realize it here, great is the loss. Discovering the Ātman in every being, the wise ones, dying to this world of sense experience, became immortal".

Realising the Universal Self as his true nature, of which his own ego was but a projecting tip, he recognises his oneness with every being and this makes him one who has achieved the

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highest elevation of the spirit by thus rising above the given world of change and mortality, he achieves true life unlike the false life of the ego which is but a life darkened by spiritual blindness and misery.

"He is a real jīvanmukta, whose real nature is not influenced by egotism and whose mind is not subjected to attachment, whether he remains active or inactive."

This goes to say that the old limited individuality tainted with its various attachments, responses and desires is transcended by the jīvanmukta, giving place to an expansive awareness and love which goes to find its consummation in the spiritual realisation of the eternal, pure, enlightened self of all - that is Brahman.

Again for one who has attained jīvanmukti the phenomenal world wherein he moves and acts ceases to exist, leaving alone the all - pervading, eternal noumenon. The jīvanmukta who lets go of this world of change, and death does so only on realising that this is not self and that this world of empirical experience is not the reality, and not an end in itself. Swāmi Vivēkānanda taught that if avidya, worldliness, leads to deep darkness, vidya, other worldliness, may lead to still deeper darkness for when man merely delights in his inner life, in the world 'beyond' neglecting the environment of the outer world in which his

life is cast he will enter into still greater darkness as it were. Man, according to him, in no way achieves the state of actionlessness by merely abstaining from action and neither does he attain spiritual perfection by merely renouncing actions. The world does not cease to exist by merely closing one's eyes to it. On the other hand what is to be understood rightly is that negation of worldliness is quite different from negation of the world. A true jīvanmuktā is one who adopts the former which is negation of worldliness for it is this which leads to life and more life and total fulfilment in the end. The Isa Upaniṣad says, "In this very life they have overcome birth and relativity whose minds are fixed on the sameness, for Brahman is free from all evil and is the same in all. Therefore they are fixed in Brahman".

Hence Śvāmi Vivēkānanda's view is that a true jīvanmuktā is one who understands that Reality is one, untouched by limitations such as outer and inner, of the not-self and self and who conducts his life in the light of this all embracing knowledge. It is this knowledge that will help him to overcome death by the wise handling of this world of death, death that acts upon man continually in the form of the temporal and he achieves immortality through the knowledge of his individual self as one with the eternal an ever present Brahman.

It is with the strength arising from this total vision of oneness of Reality that total life efficiency is achieved which is both

1. Isa Upaniṣhad V - 19
efficiency in external life and action as well as efficiency in internal thought and contemplation of the Divine.

Therefore a jīvanmukta is one who bears the testimony to the truth, for he has realised the Supreme Truth which transcends the body and its senses. It is the truth which is witness of all, the Absolute Intelligence of infinite bliss and self-effulgent. He is one who has firm conviction that the whole Universe fulfils itself on account of the Divine presence which is all prevailing, that the whole world is ever projected in God. He is one who stands ever centred in the Self which is all consciousness, all pure being, pure thought and all pure bliss and this is none other than the one and only Brahman.

Jīvanmukti As a Social Concern

According to Swāmi Vivēkānanda social concern and the responsibility that goes with it form the very core of Hindu religion. With regard to social thought the very first thing, he calls, to be recognised is that human society as an empirical one has a unity and solidarity of existence and that this fact is sustained, supported and inspired by the transcendent reality. "Ethics is Unity", said the Swāmi, and he often pointed out 'that knowledge was the finding of unity in diversity and that the highest point in every science was reached when it found the one unity underlying all variety, and this was as true in physical

1. Swāmi Swahānand : Service and Spirituality (Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1986,) P.36
science as in the spiritual." The glorious vision of the spiritual solidarity of all existence, is that which alone can become the basis of a rational ethics and of all progressive inter-human relationships and the highest that man can achieve, awakening to the eternal truth of oneness, in the field of inter-human relationships is the ethics of the enlightened self or selflessness.

Social concern or lōkasaṅgraha is the self dedication towards the welfare of the world. It is the highest law of life which prevails at the ethical and spiritual planes. It is best given to the enlightened man alone to practice self-dedication. The act of offering the best and most useful in one for the welfare of others is the act of social concern. This lofty ethical passion flavours the definition of dharma given by the merchant Tulādhāra to the ascetic Jajāli in the Mahābhārata's Sānti-parvā 254.9, which says thus: "He knows dharma 0 Jajāli, who is always friend of all, and who through his actions, though and speech is absorbed in ensuring the welfare of all". The Advaita Vedānta as taught by Svāmi Vivēkānanda provides a cosmical reference to individual actions, so much so, imparting depth and efficiency to human life and work. It is believed by him that man's work in society and for society becomes more

2. Swāmi Ranganātha Nanda: The Call of Human Excellence (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1977), P-25

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efficient when that work is backed by a social awareness, but it on the other hand becomes most efficient when this social awareness is suffused also with spiritual knowledge and awareness. It is only through spiritual expansion and awareness that man is able to break through the crust of his biological limitations which make him prone to self centredness and exploitation, and send out tendrils of love and concern for his fellow men and their misery.

Swāmi Vivekānanda adheres that jīvanmuktihood is the basis for social service in Advaita Vedānta. Doing service for its own sake devoid of any desire whatsoever, is an exalted state given to the enlightened alone. Helping others by removing their physical and social needs is indeed great, but the help is greater accordingly as the need is greater and as the help is far reaching. If a man’s wants can be removed forever then surely it is the greatest help that can be given to him. Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy miseries for every. Only this can annihilate the faculty of want forever and he who gives this spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind because spirituality is the true basis of all true activities of life. A spiritually strong man will be strong in every other respect in life, and he is a jīvanmukta who works for the benefit of mankind through freedom and love. Even Śrī Krishṇa says in the Bhagavadgītā that "Earthly sufferings can be destroyed only by the destruction of avidya i.e. ignorance and this can be done by none less than Iswara (God)" — and a Swāmi

2. Bhagavad Gītā
It is rightly conceived that in this age of spiritual decline, helping others is the most important form of spiritual practice. The highest form of dāna is giving spiritual knowledge, next is giving secular knowledge next to that comes saving life and last is giving food and drink. So the dissemination of spiritual knowledge as contained in the scriptures is one of the crying needs of our age. But mere talking is not service, it has to be shown in action, in a life of renunciation and spirituality, of all suffering and infinite love. Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "Renunciation and service are the twin ideals of India. Intensify her in those channels and the rest will take care of itself".

Swāmi Vivēkānanda's teachings clearly point out that the apparent man is the manifested real man, who is one with the Absolute, the unity of existence. So service of man is in actuality service to God. He who loves all fellow beings without any distinction whatsoever, he is indeed best worshipping his God. Swāmi Vivēkānanda coined the term 'Daridrānārayāṇa', which stands for God in the form of the poor. So if one wants to find God he should serve the poor.

This worshipful attitude to men as God can be described as


the socialization of the Absolute. No doubt that the Realization of the Self as the Ultimate Reality is individual, yet most importantly men of realization see God in everything, everywhere. And when God is thus realized service of man and society most naturally becomes service of God. This spiritual method of seeing the Divine in Society and serving it, is in fact most suited for modern temper as felt by Swami Vivekananda. Whatever may be the avocation of a man, let him understand and realize that it is God alone who has manifested Himself as the World and its created beings. He is both immanent and transcendent. Such realization of Divinity is humanity leaves absolutely no room for arrogance as such, for by realizing it man cannot have any jealousy or pity for any other being. By realizing Him in and through all beings and by serving Him through humanity the devotee gains real devotion.

Swami Vivekananda writes in a letter from Chicago in 1894, "This life is short, the vanities of the world are transcient but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive." The characteristic of the good and enlightened is that they are even engaged in the welfare of all and this action is not due to mere compassion but pure love and it is through pure love that worldly sufferings can be removed. Love makes way to the inaccessible. It opens the door to the impossible. What is known through pure love is true knowledge and what work is

rendered through pure love is true service. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says that if he were to stop his work for the welfare of people, the Universe would die, but from this he did not have to gain anything, as he is the Lord, but still he does work out of love. A jīvanmukta who has transcended all desires but yet indulges in social concern is a shishta, and Universal love is profound in him. He becomes a exemplary man to the world for the love in him is that which has emerged from detachment and Brahman knowledge and realization. The whole world for him is hence his very own.

There is yet another advantage is the spiritually enlightened taking up to altruistic work, for the ignorant cannot guide the society any more than the blind can lead the blind. The enlightened are the best servers of society, they form a model to society. Following in their wake the ordinary men set themselves to their duties in all earnestness, the world feels inclined to walk their way. Work done through this way in the world becomes a means of spiritual education for man Swāmi Vivēkānanda says, "Bring all light into the world, light, bring light! Let light come into everyone; the task will not be finished till everyone has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor, bring light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor, bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated for the varieties of the education of our times are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord."

1. Bhagavad-Gīṭa III 23-24
Swāmi Vivākānanda strongly held the view that a spiritually strong man will be strong in every other respect. It is spiritual knowledge and realization that can destroy all miseries for ever and it is only this spirituality that can annihilate the faculty of want for ever. The Gīta teaches that true spirituality confers on man all round efficiency - efficiency both in the sphere of action as well as in the sphere of thought and contemplation. When man's life and action in the world are lit up by the ever present light of the Reality or Ātman, the self in all, he achieves social ethics, resulting in character efficiency in the individual and general welfare in the society as a whole. Vivākānanda says, "There are some good people, calm and great souls, who go about doing good to the world as does the spring, having themselves crossed this mighty ocean of relative existence, they help others also cross the same without any selfish motive whatsoever." This goes to say that for a spiritually enlightened soul when the idea of doing good becomes a part of his very being, then he tends to do good spontaneously and just as water cannot wet the lotus leaf, so also he, ever if amidst sinfulness, will remain untouched by it and as far as rendering service and doing good to humanity they seek no exterior motive for it is already inherent in them.

It is very beautifully said by R.D. Ranade and ... "Out of their intense love for the afflicted mankind, live only for their

benefaction and betterment, proclaiming from pole to pole like a rumbling cloud, the eternal gospel of God, from the everlasting to the everlasting”.

Śwāmi Vīvēkānanda believed that service is the finest form of inter-human relationship, for it involves a growth and a change for the better in the individual initially and then, in society at large. What our nation’s crying need today is a pervasive concern for man as man, for this, would be taken the emergence of moral awareness in man. Even the Gīta exhorts, “Cherishing and serving each other may you achieve the highest general welfare.” Śwāmi Vīvēkānanda preached that the nourishment of the inner life of man is achieved through the spirit of dedication and service with which he inspires his outer life and action and it is only through this that work becomes transformed into Yōga and achieves the double efficiency of social welfare by productive labour outside, and spiritual welfare through the inward spiritual attitude. According to Śwāmi Vīvēkānanda there was no work which was plainly secular. All work in his view is sacred. All work is a mode of worship. No service is small or low, for all work is God’s service.

Śwāmi Vīvēkānanda meant by service, that attitude to the work that one is called upon to do, the attitude to one’s fellow citizens, the attitude to oneself as a seeker of spiritual growth

1. R.D. Ranade – Pathway to God in Kannada Literature, (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 1970), P-314
2. The Bhagawad-Gītā III - 11

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the attitude of service which is blessed by spiritual awareness, ethical sense and social feeling. Service, again, he felt, has to be undertaken not as levers to power or fame or for making a big name for one's own self, but in its divine perspective as service to God Himself in order to satisfy the yearning of the soul and when service is taken up in this spirit one can be free from the aberration that would otherwise, vitiate the very endeavour. To quote the words of Swami Vivekananda, "This is the gift of all worship - to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Śiva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased really worship Śiva, and if he sees Śiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Śiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him, Śiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples." Thus whatever be the avocation of man, he should understand and realize that it is God alone who has manifested Himself as the world and created beings. He is both immanent and transcendent. Service of man knowing him to be the manifestation of God and by realizing God in and through all beings and by serving Him in and through humanity, will the heart be purified and one will be led to the feeling of sameness and oneness of all.