CHAPTER - III

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S WORLD VIEW AND SISTER NIVEDITA
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I

Nivedita travelled with Swami Vivekananda through the length, and breadth of India. As she travelled with Swamiji, she saw the multifaceted appearance of India -- her glorious past, her present fallen state, subjugated by a foreign power, and yet an heir to noble tradition. She acknowledged with a grateful heart how the Indian way of life and the noble Indian culture and tradition were explained to her by Swami Vivekananda. In the ennobling company of Swamiji, she learnt how to look into the heart and soul of India. India entered into her soul so that the presence of this country she might feel in all her works and thoughts. She began with the very essence of religion, ‘Dharma’, and proclaimed that the world needed such a concept of religion which was unafraid of truth. She could see that according to Swamiji Art, Science, and Dharma are the various expressions of the same Truth; that the ‘Patriot Prophet’ Swamiji had become the symbolic representation of what India was and is and what India really stands for, but also the symbol of the union between the West and the East. There could be no division between the terrestrial and the divine; now labour is prayer and victory means sacrifice. Nivedita did not merely listen to what Swamiji taught, but felt his teachings in her blood. Thus the Nivedita we know was born; she came like a free gift of Nature to India and transformed an awakening country into a land of the true spirit of India -- and this was Indian Renaissance.

Nivedita exercised tremendous influence upon the young generation of the time. The Vivekananda Society of Kolkata was established under the direct inspiration of Sister Nivedita. In her ‘Suggestions for the Indian Vivekananda Societies’, we find what directions she gave to the younger generation for developing a completely modern mind-set. While giving the suggestions for undertaking meaningful works, she kept in mind the real condition of the Indian youth force. She spoke of social welfare activities to be undertaken by the young people, and then she dealt with their studies.
She desired them to study books written by Vivekananda and books written on him, but not merely for embellishment or for committing to memory the saying of Swamiji. She desired the students to know Swamiji, to understand him, and to follow him in their words and deeds. But the books of Vivekananda must not become a new kind of bondage to them, for Vivekananda was against all sorts of bondages and was in favour of freedom of the mind. She wanted them to go through the biographies of great men, books of history and sociology; to read the history of Italy and Japan, of the French Revolution. Vivekananda would come within the compass of their understanding if they prepare themselves in this way. History is the witness how in every movement and revolution the younger generation played a very important part. The creation of a resurgent India needed energetic, sacrificing, and scientifically oriented bands of young people. Nivedita, like Swami Vivekananda, was well aware of this fact of history, and, so, she wanted the young blood bubbling with energy and faith to come forward to build up the modern India of her conception; of the manner of the Swamiji’s teaching to which her own being influenced could be no exception. Here is Sister Nivedita’s testimony in her own words: “One of the most impressive forms of teaching practised by our Master was a certain silent change wrought in the disciple unawares, by his presence. One’s whole attitude to things was reserved; one took fire, as it were, with a given idea; or one suddenly found that a whole habit of thought had left one, and a new option grew in its place, without the interchange of a single word on the subject. It seemed as if a thing had passed beyond the realm of discussion, and knowledge had grown by the mere fact of nearness to him.” ¹ Again, “For this was characteristic of our Master where others would talk of ways and means, he knew how to light a fire. Where others gave directions, he would show the thing itself.” ²

What are the ideas and the traits of character of Swami Vivekananda which impressed Nivedita so powerfully and made her accept him as her Master? Here again we must rely on Nivedita’s own testimony. This is how Nivedita records the first impressions which Swami made on her during his first visit to England (where Miss Margaret Noble had the opportunity of
meeting him and listening to his lectures):

"These, then, were the things I remembered and pondered over, concerning the Swami, when he left England that winter for America -- first, the breadth of his religious culture; second, the great intellectual newness and interest of the thought to us; and thirdly, 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 meainer elements in man." ³ The three things, then, about Swami Vivekananda which impressed Nivedita were, the catholicity of his religious outlook, the novelty and vastness of the intellectual horizon which the ideas of Swamiji opened to her view, and the superb nobility of his character.

The character of Vivekananda captivated Nivedita’s imagination and that trait in the character which particularly appealed to her intellectual nature was his breadth of outlook and open mindedness. The result of all this was that Nivedita accepted the Swami as her Master even during the latter’s first visit to England “The time came”, she tells us, “before the Swami left England, when I addressed him as ‘Master’; I had recognised the heroic fibre of the man and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people. But it was his character to which I had thus done obeisance. As a religious teacher I saw that although he had a system of thought to offer, nothing in that system would claim him for a moment, if he found that truth led elsewhere. And to the extent that this recognition implies, I became his disciple.” ⁴

It was, it seems, the characteristic open mindedness of Vivekananda, his refusal to mystify anything in the name of esoteric experience and find a doctrine on some miraculous attestation that had a particular appeal to the intellectuals of the West. Nivedita records how on one occasion the Swami stoutly repudiated the rule of the old teachers that knowledge was to be imparted “only to those of proved and tested fitness” and exclaimed “Don’t you see that the age for esoteric interpretations is over? For good or for ill, that day is vanished, never to return. Truth, in the future, is to be opened to the world!” ⁵

The one great cause, among others, of Vivekananda’s phenomenal
success in the West, was this that in all that he taught there, his approach was invariably rational, philosophical and scientific. He was the first, as Romain Rolland has aptly remarked, to sign the truce between Science and Religion. He never attempted to set up the claims of Religion by hoodwinking Science.

Nivedita and Vivekananda, the disciple and the Master, were both worthy of each other. The former saw in the latter no ordinary religious teacher but one whose message was the hope for future humanity, one who was "the heir to the spiritual discoveries and religious struggles of innumerable teachers and saints in the past of India and the world, and at the same time the pioneer and the prophet of a new and future order of development." 6 With this understanding and appreciation of the Master, she threw herself, heart and soul, to the task assigned to her by the Master -- the elevation of Indian women through educational work. The task was fulfilled marvellously well and Nivedita has become for us a name to be gratefully remembered for ages to come.

Swami Vivekananda insisted that she would identify herself completely with India, make herself more Indian than Indians themselves, if she were to serve Indian women. And the disciple proved herself more than worthy. Hers was not the role of a mere social worker, serving Indian women as objects of pity. She tried to understand India’s deeper values and urges by becoming a unit of the Indian milieu. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore: “She had a comprehensive mind and extra ordinary insight of love, she could see the creative ideals at work behind our social forms and discover our soul that has living connection with its past and is marching towards its fulfilment.” Tagore further draws attention to the fact that Nivedita, being an idealist, ‘saw a great deal more than is usually seen by those foreigners who can only see things, but not truths.’ 7

But just as Vivekananda fulfilled Shri Ramakrishna’s behest in a special way, Sister Nivedita fulfilled Vivekananda’s behest in a special capacity. The soul of India consisted in her spirituality and her ancient spiritual message. But ironically enough, that message was -- in the twentieth century at least -- meant mainly for foreign consumption. For home consumption, it was not
spirituality but the self-confidence flowing from it that was of significance. Even a casual student of Swamiji’s message will find it divided sharply into two torrential currents: one being the message of spirituality meant for the mundane West; and the other the message of confidence and strength meant for India that was being corroded by difference and self-contempt. Though not without the tacit sanction of his Master, the Swami appended his message of militant national confidence to the spiritual and international message of his Master. And it was this national vision of Ramakrishna’s message that the great Sister from the West -- from the very home of India’s erstwhile foreign land rulers -- elaborated and evangelised.

Nivedita understood that the spirit of Indian culture is the ideal of synthetic unity. As she explains, "Indian thought stands revealed in its entirety -- no sect, but a synthesis, no church, but a universe of spiritual culture." Hence every Indian must try to understand others, must incorporate in his philosophy of life whatever truth there is in the viewpoints of others. He must aim at a synthesis of the diverse ideals, standpoints, and ideologies. Thereby he would minimise conflict. Toleration and understanding, rather than opposition and clash, should be the guiding principle of life. Every man should perform the duties of life with all his energy and in a spirit of renunciation. But mere outwards show of renunciation is not adequate. It is not enough to be 'sannyasin-clad', but it is necessary to be 'sannyasin-hearted'. Reform must come from within. The reform that comes from within also reveals the true self and gives true self-knowledge. The world is a vale of 'soul-making'. It gives each man an opportunity to build himself up and to discover and know his true self. The future cannot be an exact replica of the past. New ideas and ideals will be evolved and they will have to be, as far as practicable, synthesised with the old. Let us quote Nivedita’s words, "Accept the exigencies of thy time, the needs of thy place, as the material out of which the soul is to build its own boat for the great journey. Think not that it can copy exactly any that has gone before. To them look only for the promise that where they have succeeded thou shalt not utterly fail. Then build and launch. Set out to find -- Thyself."
By abandoning the safe path of accepted ideals, Swami Vivekananda tried to work out new gospel of synthesis, which can be said to be his great contribution to the thought and practice of religion. The two philosophical problems about the concept of the Ultimate and the right mode of approach to it are still responsible for the creation of innumerable religions and religious sects in the world. For, these two problems are universal and all other problems can be grouped within their range. Swamiji’s efforts to resolve the conflict by an appeal to reason, broad-mindedness and toleration may help the world to-day to work out some new realisation.

Synthesis or harmony is the key-note of Vivekananda’s teachings. In Swamiji’s words, “We see various forms of religion in the world. It is a bewildering study, but it is not, as many of us think, a vain speculation. Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout this discordant sounds there is a note of concord, and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone.”

II

The close intimacy that has sprung up between Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita, and the considerable reliance that the former placed on the latter for the pursuit and continuance of the great work that he has begun, are indicated by many things that the Swami communicated to her through letters and personal messages. In a letter dated 5th May, 1897, Vivekananda wrote to Nivedita (Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble) as follows:

“Your very very kind, loving and encouraging letter gave me more strength than you think of. There are moments when one thinks entirely despondent no doubt -- especially when one has worked towards an ideal during a whole life’s time and just when there is a bit of hope of seeing it partially accomplished, there comes a tremendous thwarting blow .......... What depresses me is that my ideals have not had yet the least opportunity of being worked out. And you know the difficulty is money.
The Hindus are making processions and all that, but they cannot give money. ............

The work has been started any how ..........

So far about work. Now about you personally such love and faith and devotion and appreciation like yours, dear Miss Noble, repays a hundred times, over any amount of labour one undergoes in this life. May all blessings be yours. My whole life is at your service, as we may say in our mother tongue.” 11

Vivekananda wrote to Nivedita in another letter dated 4th July, 1897 as follows:

“My dear Miss Noble,

I am being played upon curiously by both good and evil influence from London these times here ............... On the other hand, your letters are full of life and sunshine, and bring strength and hope to my spirits, and they sadly want these now. God knows.” 12

It becomes clear from these letters how Swamiji hold Miss Margaret Elizabeth Noble in warm affection and high esteem before she came to India. In January 1898, she came to India and was soon initiated as brahmacharini (a nun) by Swamiji. There was an initial period of conflict and misunderstanding between them but this was soon brought to an end as we have already noticed.

Swami Vivekananda made it clear to Sister Nivedita later that he depended much upon her to help him in the task of constructing and rejuvenating India. In the poem entitled ‘A Benediction’ Vivekananda had expressed himself about Nivedita in a tone of prophecy. Swamiji had no soft message for Nivedita. The call he gave to her was a call for self-sacrifice and self-immolation for a noble cause. In course of a personal and intimate communication to Nivedita, Swamiji spoke as follows:

“There is a peculiar sect of Mohammedans,....... who are reported to be so fanatical that they take each new-born babe, and expose it, saying, ‘if God made thee, perish! If Ali made thee, live!’ Now this which they say to the child, I say, but in the opposite sense, to you, to-night -- Go forth into the world, and there, if I made you be destroyed! If Mother made you, live!” 13
For the noble cause of rejuvenating India, this was a clarion call to Nivedita from Vivekananda.

It is an accepted notion that Vivekananda wanted Nivedita to devote herself to the cause of education of Indian women. No doubt this matter weighed with Vivekananda and Nivedita followed his instruction in this regard in significant measure; but this was not all.

At any rate Nivedita took a much broader view of her task in India. Shortly after Vivekananda’s death, Nivedita wrote in a letter to Miss Macleod (on July 24, 1902) as follows:

"We talk of 'woman-making'. But the great stream of the Oriental woman’s life flows on -- who am I that I should seek in any way to change it? Suppose even that I could impress to 10 or 12 girls -- would it be so much gain? Is that not rather by taking the national consciousness of the women like that of the men, and getting it towards greater problems and responsibilities, that one can help? Then, when they surveyed the great scheme, have they not already become open to new views of life and necessity? Will they not achieve these for themselves? Oh Yum, I don’t know! This may all be my own sophistry. I can not tell. Only I think my task is to awake a nation, not to influence a few women." 14

That Sister Nivedita actually did awaken the nation was acknowledged by moderate and sober men like Dr. Rashbehary Ghose and Rabindranath Tagore. Dr Ghose said, “Oh one thing, however, I can speak with confidence. If we are conscious of a budding national life at the present day, it is a great extent due to the teachings of Sister Nivedita.” 15

Rabindranath Tagore spoke to Nivedita as the ‘Mother of the People’ (Lokamata). It is significant to quote from Tagore:

"She was in fact Mother of the people. We had not seen before an embodiment of the spirit of motherhood which, passing beyond the limits of the family, can spread itself over the whole country ..................... When she uttered the words ‘Our People’ the tone of absolute kinship which struck the ear was not heard from any other among us. Whoever has seen what reality there was in her love of the people, has surely understood that we -- while giving perhaps our time, our money, even our life -- have not been
able to give them our heart, ............... I have seen that Sister Nivedita saw the common people, touched them, did not simply think of them mentally ............... 16

Sister Nivedita gave concrete shape and form to the concept of Indian nationality; but she imbibed her inspiration from Vivekananda. We quote a few lines from Nivedita:

“There was one thing however, deep in the Master’s (i.e. Vivekananda’s) nature, that he himself never knew how to adjust. This was his love of his country and his resentment of her suffering. Throughout those years in which I saw him almost daily, the thought of India was to him like the air he breathed. True, he was a worker at foundations. He neither used the word ‘nationality’, nor proclaimed an era of ‘nation making’. ‘Man-making’, he said, was his own task. But he was born a lover, and queen of his adoration was his Motherland.” 17

Yet on other occasions Nivedita referred to Vivekananda’s vision of an Indian nationality growing in strength and vitality, claiming equality with other nationalities of the world. She elaborated her idea in this regard, as follows:

“What was the idea that caught Vivekananda? Is it not plain enough for him that runs to read? He saw before him a great Indian nationality, young, vigorous, fully equal of any nationality on the face of the earth. To him, this common nationality -- conscious of his own powers, and forcing their own recognition on others, moving freely forward to its own goal in all worlds, intellectual, material, social, occupational—was that ‘firm establishment of the national righteousness (dharma)’ ...............” 18

In another context Nivedita wrote:

“It never occurred to him (i.e. Vivekananda) that his own people were in any respect less than the equals of any other nation whatsoever. Being well aware that religion was their national expression, he was also aware that the strength which they might display in that sphere, would be followed before long, by every other conceivable form of strength.

............... he held in his hands the thread of all that was fundamental, organic, vital; he knew the secret springs of life, he understood with what
word to touch the heart of millions. And he had gathered from all this knowledge a clear and certain hope.

............... To him, the country was young, the Indian vernaculars still unformed, flexible, the national energy unexploited. The India of his dreams was in the future. The new phase of consciousness initiated to-day through pain and suffering was to be but first step in a long evolution. To him his country’s hope was in herself. Never in the alien. ...............”  

From all this it becomes clear that Vivekananda had a strong sense of Indian nationality and Nivedita was well aware of this.

In another article entitled ‘Swami Vivekananda as a Patriot’, Nivedita wrote:

“Perhaps the distinguishing feature of the Swami’s patriotism was the fact that it was centred in the country itself. Like all religious teachers in India he had a more complex and comprehensive view of what constituted the nation than could be open to any lay mind. And he hoped for nothing from the personality or the methods of the foreigners ............... 

............... he may be said to have imbibed completely all that the Europeanising movement among his own people had to give. His whole life from this point becomes a progressive ‘recapture of national ideals ............... He was no politician : he was the greatest nationalist.’

To him the very land was beautiful, - ‘The green earth, mother!’............ He was perpetual witness, he was as the flood-gate of the mighty torrent, of the national genius itself ............... 

............... His great cry ‘We are under a Hypnotism! We think we are weak and this makes us weak! Let us think ourselves strong and we are invincible’ had a national as well as spiritual meaning. He never dreamt of failure for his people, any more than he tolerated the superficial criticisms of exuberant fools. To him India was young in all her parts. To him the ancient civilisation meant the inbreeding of energy through many a millennium. To him the density of the people was in their own soil, and the density of the soil was no less in its own people.”  

Such was the core of nation-making that Vivekananda aimed at, and on this foundation Nivedita worked out her full-fledged programme of

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national reconstruction in India. And her robust and fiery personality, keen intellect, indefatigable energy and amazing power and capacity to work untiringly and relentlessly for the good of the Indian people helped her to a large extent for the regeneration of Indian society.

Nineteenth century in India was an age of impact, of curious amalgamation when new wine was being poured into old bottles and the stirring within was transmitted and transmuted mainly through a progressive outlook towards a comprehensive and creative idealism not essentially divorced from the basic trends of old achievements, old ideas and ideals. This acceptance of the new with the old or what the West had to give with the best of the East was one great contribution which Bengal made to India and India to the world under the inspiring guidance of her stalwarts from Rammohan Roy onwards. This galaxy of gallants included Rabindranath Tagore and Swami Vivekananda. Both of them acknowledged their debt to Western thought and science, both were India-minded in their own way. Both were strong nationalist with international outlook, both had a historical sense, a broad vision of human values and faith in the religion of man, in the divinity of humanity and humanity of divinity. Both loved music and art, and talked of Buddha and Siva, of the untouchables and proletariat classes. But their mental attitude and treatment of the subject were different. Tagore, the aristocratic artist, turned democrat with proletarian sympathies, represented essentially the rich cultural tradition of India, and the tradition of accepting life in fullness. Swami Vivekananda, though coming from the upper middle-class, was more a man of the people, represented another ancient tradition of renunciation and asceticism. Yet Tagore was primarily the weaver of imageries, Vivekananda of concentrated and ceaseless activity. Both had a world outlook and both were at the same time Indian. They seemed to represent different but harmonious aspects, and complemented one another. We know that Vivekananda was enamoured of Rabindranath’s songs and the one he used to sing to Paramhamsadeva was “I have made you my life’s Polestar.” It is also a fact that Rabindranath was leading the choir in the marriage ceremony of Krishna Kumar Mitra where one of the leading participants in vocal music was Narendranath. Kshiti Mohan Sen also
says that his first acquaintance with Rabindra Sangit was through songs sung by Swamiji. We know also from Dr. Bhupendra Nath Dutta that in their family there used to be sung a rhymed couplet concerning the Tagore family.

To Nivedita, Vivekananda was the modern mind in its completeness — she found in him the hope for humanity — “I see in him the heir to the spiritual discourses and religious struggles of innumerable teachers and saints in the past of India and the world and at the same time the pioneer and prophet of a new and future order of development. When others would talk of ways and means he knew how to light a fire. Where others gave directions, he would show the thing itself.” So, when Nivedita came into contact with master mind like Rabindranath Tagore, it was but natural that she would impress him and imprint on him unconsciously some of the ideas and ideals of her Master. Long after her death Rabindranath wrote, “women possess one thing -- that is their internal strength which is emotion. When it mingles with character, it becomes superb. That is what happened in the case of Nivedita. She almost came to worship Vivekananda. That is why she could adopt his faith and way of life. She forsook everything -- her country, her people, her family. I was really staggered by her courage and amazed by her sacrifice. I used to go to Nivedita’s place very often.”

Ratcliffe of the Statesman another trusted friend of Nivedita, stated that she had no doubt as to the capacity of the Indian mind and character to emerge. Lezel Reme or Girija Sankar Roy Chaudhuri have painted Nivedita more as an “underground worker, a friend of the revolutionaries, but she was true disciple of the Master, more than one-sided in her activities, and who would forget her splendid work in the Plague epidemics, and who would not remember her soul-stirring books?” Nivedita’s own dictum was : “Religion is not confined to Sadhana, Tapasya is not a matter of Thakurghar. Humanity is one. Each part of it is necessary to all.”

In Rolland’s interpretation of India, he refers not merely to Ramakrishna and Vivekananda but also three other leaders of Indian thought, the King of Thinkers, the King of Masses, and the King of Poets, Aurobinda, Gandhi, and Rabindranath. He showed how the first two had publicly acknowledged their debt to Vivekananda. As per Tagore, Rolland’s
explanation was that his Goethe-like genius stood at the junction of all the rivers of India, and it was permissible to presume that in him Indian reunited and harmonised two currents of the Brahma Samaj transmitted to him by his father the Maharshi and of the new Vedantism of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Spirituality of life culminating later in his religion of Man and the divinity of humanity and humanity of divinity which he had evolved in his Hibbert Lectures. It was understood that Tagore had by this time developed a healthy respect for certain aspects of Vivekananda’s line of action and social synthesis, particularly those which had their origin in the Upanishadic texts though his ideal was more on the Upanishadic Rishikula and not the monastic yellow ochre, against which he was sometimes lashing in fury.

In the 'Master as I saw Him' (p. 110), Nivedita vividly realises like flashes from the beacon fire, that in India our teachers “destroy in us personal relation in order to bestow the Impersonal Vision in its place.” The thoughts of Master become seeds and germinate in the minds of the people. It reminds us of Sankaracharyya’s famous lines in Dakshinamurti stotra.

Literary critics have tried to trace a connection between Gora and Vivekananda-Nivedita. They have referred not only to the atmosphere of Gora, its subtle surcharged scenes of a society electric with thought and loaded to the brim with passion. Actually Gora began its first appearance in the Prabasi in 1907 and it continued about two years and a half.

It has been stated that Gora is more than a novel -- it is the epic of India in transition at the most critically intellectual period of its history. It has also been stated that it portrays the picture of an aggressive Hinduism or resurgent nationalism and reminds one of the Nivedita-Vivekananda. An illusion is also sought to be established that as Gora was the scion of an Irishman, there must have been in the poet an allergic subconscious element to remind him of Nivedita’s lineage. Some go so far as to say that Gora portrays how a de-Hinduised Narendranath became a re-Hinduised Vivekananda and was turned into a cyclonic Hindu and became the loved of not only the ladies of salons of Chicago, London and Paris but of masses as well. But they forget that the only God in whom Vivekananda believed was the sum total of all souls and above all he believed in his God the wicked, his
God the Miserable, his God of all races. That was the Siva concept of Nivedita also. It is interesting to take note of Siva and Buddha concepts as it had developed in Nivedita’s consciousness and how the same two great and lofty symbols took shape in Rabindranath’s writings more in an impersonal way.

The only direct evident of Nivedita’s influence on Rabindranath’s concept of Gora is contained in his letters to Willie Pearson (quoted at p. 206 of his letters Vol. VI):

“...............You asked me what connection had the writing of Gora with Sister Nivedita. She was our guest at Silaidaha and in trying to improvise a story according to her request I gave her something which came very near to the plot of Gora ........................ She was quite angry at the idea of Gora being rejected even by his disciple Sucharita owing to his foreign origin. You won’t find it in Gora as it stands now but I introduced it in my story which I told her in order to drive the point deep into her mind."

It is as if we are reading Vivekananda when Sucharita told Benoy that he was talking just like Gour Mohan, Benoy had said --

“We want man-Gods. Other countries may be satisfied with a Wellington, Newton or Rothschild but we want a Brahmin -- who is a Brahmin -- it is he who can spurn temptation, who can triumph over sufferings, who notices not any want, whose heart is in communion with He who is straight, who is calm, who is free. India wants that Brahmin. That Brahmin can make us free.”

In the sub-conscious mind of Rabindranath, there was no doubt an image of not only the hoary age, but also of immediate past and its sponsors and the memory of Vivekananda might have unconsciously come into the poet’s picture, and to this Nivedita must have contributed. Of course to an artist of Rabindranath’s calibre and literary fineness, mere copying of a living person as the character of a book is anathema. Gora is a syncretic creation. In Rabindranath we find a synoptic appreciation of many influences, many currents, many trends. Moreover, however much Vivekananda and Rabindranath came nearer to each other through Nivedita, both were giants in their own ways. Rabindranath’s best tribute to Vivekananda came later.
In 1315 Bhadra in ‘East and West’ he wrote that the “creation of Mahabharat was our sacred task and India’s greatest men like Rammohan, Vivekananda and Ranade had began it and we had to complete it.” He referred to Swamiji as “the Mahatma who recently had died.”

True Rabindranath comes out at the end. Gora also was seeking for that ‘Bharat-Barsha’ which was to be full in riches, in learning, in religion. He envisaged an integral and universal symbol and image of India. Vivekananda’s concept of India was no doubt of the same strain generally but the difference was merely in dimension and not quantitatively or qualitatively -- “I am an Indian every Indian is my brother -- He is my life. India’s Gods and Goddesses are my Gods and Goddesses. India’s society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven and Varanasi of my old age.”

Swami Vivekananda clothed it in a definitely religious tinge: “We believe in one God, the father of us all who is omnipresent and omniscient and who ............ preserves his children with infinite love.” Rabindranath gave this cosmic sense an aesthetic and literary flavour. And Nivedita was an unconscious link between the two. She was the embodiment of the spirit of resurgent motherhood, passing beyond the limits of the family. That so many giants of faith and reason, prominent in every walk of life could be simultaneously enthused by her dynamic personality is proof positive that the name which her Master had given her was more than appropriate. She was really the dedicated, dedicated to the higher values of life.

In proclaiming the virtues of Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda did not mean to covert other to his own beliefs. That was contrary to the whole message of Vivekananda, contrary to the catholicity of spirit which he exhibited to the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.”

‘Assimilate, but grow according to your own law of growth’, represents one aspect of Vivekananda’s doctrine of freedom. How is one to assimilate, yet retain his own individuality? Well, this is to be done the way a seed does
The seed, put into the ground, assimilates nourishment from air, the earth, and water, but does not become either or all of them. It converts what it assimilates into plant substance and grows into a plant.

The other aspect of Swami Vivekananda's doctrine of freedom holds that the soul is divine, but it is held in the bondage of matter. The bondage of matter represents Maya, the enchantment of the world. So long as the soul is enveloped by Maya it is not true. The attainment of freedom consists in bursting such bondage. Freedom, so to say, means freedom from doubt, "freedom from death and misery," and release from the bonds of imperfection. 22 In a word, according to Vivekananda, to realise freedom means to develop according to the laws of one's own individual spiritual nature and innate capacity. These two complementary aspects of Vivekananda's doctrine of freedom are essential for an understanding of Margaret Noble's transformation into Sister Nivedita.

Since religion, to Vivekananda, was a matter of realisation and not mere belief in any 'faith' or sect in the conventional sense of the term, he upheld "the perfect freedom of every soul to be itself" 23 to realise for itself the truth of the "Immanent God." 24 And where is the God? Is He in the Heaven? No, He is in the temple of the human body itself, in the soul of man himself. "He is in our own hearts. Thou art He. O Man! Thou art He!" 25

How was the freedom of the realised soul to be attained? Often Vivekananda's one-word answer to this question was that freedom is to be attained through renunciation. All the three great paths of Jnana, Bhakti, and Karma (Knowledge, love, and disinterested work) required renunciation on the part of the questing soul. Man must grow continually into Pure Consciousness. Transcending the body and lower order of consciousness, he can attain spiritual consciousness only by refusing to be ruled by desires, by the ego, by the body, by the emotions. Why is the body to be transcended? Because the body represents the Maya, the seat of man's attachment to the sensory existence. He is in Maya, in bondage, he is in slavery so long as he inordinately craves for the satisfaction of the senses. In order to attain the freedom of the realised soul he must grow by consciousness given by renunciation out of Maya into the Self. To be into the Self is to know the
immanence of God — So'ham, So'ham. I am He, I am He. From Maya into the Self through renunciation — these three concepts represent the whole of Vivekananda’s philosophy of life as well as of religion.

Giving her own understanding of Swamiji’s philosophy of life and religion in the perspectives of Maya, Self, and Renunciation, Nivedita wrote:

“By Maya thus meant that shimmering, elusive, half-real, half-unreal complexity, in which there is no rest, no satisfaction, no ultimate certainty, of which we become aware through the senses, and through the mind as dependent on the senses. At the same -- ‘And That which all this is pervaded, know That to be the Lord Himself!’ In these two conceptions, placed side by side, we have the whole theology of Hinduism as presented by Swami Vivekananda in the West.”

Giving her own slightly extended interpretation of Vivekananda’s philosophy of renunciation, Nivedita observes that by renunciation, Vivekananda actually meant ‘conquest’ of ease sustained and determined effort, absorption in hard problems through lonely hours, and the achievement of mastery not just in the field of religion but in any field of life. It means taking life as a battle field rather than a ballroom. “To him”, as Nivedita writes of Swami Vivekananda, “the workshop, the study, the farm yard and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of monk or the door of the temple.”

It is a further measure of the breadth of Vivekananda’s world view that he sounded his call in the name of all that was strongest, finest, and noblest in man, and never in the name of sectarianism, bigotry or fanaticism or, so to say, the meaner elements in man. He taught both tolerance and universal acceptance as well as the validity of religious paths. He taught that “each soul is potentially divine and that human beings should be viewed, not as sinners, but as divinities on earth.” Yes, divinities! Because man has the god-like power within himself to raise himself above the world to a pure life. According to Vivekananda, human beings are children of God, of course, and not sinners, are capable of supreme sacrifices, and being motivated by love entailing total selflessness. That kind of conscious elevation of human soul to the noblest and best that is already in man, was, to Vivekananda, religion.

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in the highest sense of the term -- *realisation*, or so to say, *the freedom of the realised soul*.

The one thing that man is struggling for is the freedom of his soul. He is always seeking to burst the bondage of his imperfections, his Maya, so to say, without perhaps even being aware of it. But the struggle he must carry on, till by the continuous conquest of meaner element of him, he realises the noblest and best in himself. As Vivekananda proclaimed, “*All our struggle is for Freedom, we seek neither misery nor happiness but Freedom, Freedom alone.*”

Swami Vivekananda appeared in the world scenario with the gospel of Vedanta that “God is one, without a second.” Apparently many, He is really one. The whole world is the manifestation of God and all apparent struggles and conflicts arising out of ignorance find resolution in the realisation of oneness of God and of man’s inner being identified with Him. The bold and fearless teaching of this great truth by Vivekananda brought hope and peace to many souls in England groping in darkness.

To quote Sister Nivedita:

“I cannot tell you in detail of the personal energy that has been shown by people, whom I could name, in consequence of their intense realisation of the world as the manifestation of God, and of themselves as identical with God, and for whom therefore, errors, sins, and impossibilities cannot exist.

It is indeed a new light. It is a new light to the mother dealing with her children. Because, if sin does not exist, if sin is only ignorance, how changed, how different is our position towards wrong and towards weakness and towards fear, instead of the old position of condemnation! The old notion, the old conception of any sort, which has at the bottom hatred, goes away, and instead there is love -- all love.”

Continuing her exposition on the contribution of Vivekananda’s world thought to the West, Margaret Noble said that in Europe people entertain a passion for service --

“.............. Even here your Eastern wisdom brought the light of nonattachment .............. that if it is a matter of the least consequence to us, whom we serve, then, our service is as nothing.”
Quite in keeping with the process of Indianisation that Margaret Noble had to undergo, Swamiji’s talks with her always centred on India and the things that were Indian. That was always his central theme. “He spoke of the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon; of the great religious teachers, of saints and patriots, of Rajputs, Sikhs and Marathas; of the history of the people; of the geography of the land, of ethnology, sociology, science, and metaphysics.”

He would speak of the glorious past of India to drive home the message that India, seemingly old and effete, was really “young, ripe with potentiality, and standing at the beginning of the twentieth century on the threshold of even greater developments than she had known in the past.” The best way to describe how ‘India’ was heard by these ‘early learners’ through the lips of Swami Vivekananda is to quote the language of Sister Nivedita herself:

“............... listening to that inexhaustible flow of interpretation, broken out rarely by question and answer, in which he would reveal to us some of the deepest secrets of the Indian world.

............... It was here that we learnt the great outstanding watchwords and ideals of the Indian striving. For the talks were, above all an exposition of ideals. Facts and illustrations were gathered, it is true from history, from literature and from a thousand other sources. But the purpose was always the same, to render some Indian ideals of perfection clearer.”

Having outlined his goal of universal religion, Vivekananda emphasised that the time had come for the realisation of the goal of divinity and oneness through renunciation, through our giving up our narrow, egoistic self which is eclipsing our real self. Man must know through renunciation that he is the Divine, Brahman, Om Tat Sat, Om! The knowledge of oneness and renunciation as a means of attaining oneness must issue concretely in selfless service to humanity. One can serve humanity only when one has been able to achieve renunciation. Renunciation, in the ultimate analysis, involves the negation of self which, in turn, enables to achieve oneness with humanity.

In the opinion of Nivedita, religion meant to Swamiji essentially a man-making, character-making endeavour ensuring the progress of the
individual and the nation towards the greater consciousness of their true nature. Likewise, Nivedita hold that renunciation -- the other religious principle of Swamiji -- meant to Swami Vivekananda not merely the 'vairagyam' (the forsaking of the world of senses) of a monk but also the acquisition of strength and fearlessness, indeed the acquisition of mastery over any field of life through sustained and determined effort. To quote Nivedtia:

"......... He made us feel that all study was an austerity directed to a given end of knowledge. And above all, he preached that character, and character alone, was the power that determined the permanence of a religious wave. Resistance was to his mind the duty of the citizen, non-resistance of the monk. And this, because, for all, the supreme achievement was strength."

In taking man-making to be essence of religion and in brushing aside the distinction between the sacred and the secular, Vivekananda, Nivedita points out, had a national objective as well as to pursue in religion. The new phase of religious consciousness that he initiated, he hoped, would put in motion the process of ensuing India's rise to greatness as a nation.

Swami Vivekananda's assertion that life itself was religion, his constantly reiterated exhortation to awake, arise, and struggle, and his great cry -- "We are under a Hypnotism! We think we are weak! Let us think ourselves strong and we are invincible," had a national as well as spiritual meaning. Such 'assertion', 'exhortation', and 'cry' expressing an important aspect of the religious ideas of Swami Vivekananda had all the ingredients of turning India into a great nation. His strength lay in giving the world the concept of the divinity of man and in teaching humanity what was true in religion -- true for the East as well as the West.

Swami Vivekananda was to bring manliness for all. He never wanted money or power or anything but persons. "Give me men! Give me men!", he said over and over again. He believed that with just half a dozen disciples endowed with spiritual power for humanity he could conquer the whole world. Such assertion of Vivekananda was consistent with his conception of world history : "The history of the world is the history of a few earnest men,
and when one man is in earnest the world must just come to his feet,” he said.

As a cultural revolutionary, Swami Vivekananda’s ultimate aim was to kindle in every man that sense of freedom in a new era of humanity when every man will be free to do good. As Swamiji himself said to Nivedita: “We have not seen humanity yet and when that era dawns there will be no line of least resistance -- for everyone will be free to do good.”

While such was his ultimate aim, he was not oblivious of the immediate practical problems facing individual men or nations. Man-making was his work, but he thought that he could do that work better by “giving them bread to eat and with necessities available than without.” He foresaw the possibility of a Sudra (Proletarian) revolution and warned that the world had to pass through ‘the great tumults, the terrible tumults’ of the Sudra revolution if the world did not pay greater attention to solving the problems of the Sudra. Vivekananda asked people not to forget one basic truth: “All accumulations are for subsequent distribution.”

In the words of Vivekananda (as recorded by Nivedita), Advaitism teaches us that “the final essence of things is Unity. We see many, yet there is but one Existence ............ These distinctions which we so love are all parts of one Infinite fact and that one infinite fact is the attainment of Freedom.” Basically it is this knowledge based on the Vedanta philosophy that Swamiji preached to the people in the East and the West. In that sense, as Nivedita rightly opines, Swamiji “was not only one of the great historic teachers of the East, but in my view also of the West.” True to his teaching, he established the Order of Ramakrishna with the avowed aim of realising the highest ideals of the East and the West.
The ideological changes that had taken place in India about the end of the last century must be taken into consideration when we come to discuss the views and activity of Swami Vivekananda as his ethical teaching was indissolubly interwoven with social and political problems. His world outlook had ingested new elements of moral consciousness generated in the process of the general transformation of moral norms of the feudal society. He made use of the traditional notions and images but concentrated on moral aspects of Hinduism for then only as he thought might form the foundation of socially oriented moral consciousness. Vivekananda criticized orthodox beliefs but he never meant disconcerting and abrogating them, he appealed principally not to the “outer”, ritualistic credences but to “inner” religious convictions that made, to his mind, the foundation of Indians’ life and were to develop after all into a stimulus of social and national liberation. He wrote: “My idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception.”

According to Vivekananda, the very notion of morality should include the realisation of the one universal spiritual substance. “The Vedanta claims that there has not been one religious inspiration, one manifestation of the divine man, however great, but it has been the expression of that infinite oneness in human nature, and all that we call ethics and morality and doing good to others, is also but the manifestation of this oneness.”

Practically selflessness and egoism appear as universal ethical categories and are qualified in this connection as corresponding to the general dichotomy of good and evil. The origin of this interpretation is to be sought for in the religious idealistic doctrine of Vedanta in which selflessness is associated with striving to realise one’s divine nature immanently inherent in every individual and with apprehending the oneness of spiritual substance, while egoism is represented as loss of unity caused by reducing the inner divine self to man’s mental, emotional and physical life. Vivekananda followed this course upon the whole. He stated, “There is to be found in every religion the manifestation of this struggle towards freedom. It is the ground-work of all morality, of unselfishness, which means getting rid of the
idea that men are the same as their little body." 38

Vivekananda did not descent upon perfection of morality but to elucidate the concrete stages on the way to attaining it. Perfection is achieved by gradual abnegation first of egoistic cares and desires for the sake of one’s family, then of the narrow interests of the family for the sake one’s friends, and by self-abnegation for the sake of the people, of the mother-land, by renouncing every thing and being ready to sacrifice his very life for the good of the country. Not a single of these stages which bring men to the realisation of universal unity should be ignored. An individual who is unable to sacrifice himself for the sake of his motherland won’t be able to achieve self-abnegation for the sake of all humanity. That is how Vivekananda argued it, “Every action of our lives, the most material, the grossest as well as the finest, the highest, the most spiritual, is alike tending towards this one ideal, the finding of Unity. A man is single. He marries. Apparently it may be a selfish act, but at the same time the impulsion, the motive power is to find that unity. He has children, he has friends, he loves his country, he loves the world and ends by loving the whole universe.” 39

It was not the theses cited above that determined the moral and religious teaching of Vivekananda but his authorising of a new role of the sannyasin living in the world and for the world, investing themselves with the mission of bringing enlightenment and liberating people’s masses from ignorance. These were to be young men, heralds of a better future who should wake masses to activity and put them up to struggling for the material and spiritual renascence of India. Vivekananda disclosed his plans thus, “with this object in view I shall establish a Math to train sannyasins, who will go from door to door and make the people realise their pitiable condition by means of facts and reasoning, and instruct them in the ways and means for their welfare, and at the same time will explain to them as clearly as possible, in very simple and easy language, the higher truths of religion. The mass people in our country is like the sleeping Leviathan.” 40

Otherwise, while accepting the traditional sannyasa, “the sacred sacrifice,” the philosopher assisted eliminating the border line between the lay and the religious activity by his new interpretation of sannyasins’ duties
and part in life; in fact he constructed a novel hierarchy of activities, putting forward the social, humanist activity aimed at awakening the national self-consciousness.

In Vivekananda's world outlook we can observe a peculiar interpretation of the very motives that were extant also in the creative work of other great ideologists of the national liberation movement, B.G. Tilak, and Aurobinda Ghose. Tilak's attention was concentrated on preaching the selfless service of Karmayogins and he did his best to set them into the way of practical activity. Most in point comes here the evidence of V.P. Varma, an Indian scholar. Aurobinda Ghose came in the second part of his life to the conclusion that sannyasins' spiritual authority should prevail due to the impact of their devotion on the historical development of the Indian nation.

Vivekananda saw a cause of India's deplorable state in the wrong comprehension of Jati Dharma by higher castes and in it having been arbitrary interpreted. The arbitrary was to his mind, "a new evil which has to be guarded against." "They (the higher castes) think they know everything of Jati Dharma, but really they know nothing of it. Appropriating to themselves all privileges, they are going to their doom! I am not talking of caste as determined by qualitative distinction, but of the hereditary caste system. I admit that the qualitative caste system is the primary one, but the pity is, qualities yield to birth in two or three generations. Thus the vital point of our national life has been touched, otherwise, why should we sink to this degraded state?" An irreconcilable enemy on the caste system in its contemporary form, stiff and reserved, with the high castes in the privileged position, Vivekananda supposed that if the true Jati Dharma is brought back and rightly and truly preserved, "the nation should be able to develop really."

In an address to his followers, young sannyasins, Vivekananda said, "Your duty at present is to go from one part of the country to another, from village to village, and make the people understand that mere sitting idly won't do any more. Make them understand their real condition and say. 'Oh ye brothers, arise! Awake! How much longer would you remain asleep!'" That was one more proof of the growing tendency to express norms of social morality in a new way and not in the old form of caste.
regulations and severely allocated duty with its formal prescriptions and prohibitions.

In accordance with the spirit of Vedanta Vivekananda considered the good and evil as God’s attributes. In one of his lectures he proclaimed, "We now come to see that we can have the personal God, the creator of this universe, who is merciful and also cruel. ................. He is the good, He is the evil. He smiles and He frowns. And none can go beyond His law." Since God’s attributes belong to man as well, though naturally in a lesser degree, good and evil are both “conditioned manifestations of the soul” of man at the stage when he had not as yet realised his divine self, evil being the external coating and good the nearer coating of the real man, the self. Being a Vedantist, Vivekananda believed that “the good for him who desires Moksha is one, and the good for him who wants Dharma is another.” Vivekananda was true to the tradition and believed the criterium of the good to find expression in man’s unification with the divine self, immanent and transcendental.

Alongside with Vedantist interpretation of these categories we see in Vivekananda a readiness to treat them as a unity of the subjugated and the objective individuals, and these being no values outside them. He wrote, “Life is good or evil according to the state of mind in which we look at it, it is neither by itself. Fire, by itself, is neither good nor evil. When it keeps us warm we say, ‘How beautiful is fire!’ when it burns our fingers we blame it. Still, in itself it is neither good nor bad, so also is this world.”

Good and evil are conditioned not only by the qualities of the object but by the subjects attitude to them, that is they are subjective notions. Here we see Vivekananda’s inclination towards relativism in ethics. Yet he indicates the objectivity of these categories as well. “No permanent or everlasting good can be done to the world; we may satisfy the hunger of a man for five minutes, but he will be hungry again. ................. The sum total of the good things in the world has been the same throughout in its relation to man’s need and greed.” “And further, we cannot add happiness to this world; similarly, we cannot add pain to it either. The sum total of the energies of pleasure and pain displayed here on earth will be the same
Thus, according to Vivekananda, the correlation of good and evil had been fixed once and for all and is static.

Vivekananda points out the inner relationship of good and evil and proceeds on to say that good is consolidated due to its being opposed to evil: man hates evil, overcomes it and thus attains to the perception of good. Difficulties and sufferings he encounters strengthen him. "As pleasure and pain pass before his soul they leave upon it different pictures, and the result of those combined impressions is what is called man's 'character'. If you take the character of any man it really is but the aggregate of tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind, you will find that misery and happiness are equal factors in the formation of that character, and in some instances misery is greater teacher than happiness."

Conforming to the principles of Vedanta, Vivekananda believed that every man should in realising this divine self strive to demolish the contradictions of good and evil. Yet Vivekananda's treatment of these categories is in some way original and non-traditional, in particular as regards his attitude to the problem of overcoming good and evil. The traditional idea of perfection can be achieved and that is the most important part of Vivekananda's teaching -- by an individual who actively breaks into social life and whose moral opinions correspond to the needs and wants of his country at a certain stage of its development.

Categories of strength and weakness are prominent in Vivekananda's ethical conception and they are fast bound with Vedanta's central idea of the divine essence being expressed primarily in man within the empirical world. He wrote paraphrasing a Sanskrit poem: "What makes you weep, my friend? In you is all power. Summon up your all powerful nature ............... and this whole universe will be at your feet. It is the self alone that predominates and not matter. ........... It is those foolish people who identify themselves with their bodies, that piteously cry, 'we are weak, we are low.'"

In another context, Vivekananda wrote: "Weakness is the one cause of suffering. We become miserable because we are weak. We die because we are weak."

Spiritual power and weakness are presented as universal categories through which any problems of man's life can be construed. Vivekananda
claimed that “Strength is the medicine for the world’s disease. Strength is the medicine which the poor must have, when tyrannised over by the rich. Strength is the medicine that the ignorant must have when oppressed by the learned, and it is the medicine that sinners must have, when tyrannised over by other sinners.” And again, “Know that all sins and all evils can be summed up in that one word, weakness. It is weakness that is the motive power of all evil doing, it is weakness that is the source of all selfishness, it is weakness that makes men injure others.” Yet the contents of these notions was not limited by Vivekananda to their spiritual essence only. Physical strength was considered by him a necessary condition of the spiritual strength. Many a time, he reminded his followers that by training and drilling their bodies they would sooner obtain spiritual strength. “First of all our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. You will understand Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger.” It is primarily a condition ensuring the realisation of spiritual potencies. An individual who is in possession of both spiritual and physical strength is characterised as a person of high morality having optimistic faith in competence. “We should cultivate the optimistic temperament and endeavour to see the good that dwells in everything. If we sit down and lament over the imperfections of our bodies and minds, we profit nothing.” In circumstances of colonial dependence these ideas objectively impelled acknowledging the importance of such qualities as self-respect and self-assurance. There is some hint at the enfeebling role of religion in the saying quoted.

To Vivekananda’s mind weakness was the source of all sinful actions, and strength was the mainspring of moral conduct and moral actions, that is doing what was needed for national liberation and regeneration. “What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist.”

The general humanist pathos of Vivekananda’s ethical conception manifested in his asserting the self-sufficiency of man, the human dignity,
the potentialities of every individual as an active member of society, -- was conditioned by specific circumstances of a dependent country which generated strained class contradictions and along side with it promoted the growth of national self-consciousness and the consolidation of different layers of society.

Oliver Lacombe, professor of comparative philosophy in Sorbonne intends to present Vivekananda as Gandhi’s forerunner in point of Ahimsa, non-violence, and to substantiate his opinion quotes a passage from Vivekananda’s lecture delivered in Los Angeles on January 4th, 1900: “One of the greatest lessons I have learned in my life is to pay as much attention to the means of work as to its end. ............... It appears to me that all the secret of success is there ..........., but whenever failure comes, if we analyse it critically, in ninety-nine percent of cases we shall find that it was because we did not pay attention to the means. ............... If we take care of the cause the effect will take care of itself. The realisation of the ideal is the effect. The means are the cause: attention to the means, therefore, is the great secret of life.” 56 Lacombe uses this thesis to support the idea of social peace prominent in Neo-Thomisme of which he is an adherent and asserts that Jaques Maritain, one of modern pillars of that philosophic theory, has been developing the ideals proposed first by Vivekananda and afterwards by Gandhi, and it was Swami Vivekananda whose “lucid genius had foreshadowed several decades ago one of the most serious preoccupations of the conscience of our days.”

Vivekananda believed that what had been a gaol might become means at another time. Thus, exhortations to strive for moral and spiritual perfection did not contravene with the concept that human activity was but a means of attaining a higher purpose, that of “the betterment of the world.” Vivekananda preached, “For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.” 57

With Vivekananda the virtue of non-resistance to evil is a high but incontiguous abstract ideal to be aspired for by all men. Still in practical life one’s duty is to withstand evil. “The Karmayogin is the man who
understands that the highest ideal is non-resistance and who also knows that 
what is called the resisting of evil is but a step on the way towards the 
manifestation of this highest power, namely, non-resistance. Before 
reaching this highest ideal, man’s duty is to resist evil, let him strike straight 
from the shoulder. Then only when he has gained the power to resist, will 
non-resistance be a virtue.”

Vivekananda never considered either violence or non-violence as absolute notions. From his standpoint, inconsiderate following the principle of non-violence might result in moral losses and ravages not only for the individual but also for the whole of the nation. He argued that “the teaching 'Resist not evil' seems to be the highest ideal, yet to teach this doctrine only would be equivalent to condemning a vast portion of mankind. Not only so it would be making men feel that they were always doing wrong, and cause in them scruples of conscience in all their actions? that constant disapproval would breed more vice than any other weakness would. To the man who had begun to hate himself the gate to degeneration had already opened; and the same is true of a nation.”

Vivekananda’s view-point was that people of the West were pragmatical and held enjoyment to be their main aim of life. “In the English character,” Vivekananda wrote, “the business principle of the trader is principally inherent the Englishman humbly submits to the king and to the privileges of the nobility, only if he has to pay a farthing from his pocket, he must demand an account of it. But if the king wants money, the Englishman says, ‘All right, but first let me understand why it is needed. What good it will bring; next I must have my say in the matter of how it is to be spent, and then I shall part with it’.” The main feature of ‘Indian character’ was, he believed, spiritually, “The Hindu says that the political and social independence are well and good, but the real thing is spiritual independence – Mukti. This is our national purpose.”

Stating that each nation has its own character and its own moral purpose and that “the manners and customs of a nation must be judged from the standpoint of that purpose,” Vivekananda made the following conclusion, “The Westerners should be seen through their eyes; to see them through our
eyes, and for them to see us with theirs -- both these are mistakes. The purpose of our life is quite the opposite of theirs. Our goal of life is Moksha. The purpose of the life in the West is Bhoga, enjoyment.” Moral principles of Westerners were found to be the opposite of and incompatible with religio-ethical duties of man in India, these duties and claims being exceptional and peculiar.

For all that Vivekananda emphasised the obligation of making allowance for the nation’s ‘moral character’ and ‘its moral purpose’ when assessing its way of life, he criticised ethical norms of the West from Vedanta and nationalist Indian positions.

Vivekananda criticised utilitarians for ignoring higher, spiritual wants. In his travels abroad he had observed irrepressible chase after gains, unreserved egoism legitimated in the bourgeois society, and remarked the spiritual misery of people who had concentrated on satisfying their material appetites and became slaves of their own desires. These desires never consummated, there was no stopping and no rest for man. Utilitarians say, “Don’t talk of God and hereafter, we don’t know anything of these things : let us live happily in this world.” And Vivekananda retorts, “As long as you are a slave of nature how can you? The more you struggle the more enveloped you become.”

Vivekananda’s views objectively considered contain an admission that humanism, equality and other higher ideas cannot be realised at all in the Western bourgeois society since they need a foundation of higher spirituality -- which he identified with that of India. The category of spirituality was given much place in his nationalist conceptions of a more perfect society to be created, a bourgeois one is kind but devoid of contradictions it possessed in reality.

Vivekananda’s social and moral-religious views had great influence on all the various layers of Indian society. He stimulated a new perception of a number of problems, ethical ones included, and created a complete ethical doctrine, the ethics of Neo-Vedantism. Great political leaders and ideologists of the national liberation movement, M.K. Gandhi, J.L. Nehru, B.G. Tilak, Aurobinda Ghose, had recourse regularly to Vivekananda’s creative heritage,
though each of them conceived it in his own way. The ethical views of B.G. Tilak and Aurobinda Ghose further manifest a correlation of moral problems with the requirements of social and political development of India.

Notes and References

2. Ibid, p. 98.
3. Ibid, p. 15.
4. Ibid, p. 11.
5. Ibid, p. 224.
22. Ibid, p. 23.
27. Ibid, p. 9.


33 Ibid, pp. 50-51.


46 Ibid, p. 111.


48 Ibid, p. 27.


51 Ibid, p. 201.


59 Ibid, pp. 35-36.


