CHAPTER - III

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : BIOGRAPHY AND THE MAIN INFLUENCES ON HIS LIFE
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Need for His Biography

It is essential to study the biography of Swami Vivekananda in order to understand his central ideas as well as the heart of his political philosophy. For history is the record of the biographies of great men that the world has produced. It reveals the clues which point out the significant influences of the family, education, the social movements, the personal contact with the spiritual guide and so on. It is no doubt true that a great man is not merely a creature of circumstances but also a creator of them. This is true of Swami Vivekananda who gave his gospel of man-making to the world. His thoughts on the Vedanta and the rebuilding of the Indian society on a spiritual basis have left an indelible impact on the Indian philosophy and society. His thoughts on the need, the role and the significance of 'New Religion' for humanity, delivered in the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago, in the year 1893, still rang in the ears of the thinkers of the world, meeting again, to discuss the urgency of the man-making religion, after
a century, i.e., in 1993, in Chicago. It is no exaggeration to say that it is India that has the rare privilege of creating such great and unique personalities. Einstein rightly said, that man is great who leaves a permanent imprint on the world and makes it better than what he found when he was born. Swamiji was one among such great men.

Birth and Childhood

It is important to note the time, the events and the circumstances of Narendra's birth. His would-be master, Sri Ramakrishna, was 27 years old. Rabindranath Tagore was just 2 years old. The world was waiting for the great soul, Mahatma Gandhi, just 6 years ahead. The first war of Indian independence had taken place already 6 years earlier. The East India Company had already handed over the Indian administration to the British government 5 years before. The great movements were already working hard to face the forces of Christian missionaries and also to revive the Indian Sanatana Dharma (Hindu religion). People were much confused by the welter of the prevailing views. To end the confusion the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical society were to be born. Amid such confusion and terrible conditions in India's life, Swami Vivekananda was to
be born. He was born at Calcutta, in Bengal, in the morning of Monday the 12th January 1863. It was a day of Makara Sankranti which is always a great and sacred festival for the Hindus. It symbolises a major transformation and the birth of a new era. The special worship was offered to the Ganges by millions of devotees.

Swamiji's original name was Narendranath Datta. Swami Vivekananda was the name by which he was first called by Khetri Maharaj who was one among the disciples of Swamiji. Vivekananda's family was cultured, well educated and moderately wealthy, but a fully free thinking one. His future life was much influenced by his gifted father, Viswanath Datta and saintly mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi both of whom kept a chastening eye upon him. His father was an advocate and a rationalist. He had a lot of sympathy for poor and suffering people. He never had an excessive respect for customs and traditions. Once Narendra asked his father, "What have you done for me?" His father replied, "Go and look at yourself in the mirror and you will know."* Another day Narendra asked his father, "How shall I conduct myself in the world?" His

father replied, "Never show surprise at anything."* Narendra was always encouraged by his father to meet eminent scholars and thinkers to discuss logical and spiritual matters. All these show how Vivekananda was influenced by his father. His mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi was a traditional Hindu woman. She played her part in bringing out Narendra's innate virtues. She used to tell him stories and had got by heart by him some parts of Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavad-Gita and Shiva Parvati stories. She passed on her love for them to Narendra. Through these she built up the character and conduct of Narendra. Once Narendra was punished by his teacher without his fault and he reported this to his mother. His mother said to Narendra, in consolation, "My child what does it matter if you are in the right? Always follow the truth without caring about the result. Very often you may have to suffer injustice or unpleasant consequences, for holding to the truth, but you must not, under any circumstances, abandon it."** Narendra was a witty boy. He used to keep everybody amused. Even the elders often burst into laughter. He was never shy and mixed with everyone freely. He was the beloved of all. "With every


family in the locality, of high or low caste, rich or poor, he established some sort of relationship. If any one of the boys whom he knew suffered any bereavement, he was the first to offer consolation."* Many years later Narendra proudly said to an audience, "I am indebted to my mother for whatever knowledge I have acquired."** His mother was his first teacher. He learnt the Bengali alphabet and first English words at her feet. At the age of six he was sent to school. The school seemed like a prison to him. He was always playful and never used to sit in a place for a long time.

Narendra was the personification of courage. He was expert in boxing, wrestling, swimming and riding. He also possessed a sweet voice. In 1879 he entered the Presidency College of Calcutta for higher studies. He studied philosophy, psychology, literature, logic and history. History was his favourite subject. He had a great memory and he was exceptionally intelligent. Professor Hastie, the Principal and Professor of English literature, remarked, "Narendra is a real genius. I have travelled far and wide, but have not yet come across a lad of

his talents and possibilities even among the philosophical students in the German universities. He is bound to make his mark in life.** Later, unfortunately, his family in the year 1884 had to pass through a bad time. Swamiji moved from place to place in order to get a job to maintain his mother and sisters. He moved about barefoot from office to office, often undergoing starvation, but the result was frustration and disappointment. This direct contact with life made him aware of what suffering was and created in him a deep sympathy for the poor and the rejected in society. It made him feel the wretchedness of the Indian social set-up. He discovered that society has no place for the weak, the poor and the abandoned. Thus after his return from America, he dedicated his life to the service of humanity in India till his life came to an end on 4 July 1902.

** Turning Point **

Narendra's mind was governed and influenced by the two aspects of his parents. The mother was a traditional Hindu woman with her dedication to Viresh-Shiva with whose blessings was Narendra/born. But his father, who was an advocate, was a

rational thinker. We find in Narendra a fusion of emotional faith and sceptical thinking. His urge to see God made him move from place to place to find out a person who would enable him to see the divine light. Many people who claimed to have seen God disappointed him. But his search for God continued. His Principal, while explaining the nature of mysticism of the great poet, Wordsworth, made a reference to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Narendra found Ramakrishna to be a simple priest of goddess Kali at Dakshineswara of Belur Math. He found him to be a mystic, often going into a trance. Narendra regarded his mystical trance as a sort of hypnotism and Ramakrishna as a tantric magician. He put him the question, "Have you seen God? Can you show Him to me?" Ramakrishna, with a smile on his face, replied, "I am seeing God, in a brighter way than your presence." The contact between the aspirant and the spiritual teacher continued. The sceptical mind of young Narendra was hesitating to believe the words of Sri Ramakrishna. But, one day, a mere touch of Ramakrishna moved Narendra into a deep experience of trance and made him forget himself for hours together and brought in him the ineffable touch of the divine.

Narendra, a Kshatriya by birth, turned into a Dvija, i.e., reborn as a Brahmin, who realised Brahman. Thus Narendra truly became Vivekananda, that is, one who finds bliss in discriminating between the true and the false, the eternal and the temporal, the free and the binding. The contact with his spiritual guide, Sri Ramakrishna, became the leading light in his later life. It became a turning point in the life of Narendra who became the champion of propagation of the master's Vedanta message to the world.

His Master Speaks

It is true to say that Vivekananda was the spokesman of his spiritual guide, Sri Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna was a man born with all the traditional convictions of the Hindu religion, theology and philosophy. His distinction lies in his deep mystical experiences through which he continued the Hindu faith. He made personal experiments in demonstrating the truths of the Hindu religion, theology and philosophy. He held that all religions are equal and they are the different ways of arriving at the same end, like all the rivers, ultimately ending in the ocean. The ancient Rishis said, "Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudha Vadanti." That is, the reality is one, the wise men call it many. Likewise,
God is one but He is called by many names; He is called by names like Rama, Hari, Buddha, Kali, Brahman and so on. The reality is one and the same. Its forms are different. It may be with a form or without a form, i.e., formless. God is Sat, Chit, Ananda. He is pure existence, pure consciousness, pure bliss, eternal and perfect.

It seems that Ramakrishna Paramahamsa derived his philosophical position from that of the traditional Vedantic philosophers. For him the world was not illusory but manifestation of the absolute spiritual substance, Brahman. He says that reality at all levels is equally true. But whatever takes place in the material world does not affect Brahman. Brahman is unaffected by good and evil, virtue and vice, in the material world. Brahman is like the sun that shines equally upon the virtuous and the wicked. Ramakrishna makes a distinction between the true (Vidya) and the untrue (Avidya) knowledge. The knowledge of diversity is ignorance. The knowledge that asserts the presence of God everywhere is true knowledge.

Ramakrishna was a great Yogi. He believed that Brahman is perceived only in super-conscious state, called Samadhi, when the flow of thoughts stops and absolute silence reigns in the
soul. Ramakrishna says that he who has realised Brahman becomes silent.

It seems that Vivekananda's views on religion, theology and philosophy which found expressions in his writings, speeches and dialogues, bear the impact of the ideas and ideologies of his spiritual master Sri Ramakrishna, the great Vedantic mystic. His ideas inspired his disciple, Swami Vivekananda, to speak, now onwards, to the world at large. Once Swami Vivekananda said, "All that I am, all that the world itself will some day be, is owing to my master, Sri Ramakrishna, who incarnated and experienced and thought this wonderful unity which underlies everything, having discovered it alike in Hinduism, in Islam, and in Christianity."*

Intelligible Impact

Shankaracharya is one of the greatest thinkers of India. He is the founder of the Vedanta philosophy. It is called Advaita Vedanta. It means monism or non-dualism. Brahman is the whole and sole reality. Brahman and Atman are identical. The world is

Mithya, i.e., not real or an illusion. It is not absolutely unreal like the sky-flower, but not real like Brahman. It is empirically real, but transcendentally unreal. The general impression in the east and west is that his Advaita Darshana is Indian philosophy or the Indian philosophy means the Advaita of Shankaracharya. Its grip over the minds of the people is so intense and deep that they could not think otherwise. Its effect filtered into the culture of the majority of the Indians. It has governed their attitudes towards the world. It has established itself as the way of life, culture and tradition.

Swami Vivekananda, who followed Shankaracharya's Advaita theory, says later that the keynote of the whole philosophy of Shankaracharya is the well known formula of the three words from the Chhandogya Upanishad, "Ekam Eke Advaitam." This means that there is only one essence without the second, Brahman is the only real being, the only reality. All other things are only its Nama Rupa or phenomenal appearances. They issue from it and dissolve into it.

Thus to have a grip over the central ideas of Vivekananda, it is necessary to understand the Advaita of Shankaracharya. Swami Vivekananda was convinced both by the philosophical
reasoning and by his own spiritual experience that the Advaita of Shankaracharya is the ultimate truth.

Swami Vivekananda is rightly called a neo-Vedantin. He is a practical Vedantin. He translated personally the Upanishadic doctrines into action and gave a call to all the Indians, of his time and later time, to put into practice wholeheartedly the eternal message of the Upanishads, as put forward by Shankaracharya.

Reason Awakened

Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of the different temperaments. The rational element in him, which he inherited from his father's legal acumen, got an impetus from the study of the great philosophic works of the western thinkers like Hume, Kant, Descartes, Hegel, Spinoza, Spencer, Darwin, Comte, Mill and so on. One finds in his central ideas and critical approach these philosophers' influences. Swamiji, often doubting the mystical trances of his master, reminds us of the sceptical mind of Hume. His distinction between the apparent man and the real man of Descartes and that of Kant who laid the foundation for the distinction between noumena and phenomena. Like Spinoza,
Swami Vivekananda may be called a God-intoxicated man whose thirst for God-realisation was a never-ending urge in him. Similarly we find in Vivekananda a strong influence of Hegel's views of absolute, as the sole ultimate reality. We find Swamiji's idea of God and absolute identical, as in case of Hegel. We find in Vivekananda's thinking traces of the pessimistic approach of Schopenhauer, his love and admiration for the Bhagavad-Gita and its influence on men's life and actions. His views on religion are much influenced by the "Three Essays on Religion" by John Stuart Mill who was a great logician and philosopher. We find in his "Reason Awakened" the impact of the works of Spencer and Darwin, the pioneers of the theory of evolution in his time. His central ideas bear the influence of the theories of evolution.

One finds in the personality of Swami Vivekananda the control of the Sanathana Dharma, with its eternal spiritual message of the Upanishads regarding the goal of human life, i.e., Moksha, emancipation. The formal study of his views on Yoga, especially Raj-Yoga, reveals the secret of his mission that a true Yogi is one who fuses in himself contemplation and action, for the welfare of the world. The reality of the mission was demonstrated by Swamiji in his life.
Apart from all these influences, one finds in his make-up the dominant role of mysticism, contemplation, trances, and Brahman-dominated Advaita of Shankaracharya, and the awakened reason.

Amidst Reformers

There were two great social movements, for reforms, when Narendra was a young dynamic person. One movement was called the Brahmo Samaj and the other one was called Arya Samaj. They were the result of English education in India. Brahmo Samaj was a liberal movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the champion of it. He upheld the supremacy of the reason. It was an intellectual movement. It had an impact on young Narendra. He became one of its members.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy criticised idol worship of the Hindu society. He asked his followers not to worship idols. On the contrary, they were to have reverence for the eternal, immutable being, for he is the author and preserver of the universe. He pointed out the importance of the western rational method for solving many problems of the Hindu society. This rational approach of Brahmo Samaj impressed the young mind of Narendra,
but the deep spiritual yearning of his soul steadily turned him away from this Samaj.

**Brahmo Samaj**

The Arya Samaj was a reaction to the Brahmo Samaj. It was a revolt against the western civilisation in India. The leaders of the Arya Samaj doubted the patriotism of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. Dayananda Saraswati was the founder of the Arya Samaj. He wanted to have a modified Hinduism. He gave a new orientation to the Hindu faith. His chief call was "Back to the Vedas." The Arya Samaj leaders wanted a militant revival of the ancient Vedic tradition. They desired to make Hinduism aggressive. Their chief motto was to realise the religious, social and national unity of India. This movement generally opposed Islam and Christianity. Dayananda Saraswati wanted the Indian people to get rid of the differences of caste and class. His idea was to make the people of India understand their own tradition, culture and return to it. He insisted on the infallibility of the Vedas. The Vedas were to be the guiding principle for every aspect of life and the basis of every branch of learning.
We find in Swami Vivekananda the revivalistic spirit of the Arya Samaj and the reformist approach of the Brahmo Samaj. A distinguishing feature of his approach is that he gave more importance to the Upanishads than the Vedas. In reinterpreting the Hindu tradition he followed the Brahmo Samaj movement. The western culture and civilisation have a strong grip over the central ideas of Swami Vivekananda which he derived from the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. He accepted the values of education, social organisation, the practical knowhow and individual freedom. These were the ideas and values championed by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

However, overall, one finds in his approach the dominance of the impression created by Arya Samaj which seeks to retain the supremacy of the Vedic teachings.

First-hand Contact

Another factor which influenced Vivekananda greatly was his tour in India. In this context one is reminded of Gopal Krishna Gokhale who advised Mahatma Gandhi, similarly, but much later, to take up the tour of India on foot before the latter took up the service of the people. Narendra began his tour in 1891 and went round the various parts of India for
two years. Romain Rolland observes that there was not a single hour of his life when he was not brought face to face with the sorrows and feverishness of the various types of rich or poor men living in the rural or urban places. He became one with their life and the book of life revealed to him much more than the books in the libraries of the world could have done. His journey through India brought him in direct contact with the miseries of the masses. It made him aware of the dumb suffering of the people. He was shocked to see that people were denied the basic necessities of life like food, clothing and shelter. Young idealistic Vivekananda identified himself with the unhappy masses both in the villages and the towns and decided to devote himself to the removal of their miseries. He determined to reshape the outlook of the Indian people on the basis of Vedanta. Thus we find that the understanding and compassion of Vivekananda for the Indian people turned him into one of the greatest humanists India has produced.

Influence of Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita and Ramayana, Mahabharat

Vedas

The Vedas have exerted a great influence on the social and political life of India. According to Swami Vivekananda,
Veda means eternal and infinite knowledge. He wanted to cure the spiritually sick society and make it healthy and active with the help of the Vedas. He wished to stabilise faith in his countrymen on the basis of the Vedas. He desired to achieve the spiritual unity of India. He wanted to cultivate a critical approach and establish a liberal outlook in regard to the study of the Vedas.

The Supremacy of the Vedas

Vivekananda says, "All knowledge is Vedas, infinite as God is infinite."* The knowledge of the Vedas is supreme and absolute. He regarded the Vedas as authoritative. He says, "With the exception of the Vedas, every book must change. The authority of the Vedas is supreme for all time to come; the authority of every one of our other books is for the time being."** He challenged the critics to disprove the knowledge of the Vedas. He asks how dare can the critics criticise the venerable forefathers. He thinks that a little learning has muddled the brains of the critics. He feels that they have not tasted the


science of the Rishis. He doubts whether the critics have read the Vedas. He tells them that the Rishis have thrown a challenge and they should take it up if they have courage. Even modern science cannot measure the knowledge of the Vedas. 

Vivekananda believed in the eternity of the Vedas. The Vedas are perceptions of truth. He defended the Vedas and considered them as sacred and eternal. At the same time he is critical of them. He held the view that the Vedas are not the last word on revelation. He says, "The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded."* He wanted India to recapture the eternal spirit of the Vedas. He wanted to bridge the gulf between the orthodox and modern outlook. He criticised modern India as a product of the western influence. It was imitative, rootless, sceptical and dithering. Indian life was reduced to emptiness. It was difficult to reshape India in a western mould. It required a firm ground to hold the ideals. Vivekananda provided the ideals by reviving faith in the religious values of India. 

He desired to bring in the spiritual unity of India on the basis of Vedic knowledge. The Vedas, according to him, are

acceptable to all the religious sects in India. The Vedas are a common source and inspiration for all. Even Buddhism and Jainism do not condemn the knowledge portion of the Vedas. They criticised the bad practices of the Vedic religion. In the same way all the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy based their systems of thought on the Vedas. Vivekananda says, "The demand of new India was not for a new sect; it was for a universal religion acceptable to all Hindus. The first effort to provide such a basis was made by Dayananda Saraswati who saw in the Vedas the revealed world of God and felt that, as the Vedas were accepted by all who claim to be Hindus, religion based on the Vedas should have a universal appeal in India."*

We find in Vivekananda the mixture of an emotional approach of a mystic and the rational attitude of a philosopher. We find in him a clash and conflict of the opposing views about the Vedas. He says, "Personally, I take as much of the Vedas as they agree with reason."** He says that there are contradictions and even superstitions in them. He prefers reason to blind faith. He criticises dogmatic thinking and says that

people must be free from myth and blind faith. He was of the opinion that the outward forms of a religion suppress truth. So he advised people to avoid book-worship and interpret the sacred texts (Vedas) rationally.

He emphasised the importance of the individual and his development in society. The individual should depend on reason in all fields of life, social, political, religious and so on. He was a champion of reason. He tried to emancipate the individual from the bonds of the passive and die-hard society. He felt that the stability and order of social and political life should be based on reason. Reason should encourage and initiate the growth of individual and society.

Swami Vivekananda held liberal views on the Vedas. To quote his own words, "The proof of religion depends on the truth of the constitution of man and not on any books. These books are the out-goings, effects of man's constitution and man made those books. We are yet to see the books that made man. Reason is equally an effect of that common cause; the constitution of man is where our appeal must be."* He refused to accept the claim of the infallibility of anything including the Vedas. The

exception of the Vedas as the supreme infallible scriptures will lead to the denial of reason and the slavery of the individual and come in the way of the growth of society. He never accepts the Vedas as the final truth. He revolted against the tyranny of, "terrible orthodoxy. And thank God I have crossed that ocean."*

He insisted on positive, rational, interpretation of the scriptures. "Neither orthodoxy nor westernism could hold him within its bounds. Even regarding the scriptural statements he had his own views. He refused to depend solely on writings of the great commentators. Yet by his outstanding personality he carried all before him."**

Thus we find in Vivekananda a proper coordination between the views of liberal and orthodox people of his time. We may say that he was a liberal among the orthodox and an orthodox among the liberals. He was free from the limitations of their extreme views. In one context, he criticises the social evils and the authority of the Vedas and in another, he seeks to favour orthodoxy for social stability. So Swamiji was in a class by himself and stood unique between the liberal and the orthodox traditions.


Vivekananda is both a critic and an appreciator of the orthodox and modern approaches of the traditional people and western educated, liberal people of his times.

Vivekananda was not for the use of the word Hindus. To him it was only a geographical name given by foreigners. He says that the Hindus are to be called Vaidicas. They are the followers of the Vedas. He renamed Hinduism as Vedic religion. He encouraged the development of religious sects in India for the expansion of knowledge. But he criticised the sectarian outlook on religion. To him, the Vedas stood for a positive and catholic outlook on life.

**Upanisads**

His study of Upanishads has produced a deeper impression on his mind than that his study of the Vedas. He prefers Upanishads because they give importance to Jnana and subordinate Karma to it. His views are based on the philosophy of the Upanishads. His independent thinking and critical approach are the result of the impact of the Upanishads. He "took unconcealed delight in polemics in the rough and tumble of logical warfare. He was a fighting philosopher like his great predecessor in Vedanta, Shankaracharya."* He said to his country-men, "Go back

* V.S.Naravane, Modern Indian Political Thought : A Philosophical Survey (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1964), p.82.
to your Upanishads -- the shining, the strengthening, the bright philosophy -- and part from all these mysterious things, all these weakening things. Take up this philosophy; the greatest truths are simplest things in the world, simple as your own existence. The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them, and the salvation of India will be at hand."

On the basis of the Upanishads, Vivekananda has derived three important ideas of human nature, individual freedom and the necessity of strength. These central ideas which govern his entire thinking may be treated in detail later, but something can be said about them in brief in this context. Vivekananda advocated that man is spiritual or divine. The individual Atman is Him. Man and God are identical. So man by nature is pure and free. His main task in life is to make people reflect upon his divine nature. Swamiji believed in individual growth and perfection. He never accepted the concept of sin in the theory of creation of man. According to Vivekananda, the individual must enjoy earthly life and then renounce it for a higher ideal. Vivekananda says that freedom is man's natural right. No individual community can make progress without freedom. His idea

of strength has been derived from the Upanishadic ideal of impersonal self. He revolted against individual fear and weakness. He warned the individual not to think of his weakness but of his strength. Strength is necessary to resist injustice in society. He advised the poor and the weak to resist tyranny in society. He exhorted the young, "Be strong and be manly." Swamiji was a worshipper of Shakti (Goddess of strength) which permeates all aspects of life. Thus Vivekananda himself initiated the worship of Mother India. He rejected the "politics of beggary and encouraged strength and boldness to achieve India's freedom."

Bhagavad-Gita

He derived from the Bhagavad-Gita the message of ceaseless, selfless activity which India should adopt to achieve political and social freedom. Vivekananda affirms that the world is real and supported selfless activity. To secure freedom the individual must perform Karma and serve selflessly. Only a free individual can fulfil his obligations to society and become perfect. Thus individual freedom consists in performing selfless activity for society. Freedom lies in selfless activity and activity strengthens the individual in social life. One can trace the influence of the traditional Hindu classic, Bhagavad-Gita, on Vivekananda's central ideas of Raja-Yoga and Karmayogin. These ideas will be discussed later.
Ramayana and Mahabharat

The Ramayana and Mahabharat, the great religious books, had a strong influence on the mind of Swami Vivekananda. His mother, a devoted reader of the sacred books, inculcated love and affection for these books in his boyhood and youth. Vivekananda found in the Ramayana and Mahabharat the ideological model for human relationships in the family and society. Rama is an ideal son, brother, husband and king. Sita stands for an ideal wife who always stood by her husband. She was a woman capable of great sacrifice and unique character whose name an Indian woman takes on rising in the morning. The Mahabharat stood for a great fight between the good and the evil. The Pandavas represent the forces of the good and the Kauravas the forces of the evil. Life is a battle that is Kurukshetra. The message of the Mahabharat is that though the good suffers at the beginning, it succeeds at the end. Swamiji finds in Bhishmacharya the ideal of frankness and firmness and duty consciousness. Krishna represents expertise in polity. Because of his skill and intelligence the Pandavas are enabled to overcome the wickedness and evil of the Kauravas.

Reflections on the Rock

None can imagine the terrible pain that enveloped the mind of Vivekananda while he was sitting on the rock at
Kannyakumari. This rock may be described as a perfect symbol of unity as well as sanctity. It is a meeting point of the three seas. It is a place where the north and the south, the east and the west meet at Kannyakumari. Kannyakumari is said to be an incarnation of Goddess Parvati, the wife of Lord Shiva. Mahatma Gandhi said, "The place furnishes a sight unequalled in history, for this is no port of call for vessels; like the Goddess, the waters around are virgin ... This place is eminently suited for contemplation. I wish I were to stay here for ever."*

Swamiji's direct contact with the lives of the masses and his deep studies of the ancient great ideals of India created a turmoil in him. His heart broke at the thought of the miserable masses and he was wondering as to what he should do for them. At the same time, his mind was keen on looking back on the past splendour and lofty spiritual culture of India. Swamiji was faced with the various dilemmas. What were the contents of Swamiji's meditations? His disciples say, "They were as deep as the Indian ages; they were all on India itself.** "There ... seated by himself on the last stone of India, he thought of the purpose

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** Yuva Bharati (Kannyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, August 1993), p.23.
and the frustration of the Indian world. He thought, not of Bengal or of Maharashtra, or of Punjab, but of India and of its very life. He passed in his thought through all the Indian centuries and he perceived, as few souls have ever done in India, the realities and potentialities of the Indian experience."* He saw whole India purposefully and synthetically as a great master builder sees a whole architectural design. He saw religion as the very life and spirit of the Indian millions. He saw its future regeneration as a whole, and he said in the silence of his heart that India would rise through a renewal and a restoration of that highest spiritual consciousness which has made India, at all times, the cradle of the nations and the cradle of the faith.

"His mind surveyed, as it were, whole India and everywhere he saw that the poor and the low had been oppressed and down-trodden for hundreds of years in turn by each power that came in the flow of fortune to rule over them. But he saw that the worst fate that had ever befallen the masses came from within the pale of Hinduism itself. The autocracy of the priesthood, the despotism of caste, the terrible demarcations that these created within the social body, made a majority of the followers

* Yuva Bharati (Kannyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, August 1993), p.23.
of Hinduism the outcastes of the earth. The Swamiji saw these as the almost insurmountable barriers that had blocked the progress of the Indian nation."

He wondered, "But what have we, several millions of Sannyasins, been doing for the masses? Teaching them metaphysics? This is all madness! Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was right when he said that religion was not for men with empty stomachs! How can the millions rise, how can the millions be spiritual when they are starved? We have, first of all, to improve their material condition and give them education along this line, and then they will themselves solve their own problems. To effect this the first thing wanted is men."

So the conflict between hard fact of India of his time and its past made him decide, once for all, to cross the ocean and preach the spiritual message of India to the western world leading a highly materialistic life, and in return, to get all the aid from the western rich land, food for the hungry mouths. Thus, in his contemplative mood, the future plan of Vivekananda got a shape, the first part of the plan being to go to the western world.

* Yuva Bharati (Kannyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, August 1993), p.25.
** Yuva Bharati (Kannyakumari: Vivekananda Kendra, August 1993), p.25.
Participation in Parliament of Religions

Swamiji began his noble speech in the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago with the words "brothers and sisters of America." These words created in the hearts of the audience a thrilling experience that set them clapping. It created in them a sort of a close relation with each other which was usually not known to them. They were used to be addressed as ladies and gentlemen. But Swamiji's powerful and enchanting words hypnotised them. They forgot that they had been sitting there hours together to hear the eternal message of India. The Chicago experience left a great impression on Swamiji's later life.

The Ramakrishna Mission Order

The contact of Vivekananda with the Christian missionaries in India and abroad gave him an insight and foresight to start the Ramakrishna Mission order in the USA. He established this order in the year 1897 to spread the message of his great teacher, Ramakrishna. He knew the weaknesses and strengths of Hinduism. He wanted Hinduism to survive in future and keep its doors open to others. He felt that Hinduism had
to take interest in the welfare of the neglected people in society. It had to find God in the poor, in the suffering, the starving, the unnoticed and the uncared for lot in society. It is surprising to note that some traditional Hindus opposed his creation of the Ramakrishna Order both in India and abroad. It was but natural on their part to oppose Swamiji because Hinduism had been thus far a closed religion, and the doors of it had not been open to the majority of people, including the considerable sections of the untouchables. By establishing the Ramakrishna Order Vivekananda began a radical reformation in the Hindu religion.

**Personality**

It is extremely difficult to describe in brief the unique personality of Swami Vivekananda. We find in him so many aspects fused together. He is not a traditional Sannyasin who turns his back on the burning problems of his society. On the contrary, Swami Vivekananda finds the main motto of his life in the betterment of the suffering humanity. He is a unique Sannyasin combining in himself the traditional Hindu values of life along with the western altruistic spirit. Swamiji never cared for his personal liberation. He found joy in liberating the masses of
India from their ignorance, superstition and poverty. He used to find Narayana (God) in the moving temple of the poor, in the uplift of the downtrodden and the orphan. Like Buddha, he had a compassionate heart which used to melt with the tears of the suffering humanity. So, in a way, it is not right to call him a Sannyasin in the traditional Hindu sense.

We find in his great personality the elements of great thinkers. He made a severe criticism of the traditional Hindu society with reference to its so many ritualistic, dogmatic ideas and the outmoded social set-up. Swamiji never reconciled himself with the wretched priestcraft of the Hindus. No Sannyasin other than Swamiji has condemned, so severely and in such bitter words, the exploitation of the ignorant people in the name of religion by the priests. In spite of all these, he tried to retain the part and role of idol worship which, in a sense, is a powerful cause for the priesthood in the Hindu religion.

Swamiji was a man of great vision. He anticipated correctly a century ago that the 20th century would be a century of the masses, socialism and humanism. He also expected that for the peace and prosperity of humanity the Indian spiritual heritage would be the most valuable asset and instrument.
Swamiji was a rare personality that India has produced in recent years. He tried his best to awaken the Indian people who were in a great slumber. He tried to remove the passivity that dominated the Indian society. His unforgettable message was "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.* This message is yet to be fully realised by the Indians. Swamiji was a first rank patriot who lived, contemplated and worked for the progress of India.

We find in the personality of Vivekananda a combination of two seemingly opposite characteristics, namely the religious principles and secular philosophy. Religion for Swamiji was an inseparable element of human life. No part of life was bereft of religion. Religion was part and parcel of life. It enables one to see that the divine is present in oneself as also in everyone else. In this sense, for Swamiji, religion and secularism were not opposed. The welfare of one was the welfare of all and vice versa. The present-day compartmentalisation of religion and politics did not exist in his thought. He argued that religiosity and society have been always together and will continue to be together. For religion means uniting

* Swami Vivekananda, To the Youth of India (twelfth impression; Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1991), p.111.
mankind; Dharma literally means uplifting humanity materially and spiritually.

Swamiji had an exceptionally strong and well built body, a commanding height, shining eyes and a divine smile on his face, attracting and influencing one and all. He always advised young men and women to achieve physical fitness and mental alertness and ensure that they had a sound mind in a sound body ever ready for the service of the country.

Besides his powerful personality, Swamiji had an amazing mastery over the English language. This was his powerful weapon which he employed for the propagation of the ideas of his Guru and his own programme. His oratory was of course in evidence at the parliament of religions at Chicago. Swami Vivekananda was thus a very gifted and multidimensional personality with so many abilities and skills. No wonder he succeeded so much in his various undertakings.