Swami Vivekananda often inadequately called India’s great patriot-saint may far more appropriately be described as the greatest prophet of humanism in recent history. He wrote to an English friend, “Doubtless I love India. But everyday my sight grows clear. What is India or England or America to us? We are the servants of that God, who, by the ignorant, is called Man. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree? There is but one basis of well being, social political or spiritual - to know that I and my brother are one. This is true for all countries and all people.”⁴ Again he wrote to another,

*The eternal, the infinite, the omnipresent, the omniscient is a principle, not a person. You, I and everyone are but embodiments of that principle; and the more of this principle is embodied in a person, the greater is he, and all in the end will be the perfect embodiment of that, and thus all will be one, as they are now essentially. This is all there is of religion, and the practice is through this feeling of oneness that is love. All old fogey forms are mere old superstitions.*
Now, why try to keep them alive? Why give ditch water to drink whilst the river of life and truth flows by?  

Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendra Nath Datta on 12th January 1863 as the son of Viswanath Dutta, a leading advocate of the Calcutta bar and Bhuvaneswari Devi who was a woman of great culture and wisdom. A great source of Vivekananda’s spiritual and moral development, his mother served as his first teacher. She helped him imbibe the glory of his nation, its tradition and culture through narrating the tales of *Puranas* and *Ithihasas*. About this Vivekananda says, “I am indebted to my mother for the efflorescence of my knowledge”. Her powerful exhortation, “Always be a man, my son!” evoked in young Narendra a concern for the poor and the needy around him. When one day the young Naren came and told her about the unjust and unpleasant treatment in his school, she advised him on the basic lessons of truth and duties, the supreme values of the nation he belongs to. She said, “My child, what does it matter, if you are in the right? Always follow the truth without caring about the result. Very often you may have to suffer injustice or unpleasant consequences for holding to the truth; but you must not, under any circumstances, abandon it.”

She taught him moral lessons with loving support and also inspired him with her powerful words, “Keep your conduct spotless and clear and prestige well guarded. At the same time, see to it that none is insulted or injured by you.
Mind should always be calm and stable. But if occasion demands, be strong.” 6 The spirit of humanism his mother instilled in him made him a hero among his friends which can be illustrated through a few incidents of his life. The story of Vivekananda rescuing a child from a horse’s hoof when he was only six years old is familiar to many who know his biography. This incident of self sacrifice is as follows, “Putting his dolls underneath his left arm Naren rushed to the lad’s help, heedless of his own safety, and grabbing him with his right hand, pulled him almost from under the horses’ hoofs.” 7 When having returned home, he told his mother, the whole story she was much pleased and delighted. Patting lovingly on his back, she said, “Always be brave and bold, my son!” 8 The young Naren rescuing a mother along with her child from being run over by a carriage was another incident of his college days. Recalling the days spent with Vivekananda, a friend writes about the influence of his mother on his life: “Her character was a constant inspiration to my life and work”. 9

Again referring to a lecture on The Ideals of Indian Women, when he was in the West, Mrs. Bull, one of his western disciples had written: “Having given from the Vedas, from Sanskrit literature and the dramas these Ideals, and having cited the laws of today favourable to the women of India, he paid his filial homage to his own mother as having enabled him to do the best he had done, by her life of unselfish love and purity, that caused him by his very inheritance to choose the life of a monk.” 10 It is interesting that whenever he
spoke anything important related to womanhood or culture the thought of motherhood and his own mother would pass through his mind. “One who does not worship his mother can never truly rise”,\textsuperscript{11} he said. This utterance of Vivekananda may appear rather irrelevant especially in the present age when devotion to mothers is no longer a reality. But he was the son of a culture which has had a long tradition of mother worship, a fact vindicated by so many such parallels like Adi Sankaracharya whose love for his mother was as strong as his passion for spirituality. True, it is difficult to reconcile asceticism and attachment. But Swami Vivekananda turned this attachment into \textit{sadhana} or preparation for the higher life. Thus he said, “In India, the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us she is the representative of God, as God is the Mother of the Universe”.\textsuperscript{12} Mother was to him the icon of the Universal female energy, the supreme energy, \textit{parasakti}. And mother worship was to him the alpha and omega of his spiritual practices. Bhuvaneswari Devi remained the strong influential force in Vivekananda’s life through out. “There is an incident when Bhuvaneswari Devi visited Belur Math, and called out from the ground floor at the top of her voice, ‘Bilu-u-u!’ . Hearing his name, the famous monk came running down the stairs and got engrossed in deep conversation with his mother.”\textsuperscript{13} So much was he to Bhuvaneswari Devi to whom he remained her beloved child Bilu throughout.
Father too was a source of inspiration. He instilled in him the sense of hospitality, self abnegation, humanitarian attitude towards the poor as well as his fellow beings and politeness, in young Naren. The concern for the poor his father had instilled in him was remarkable. The biographers of Swami record the following:

One day a monk came and asked for alms. All that Naren had was a hand-embroidered dhoti wrapped round his waist. He was proud of his new cloth, for it was his first garment marking his passage out of infancy, but straightway he gave it to the sadhu who tied it round his head and went way blessing the boy. When asked what had become of the cloth, the boy replied, “The sadhu begged for alms and I gave it to him”.  

His father seemed to have appreciated his son’s generous mind “To my father I owe my intellect and my compassion”, said Swami Vivekananda. He had also “inherited from Viswanathbabu [Viswanath Dutta] something unique in the form of instinctive courage to face any odds with manliness, sharp intelligence to think independently and to guard self-respect, something with which one can build up one’s future career in the absence of anything else in the world.” His father had helped him a lot to develop his personality and from him he had gained the practical knowledge about the world which helped him in his later life. “From his father, Narendra had
learnt the art of grasping the essentials of things, seeing truth from the widest and most comprehensive standpoints, and holding to the real issue under discussion.”. He provided many opportunities to young Naren to undergo discussions with the scholarly persons in various intellectual topics which helped him to develop self confidence and increase his intellectual capability. He also taught him the essence of different religions and cultivated in him a sense of religious harmony. “Whenever he got a copy of the Islamic or Christian religions he would give it to his son. Once presenting a copy of the Bible he reminded his son to find the essential unity of all religions.”

His parental inspiration and support apart, his own inherent qualities including spirituality, manliness, leadership quality, intellect, wide spectrum of knowledge and vast reading got for him the world’s attention. An agnostic in early age, Vivekananda would believe nothing unless proved by experience. He wanted to see everything himself to believe. And he was very eager to know whether things were like they were said to be. One may be interested to hear about the boy Narendra who waited in the solitude of midnight to see the divine monkey Hanuman coming to the banana grove as told in the stories! The boy Naren smoking different hookahs, meant for different castes, at his father’s parlour to test if there is any truth in such segregation is a strong evidence to support this attitude in him.
During his college days, he was attracted to the socio-religious movement of Brahma Samaj founded by Raja Rammohan Roy who fought the caste divisions and priestly supremacy of the early 19th century. Later, he joined Brahma Samaj and got actively involved in the socio-religious reformation movement. But all the while Narendra’s spiritual inclination remained and he soon realized that he had a different goal to achieve, enlightenment and attainment of the ultimate Truth. It was this spiritual quest that brought him to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, who later became his spiritual preceptor who embodied all the values enshrined in ancient Indian scriptures. Interviewed on 23rd October 1895, he thus spoke of the enlightening and determining influence of Sri Ramakrishna on his life: “It only needed the meeting with a great teacher- Ramakrishna Paramahamsa – to kindle in me the final determination to follow the path he himself had trod, as in him I found my highest ideal realized.” 19

Naren first received a clue about the rare spiritual state of Sri Ramakrishna from Prof. Hastie. Professor Hastie mentioned Sri Ramakrishna’s name as one who passed into ecstasies, while explaining the meaning of ecstasy in one of Wordsworth’s poems to his students. 20 Later Ramachandra Datta, one of his relatives too directed him to Shri Ramakrishna. “If you have a real desire to realize God”, Datta suggested Naren, to meet “the Master at Dakshineswar instead of visiting Brahma Samaj and other places”. 21
At the first meeting itself, Sri Ramakrishna had realized the spiritually gifted soul in Naren whom he desired to make a ‘Spiritual Benefactor of Mankind’. Sri Ramakrishna said, “Oh, how I have longed to pour my spirit into the heart of someone fitted to receive my message.  

At the first sight itself Ramakrishna embraced his long awaited disciple telling “I know that you are that ancient sage Nara, incarnation of Narayana, born on this earth to cure the intense miseries of the world”. Naren’s intellectual strength and spiritual purity impressed Ramakrishna so much so that he later said, “My Narendra is a coin with no alloy whatever: it rings true”.  

He loved him very much and strengthened his spiritual vision aiming to initiate him in the path of service and devotion to humanity. But Spirituality, Ramakrishna believed, is the basis of all humanitarian deeds. Therefore he wanted Naren to become a Jnani and a Bhakta at the same time. Vivekananda’s later call to see God or Narayana in the millions of poverty stricken masses, the poor Narayanas, or the Daridryanarayanas as he himself said was perhaps the reflection of his Master’s teachings. Swami Vivekananda was all adoration for his master and realized the integrity, purity, and spiritual wisdom in him. He accepted Ramakrishna as his Spiritual Master and regarded him as God incarnate. “‘Incarnations’, Vivekananda once said, “can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish”. Such incarnations are the Teachers of all teachers, the highest manifestations of God through man, he believed. “God understands human
failings and becomes man to do good to humanity.” Vivekananda believed.

Though born of an Aristocratic family, he had undergone struggles and hardship during his early life. The family disputes from the paternal side caused heavy financial loss and forced his family to leave the ancestral home. The sudden demise of his father, the only earning member of the family, had badly affected his further studies and the family as a whole had to face even frequent starvation. “As the eldest male member of the family, he had to find the wherewithal for the feeding of seven or eight mouths and began to hunt for a job. He also attended the law classes. He went about clad in coarse clothes, barefoot, and hungry. Often he refused invitations for dinner from friends, remembering his starving mother, brothers and sisters at home. He would skip family meals on the house, so that the people at home might receive a larger share of the scanty food.” But even in the poor financial condition, he was very particular in upholding morality and faith in God. Here is one of his dialogues with the brother disciples on his experiences of the darkest period through which he had passed:

Some of my old friends who earned their livelihood by unfair means, asked me to join them. A few among them, who had been compelled to follow this dubious way of life by sudden turns of fortune as in my case, really felt sympathy for me.
There were other troubles also. Various temptations came my way. A rich woman sent me an ugly proposal to end my days of penury, which I sternly rejected with scorn. Another woman also made similar overtures to me. I said to her, “you have wasted your life seeking the pleasures of the flesh. The dark shadows of death are before you. Have you done anything to face that? Give up all these filthy desires and remember God!”

In spite of all these troubles, however, I never lost faith in the existence of God or in His divine mercy. Every morning, taking His name, I got up and went out in search of a job.  

Yet throughout the days of penury the angelic inspiration and spiritual support of his Master spread its wings of protection over him. “The Master’s love for and faith in Naren acted as a restraining force on the freedom-loving young disciple and proved an unconscious protection from temptations.” 

Vivekananda himself reminisced of his Master.

Sri Ramakrishna’s influence on Naren was so much so that his mind yearned to embrace an ascetic life. Spiritual purity and celibacy became the new principles of his life ever since he met Ramakrishna. But this ran in contrast to the interest of his parents and other family members. They even prevented Naren from visiting his Master whom they believed had played a major role in making him averse to marriage and family life. But the love and regards
of his Master in the days of his misfortune which helped him a lot in developing mental courage and spirituality in him made him adhere to the former. Naren took his final decision to be a monk rather than a householder. When his Master came to know about his strong decision, he became happy as never before. Vivekananda himself later said about his Master’s love, warmth and affection from the day of his first meeting with him till the end of his life. as, “He made me his slave by his great love for me!” 

Vivekananda later expressed his devotion to his Master in a letter to Swami Shivananda in 1894: “My supreme good fortune is that I am his servant through life after life. A single word of his is to me far weightier than the Vedas and the Vedanta….Oh, I am the servant of the servants of his servants”. Throughout his ascetic career Vivekananda remained an ardent disciple of Ramakrishna. He said, “I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me, and will not give me rest till I have finished it! And oh, how shall I speak of him! Oh, his love for me! 

One cannot find anywhere such a master-disciple relationship as in the case of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. The Master’s faith and trust in his beloved disciple was so inordinate that he wished to make Naren his spiritual successor whom he entrusted to look after his disciples, train and guide them in
Some disciples of Swami Vivekananda thus write about Ramakrishna’s confidence in his spiritual successor: The Master wrote on a piece of paper, “Narendra will teach others.” Naren hesitated and said, “I won’t do that.” But the Master replied, “You shall have to do it.”

His eastern and western disciples had mentioned the reason why the Master had put such a responsibility on him as, “It is only the illuminate person, fully aware of the dimensions of man, who can understand human problems in right perspective; and Sri Ramakrishna had deliberately, one could say forcibly, turned the mind and heart of the Swami towards humanity, charging him to teach.

The last words of his Master had ever reminded and guided him in fulfilling the spiritual mission entrusted by the former. The following words of Ramakrishna while at the garden house of Cossipore resonated in his memories for good: “O, Naren, today I have given you my all and have become a Fakir, a penniless beggar. By the force of power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go where you come from”. The master was confident about Naren’s intellectual, moral and spiritual power which would guide his brother disciples after his death. And the disciple was also confident that his master’s blessings would energize and empower him in spreading the spiritual message and guiding
the world in the path of salvation. Indeed Vivekananda firmly believed that Ramakrishna was his spiritual mentor who made him what he was. Later in one of his public lectures in England, paying tribute to his great Master Vivekananda said:

   I am what I am, and what I am is always due to him; whatever in me or in my words is good and true and eternal came to me from his mouth, his heart, his soul. Sri Ramakrishna is the spring of this phase of the earth’s religious life, of its impulses and activities. If I can show the world one glimpse of my Master, I shall not have lived in vain.  

After the demise of Sri Ramakrishna, Narendra and his brother disciples underwent hard and tragic situations in their life. They had struggled a lot even to satisfy primary needs like food, clothing and shelter. As directed by his Master, Naren undertook the responsibility of the brother disciples and succeeded in bringing them together even in adverse conditions. His organizational ability was so great that he could guide them carry on spiritual practices in unity.

Giving spiritual guidance to his brother monks apart, Vivekananda was particular on his own Sadhana (preparation for higher life) for self realization. But it was always the service to humanity that he deemed as his mission throughout life. It was the day his Master had passed away
exactly a year, Naren wished to go for a pilgrimage leaving his responsibilities and bondages with his brother disciples. He left the monastery as a wandering monk with a copy of *Bhagavad Gita*, a water pot; necessary clothes packed in a bundle and a staff, as his only belongings. On the eve of this wandering, the thought of his brother disciples, who were dependent on their leader troubled him greatly. Thus write his disciples:

*This time he made up his mind to break with the monastery in order to test his own strength, to gather experience of another way of life, to make himself fearless, and at the same time to force his brother disciples to stand alone on their own feet, in self-reliance. It was struggle for him to free himself: his mind for some time wavered between the desire for the wandering life and his sense of responsibility for brotherhood.*

He began his journey as a wandering monk, assuming the name Vividishananda. During his wandering he vowed not to receive money or beg food from others. He would eat only what was offered to him without asking. His in-depth knowledge in Sanskrit scriptures and the spiritual training from his Master, Narendra travelled all over the country as a wandering monk to serve the mission his Master entrusted him with – ‘Service of God in Man’ and to understand his people and their life. His
state of mind is thus described by his disciples, “Sometimes a dim vision of the missionary life, of ministering to the poor and downtrodden at the urge of the inner self, would present itself to the Swami’s mind. This idea of service to man as the manifestation of God engrossed him at times”.

He wished to preach the truth of religion to the laymen and help them practice Vedantic values to cultivate spirituality, faith and service-mindedness, the ideals his master embodied. He would often discuss with his brother disciples his idea of practicing Vedantic ideals in life. But health problems haunted him. His warmth and attachment to his brother disciple too dissuaded him from very long journey. He thus told to Sharatchandra Gupta, Assistant Station Master at Haridwar when asked why he was sad.

*My son, I have a great mission to fulfill and I am in despair at the smallness of my capacity. I have an injunction from my Guru to carry out this mission. It is nothing less than the regeneration of my motherland. Spirituality has fallen to a low ebb and starvation stalks the land. India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her spirituality.*

Later he decided to stay far away from his dear and near ones whose contact would prevent him from spreading the message of his Master and decided to return only after achieving his spiritual mission. During his
conversation with Akhandananda, his brother monk who accompanied him in his journey in January 1891, he said, “It is not possible to perform any spiritual disciplines unless the Maya [bondage] of the brother disciples is given up. Whenever I plan to practice disciplines, the Master puts some obstacles in my way. Now I shall go alone. I shall not tell anyone where I am staying”.  

At last in February 1891, he left the monastery for a long journey, renouncing all sorts of bonds. Finally, as his disciples wrote, “Renouncing all ties, loosing all bonds, breaking down all limitations, destroying all sense of fear … went forth, even as the rhinoceros – towards Alwar, in the beautiful and historic land of Rajputana”.  

While leaving Baranagore Math he mentioned his strong determination to return only after achieving the spiritual goal. “I shall not return until I acquire such realization that my touch will transform a man”, he said. “  
His mind restlessly aspired to spiritually regenerate his country despite his awareness regarding the limitations of his capabilities. He relied on his Master’s faith in his potential to restore India whose culture had degenerated under alien influence to her past glory. Therefore he decided to raise his countrymen spiritually and culturally by imparting Vedic knowledge. Men of various hues flocked to him, listening to the gems of thoughts descending from the Himalayan heights of his knowledge. Rich and the poor, elite and laymen, Princes and Ministers – all thronged him in their eagerness to taste the nectar of spirituality. He would use all kinds of
followers for the spiritual empowerment of the world. An organizer of no mean merit, he would win over influential people with mass following. There were Princes and Dewans (ministers) who hosted the Swami. Though criticized for his high level contact in spite of his having been a saint dedicated to the cause of the poor Vivekananda with reasonable conviction stuck to his ground. “If I can win over to my cause those in whose power are wealth and the administration of the affairs of thousands, my mission will be accomplished all the sooner; by influencing one Maharaja alone I can indirectly benefit thousands of people”, 41 he said.

During his wandering, he came across many undesirable social evils based on inequality. He realized that the major problem modern India faced was the subjugation of the Indian poor and women who could have played positively for the versatile progress of the nation. “He had rigorously pleaded that a nation could not make satisfactory progress if these factors remained ignored” 42 Vivekananda wrote once to Bhushan Ghosh in 1895 that “trampling of woman, and grinding the poor through caste restriction are two great evils of India.” 43 The miserable condition of his countrymen devoid of even food and cloth pained him too much. “His soul “brooded with tenderness and anguish over India’s poverty”. 44 Realistic and rational in thinking, Vivekananda deplored many of the superstitions eating into the vitals of the nation and felt the need to educate the common mass and women as the only panacea to rejuvenate India fraught with material
decline. Recalling his Master’s words that religion is not for the empty
stomach, he wished to find out some concrete measures to uplift the
sidelined and the suppressed and bring them to the main stream, giving
them equal rights.

His journey to Kanyakumari by the end of 1892 was eventful. His
experiences at this southern tip of India intensified his feel for India’s
suffering lot more than before. Having had his obeisance done at the feet of
the Goddess Kanyakumari, he swam across the waves towards the towering
rock (the present Rock Memorial) in the sea where he sat in long meditation.
Here again the thought of his poor countrymen whom he saw the Gods
incarnate clouded his mind. “He asked himself as he beat his breast, ‘What
have we done, we so-called men of God, the sannyasins, what have we done
for the masses?’” ⁴⁵ writes Romain Rolland.

This biographer of Swami Vivekananda thus narrates his experiences at
Kanyakumari:

\[\text{At this date, 1892, it was the misery under his eyes, the misery}
\text{of India that filled his mind to the exclusion of every other}
\text{thought. It pursued him, like a tiger following his prey, from}
\text{the North to the South in his flight across India. It consumed}
\text{him during sleepless nights. At Cape Comorin it caught and}
\text{held him in its jaws.}^{46}\]
Later Vivekananda himself had expressed this state of mind in a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda on 19 March 1894:

*My brother, in view of all this, especially of the poverty and ignorance, I got no sleep. At Cape Comorin, sitting in Mother Kumari’s temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock, I hit upon a plan: We are so many sannyasins wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics— it is all madness. Did not our Master use to say, “An empty stomach is no good for religion”? That those poor people are leading the life of brutes, is simply due to ignorance. We have for all ages been sucking their blood and trampling them underfoot”.*  

During the three days long meditation on the rock, he developed a prophetic vision about the need of regenerating India from her material and spiritual degradation and decided to dedicate himself for the cause of his motherland. The only way how to bail India out of her present decline was by cultivating the spirit of renunciation and service among the people, he realized. It was thus the Kanyakumari experience more than anything else that made him a man of action – a *Karma yogi*. It changed him into a social reformer who dedicated the rest of his life to the cause of the poor. He was to infuse a new strength and vigour in the minds of the people through arousing the dynamism of spirituality latent in them.
This change of mind after the meditation at the rock at Cape Comorin could be well seen in many instances during his further journey from Kanyakumari to Hyderabad. He spoke about his mission to educate the poor and give them awareness on their problems and potentialities during the discussion with Raja of Ramnad at Rameswaram and his plan to uplift the masses by fighting against the social evils and customs and spread the ideal equality through popularizing Vedanta among the common masses. The Swami’s discussion with a pundit at Pondicherry reveals his transition from a Jnana Yogi to a Karma yogi. This could further be noticed from his advice to a young social reform activist in Madras. His clubbing patriotic ideology with social reform is described as follows by his biographers:

Repeatedly he urged on them the need to analyze foreign ideals critically and to guard against assimilating the materialistic foreign culture. They should preserve and make the most of all that was great and glorious in their country’s past; otherwise the foundations of the national structure would be undermined. He was not an enemy of social reform; on the contrary, he himself yearned to reform: but it must come from within, not from outside India; it must be constructive, not destructive. 

\[48\]
He also wished to cross the seas as a missionary to reveal the glory of Indian culture and its socio-religious and humanistic ideas to the western world. He had expressed this desire in a talk at Hyderabad. Many eminent persons encouraged him and promised financial aid to participate in the ‘Parliament of Religions’ to be held in connection with the World’s Columbian Exposition in the city of Chicago from September 11 to 27, in 1893, which aimed at the synthesis of universal religions. With the help of the large circle of devotees, especially the Raja of Khetri, he went to United States on 31st May, 1893 with a mind filled with devotion to his Master and his country. His emotional mind is thus described by his disciples:

*His eyes were filled with tears, his heart overwhelmed with emotion. He thought of the Master, of the Holy Mother, of his brother-disciples. He thought of India and her culture, of her greatness and her suffering, of the Rishis and of the Sanatana Dharma. His heart was bursting with love for his native land*.

**MAIDEN JOURNEY TO THE WEST**

Having touched the shore of America, Vivekananda got the opportunity to become a delegate in the Parliament of Religions as the accepted spokesman of Hindu Dharma with the aid of the letter from Prof. Wright to the chairman of the Committee for the selection of delegates. The
Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, a great event in History, was a landmark in Vivekananda’s missionary life. It was his address before this international community of scholarship that brought him to world’s attention, helping him spread Vedanta wherever he went. “It was only a short talk, but its spirit of universality, its fundamental earnestness and broadmindedness completely captivated the whole assembly”.\textsuperscript{50} Here again the thought of his Master and his blessings proved inspiring. Replying to someone who mentioned Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual influence on him at a meeting at Calcutta arranged to welcome him on his return from the West, Vivekananda said:

\begin{quote}
Brothers, you have touched another chord in my heart, the deepest of all, and that is the mention of my teacher, my master, my hero, my ideal, my God in life – Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped anyone in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

The impression which he had gained through his performance in the Parliament of Religions had made him world renowned. The metropolitan newspapers proclaimed him a Prophet and a Seer. The New York Herald spoke of him as “He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of
Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.”  

Dr. Annie Besant thus writes on the general American impression about Vivekananda who emerged from the Parliament of Religions: “That man a heathen!” said one, as he came out of the hall, “and we send missionaries to his people! It would be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us”.

Mr. Merwin Marie Snell, President of the Scientific Section of the Parliament, in his letter to the editor of the Pioneer, an Allahabad based Anglo Indian newspaper, commended on Vivekananda: “…there is no doubt that the continued interest is largely due to a genuine hunger for the spiritual truths which India through him has offered to the American people… America thanks India for sending him”.

Though he had moulded a deep impression and universal recognition in the minds of the people of the West with his scientific and dynamic humanistic philosophy presented in the Parliament of Religions, his mind was always urged to fulfill his life’s mission – to work for the cause of poor and sunken masses of India. “In the midst of all the immediate acclaim and popularity that his appearance at the Parliament had brought him, he had no thought for himself; his heart continued to bleed for India”. He didn’t even forget to mention (on September 20) at the Parliament of Religions the prime intention behind his visiting America. The crying need of the common masses in India was not religion but bread, and it was to seek necessary aid to satisfy the physical needs of the countrymen he visited the West, he said.
He also mentioned that his intention behind his visit to the West is none other than that. Thus he wrote to Haripada Mitra on 28 December 1893: “I came to this country [America] not to satisfy my curiosity, nor 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.”

After the Parliament of Religions, he continued to remain in the West to learn the secret behind its material advancement which he wished to apply for his country. He also wished to impart a sense of spirituality to the westerners which their civilization lacked. Chicago based newspaper *Interocean* thus wrote in 1894: “Vivekananda lingered in Chicago for several months after the great Parliament of Religions closed, studying many questions relating to schools and the material advancement of civilization in order to carry back to his own people as convincing arguments regarding America as he brought to this country the morality and spirituality of his own people.”

He didn’t hesitate to seek financial aid from the West for his future mission in India. He willingly accepted the offer of a Lecture Bureau for a tour of United States. He also went to England and London for the same purpose. His journeys here also helped him realize the spiritual curiosity of the Westerners and he decided to start institutions in America to teach them the fundamentals of Hindu thought, “what he desired was a spiritual rather than
a temporal organization, a union of noble, pure, preserving, and energetic souls, bent on personal realization working by genuine interest in and love for humanity.”  

He loved the spiritual East and equally admired the materialistically vital West. Meanwhile the dearth of spirituality in the West and materialistic advancement in the East would not help civilization progress, he thought. Hence the necessity of East and West coming to a communion, a free exchange of Spiritualism and materialism. According to Romain Rolland,

The apparently contradictory conceptions in Indian metaphysics (the Absolute Unity of Advaitism, ‘qualified’ Unity, and Duality), which clashed even in the Upanishads, needed to be reconciled and the bridge built joining them to the conceptions of Western metaphysics by the establishment of a table of comparison destined to set forth all the points of relationship between the profound views of the oldest Himalayan philosophy and the principles admitted by modern science.  

Therefore to spread his spiritual teachings in the west he founded the Vedantic Society in New York in November 1894. It helped him unveil the secrets of Vedantic spiritualism to the West and convey India’s gospel of universal religion, brotherhood and love.
News of his mission’s success in the west came to India through the publications which carried the American newspaper reports on Vivekananda. Meetings held in different parts of India also highlighted his works in the West. His brother disciples, friends and devotees urged him to return to his parent country. But for his country’s poor and downtrodden, he decided to spend some more days in the West. “He well knew that the poor of India could not, and the wealthy Indians would not, help him financially to translate into action his plans for the uplift of his country; whereas by staying in America he would be able to earn money for his cause.”

He wished to train some of his disciples on the practical application of Vedantic ideals in the West and make them fit for the benefit of humanity. This led to a new phase in carrying out his mission in the west. He shared his wish on this kind of training programme through the letter he wrote to Mr. E. T. Sturdy on 24th April 1895, which reads as follows, “This year I am hoping to work along this line – training up to practical Advaita realization a small band of men and women. I do not know how far I shall succeed. The West is the field for work, if a man wants to benefit humanity, rather than his own particular sector country.”

He also decided to initiate some of his western disciples into sannyasa and train them to carry his work in the west even in his absence. He to the Raja of Khetri wrote on 9 July 1895: “I have planted a seed in this country; it is
already a plant, and I expect it to be a tree very soon. I have got a few hundred followers. I shall make several Sannyasins, and then I go to India, leaving the work to them”. 62 Recalling the memorable days spent with Vivekananda at Thousand Island Park, Miss Christine Greenstidel, later Sister Christine, stated that “He wrote to one of his friends that he wanted to manufacture a few yogis out of the materials of the classes. He felt that his work was now really started and that those who joined him at Thousand Islands were really disciples…” 63 In a letter to Alasinga Perumal in August 1895 he wrote, “I have a truth to teach, I the child of God. And He that gave me the truth will send me fellow-workers from the earth’s bravest and best”. 64

After the successful completion of his mission in America, he visited European countries to enlighten the superstitious Western minds with Vedantic wisdom. While at Thousand Island Park he planned to write books in English on Vedanta to enlighten western intellectuals with Indian philosophical thoughts. During his first visit to England for about two months from 10th September to 27th November of 1895, he gained many disciples for spiritual work. Mr. E. T. Sturdy, most prominent among them, was ready to campaign for Vedantic ideas both in England and other parts of Europe. Miss Margaret Noble and Miss Muller, the two educationists, became his disciples who later served to empower the Indian women. They supported him intellectually and financially for his proposed educational
institution for girls in India. Captain Sevier, a retired army officer, and his wife Charlotte, being attracted by his June 1896 lectures on Vedanta at London commented, “This is the man and this is the philosophy that we have been seeking in vain all through our life!” Having turned into his ardent disciples, they helped him a good deal in fulfilling his mission in England. Another was Josiah. J. Goodwin, an English journalist, whom the Office bearers of New York Vedantic Society appointed stenographer to transcribe the talks and classes of Vivekananda. These great ones apart, there were other devotees in the West who worked life long to propagate his spiritual message. “They found in him the living examples of his own theories, and were ready to follow him, because they believed that a philosophy which had produced such a one, could, if they followed his example, do much also for them” 66

Amidst his visiting different places, giving public lectures, interviews and writings while in the west, his mind zeroed in on his future works in India. He discussed this with his brother disciples and encouraged them through letters. This could be well seen from his letters to them. On 6th August 1896 he wrote: “Do not be afraid. Great things are going to be done, my children. Take heart…In the winter I am going back to India and will try to set things on their feet there. Work on, brave hearts, fail not – no saying nay; work on – the Lord is behind the work …Mahasakti is with you…” He desired to establish such centers in Calcutta, Madras and Himalayas. Inspired by the
Swami to this task, Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, his Western disciples readied themselves for it. They wrote: “We will begin work with these three centers; and later on, we will get to Bombay and Allahabad. And from these points, if the Lord pleased, we will invade not only India, but send bands of preacher to every country in the world” 68 His philanthropic mind didn’t forget the cause of Indian women too belonging to the weak section of population. Hence his starting institutions to educate the girls who could be instrumental in national reconstruction and his decision to bring Miss Margaret Noble, later Sister Nivedita, an educationist to India and depute her to work for the general welfare of women folk through education.

After four years of hectic work in the West, the extreme desire of millions of his countrymen forced him to come back to India on 15th January 1897. He had received hearty welcome from all the places in his journey from Colombo to his native land. He had also delivered lectures, attended public meetings, personal visits with the elite and engaged in planning his future work in India on his way back to his native land, Bengal. His decision to spend the rest of his life to regenerate his nation and restore its spiritual eminence forced him overlook his poor physical health and mental strain. Thus writes K.S. Ramaswami Sastri, son of Prof. Sundararama Iyer who lived with him before his visit to West during 1892:
The difference that I noticed between Vivekananda of 1892 and Vivekananda of 1897 was what struck me most. In 1892 he looked like one who had a tryst with destiny and was not quite sure when or where or how he was to keep that tryst. But in 1897 he looked like one who had kept that tryst with destiny, who clearly knew his mission, and who was confident about its fulfillment.69

He strongly believed that the youth are the backbone of a country and only through them cultural, moral, physical and spiritual regeneration of India is possible. He therefore directed his brother disciples to cultivate in them faith and a spirit of renunciation. In a letter dated 2nd May 1895 he thus directed one of his disciples: “Work among those young men who can devote heart and soul to this one duty – the duty of raising the masses of India. Awake them, unite them, and inspire them with this spirit of renunciation; it depends wholly on the young people of India.” 70 The very same message Vivekananda gave to another young monk: “Listen, my boy! Sri Ramakrishna came and gave his life for the world; I also will sacrifice my life; you also, everyone of you, should do the same. All these works are only a beginning. Believe me, from the shedding of our life-blood will arise gigantic heroes and warriors of God, who will revolutionize the whole world!” 71
While addressing people who gathered at various places to welcome him on his way back from America he mentioned the need of young generation to work for India’s bright future. He stressed the need of giving them proper training through man making and character building education with a holistic vision. In an interview to The Hindu, Madras, in February 1897, he thus mentioned his desire to start institutions training the youth to serve the common masses: “I want to start two central institutions at first – one at Madras and the other at Calcutta – for training young men as preachers … I want to start at first these two institutions for educating missionaries to be both spiritual and secular instructors to our masses. They will spread from centre to centre, until we have covered the whole of India.”

According to his disciples, “He used to say that, if he could get ten or twelve youths fired with a faith like that of Nachiketa, he could turn the whole current of thought and aspirations of his country into a new channel.”

ESTABLISHMENT OF MONASTIC CENTRES

He mooted the idea of launching an organization to spread Sri. Ramakrishna’s message to save mankind through spiritual service. With this purpose he organized on May 1, 1897 a meeting of Sri. Ramakrishna’s disciples and other dedicated youngsters at the residence of Balrambabu, his brother disciple. The meeting unanimously accepted the Vivekananda’s proposal. Named Ramakrishna Mission Association, it came to have
branches at different parts of the world training people in selfless service through Vedantic teachings.

His work in company of his brother disciples resulted in establishing monastic centers in different parts of India. Of them the most famous one was the Advaita Asrama, established in Himalaya on 19 March 1899, his Master’s birth day. The Asrama soon became the beehive of spiritual activities. The philosophy of monism, idea of universal brotherhood and the synthesis of universal religions were ideals the Asrama (monastery) activities zeroed in on. The Swami thus wrote: “Here it is hoped to keep Advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations. Here will be taught and practiced nothing but the Doctrine of Unity, pure and simple; and though in entire sympathy with all other systems, this Asrama is dedicated to Advaita and Advaita alone.” It later developed into a celebrated seat of spiritual learning, bringing out a profusion of spiritual literatures including the prestigious *Prabuddha Bharata*, the journal of Ramakrishna order.

The mission also launched many welfare schemes to ameliorate the conditions of the poor and illiterate. Of such many important works educational service topped. The Ramakrishna Order opened educational institutions to provide man-making and character-building education to common masses along with imparting knowledge of Science and
Technology. Health care, rural and tribal welfare activities conducted by the Mission proved a solace to the marginalized and the downtrodden. Famine relief activities of the Mission, especially the works of Ramakrishna Mission Plague service, instituted on March 31 of 1898 under Vivekananda’s instruction were widely admired. The Mission also organized movements to inculcate in the youth the spirit of cooperation and service mentality and right attitude towards life. The Mission has again been serving society by giving free food to thousands of poor people all the country over.

The Mission engaged in the overall uplift of the nation, left no area neglected. Worried of the poor socio-economic, intellectual and spiritual condition of Indian woman, the Swami envisioned establishing women’s organization in the name of Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother. Ramakrishna Sarada Mission thus started concentrating on the all round progress and emancipation of women members of the society. He also wished to open Sri Sarada Math, monastery for women sanyasins or Parivrajikas as they were called. His plan of female education saw its fruition through his most loving disciple Miss. Margaret Noble, the Irish born educationist who had adopted India as her country. She was as Vivekananda called her Nivedita or the dedicated one, dedicated at the altar of reascent Mother India and was ready to undertake any job entrusted to her by her Master, however much hazardous it might be. Having had a thorough knowledge of Indian idea of womanhood, she embarked on with the mission her Master gave. Her works
for women’s education were widely admired. The full support and blessings Vivekananda gave Sister Nivedita succeeded in her mission of educating the fair sex. She could bring about universally applicable qualitative improvement in the field of women’s education. The girls’ school she started at Calcutta proved revolutionary experiment in modern India’s female education.

He also established many more institutions for public utility, education and health care in different parts of the world and also initiated the establishment of Maths or monasteries and educational institutions. Establishing monastic centers of Ramakrishna Order apart, his earnest efforts and guidance resulted in the publication of three magazines, *Brahmavadin* of Madras, *Prabuddha Bharata* of Almora and *Udbodhan* of Calcutta that covered the wide spectrum of India’s spiritual knowledge, particularly the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

His deteriorating health and physical discomforts prevented him a little from continuously straining for the Ramakrishna Mission Association during 1898. Thanks to the direction of his doctors and brother disciples, he decided to stay in the dry and cool atmosphere of Almora for some days to regain health. But this was also the time the demise of some of his most loving ones put him to sorrow. Pavhari Baba, whom he deemed his spiritual teacher next to his Master, the English Journalist and his spiritual disciple J. J. Goodwin
who had been his life long companion working as stenographer to translate his lectures in the West and B. R. Rajam Iyer, the young and vibrant Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* left the world for good. The physical and mental strain thus caused made him return to Calcutta on 18 October 1898, and engage in activities of the Math, mainly training the sannyasins and brahmacharis, classing them on Indian scriptures. With the financial help from his western disciples like Miss. F. Henrietta Muller and Mrs. Ole Bull he established a permanent monastery on the bank of the river Ganga at Belur. The Belur Math later became the permanent headquarters of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement.

His second visit to the West during July 1899 lasted for two years. During this time as usual he gave lectures on Indian philosophy, participated in discussions and met people at many places. He could oversee the working of Vedantic centers established in various parts of West under Ramakrishna order. Miss. Boock, a member of New York Vedanta Society and a student of Swami Abhedananda had donated him 160 acres of land in San Antone Valley in Santa Clara County in California in June 1900. Later, under the supervision of Swami Turiananda, the Shanti Asrama training centre for meditation was established there in 1902. On 26 July 1900 he left New York for Paris where he attended the Congress of the History of Religions held from 3 to 8 September 1900 in connection with the Paris Exposition.
The call of his motherland was irresistible and he reached Belur Monastery on 9 December 1900. On 3 January 1901 he visited the Advaita Asrama in Himalaya where he was happy at the work of his brother disciples. Later he went to Varanasi and laid the foundation of an organization, Ramakrishna Home Service. In March he went on a pilgrimage to different places in East Bengal and Assam along with his mother, sister, aunt and some of his brother disciples. This was his last public tour. Ill-health prevented him from further physical exertion and intellectual strain. Following the direction of his doctors and brother disciples, he kept away from all strenuous activities and future plans and rested at the Math in Calcutta to regain health. Though his ill-health interrupted his religious and social activities, his patriotic soul urged him do more for India’s spiritual and material prosperity. Evidence has it that he discussed with the Indian National Congress activists on the need of founding an institution to train teachers for preserving the Vedic culture and Sanskrit learning when they met him seeking his blessing in December 1901. Perfectly satisfied in his work of carrying out his Master’s mission, Vivekananda wished to retire from the responsibilities of the Math. He said, “What does it matter? … I have done enough for fifteen years”. 75 On the day of his Mahasamadhi, while walking along with his brother disciple, Swami Premananda, he said, “If there were another Vivekananda, he would have understood what Vivekananda has done! And yet, how many Vivekananda shall born in time!!” 76
In fact by this time he wished to transfer his responsibilities to his vibrant followers before his passing away. And as if with the premonition about his numbered days the Swami withdrew from all affairs of the Math. “I delivered my message and I must go … The shadow of a big tree will not let the smaller trees grow up. I must go to make room”, he told Miss. Mac Leod who met him two months before his attainment of eternal beatitude.  

Sister Nivedita reminisces of Vivekananda’s mindset during his last days. She wrote, “How often, he said, does a man ruin his disciples by remaining always with them! premonition and prediction proved right. Swami attained the eternal beatitude on 4 July 1902 at the age of thirty nine, leaving behind him a great saga of renunciation and service to mankind. “When men are once trained, it is essential that their leader leave them, for without his absence they cannot develop themselves”.

During the evening of his life he continued to remind his brother disciples about their future work after his eternal journey. Thus he wrote to them: “Whether I live or die, whether I go back to India or not, you go on spreading love, love that knows no bounds …” When death is so certain, it is better to die for a good cause”. Having foreseen his nearing end he said to one of his brother disciple that, “A great Tapasya and meditation has come upon me, and I am making ready for death”. While in Kashmir, once he told Sister Nivedita about his readiness for the eternal rest. “Whenever death approaches me, all weakness vanishes. I have neither fear, nor doubt,
nor thought of the external. I simply busy myself making ready to die. I am as hard as that”-and the stones struck one another in his hand- “for I have touched the Feet of God!”,” 81 he said.

REFERENCES

2. Ibid., p. 294.
4. Ibid., p.24
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p.516.
10. Ibid ., p. 516.


27. Ibid., p.100.

28. Ibid., p.146.


32. Ibid., p.523.

33. Ibid., p.182


36. Ibid., p.216.

37. Ibid., p.221.

38. Ibid., p.261.

39. Ibid., p.264.
40. Ibid., p.241.

41. Ibid., p.293.


46. Ibid., p.20.


49. Ibid., p.391.

50. Ibid., p.418.


53. Ibid., p.429.

54. Ibid., p.436.

55. Ibid., p.438.


74. Ibid., P.432.


77. Ibid., P.638.


