Swami Vivekananda had closely seen the miserable condition of the people during his wanderings of India. He saw the poverty of masses and prosperity of elite; exploitation of poor and ignorant people in the hands of rich and the priestly class; degradation of women; exploitation in the name of caste, etc.1 Moved by the pathetic conditions of the lower classes in India, he believed that social and economic development of the people was necessary along with their spiritual development. Vivekananda was not a sociologist or economist in the strict academic sense, but he had his definite views about the social and economic development of India. He convincingly spoke against exploitative caste system, untouchability, gender discrimination, illiteracy and colonial plunder and presented a case for education, social justice, economic equality, industrial development, scientific outlook and technology. He wanted to synthesize westernized material development with Vedanta which he used to call practical Vedanta or Vedantic socialism.2

For Vivekananda, poverty and ignorance were the two main problems of India. Before his departure for U.S.A. for the first time, he said to his brother disciples, Swami Brahmananda and Swami Turiyananda, “I have now travelled allover India. But alas! It was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears. It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their suffering. It is for this reason-to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India that I am going to America”.3 Finding solution of the problem of Indian poverty was so much a concern for him that he decided to go to America to find some way out and perhaps he did not visit America primarily to preach religion. “I shall now cross the ocean and go to the western nations

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1 The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Volume I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 2000, p. 341.
3 Romain Rolland, The Life of Swami Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 2004, p. 82.
in the name of India's millions. There I shall earn money by the power of my brain and returning to my country will devote myself to carry out my plans for their regeneration or die in the attempt.  

He wrote from America to Haripada Mitra, one of his disciples, “He has come here not for name or fame but to see if I could find any means for the support of the poor in India. If God helps me, you will know gradually what those means are”. He appealed to send missionaries to India to teach them how better to earn a piece of bread and not teach metaphysical nonsense. Even in his lectures and private conversations, he constantly asked the Americans to send to India instructors in industry. The 'Salem, Evening News' (US) reported, "The speaker (Swami Vivekananda) explained his mission in this country to be to organize monks for industrial purposes, that they might give the people the benefit of this industrial education and thus elevate and improve their condition”. Five years of wandering allover the country on foot made him familiar with the real face of India. He was deeply moved by the miserable state of the ignorant masses who had taken it as their fate. Besides, he himself had experienced acute financial hardships after his father's death. In Madras, near the sea-side, he saw the wretched and half starved children of fishermen, working with their mother, waist-deep in water. Vivekananda's kind heart and rational outlook could not bear this, tears filled in his eyes and he cried out 'O' Lord why dost Thou create these miserable creatures! I cannot bear the sight of them”. The only question of the time was how to uplift the masses in India who had gone to this stage not in few decades but through the tyranny of centuries. He prayed, “Mother, what do I care for name or fame, when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty! To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come, when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, and here they spent millions of rupees upon their personal comfort! Who will raise the

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4 Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Volume II, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1979, p. 203.
7 Ajeet Jawed, Swami Vivekananda An Iconoclastic Ascetic, Ane Books India, New Delhi, 2007, p. 179.
8 Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Volume I, 1979, p. 365.
masses of India? Who will give them bread? Show me, Mother, how I can help them”. 9

Vivekananda analysed that main reasons for India’s low development and poverty were: first, economic plunder by the British colonial rulers of the masses of India; and, secondly, socio-economic inequalities among Indian people thrust upon by the affluent classes of India. That was why he vociferously criticised big landlords and upper caste for the neglect of the lower castes and the poor. Komarov quoted Vivekananda, “A few hundred of modernized and half educated people who lost their nationality, that is all that modern British India can boast of, and nothing more...... The monstrous hunger, involving millions of lives, has become an inevitable consequence of the British power. India could feed five times more people than her present population if everything would not have been taken from the people right at the roots”. 10 To Marx, India appeared as a country extremely disunited. A country not only divided between Mohammedan and Hindu, but between tribe and tribe, between caste and caste, a society whose framework was based on a sort of equilibrium, resulting from a general repulsion and constitutional exclusiveness between all its members. Such a country, such a society, according to him, was predestined to be a prey of the invaders. 11

Vivekananda relentlessly exposed bourgeois chauvinism, capitalists and colonial masters for profits, suppression and exploitation. He had seen the rich aristocrat people of the world and knew their evil designs and methods of exploiting the poor. He was also of the opinion that the imperialist government of the day had given protection to the bourgeois for exploitation of the Shudras (proletarians). “Those who have money hold the Government of the land under their thumb, plunder the people, drink their blood, depute common people in far-off countries to fight, so that in case of victory their coffers may fill their bags with gold obtained with the blood of

these simple people.\textsuperscript{12} He was first in India to pay attention to the masses, to the suffering and misfortune of his compatriots; thereby he raised the paramount problem of India of his day. “I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall, they pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them”.\textsuperscript{13} The whole purpose of development and growth is to raise the living standard of the lowest of the lowly and poorest of the poor. Actually these are people who work in the fields and factories, produce goods for millions of others but never get their own right in rightful manner. If history is based on the production of material goods, then the decisive role in history belongs to the producers of the material goods, the working people.\textsuperscript{14} The progressive development of society from lower to higher forms is called social progress. For Marxists, it is of two types: an exploitative and socialistic. Marx described the former as an abominable idol that would drink nectar only from the skulls of the slain. The latter is guided and directed by a communist or workers’ party which leads the masses, directing the efforts of all working people towards a single goal and ensuring the best possible results of social development.\textsuperscript{15} They divide this progress into phases, viz., the primitive-communal, slavery, feudal and capitalist and socialist-communist phase of development. These phases, signifying stages in the progress of world of history are called socio-economic formations. The concept ‘socio-economic formation’ was introduced by Marx and was widely employed by Engels and Lenin. According to Lenin, it is an integral social organism, with its own skeleton, flesh and blood.

Society is a category which is equivalent to the boundaries of nation states. While sociologists in practice often operate with this everyday terminology, it is not adequate because societies do not always correspond to political boundaries. Globalization, in particular, has exposed the limitations

\begin{itemize}
    \item[12] Komarov, \textit{Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union}, p. 120.
    \item[15] Lenina Ilitskaya, \textit{ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism}, p.293.
\end{itemize}
of traditional theories which equated society with nation state. Society is the basic organization which nurtures and sustains individuals. It is an organization of the individuals with a control over the lives of the individuals. Society liberates and limits the activities of men, sets up standards for them to follow and maintain; whatever the imperfections and tyrannies, it has exhibited in human history, it is a necessary condition of every fulfillment of life.16 ‘The manhood of man’, Vivekananda says, ‘the womanhood of woman, the reality of everything is the Lord—and that this Lord we are trying to realize from time without beginning in the objective world.17

Some Marxists substituted ‘social formation’ for ‘society’, but in practice these two terms are equivalent. Society of the spectacle is a term invented by G. Debord (1994) to describe the way in which, in contemporary society, the social and natural worlds are presented as images of spectacles’.18

There are four different concepts of society (1) the mechanistic concept, (2) the atomistic concept (conglomeration of individuals), (3) the organic concept (super individual entity), (4) the functional concept (system of interrelated individuals).19 Among these four conceptions, the organic one is widely upheld. The difficulty with the organic theory is that an organism is subject to the laws of birth, growth and death. It must decay after a period of growth and ultimately be extinct. But this natural process is not true of all societies. Ancient Indian society and Chinese society have resisted total extinction all through history although they have gone through vast changes. Swami Vivekananda opined that society, as a whole, is a passing phase in human evolution since it is in a constant flux. There are four theories regarding the evolution of society (1) simple linear growth theory, (2) stage theory (3) cumulative retro-active evolution theory, (4) cycle theory.20

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17 Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p. 316.
linear growth theory is pointed by a straight line, marking a gradual and continuous development of man's civilization. In an economic system, an initial agricultural revolution makes possible a diversion of productive factors to manufacturing, which in turn makes agricultural mechanization, chemical fertilization, and rapid delivery of agricultural products possible. It means that there is a second agricultural revolution due to the growth of manufacturing industries which was initiated by an earlier agricultural revolution. Vivekananda challenged the concept of linear progress. All progress proceeds by successive rise and fall and there is no progress in a straight line.\textsuperscript{21} A straight line, infinitely projected, must end in a circle.\textsuperscript{22} It returns to the starting point.

Life can never be in equilibrium. Complete equilibrium is never attained (by an organism) and would be fatal if it were attained, as it would mean stagnation, atrophy and death.\textsuperscript{23} The commonest and oldest type of social classification is expressed as a dichotomy. Its various forms distinguish the few and many, the gentry and the commonality, the elite and the masses, the free and the servile, the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, the educated and the uneducated, the productive and the unproductive (the leisure class), and, in the Marxist formula, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Tripartite divisions are commonly employed, such as the feudal distinction of noble, burgher, and the serf, and the present day conventional designation of “upper”, “middle,” and “lower” classes. The basis of these class distinctions is status, birth and wealth.\textsuperscript{24}

The word ‘class’ is derived from the Latin word \textit{classis}, a group called to arms, a division of the people. Tradition ascribes to Servius Tullius, a legendary Roman King (578-534 B. C.), who created a new division of Roman society into classes or orders.\textsuperscript{25} Some investigators claimed that the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume V, p. 271.
\textsuperscript{22} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume I, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{23} P. A. Sorokin, \textit{Social and Cultural Dynamics}, p. 635.
\textsuperscript{25} At that time in ancient Rome all free citizens able to carry arms were enrolled in the army. Servius Tullius divided the soldiers into five classes or orders according to their wealth, that is, their ability to provide their own horses, armour, etc. Subsequently the word ‘class’ was applied to large groups of people in which human society came to be divided.
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division into classes rested on the difference in intellectual standards: the more gifted and active, the more apt to command formed the ruling classes; the dull and stolid formed the oppressed classes. Other people attempted to explain the class division by income and property. However, there is a glaring disparity in the income of the ruling and the oppressed class. Some classes were privileged, others, on the contrary were underprivileged.26

Lenin in his work, *The Great Beginning*,27 points out four distinctive marks differentiating classes, viz., 1. Their place in a historically determined system of social production. 2. Their relation to the means of production, 3. Their role in the social organization of labour, 4. Share of social wealth they get and the methods by which they get it. The ownership of means of production establishes a social group as a ruling class enjoying every privilege while the estrangement from the means of production turns a social group into an oppressed class whose lot is destitution and deprivation of rights.28 The separation of capital ownership from the management and control of industry makes propertylessness such a broad category that it fails to distinguish between groups with different economic positions, such as managers and shop floor workers.29

Economically, class division of society was based on the surplus product, which turned with the passage of time, into private property. In primitive society, weapons, clothing, food, ornaments, etc. had already become personal property. To handle these articles needed adequate skill, so the primitive huntsman had to adapt himself to the individual article. With the spread of individual type implements and individual production, the primitive commune began to disintegrate and social inequality set in. Marx said, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles, freemen and slave, Patrician and Plebian, Baron and Serf, Guild-master and Journeyman, in one word, oppressor and oppressed, standing constantly in

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26 Lenina Ilitskaya, *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, p. 298.
27 *Collected Works of V. I. Lenin*, Volume XXIX, Progressive Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p. 421. Classes in an exploiting society as 'groups of people one of which can appropriate the labour of another owing to the different places they occupy in a definite system of social economy.
28 Lenina Ilitskaya, *ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, p. 298.
opposition to each other, carried on an un-interrupted warfare, now open, and now concealed”.  

In the same spirit but on the realistic side, “Who is Society', asked Vivekananda, “the millions or you, I and a few others of the upper classes”? Vivekananda criticized vehemently the Nietzschean ideas that the types of individuals we conceive to be the best ought to be ‘bettered’. In a society where the greater number cannot develop their real capacities, no one, even the best, can effectively develop one’s own since the development of one is determined by the development of the others. No one would understand this art and philosophy if the vast majority is next to brutes? Class analysis has been criticized by several sociologists on the grounds that social class is no longer relevant to an understanding of modern societies. They even celebrate the ‘death of a class’. They claim that with high rates of social mobility and other factors the old link between class and beliefs has largely disappeared and people no longer believe that class and class differences are salient. 

Historically, first major division of labour was associated with the separation of cattle breeding (pastoral) tribes. It increased social wealth as well as slave labour because the economy was based on barter system. Second major social division of labour occurred when the handicrafts separated from agriculture. It increased economic inequality. Third major social division was the separation of mental from manual work. Mental work became the monopoly of minority while the hard physical work was the lot of the vast majority. Three antagonistic class formations are slavery, feudalism and capitalism.

E. O. Wright divided ownership power into three aspects: control over resource allocation and investment; control over physical apparatus of production; and control over labour power. The capitalist class controlled the overall investment process, the physical apparatus of production and labour power. The proletariat was excluded. For Marx, all economic value is created by human labour alone. All factors other than labour are unimportant

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30 Lenina Ilitskaya, ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, p. 156.
31 Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p. 88.
32 D. Bums, Political Ideals, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1949, p.278.
34 Lenina Ilitskaya, ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, p. 311.
and unessential. But value is a psychological phenomenon. It is not to be found in the commodity but in the desire of the mind.

In case of India, class is more depicted in the form of caste throughout history. A caste system is a form of social stratification in which castes are hierarchically organized and separated from each other by rules of ritual purity. The ritual segregation is further reinforced by rules of endogamy.\(^{36}\) The caste system in India is one of the most complicated institutions and is, in one way, synonymous with the whole Hindu organization. While the Hindu caste system is organized in terms of four castes, there is much diversity at the local, village level, where the major castes are further divided into smaller groupings of sub-castes called *jati*.

A solidified caste structure, such as India’s involves the most extreme form of status hierarchy. Castes of any size always have their superior and privileged families. Individuals within the caste may differ in wealth, in occupational efficiency, in physical attainments, in choice of vocation among those to which the caste is limited, in political position, in number of the *Vedas* read, or in number of knots in the sacred cord, and so on.\(^{37}\) Caste was occupational in its origin. It was a case of division of labour. It was something like a grouping of the entire population of India into several classes with duties and responsibilities allotted to each, for efficient working of social organization.

The Sanskrit word for ‘caste’ is ‘*Varna*’\(^{38}\) which means ‘colour’. If the word colour is taken literally, the caste system would then be a division of the people according to the complexion of their ‘skin’. In ancient books, which describe the *Brahmans* – the first caste as white, the *Kshatriyas* – the second caste is red, the *Vaisyas* – the third caste as yellow and the *Shudras* – the fourth as black. However with the passage of time the caste started to be linked to the birth in a family. This process started in the later *Vedic* age, following which all the cruel and inhuman features of the caste system emerged, having religious sanctions too. No religion on Earth preaches the


dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on
Earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as
Hinduism. That is why the social reformers of nineteenth century tried to hit
religion in order to eradicate caste system.

Beginning from Buddha down to Rammohun Roy, everyone made the
mistake of holding the caste to be a religious institution, and tried to pull
down religion and caste all together, and failed. But inspite of all the ravings
of the priests, caste is simply a crystallized social institution which, after
doing its service, is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench, and it
can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social
individuality. There are always two causes to produce a disease, some
poison germ outside, and the state of the body. When the body is degraded to
a lower vitality the germs may enter and thrive and multiply, there is no
power in any germ in the world to produce a disease in the body as long as it
is strong. It is just so with the national life. It is when the national body is
weak that all sorts of germs, in the political state of the race or in its social
state, in its educational or intellectual state, creep into the system and
produce disease. To remedy it, the efforts should be to strengthen the men, to
make the blood pure, the body vigorous, so that it will be able to resist and
throw off all external poisons.

Swami Vivekananda ridiculed the idea of putting the blame on others.
There is no fun to put blame on the foreigners, whether Mohammedans or
Christians, for our own faults. If a Bhangi comes to anybody as a Bhangi, he
would be shunned as the plague; but no sooner does he get a cup full of water
poured upon his head with some mutterings of prayers by a Padri, and get a
coat on his back; no matter how threadbare, and come into the room of the
most orthodox Hindu, don’t see the man who then dare refuse him a chair and
a hearty shake of the hands. Think of the last six hundred or seven hundred
years of degradation when grown up men by the hundreds had been
discussing for years whether they should drink a glass of water with the right

40 Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Volume I,
p. 530.
hand or the left; whether the hand should be washed three times or four times.\textsuperscript{42}

The society was to be saved from the superstitious rituals and mindsets who were all out to get the poor people follow these. Those whose heads have a tendency to be troubled day and night over such questions as whether the bell should ring on the right or on the left; whether the sandal-paste mark should be put on the heed or anywhere else, whether the light should be waved twice or four times—simply deserve the name of wretches\textsuperscript{43} …… It is owing to that sort of notion that we are the outcasts of fortune, kicked and spurned at, while the people of the West are masters of the whole world. Vivekananda claimed, “What can you expect from men who pass their lives in discussing such momentous questions as these and writing most learned philosophies on them! “If a potato happens to touch a brinjal, how long will the universe last before it is deluged? If they do not apply earth a dozen times to clean their hands, will fourteen generations of ancestors go to hell, or twenty-four? For intricate problems like these they have been finding out scientific explanations for the last two thousand years… while one fourth of the people are starving”\textsuperscript{44}.

Some social reformers thought solely in terms of secular education and argued that the only way of remedying the iniquities of the prevailing system was to crush religion. That religion is at once a religion of sensualist exuberance, and a religion of self-torturing asceticism, a religion of the "Lingam" and of Juggernaut, the religion of the Monk and Bayadere (dancing girls).\textsuperscript{45} There is a danger of our religion getting into the kitchen. We are neither \textit{Vedantists}, most of us now, nor \textit{Puranics}, nor \textit{Tantrics}. We are just “Don’t touchists”. Our religion is in the kitchen. Our God is the cooking pot, and our religion is “Don’t touch me, I am holy”. If this goes on for another century, every one of us will be in a lunatic asylum.\textsuperscript{46} Swami Vivekananda differentiated the real and apparent religious rituals and customs. He wrote to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume III, p. 167.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VI, p. 264.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 318.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Marx and Engels, Selected Works, Volume I, p. 319.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume III, p. 167.
\end{itemize}
Alasinga, ‘Religion is not in fault…. But it was the want of practical application, the want of sympathy… the want of heart’.  

The abolition of classes means placing all citizens on an equal footing with regard to the means of production belonging to society as a whole. It means giving all citizens equal opportunities of working on the publicly owned means of production, on the publicly owned land, at the publicly owned factories, and so forth. No doubt, abolition of classes is a very lengthy process, which occupies a historical epoch following a socialist revolution. Vivekananda referred to Guru Nanak, Chaitanya and Kabir who believed in the equality of human beings and preached brotherhood. He asked his countrymen to follow their teachings and shun narrow thinking.

Swami Vivekananda believed in the logic of the caste system which assigned in each individual his slot in the social structure. The proliferation of castes was, therefore, not a sign of weakness, but of strength. Those who have aptitude for a particular work form a class. The original idea of jati was – freedom of the individual to express his nature, his Prakriti, his jati his caste. The present caste is not the real jati, but hindrance to its progress. Caste is the only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups, and you cannot get rid of that, wherever you go, there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be privileges of caste. That is what we want, no privileges for any one, equal chances for all. According to Vivekananda, the idea of privilege is the bane of human life. Vivekananda identifies four kinds of privileges prevailing in society: I privileges claimed on the basis of differences of physical strength (most brutal, claimed by the physically strong over the weak); 2. privileges based on the differences, of possession of wealth (claimed by the moneyed man over the poor); 3. privileges based on the basis of differences of the power of the intellect (claimed by the elites over the illiterates); 4. privileges based on the differences of the power of spirituality (most cruel, claimed by the spiritual

48 Collected Works of V. I. Lenin, Volume XX, p. 46.
men, i.e., the priests over lay men).\textsuperscript{51} Komarov observes, 'being incapable, due to social and historical reasons, of actually rising against the first cause of evil, viz., private property, Vivekananda attacked its consequences.\textsuperscript{52} As \textit{Vedanta} preaches divinity of man, which means every body has the same potential capacity to be great and good, it can never sanction any of these privileges. 'The work of \textit{Advaita} is to breakdown privileges, that is, to bring about a new social order based on equality of opportunities for everybody.

Vivekananda does not believe in the equality as Marxism does. In a Vedantic society, the absolute sameness of conditions appears to be impossible. That all men should be the same, could never be, however we might try. But what can be attained, is elimination of privilege.\textsuperscript{53} The enjoyment of advantage over another is privilege, and throughout ages, the aim of morality has been its destruction. The \textit{Vedantic} society pleads for unity in variety and absolutely no privilege for anybody on any ground.

According to Bentham, the individual often seeks his own pleasure even at the cost of the happiness of the society as a whole. Consequently, there is necessity of sanctions to force an individual to do a particular thing with a view to promoting the happiness of the society.\textsuperscript{54} Sometimes it results into the dominant minority attempts to hold by force-the privilege which it has ceased to merit, and then the proletariat repays injustice with resentment, fear with hate, and violence with violence when it executes its art of secession.\textsuperscript{55} Toynbee has been criticized on the ground that his generalizations do not depend on scientific theorization and also that Toynbee's conceptual foundation lacks adequacy. Vivekananda opined that the history of mankind will be guided better by the progressive increase in the

\textsuperscript{51} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume I, p. 423.
\textsuperscript{52} Komarov, \textit{Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union}, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{53} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume I, p. 435 'The difficulty is not', Vivekananda points out further, 'that one body of men are naturally more intelligent than another, but whether this body of men should take away even physical enjoyment from those who do not posses that advantage. That some will be stronger physically than others, but should they should gather unto themselves all the attainable happiness of this life, That some people, through natural aptitude, should be able to accumulate more wealth than others, is natural; but should they tyrannize and ride roughshod over those who cannot acquire so much wealth.
\textsuperscript{54} V. D. Mahajan, \textit{Recent Political Thought}, Premier Publishing Co., Delhi, 1953, p.4.
\textsuperscript{55} Arnold Toynbee, \textit{A Study of History}, p.224.
provision of spiritualization of mankind.\textsuperscript{56} The oppression of the so called lower castes by the upper castes in different regions of India, which Vivekananda witnessed during his travels across the country during 1890-93, filled him with dismay that in a country where ideally man was to be regarded as a living God, how was it that he had come to be disparaged as useless and ‘untouchable? This traumatic experience acquired during his wandering days before he sailed for America, coupled with his exposure to the humanity’s approach to life’s problems in a thoroughly commercialized America during 1893-95, consigned Swami Vivekananda of the necessity of working both for the downtrodden in India and for the spiritually alienated ‘Carpet Begars’ in the U.S.A. He was very clear in his mind that \textit{Vedanta} on one hand, could be an instrument for the restoration of the dignity to the oppressed; on the other hand, it could cure the narrow–minded ‘money grabbers’ of their shrunken view of life. He actually tried to bring the ideals of \textit{Vedanta}... into the everyday practical life of the saint or the sinner, of the sage or the ignorant, of the \textit{Brahmins} or the \textit{Pariah}.\textsuperscript{57}

In a more general interpretation of the caste system, Swami Vivekananda would often draw attention to four major types of activities in any socio-economic set up. The intellectual type of activity, including religious law–giving, was represented by the \textit{Brahmana} caste, the war like activities by the \textit{Kshatriyas}, the commercial activities of the \textit{Vaisyas}; and the remaining ( Mostly humdrum) activities of the \textit{Shudras}. A society rested upon all these four pillars, so that none of these castes was inherently superior to any other.\textsuperscript{58}

Vivekananda did not believe in the caste struggle. All castes should be treated equally and given equal opportunities to grow both socially and economically. He believed in the dynamics of caste development, that is, there should not be any barrier to the vertical development of castes as was possible in the pre-historic period. As there are \textit{satva}, \textit{rajas} and \textit{tamas}-one or the other of these gunas more or less in every man, so it is quite possible for

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume V, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume I, p. 36.
\end{flushleft}
one to adapt to other qualities as well if determined and thus can shift from one caste to another. Otherwise how Vishvamitra did become a Brahmin and Parshuram, a Kshatriya?59

The laws of species formation, by themselves, operate independently of man. Natural selection was effective ever since living creatures had appeared, before man evolved at all. Moreover, man also, as a biological species, is the product of natural selection.60 The effort has always been conquering one’s nature but in society if this natural selection is denied then additional stimulus is necessary. Swami Vivekananda said, “If the son of a Brahmana needs one teacher, that of a Chandala needs ten. Greater help must be given to him whom nature has not endowed with an acute intellect from birth”.61

Social evolution bears the marks of a struggle for social leadership, by the four primer castes. Rulers have asserted their dominance over others either by assuming priestly functions enjoined by the scriptures, or by making use of their armed power or through the establishment of some kind of commercial hegemony. As such, neither Brahmana power nor the power exercised in their turn by the Kshatriyas or Vaisyas can be denounced, so long as such power helps in maintaining a just social order. Each is good in one aspect or the other.62 But continued exercise of power by any single social type is sure to lead to misuse of that power. Whenever power is used for evil, it becomes diabolical. He said, “The time comes when these priests began to get all the power in their hands, and at last they forgot the secret of their power, poverty ..... They began to spread out their hands to clutch at the riches of society. Similar degradation occurred in respect of the other castes as well.63 Following such degradation, there comes about a transfer of power from one type of leader to another, from one caste to another caste. At such critical times, new social leaders rise to assert themselves, while old heroes fall.

60 Lenina Ilitskaya, ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, p. 261.
62 Ibid., pp. 380-82.
While in England in 1896, Swami Vivekananda responding to social and economic trends there remarked, “Everything goes to show that socialism or some form of rule by the people call it what you will, is coming on the boards. The people will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more fired”. The exercise of power by the numerical majority, the dominance of the *Shudra* caste—‘labour rule’ will have the advantage of the distribution of physical comforts and disadvantage of the lowering of culture. There will be great distribution of ordinary education but extraordinary geniuses will be less and less. He understood that the growth of bourgeois relation was conducive to this awakening, and believed that it would, in the ultimate end, lead to the establishment of the power of the working people—viz. to socialism. At the same time, as a nationalist, he strove to remove social conflicts, and to achieve some compromise between the exploiters and the exploited and thereby to secure national unity. He warned the educated and capitalist class who had received education and accumulated wealth on the cost of working class, either to work for them or face their wrath. He said in 1898, ‘They have worked so long uniformly like machines guided by human intelligence, and the clever educated section have taken the substantial part of the fruits of their labour. The lower classes are gradually awakening to this fact and making a united front against this, determined to exact their legitimate dues. The masses of Europe and America have been the first to awaken and have already begun the fight. Signs of this awakening have shown themselves in India, too, as is evident from number of strikes among lower classes nowadays. The upper classes will no longer be able to repress the lower, try they ever so much’.

But such procrastinations did not make Swami Vivekananda altogether pessimistic about the future. The greater the extents of this transformation from lower nature to higher nature, from less truth to more truth, the closer the society will be to perfection. The ideal state will be one where .... knowledge of the priest period, the culture of the military, the distributive

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65 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume VI, p. 381.
spirit of the commercial, and the idea of equality of the last (of labour rule) can all be kept intact, minus their evils\textsuperscript{68}... through the imparting of moral principles, good behavior, and education. We must make the Chandala come upto the level of the Brahmana........Then only shall I know that our study of the Vedas and Vedanta has been a success.\textsuperscript{69} He made a firm call for Brahmins to understand their basic duty, that is, the dissemination of knowledge to non-Brahmins. The Brahmin should like the cobra, suck the poison he had injected in the social body to cure it, failure of which would lead to disastrous consequences: ‘Beware, Brahmins, this is sign of death! Arise and show your manhood, your Brahmin hood, by raising the non-Brahmins around you---not in the spirit of the master---not with the rotten canker of egotism crawling with superstitions and the charlantry of the East and the West—but in the spirit of a servant’.\textsuperscript{70} Swami Dayananda a well-known reformer from Gujarat vehemently opposed eating food from the hands of the low-caste people. He said that the persons belonging to the higher caste should not eat food prepared by a shudra as their characteristics would enter the body and mind of the higher caste person.\textsuperscript{71} Vivekananda characterized this as hypocrisy and irreligiousness on the part of the higher-castes and pointed out that no great work can be done by that body one limb of which is paralyzed.\textsuperscript{72}

Again as admonition, he said, “In this country of ours, the very birth place of Vedanta, our masses have been hypnotized for ages. To touch them is pollution, to sit with them is pollution, hopeless they were born, and hopeless they must remain! And the result is that they have been sinking, and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come.\textsuperscript{73} Vivekananda identified that religion was above caste and gender. But it was unfortunate that caste division was based on religion. In fact, true religion represented a casteless society. Above words spoken against the so called religion reminded

\textsuperscript{68} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VI, p. 381.
\textsuperscript{69} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VII, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{70} Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IV, p. 300.
\textsuperscript{72} Romain Rolland, The Life of Swami Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{73} Ajeet Jawed, Swami Vivekananda An Iconoclastic Ascetic, p. 31.
us the context of Marx’s widely used quotation ‘Religion is opium of the people’.\(^{74}\) He took religious beliefs of the people responsible for increasing tolerance of the people to bear even the excesses of the oppressed class as the will of God. Marx was a critic of religion because it supported the heartless class of capitalists and created illusory fantasies for the poor. Vivekananda was also against the exploitative religion and believed in that kind of religion which took care of the life of the poor in this world. He was also against the heartless rich people and priests who were responsible for the exploitation of lower classes. ‘You, the upper classes of India, do you think you are alive? You are but mummies ten thousand year old!’\(^{75}\) Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed’.\(^{76}\)

Vivekananda held the higher castes, particularly the Brahmins, responsible for the evils of priest craft, for untouchability and for their exclusive claim on spirituality and sacred scriptures. In his reply to the address of the Maharaj of Khetri, he remarked, ‘This (tyranny of the upper castes) is the bane of human nature, the curse upon mankind, the root of all misery---this inequality. This is the source of all bondage, physical, mental, and spiritual’.\(^{77}\) Materialism brought in by the Britishers had come to the rescue of India in a certain sense, by throwing open the doors of life to everyone, by destroying the exclusive privileges of caste by opening up to discussion the inestimable treasures which were hidden away in the hands of very few.\(^{78}\) He expressed the hope that under the then existing capitalist system, caste system will disappear.

Vivekananda found natural caste as one thing and artificial caste as another. He exhorted that if you say that there is heredity, then my answer is that heredity is the result of Karma and the Karma of the Shudra expels the

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\(^{74}\) This is known quotation by Karl Marx, the German economist and Communist political philosopher. The original German text, in Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1843 is: Die Religion... ist das Opium des Volkes. This has been translated variously as 'religion is the opiate of the masses', 'religion is the opium of the masses' and, in a version which German scholars prefer 'religion is the opium of the people'. The context the phrase appears is this: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people".


\(^{76}\) Ibid., p. 247.

\(^{77}\) Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IV, p. 329.

heredity of the *Brahmin*. Let us all be *Brahmins*. Almost all our religious movements from time of Buddha downward have been directed against caste and they were all successful more or less and most successful was Buddha, for nobody in the history of the world loved better than he. ‘We want Sankara’s head and Buddha’s heart for the regeneration of our country. Ramanuja, Nanak, Chaitnya, Kabir, Dedu could remove the barrier of caste only by force of love, over flowing love. If a woman is a jewel, take her in marriage even if she comes from a low family of the lowest caste. Nation idea must take the place of caste idea.’ Here his ideas were contrary to Swami Dayananda who opposed inter-caste marriages. Despite condemnations, Vivekananda continued with his orthodox ways. On the birth anniversary of Swami Ramakrishna, he invested the holy thread to 50 disciples. He continued flouting caste-rules publicly. Sister Nivedita writes that she herself witnessed the Swami breaking caste and religion based barriers in Punjab and Benaras. He called Mussalman vendor, bought and ate sweetmeats from his hands. He warned his countrymen to shun narrow ideas and outlook and stop fighting among themselves as independence was round the corner. “I see that the independence of India will come in some unthinkable way but if you cannot make yourself worthy of it, it will not live over three generations. India cannot be Japan or Russia. She must stand on her own ideal. She will have to build up a government that includes members of all castes, with no superiority complex between them.” Swami Vivekananda discovered the greatness of man, and particularly of men in the humbler walks of life who were the despised and the denied in our Indian society. At the same time, he brought home the value of Indian thought at its highest and pristine best; as in the *Vedanta*. He was able to convince that what our ancestors had left in the *Vedanta* philosophy was of permanent value, not only for us in India but also for the rest of humanity.

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The critics ridiculed Vivekananda for attempting at class-reconciliation, which according to them was a utopian idea. For this attitude, he has been called a 'reactionary'. According to the Soviet scholar E. P. Chelyshev, ‘...the utopian striving to reconcile class-contradictions stemmed from a fervent desire to unite all the forces of the people for struggle against colonialism.' But Vivekananda insisted that everyone must work out his own salvation. He opined that if the ideas are put into their heads, they would do the rest.

He also coined a new word *Daridra–Narayan* or a “God in the poor and lowly”. This word has been accepted by the whole of India, and, in a way, it brings in a sense of responsibility for the average man to look upon the poor and the humble, the suffering ones and the frustrated ones of society; as if they were deities incarnate or fragments of God, to serve who was to serve God. Mahatma Gandhi’s revival of the old expression which was used in Gujarati by the Vaishnava poets of Gujarat, namely, ‘*Hari-jana*’ or ‘the Men of God’ was a very fine expression; but *Daridra Narayana* implied or brought in an element of sense of duty which was enjoined upon man to serve the poor if they wanted to serve God. Swami Vivekananda raised this service to the dignity of religion and gave it a divine halo never dreamt of before. It gave a new shape to the spirit of service; first in India and gradually in the rest of the world. “Him I call a *mahatma* whose heart bleeds for the poor”, wrote Swami Vivekananda to his Indian disciples in 1894-95. He constantly urged his followers and associates to serve the poor and the oppressed, and to treat both men and women with equal regard.

During the five decades, preceding the First World War, India experienced a ‘grim crescendo of death’ due to epidemics and the most widespread famines in India’s recorded history. Famine may be considered

84 E. P. Chelyshev, *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union*, (tr. Harish C. Gupta), p. 219. Chelyshev also considers Vivekananda a utopian thinker and not revolutionary activist as far as social changes were concerned.
86 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume V, p. 58. I should see God in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I worship them. The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the deceased, coming in the shape of lunatic, the leper, and the sinner...Bring light to the poor; and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor.
simply a result from a failure of supply due to disruptions in the cycle of nature or through human activity such as war. Further reflection, however suggests that there are significant differences between the causes, experience and consequences of what has been termed ‘modern famine’ and those associated with famine in precious ages. In a modern famine, unlike famine in preceeding eras, a direct relation can be shown to exist between poverty and the impact of famine as food may be available but only to those who can afford it. Commenting on the nature of ‘modern famine’ J. Dreze and A. Sen declare that given the immense increase in food production and transportation networks over the last few centuries, the persistence of hunger and recurrence of famine are both morally and politically unacceptable.

Though some of the natural causes of famine remained the same, such as, failure of rains, British policies were also responsible for the devastation caused by famines. Undermining of indigenous industry due to British tariff policies, hoarding of food supplies, landlordism policy of 1796 were some of the factors responsible for famines. In spite of the fact that the government had a far greater capacity to intervene to the face of human disaster, the influence of Malthusian and Darwinist ideas encouraged the belief that a population artificially sustained would merely encounter an even more horrendous reckoning at some future date.

From 1866 till the end of nineteenth century, Bengal underwent five major periods of famine beginning with the great Orissa famine after a gap of almost a century since the last precisely recorded severe famine. During his parivrajaka wanderings, he experienced, the miseries of the people, due to famine. Several of the areas on Vivekananda’s route, Bengal, Bihar, Madras, Hyderabad and Bombay experienced a higher than average deficiency in rainfall which continued over successive years from 1891. Social famines and scarcities, therefore, were a feature of life along the course of his route. He took with him to the West experiences of unprecedented famine as well as

perceptions of seeming indifference on the part of India’s administrators, traditional elites, and recently created propertied classes to the plight of the dispossessed and legions of rural poor.

A country where millions of people live on flowers of *Mahua* plant, and a million or two of *Sadhus* and a hundred million or so of *Brahmins* suck the blood out of these poor people.\(^91\) During his lectures in the U.S. he painted a picture of the precarious nature of the existence of the Indian peasant dependent upon a pitifully low income, whole districts feeding on edible blossoms, men eating rice alone and women and children taking merely the water in which rice had been cooked, while the shadow of famine lurked behind any failure of the rice crop.\(^92\) He was also skeptical of the amount of practical help, as distinct from proselytizing, that had been forthcoming from missionaries who according to him had fine theories and started with good ideas, but did nothing for the industrial condition of the people. This was only after the enactment of Famine Codes that such philanthropy was not to set the stage for attempts to convert the young from their religious faith.

He too shared with other Indian intellectuals of his day the conviction that the nature and incidence of famine had changed in India. Famine has come to be a constant feature in our country, and now it is, as it were, a state of blight upon us. The growth under British period was lopsided and favoured only the privileged classes. It excluded the toiling people like peasants, labourers and other downtrodden classes of the society. The self-sufficiency of Indian villages collapsed due to the imports of cheaper British machine made products. As a result, traditional economic pursuits of people were destroyed and they became unemployed. There was exploitation and plunder of raw material by the colonial masters. This further weakened the Indian economy. India with an area much smaller than the United States contains twenty three hundred millions of people and of these, three hundred millions earn wages, averaging less than fifty cents per month. In some instances, the people in whole districts of the country subsist for months and even years, wholly upon flowers (*Mohua*), produced by a certain tree which when boiled

are edible. He spoke with hatred of the British Colonialists who were guilty of the immeasurable misfortunes of the Indian people. He pointed out that India would have resources, sufficient for a population five times greater than she had if its entire output were not exported.

However, he remained silent on the question of political remedies for this situation, insisting primarily upon the internal transformation of individuals as a way of changing external social conditions: a characteristic, which has drawn criticism from later socialist and moralist writers. For him, the remedy for India’s problems could only be found by addressing what he deemed to lie at the heart of the nation’s life, namely religion. Politics, society, municipality, plague – prevention work, and famine relief work – all these things will be done as they have been done all along ere, only through religion. According to him, it is the powerful in any society who bring about change, and in India these men of power are those who are giants in religion. It is to these individuals that the responsibility of changing social laws and usages falls when necessity demands. Once the Indian people have a sufficiency of food, then they will develop a taste for Vairagya (renunciation) and again listen to the words of Sannyasins. Throw aside your scriptures in the Ganga; teach the people first the means of procuring their food and clothing and then they will find time to read the scriptures. If their material wants are not removed by the rousing of intense activity, none will listen to the words of spirituality”. For him, India’s only hope was her masses. He thought that the new India would arise, out of the huts of fishermen, the cobbler and the sweeper, the grocer’s shop, from the oven of the fritter seller, from the factory, from the mart and from markets, from the forests, from hills and mountains. In a prophetic mood he said, “The great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I cannot quite see which but it will be either Russia or China”. This he said, when China was...

93 Ibid., He also wrote of benefit of the British rule, which was increased contact with the outside world.
still under the autocratic rule of the Manchu emperors from which there was no prospect of release for centuries to come, and while czarist Russia was sending the noblest of her people to the Siberian mines. To the ordinary thinker, those two countries seemed the most unlikely nations in the world to usher in a new era. The cycle of nature will revolve scientifically. He was more a lover of the poor. This was the eternal prayer on his lips. When, therefore in 1929-30, a book entitled “Vivekananda, The Socialist” was written, uproar was raised by many old men, on the one hand, who condemned Swami as being un-Hindu, and by many young men, on the other hand, who termed him simply a mystic and spiritualist. Was he a counter revolutionary when he said, “So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold everyman a traitor who, having been educated at their expenses, pays not the least heed to them”? Was he a mystic when he said, “First bread then religion” or I do not believe in a religion or God who cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth? The greatest service he rendered to humanity was to wrest religion from the mystery mongers, the priests, and brought it within the reach of common man. He ridiculed the theory of preaching sermons to the starving labourers.

The common man has more perseverance and fortitude than the uncommon rich man because the common man can work diligently even with an empty stomach. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them simply half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy. Swami Vivekananda himself organized Ramakrishna Mission which did brilliant work during the famine of 1897.

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98 Manmatha Nath Ganguli, *The Vedanta Kesari*, April 1960. As per Manmatha Nath Ganguli’s writing in *The Vedanta Kesari* of January and April 1960. “One day I asked Swamiji, China is such an old country. Do you think this ancient country with its civilization will die out”? He was silent for a while. Then he said, “I see before me the body of an elephant. There is a goal within. However, a lion cub comes out of it. It will grow in future and China shall become giant and powerful”.


100 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume V, p. 45.

101 *Ibid.*. p. 58. His prayer had always been, “may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all socials”.


103 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Volume II, p. 430.
and on all other important occasions. That is why he started at Banaras and Haridwar, Ramakrishna Sevasrams, asylums for the sick, the splendid institutions in the country, and many other institutions like this.

His followers have also organized several times famine relief; plague relief and cholera relief parties. The selfishness of purely contemplative faith, detached from human sorrows and sufferings and practiced in far away reclusion, was exposed to the world for the first time in no uncertain terms. Occasionally in the past, sadhus in India and organized friers in the other parts of the world descended upon the field of human activity in the shape of workers and even warriors. But many monks through the ages were probably afraid of straying from the path of God by getting involved in service to humanity. They could not, unlike Vivekananda, muster the confidence to leave aside reading scriptures, practicing meditations and offering prayers in order to devote themselves to the service of others.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa with a very beautiful simile gave a message of hope for even the busy household who can still pursue the path of God while remaining in the world. He should put himself in the position of a maid servant who is dutifully busy during the whole day and the waking hours of the night, serving her masters, but she knows that the household and its material interests do not belong to her. In her heart, she is also apart and has her own interests, her own beloved to think of. To him she is devoted in the heart of her hearts. Swami Vivekananda was even not worried in the least about the salvation of the monks of the Ramakrishna order. They would, according to him, go down into the hell, if need be, to save others. To think of their salvation, he argued, was unworthy of the disciples of Ramakrishna. Their liberation is secured, if they are skeptical about it, by the service done. Swami Vivekananda’s influence in these spheres in the whole world is as real as it is permanent.

During the great epidemic of plague in Calcutta, a religious scholar complained that he was not getting any opportunity to discuss religion with Swami Vivekananda. He replied. “So long as even a single dog in my country

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is without food, my whole religion will be to feed it”. That was to him the essence of religion. This was a new thought, a life giving nectar churned out of the ocean of poison that had kept India in stupor through centuries.

‘The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on your heads; those to whom we have been giving dirty water to drink, when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past; the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to serve in sight of plenty; the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of ill and whom we have hated with all our strength; the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of Lokachara; to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice’. 

The poor in the west are devils; compared to them are angels, and it is therefore so much the easier to raise our poor. The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality. That is the great task between our people and primes. Till now nothing has been done in that direction. Our duty is to put the ideas into their heads, they will do the rest.

Swami Vivekananda believed in the empowerment of proletariat or ordinary people. He believed in a system which could stop the exploitation of workers. It might be called by any name. ‘Everything shows that socialism or some form of rule by the people, call it what you will, and is coming on the boards. The people will certainly want the satisfaction of their material needs, less work, no oppression, no war, more food, what guarantee have we that this, or any civilisation, will last, unless it is based on religion, on the goodness of man’?

To put life into the dead poor masses, strength must be infused in them. He bluntly told them their faults and motivated them to rise up to the situation. To the non – Brahman castes, he told them to wait and not to hurry. Do not seize every opportunity of fighting the Brahmans; you are
suffering from your own fault. Instead of wasting your energies in vast discussions and quarrels in the newspapers, instead of fighting and quarrelling in your own homes, which is sinful, - use all your energies in acquiring the culture which the Brahman has and the thing is done.  

He regarded the labouring classes as the backbone of the country. "Ye, labouring classes of India, as a result of your silent, constant labour Babylon, Persia, Alexandria, Greece, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Baghdad, Samarkand, Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Holland and England have successively attained supremacy and eminence. Instead of preaching any momentary social reform or trying to remedy evils, he asked the lower classes to work to realize more and more the Vedantic ideal of the solidarity of man and one’s inborn divine nature. Had I the time, I would gladly show you how everything we have to do, was laid out years ago by our ancient law givers, and how they actually anticipated all the different changes that have taken place and yet to take place in our national institutions. They were also breakers of caste but they were not like our modern men. They did not mean by the breaking of caste that all the people in a city could sit down together to a dinner, a breakfast and champagne, nor that the fools and lunatics in a country could marry, when, where and whom they chose, and reduced the country to lunatic asylum. He was able intuitively to arrive at the idea that only the working class, which was just coming into being in India at that time, was the decisive force in social development. He saw how they were gradually developing courage, becoming physically strong, fearless and energetic. Even street cleaners did not know that servility of customs. He was struck by these changes. He acclaimed the development of an industry which was bringing Indian deliverance from backwardness and feudalism. A logical materialist view on history consists in recognizing the decisive role of material production in society’s development and consequently, the working people’s key role as the makers of history and chief force of social development.

Vivekananda was aware of many contradictions in the capitalist society which

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112 Lenina Ilitskaya, ABC of Dialectical and Historical Materialism, p. 350.
turns the worker into a mere appendage of the machine. Pointing out that the
workers of Europe and America were already fighting for their legitimate
rights, Vivekananda wrote, “Signs of this awakening have shown themselves
in India too, as is evident from the number of strikes among the lower classes
nowadays”. Manifestations of evil-oppression and misery were nevertheless
to the resisted. Swami Vivekananda was no believer in the principle of ‘non–
resistance’. Fighting the forces of evil and working for the alleviation of
misery are the duties assigned to man, as it were, by his very nature.
Renunciation – nonresistance – non destructiveness are the ideas to be
attained through less and less worldliness, less and less resistance, less and
less destructiveness. Keep the ideal in view and work towards it. None can
live in the world without resistance, without destruction, without desire. The
world has not come to that state yet when the ideal can be realized in the
society. 

Swami Vivekananda doubted whether total elimination of the forces of
evil would be possible in the future. The world will go on with its happiness
and misery through eternity. He made the bold assertion that there was no sin
and no sinners. Nothing was purely good or purely bad; everything was a
mixture, albeit in different proportions of the good and the bad. In his
approach to the problem of good and evil, Vivekananda shows elements of
dialectical approach. 'Both good as well as evil', says Chelishev, 'from
Vivekananda's viewpoint, are relative, it is only their mutual relation which is
absolute. Difference is the source of life; it is beauty, it is the art of
everything. The whole universe is a play of differentiation and oneness.
There is an echo here of Adam Smith’s famous action that 'discussion of
labour' is the principle underlying social and economic progress. ‘It is the
great multiplication of the production of all the different arts, in consequence
of the decision of labour, which occasions, in a well governed society, that

114 Ibid., p. 125.
Universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people*. Money is dead capital, the nation's living wealth is hard personal labour which builds body, mind and soul. Neo-Vedanta preached the gospel of labour. The capable and industrious worker will get in position above the middleman, that imbecile and parasite of society. Capital drifts into the hands of the worker whose skill is yoga. ...He is a hero, a brave fellow; a lion in human shape, the wealth approaches him. It was not necessary that every individual should follow the rules of sannyasin. Some sort of materialism, toned down to our own requirements, would be a blessing to many of our brothers, who are not yet ripe for the highest truths. There has been ample provision made for them in our books; but, unfortunately, in later times, there has been a tendency to bind every one down by the same laws as those by which the sannyasin is bound, and that is a great mistake. Vivekananda was aware of the fact that starving people need bread first and religion afterwards. He could realise the economic necessities of human beings with compassionate heart.

The imposition of the strict moral and ethical values on the poor people always hinder the materialistic development. The poor people needed food, shelter and clothes, first which depended on the use of science and western methods for economic development of the country. Vivekananda was of the opinion that science like religion was also searching truth. He called scientist as a rishi. Science and technology could make possible material betterment of people without falling into the trap of slavish imitation of western ways of life.

He urged the country men to come out of their narrow shells and adopt what-so-ever was helpful in the socio-economic development of India. Vivekananda had the privilege to observe the economic and technical development of both Europe and Japan. He appreciated their development. He wanted that India must have its own model of development which should be

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according to the ethos, pathos and culture of Indian people.\textsuperscript{120} He favoured inclusive growth, that is, all sections of the society must participate in the process of development. He supported the cause of material well being of the masses and bridging the gulf between the rich and the poor. Therefore, there was need for economic development of the country by developing industries and by using modern science and technology. He also emphasized that this development must be ethical too. He professed the doctrine of \textit{Vedantic} socialism, which was a blend of \textit{Vedantic} philosophy and economic development.\textsuperscript{121} Vivekananda’s mission was to uplift the destitute, the poor, illiterate peasantry and working class. He wished to have a team of selfless workers who would go from village to village preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, gospel of social rising and the gospel of equality.

He wanted that India should also go for the development of industry, using modern science and technology without neglecting its small and cottage industry. He was highly impressed by the Japanese model of industrial development. Japan used the technical know-how of Europe, but developed those industries which used local raw material. He had great hope on the young people for learning modern techniques of production. He said, ‘If I can get some unmarried graduates, I may try to send them over to Japan and make arrangement for technical education there, so that when they come back, they may turn their knowledge to the best account for India. What a good thing that would be!’\textsuperscript{122} Swami Vivekananda opined that industrialization of India could not be possible without the development of science and technology; power and energy; and iron and steel. This he expressed with Mr. Jamshedji N. Tata when he was a co-passenger of Swami Vivekananda in the ship, traveling from Japan to Chicago. He motivated Mr. Tata to establish a research institute of science and to start manufacturing a key raw material. Mr. Tata took this challenge and established Tata Institute of Fundamental Research and Tata Iron and Steel Co. He wrote a letter to Swamiji.

\textit{Dear Swami Vivekananda,}

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  \item \textsuperscript{120} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 220.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume VII, p. 183.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume V, p. 371.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
I trust, you remember me as a fellow-traveller on your voyage from Japan to Chicago. I very much recall at this moment your views on the growth of the ascetic spirit in India, and the duty, not of destroying, but of diverting it into useful channels.

I recall these ideas in connection with my scheme of Research Institute of Science for India, of which you have doubtlessly heard or read. It seems to me that no better use can be made of the ascetic spirit than the establishment of monasteries or residential halls for men dominated by this spirit, where they should live with ordinary decency, and devote their lives to the cultivation of sciences—natural and humanistic. I am of the opinion that, if such a crusade in favour of an asceticism of this kind was undertaken by a competent leader, it would greatly help asceticism, science, and the good name of our common country; and I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda. Do you think you would care to apply yourself to the mission of galvanizing into life our ancient traditions in this respect? Perhaps, you had better begin with a fiery pamphlet rousing our people in this matter. I should cheerfully defray all the expenses of publication.

With kind regards, I am, dear Swami,

23rd November, 1898. 
Yours faithfully,
Esplanade House, Bombay. 
JAMSEDJI N. TATA. 123

But the social and political set up of the Europe was disapproved by Vivekananda because it was promoting bourgeois and exploiters, who were against the workers. The western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks. Constitutional rule, freedom, parliament, -all those things that you hear about

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123 Eckehard Kulke, *The Parsees in India*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1974, p. 258. It is said that during his first voyage to USA, Vivekananda happened to meet Jamshed Ji Tata who was sailing on the same ship. Vivekananda talked about the drain of wealth from India, and tried to convince Tata of the supreme need for India's industrialization. He also advised Tata not to import matches from Japan, but to set up a match factory in India itself, which would help him earn a larger profit and at the same time provide employment for many of his countrymen and check the drain of wealth from India.
are but jokes. In India peasants worked hard from morning to sunset, and somebody else took away bread out of their hands, and their children remained hungry. Notwithstanding the millions of tons of wheat raised in India, scarcely a grain passed in the mouth of a peasant. They lived upon the poorest corn which Americans would not feed to canary-birds.

Swami Vivekananda was thus both a democrat and a socialist, not so much from any ideological learning as by his intuitive assessment of the natural course of historical events. The challenge which they were now beginning to throw at the emperors and the Mughals of the business would impress him because of the spirit of fearlessness and faith in their own power which such challenges represented. Sister Nivedita, who accompanied him during his second visit to West, introduced him to some of the prominent revolutionaries and philosophers including Kropotkin, the propounder of Anarchism. Kropotkin was a famous Russian revolutionary living in exile. Vivekananda met him in Paris in August 1900 and discussed India's condition with him. In London, he met Edward Carpenter and other Socialist Democrats. He also knew Bakunin, another prominent socialist leader of Russia.

Like a socialist, he exhorted the masses to arise, awake and assert for their rights and foretold that the Proletocult (Proletarian culture) of the masses would be the future of New India. However, it was not the knowledge of the concept but the sufferings of the people, which made Vivekananda, an advocate of Socialism. According to Ramsay Macdonald, “No better definition of socialism can be given in general terms than that it aims at the organization of the material economic forces of society and their control by

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125 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume VIII, p. 86.
126 Amiya Kumar Majumdar, (ed), Nivedita Commemoration Volume, Vivekananda Janamsthan, Calcutta, 1968, p. 5. Though there is no evidence that he had read 'Das Capital' or 'The Communist Manifesto' of Marx yet his writings and speeches make it evident that he was well acquainted with the literature of the socialist revolutionaries of Europe and had met some of them.
127 Socialism is defined in Encyclopedia Britannica (11th edition) as that policy or theory which aims at securing by the action of the central democratic authority a better distribution and in due subordination thereto, a better production of wealth than now prevails.
the human forces".\footnote{128}{V. D. Mahajan, \textit{Recent Political Thought}, p. 253.} In the West, the term 'Socialism' was first used in the Poor Man's Guardian in 1833. According to another opinion, the name 'Socialism' came to be known in the year 1835 when Robert Owen, a successful capitalist, founded 'The Association of all Classes in all Nations'. The tradition of this utopian socialism actually began from Plato. In his \textit{Republic}, he elaborated the plan of a social order in which property was to be held in common and injustice was to be unknown.\footnote{129}{Santwana Dasgupta, \textit{Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda}, 236.}

Vivekananda disapproved of all restraints on liberty, except where such restraints were absolutely essential. 'Liberty,' said Vivekananda, is the first condition of growth. Just as men must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, dress and marriage, in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others'.\footnote{130}{J. S. Mill at the end of his essay \textit{On Liberty}, said, 'The worth of a state in the long run is the worth of the individuals, composing it; and a state which postpones the interests of their mental expansion and elevation to a little more of administrative skill..a state which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hand even for beneficial purposes-will find that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished, and that the perfection of the machinery to which it has sacrificed everything will in the end avail it nothing, for want of the vital power which, in order that the machine might work more smoothly, it has preferred to banish.\footnote{131}{John Stuart Mill, \textit{Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government}, London, 1931, p. 170.} Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of misappropriation of wealth etc., by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others, and all the members of the society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge.\footnote{132}{Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p. 387.}}

Democracy is people's power (Greek word Demos- the people, Kratos-strength).\footnote{133}{V. D. Mahajan, \textit{Recent Political Thought}, p. 327.} According to President Lincoln, democracy was the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In fact the word democracy
has been used ever since that time of Herodotus to denote that form of government in which the ruling power of a state is legally vested, not in any particular class or classes, but in the members of the community as a whole.\footnote{134}{Lord Bryceee, \textit{In Modern Democracies}, quoted in V. D. Mahajan, \textit{Recent Political Thought}, p. 261.} According to J. S. Mill, democracy was the form of government in which the whole people, or some numerous portions of them, exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by them. Vivekananda was apprehensive that democratic rule would engender a grossly materialistic society unless people in general learnt to be tolerant and generous, aware of other people’s needs and putting them above their own. 'Liberty' and 'Equality' should be based on the \textit{Vedantic} doctrine of the “equality of all beings.” When we realize that everything is same, identical, One reality, we attain freedom. This ideal is the ideal for the householder, \textit{sannyasin} (monk), all societies, mankind, animals, and nature.\footnote{135}{\textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume IV, p. 329.} He flayed social injustice and dreamed of a harmonious order in a society founded on the lofty ideals of freedom and equality. Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism and other like sects are the vanguard of the social revolution that is to follow.\footnote{136}{\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 401-02.} In a letter dated 1\textsuperscript{st} November, 1896, Swami Vivekananda inveighed against the Gold Standard which was visibly making the poor poorer, and the rich richer. Proclaiming his support for the cause of the poor, he declared that he was socialist .... “Not because I think it is a perfect system but half a loaf is better than no bread. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same persons having pain and pleasure...Let every dog have his day in this miserable world”.\footnote{137}{\textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume VI, pp. 381-82.} Actually socialism with spiritualism was his philosophy. He specifically advised his disciples to take care not to set up class strife between the poor peasants, the labouring people and wealthy classes.\footnote{138}{Ajeet Jawed, \textit{Swami Vivekananda An Iconoclastic Ascetic}, p. 185.} He wanted to change by changing the hearts of the exploiters, with the power of love, the method, later followed by Gandhi. In a letter to the Maharaja of Mysore, Vivekananda made an appeal, “My noble Prince! The life is short, the vanities of the world transient, but they alone live who live for others, the
rest are more dead than alive. One such high, noble-minded, and royal son of India as Your Highness can put it on its feet again and then leaves a name to the posterity, which shall be worshipped as god. May the Lord make your noble heart feel intensely for the suffering millions of India sunk in ignorance? It is the prayer of Swami Vivekananda”. Thus, Vivekananda's way of bringing change was different from that of the Marxists. He believed in evolution and not revolution. Education was the way. The youth, the sanyasins and other forces are to work out the transition towards a socialistic state.

As for the rich–poor divide, while it was practically impossible to eradicate it except for short periods, oppression by the rich can be minimized (a) by educating the rich to think of their poorer brethren and make suitable provision for their upkeep (the principle actualizing social welfare policy in most modern states), and (b) by educating the poor to shed their fear of the rich and to co-operate among themselves in their own interest. A band of such sannyasins could notably accelerate human progress by teaching men and women to reach their highest potential and work in harmony with one another by effacing their own-segmented interests. A hundred thousand men and women, fired with zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerv'd to Lion’s courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up – the gospel of equality. It is perhaps, hardly surprising that the first undertaking in the field of social service by the newly created Ramakrishna Mission (Sangha) was famine relief. Alerted by Swami Akhandananda in May of 1897, Swami Vivekananda sent both money and two Sevaks to assist the relief work in the region of Murshidabad. What will you do with a Mahatma residing somewhere in the Himalayas and appearing before you from the sky when the people around you are dying of starvation and the millions are degenerating for the want of education? Nonsense! If you

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139 Letters of Swami Vivekananda, p. 113.
140 Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume V, p. 15.
want to find God, serve man.\textsuperscript{142} Let us throwaway all this paraphernalia of worship—blowing the conch and ringing the bell, and waving the lights before the Images...Let us throw all the pride of learning and study of the \textit{Shastras} and all \textit{sadhanas} for the attainment of personal \textit{mukti}—and going from village to village devote our lives for the service of the poor.\textsuperscript{143}

The educated and religious leadership of the country was charged, though with great difficulty, with the task of rousing the mass of the people. Vivekananda admitted freely that his own \textit{gurubhais} had only been roused as a result of ‘terrific scolding on his part’,\textsuperscript{144} something which provoked a measure of controversy amongst the earliest members of the \textit{Math}.\textsuperscript{145} In the characteristic style, Vivekananda exhorted Swami Brahmananda in July 1897 to cut the costs of materials spent in the ritual of worship because the ‘children of the Lord are dying of starvation’ and he urged that costs of food offerings be diverted to …offering food to the living God who dwells in the persons of the poor.\textsuperscript{146}

Doing good to others was declared to be the great universal religion that all can grasp. Due to this power, \textit{Brahmin} boys were found nursing by the side of cholera–stricken patients for the first time since the time of Buddha'.\textsuperscript{147} The exact extent of Ramakrishna’s influence over Vivekananda’s ideal and practice of the \textit{sadhana} of social service has long been a source of uncertainty both within Ramakrishna Movement and among scholars outside the movement.\textsuperscript{148} Vivekananda’s systematic response to famine relief was significantly different from Ramakrishna’s spontaneous and warm hearted reaction to those specific instances of hunger and confronted him on a personal level. On January 29, 1894, he wrote a letter to Haridas Viharidas Desai, “I am born to organise these young men; nay hundred more in every city are ready to join me; and I want to send them trolling like irresistible

\begin{footnotes}
\item[142] \textit{Life of Swami Vivekananda} by His Eastern and Western Disciples, Volume I, p.213.
\item[143] Romain Rolland, \textit{The Life of Swami Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel}, p. 164.
\item[145] Swami Gambhirananda, \textit{History of Ramakrishna Math and Mission}, p. 98.
\item[146] \textit{Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda}, Volume VI, p. 404.
\end{footnotes}
waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion, education to the doors of the meanest and the most downtrodden. And this I will do or die.\textsuperscript{149}

At Lahore, a large number of B.A. students, who had a long talk with the Swami, immediately formed an association of entirely nonsectarian character, as suggested, for work among the poor, and \textit{Daridra Narayana}.\textsuperscript{150} Despite his ill-health, Vivekananda made a tour of Dacca in 1901 and there he advised the revolutionaries and the common people to fight not only for political liberation but also for economic justice, for the service of the poor, the downtrodden, the suppressed, oppressed and the repressed masses.\textsuperscript{151} His passionate speeches chalked out the path for many of the patriots who clubbed their political struggle with the establishment of an egalitarian society. During the last days of his life, when Vivekananda remained confined to his \textit{Math} at Belur, he used to advise the students who visited him in large numbers for his blessings, “What good is there if you practice \textit{yoga}, while your brethren die of starvation. Go help the needy; serve the poor and make the country a honeycomb”.\textsuperscript{152}

In the summer of 1897, during famine in Murshidabad district of Bengal, Vivekananda's disciples fed the suffering poor people for about five months. In 1898, when plague broke out, Vivekananda put himself at the head of the relief work. Under his instructions, the students organised themselves to inspect the houses of the poor and to provide relief. He ordered his \textit{sannyasin} disciples to sell the monasteries, ‘Sell it, if necessary. We are \textit{sannyasins}, we ought to always be ready to sleep under the trees and live on to what we beg everyday’.\textsuperscript{153} He himself came to live in a poor locality to inspire courage in the people and cheer up the workers. Gandhi Ji later followed Vivekananda and lived in \textit{Harijan} localities. The path shown by him led many of our freedom fighters to combine the struggle for political

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{149} \textit{Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples}, Volume I, p.533.
  \item \textsuperscript{150} Sankari Prasad Basu (ed), \textit{Swami Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers}, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, 2007, Volume I, p. 562.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Manmohan Ganguly, \textit{Swami Vivekananda-A Study}, Contemporary Publishers, Calcutta, 1907, p. 63.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Romain Rolland, \textit{The Life of swami Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel}, p. 132.
\end{itemize}
liberation with economic justice. He may be called as the precursor of all the leftist movements in India.\textsuperscript{154} When one of his Gurubhaiis confronted him saying that he was not preaching Ramakrishna and instead of bhakti and sadhna, he was asking his disciples to go about work, serving the poor and the diseased, Vivekananda thundered, “Your bhakti is sentimental nonsense, which makes one impotent. Who cares for bhakti or mukti? Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully, if I can rouse my countrymen, immersed in tomes, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of karma yoga. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or anyone, I am a follower of him only who serves and helps others without his own bhakti or mukti”.\textsuperscript{155} He instructed one of his disciples, K. S Ramaswami Shastri, “Let no one talk of karma, if it was their karma to suffer, it is our karma to relieve their sufferings, If you want to find God, serve man, To reach Narayna, you must serve the Daridranaryana-the starving millions of India”.\textsuperscript{156} “This indefatigable seer of truth and flayer of every injustice walked thousand of kilometers along the roads of India. He beheld tears and grief, the starvation and death of his disinherited brothers and sisters.\textsuperscript{157} It was not detraction from the unique genius of Ramakrishna but something beyond differences in temperament and upbringing factors frequently cited in explaining the chemistry between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Born a quarter of a century later into the later half of the nineteenth century than Ramakrishna and far more exposed to the scientific and technological achievements of a rapidly changing world, Vivekananda combined a sense of what should be done in the face of human misery with a greater sense of what could be done to intervene in natural and human disasters.

Vivekananda was so much impressed from the science and technological development of the West, while framing the rules and regulation of Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1897, he expressed the need to establish a technical institution. ‘Now the aim is to gradually develop this

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\item \textsuperscript{154} Ajeet Jawed, \textit{Swami Vivekananda An Iconoclastic Ascetic}, p. 187.
\item \textsuperscript{156} \textit{Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples}, Volume I, p.338.
\item \textsuperscript{157} E. P. Chelishev, \textit{Swami Vivekananda- Studies in Soviet Union}, p. 57.
\end{itemize}
Math into an all-round university. In it, along with the cultivation of philosophy and religion, a full-fledged technical institute will have to be established'.

Vivekananda was aware that the western development lacks moral and ethical values and the material development alone might be destructive. The European countries had concentrated only on material development; therefore, they would have to face its consequence. ‘Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years, if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life’. There was a huge destruction of men and material during two world wars. Even in the present era, there had been a fear of nuclear disaster. That is why Swami Brahmeshananda pointed out that the real solution to caste system lies in religion or spirituality as devotees have no caste.

Our civilization in dire peril has vainly invoked the spell of great words: Right, Liberty, Cooperation, the Peace of Geneva or Washington—but such words are void or filled with poisonous gas. Nobody believes in them. People mistrust explosives. There are however principles of social behaviour, of conduct and criteria of good and bad, of right and wrong, which are observed and shared by tradition and are imposed by custom, public opinion and the authority of society as a whole or of a particular group. The totality of such principles of conduct and the ideas of what human conduct ought to be, constitute the form of social consciousness known as ethics or morality.

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158 *Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Volume II, p. 56. The following methods of action were suggested for Ramakrishna Math and Mission: To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses; to promote and encourage arts and industries; and to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Shri Ramakrishna.


160 Swami Brahmeshnanda, *Interview*. (Appendix-E of the present thesis.)


together into a single family—and in the atomic age, this is the only alternative
to destroying ourselves”. 163

The material development could only provide with comforts, but it
could not give bliss, which only spiritualisms could. Therefore, there must be
a blend of science, technology and spiritualism for holistic and modern
development. By values we meant the basic moral principles that propel
people to take particular course of action. In other words, values or real
education are nation’s internal guideposts.

163 Nanda Mukherjee, *Sri Ramakrishna in the Eyes of the Brahmo and Christian
Admirers*, p. 112.