Vivekananda appeared on the scene when the country was losing its spiritual identity under the British rule. He realized that India can be regenerated only through religion and spirituality. He declared in one of his earliest lectures in India “This is the very reason, the reason, the raison d’etre, that this nation has lived on, in spite of hundreds of years of persecution, in spite of nearly a thousand year of foreign rule and foreign oppression.”\(^1\). Of course, he didn’t want the people to live in the past, but to build up a great future by restoring the nation’s spiritual and cultural heritage through assimilating the spiritual wisdom from the ancient scriptures.

Vivekananda had deep roots in the sacred literature of India with which his mother had nourished his mind which had taught mankind the ideal of the solidarity of the Universe, Renunciation, Service and Spirituality. He was probably the first among the 19th century Indian thinkers, who taught the world about India’s glory. Both a man of knowledge and action, he dedicated himself to re-enthrone his nation in the position of world’s spiritual leader, a place she had lost during the British period. His social philosophy is humanistic, covering all walks of life and social strata.
Vedanta that goes to establish the spiritual equality of all was the basis of the social philosophy of Swami Vivekananda.

Though he was proud of the culture and heritage of his country, he didn’t hesitate to point out its drawback. During his journey from Calcutta to Kanyakumari to study the culture and civilization of the country, he came to know that the major drawback of Indian civilization was none other than its poor material condition which was due to the social and economic inequality of Indian society. Even when he sat in meditation on the rock at Cape of Kanyakumari, his patriotic mind was searching for means to strengthen India materially and spiritually. His patriotism was not merely an emotional love towards his country, but a passion to renounce for serving his fellow beings.

**HUMANISM**

His wandering all over India brought him up against moral and social tyrannies over the marginalized sections of society that stunted the very growth of the nation. Swami noticed that when a society became stagnant, all kinds of tyranny developed within it. This was the state of Hindu society at that time. The Swami realized the national stagnancy that led to all kinds of social tyranny and he decided to pool in all his energy and service for the betterment of mankind. Universal humanism was his religion and he wanted to make his own nation a tool for the growth of brotherhood, prosperity and
harmony in the world. India’s ancient culture would suffice this, he firmly believed. While delivering a lecture on *The Way To The Realization Of A Universal Religion*, at California on 28\textsuperscript{th} January 1900, he said, “Let us take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future.” \textsuperscript{2} In fact his philosophy served to unite mankind all over the world with the thread of divinity.

His approach towards the poor and the needy was philanthropic. He spent his whole life for their emancipation of the weak and marginalized sections in India. In the, he had expressed his concern for this section in India. “I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth”, \textsuperscript{3} he wrote to Alasingha Perumal, on 27\textsuperscript{th} October 1894. He upheld the Indian apothegm regarding *lokasangraha* or the ‘holding together of all’. Indeed an early Indian thinker on integral humanism and total revolution, the Swami saw in the service of the poor and the needy the way to realize God. “If you want to find God, serve man. To reach Narayana you must serve the *Daridra Narayanas* – the starving millions of India…” \textsuperscript{4} he would remind. Addressing a gathering of devotees at Rameswaram temple, he said, “He who wants to serve the father must serve his children. He who wants to serve Shiva must serve His children – must serve all creatures in this world first. It is said in the *Shastra* that those who serve the servants of God are His greatest servants. So you
will bear this in mind.”  

“Look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God – but I say,…. The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted- let these be your God. Know that service to these alone is the highest religion”, he wrote to Swami Akhandananda, in 1894. On one occasion, Vivekananda was serving food to Santal workmen. Having heard the stories of their miserable life, Vivekananda is reported to have said to his brother disciples:

_Sometimes I think within myself, ‘What is the good of building monasteries and so forth? Why not sell them and distribute the money among the poor? What should we care for homes, we who have made the tree our shelter? Alas! How can we have the heart to put a morsel to our mouths, when our countrymen have not enough with which to feed and clothe themselves!’ Let us, throwing away all pride of learning and study of the Shastras, and all spiritual disciplines for the attainment of personal mukti, go from village to village, devoting our lives to the service of the poor._

This makes clear the Swami was seeking to emancipate the Indian poor from their miserable plight, empower them and bring them to the main stream of national life, giving them equal rights and opportunities. “If there is inequality in nature, still there must be equal chance for all – or if greater for
some and for some less – the weaker should be given more chance than the strong”, he opined.

The poor condition of the weaker section of society including women who were neglected and harassed by the priestly higher classes grieved him. He did not hesitate to raise his powerful voice against caste and gender discrimination. He said, “The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first and then only can any real good come…for India.”

True, he was not against the caste system of ancient Indian society and he regarded it as the natural order of any society, it being only an arrangement to maintain the social order. But he strictly objected the privileges and prejudices the caste system had brought in. Such differences were only the handiwork of the priestly communities which must be erased through education for good, he believed. In an interview in 1896, he said, “Modern caste distinction is a barrier to India’s progress. It narrows, restricts, separates. It will crumble before the advance of ideas.”

He hated India’s caste system that kept the downtrodden masses away from the main stream of the society. While addressing the gathering at Manamadura, he had expressed humorously his regret to this kind of ill treatment of the people of the lower strata in the name of caste and customs. “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.”
In Indian society the *Sudra* classes were kept in the lower strata, forbidden to accumulate wealth and receive proper education like the higher classes. These downtrodden masses had to suffer a lot under the hierarchy of the upper classes. This plight continued down the centuries, even during the British rule despite the many developments the British were said to have brought to India. Having sworn to see India as a nation of human rights and dignity, Vivekananda initiated a programme for the spiritual and material emancipation of the suffering masses. While speaking on modern India he had expressed his wish for the establishment of a working class government or ‘Shudra raj’ in the present age. “Yet a time will come when there will be the rising of the Shudra class, with their Shudra-hood; that is to say, not like that as at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaisya or the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the Shudras of every country, with their inborn Shudra nature and habits not becoming the essence of Vaisya or Kshatriya, in every society”, ¹² he said. During a heated discussion with a bigoted pundit on Hinduism in Pondicherry, he expressed his views regarding the uplift of the downtrodden masses in India. “The Swami spoke also of the uplift of the masses, and said that the time was at hand when the *shudras* (labouring class) would rise and demand their rights”. ¹³ wrote his disciples. In fact Swami Vivekananda was the early thinker to moot the idea of the working class government long before India had fallen to the grip of western oriented socialist ideology.
As noted early, he was not against the Vedic caste system that systematized a society. He only wanted to see to it that the Chaturvarnya system (four fold division of society) is observed with its Vedic purity and discipline. He sincerely wished to re-establish the balanced society as existed in ancient India which functioned as a single unit with different functions being carried out by people having different qualities. While talking with a disciple, he presented the remedy for the present day problems concerned with caste hierarchy thus:

*Do you not see nowhere in India now are the original four castes (Chaturvarnya) to be found? We have to re-divide the whole Hindu population, grouping it under the four main castes, of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras, as of old. The numberless modern subdivisions of the Brahmins that split them up into so many castes, as it were, have to be abolished and a single Brahmin caste to be made by uniting them all. Each of the three remaining castes also will have to be brought similarly into single groups, as was the case in Vedic times.*

He was a real exponent of humanism in word and deed who carried out humanitarian services as his life mission. His humanistic social philosophy rested on ‘Dharma’ which he regarded as the only medium that helps attain
self purification and spiritual strength. A realist and humanist, he lived a
seer-life, dynamic in action, dedicating his whole life to serve humanity. He
was aware of the fact that India being a spiritual land, reformation in any
field in Indian society is possible only through spirituality. Unlike other
contemporary social reformers, Vivekananda had a holistic and rational
approach towards human problems which he sought to set right through
spiritual means. He urged men to cultivate the qualities like faith in one self,
love towards fellow beings, feel the strength in one self and to feel spiritual
freedom in his thoughts and actions in order to achieve the highest spiritual
goal. Hence his rousing call to be men of dynamism and action to whom
work is worship. Thus writes Sister Nivedita about Swami Vivekananda’s
conviction: “To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself
religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid”.15 He
strongly believed that all the present problems can have their panacea in
India’s activism and transformation guided by the soul force.

He exhorted his followers to prepare themselves for attaining the highest
‘Spiritual Goal’ while leading a service minded social life through the path
of action or ‘Karma Marga’. But this being the most difficult among the
various paths, he advocated the need for following the middle path upheld
by Bhagavad Gita i.e., the path between action (Pravruti) and inaction
(Nivruti). He regarded Karma yoga as the man-making spiritual discipline.
He urged men to live the worldly life with spiritual strength and cultivate the qualities like selflessness, renunciation and love towards mankind.

His life was an inspiration for many to attain self-realization through serving humanity. Madam Emma Calvé, the celebrated opera singer who later became Vivekananda’s devotee, thus mentions how Vivekananda inspired and influenced Mr. John D Rockefeller, a wealthy American financier:

… After a while, as with Calvé, Swamiji told Rockefeller much of his past that was not known to any but himself, and made him understand that the money he had already accumulated was not his, that he was only a channel and that his duty was to do good to the world- that God had given him all his wealth in order that he might have an opportunity to help and do good to people. Rockefeller was annoyed that anyone dared to talk to him that way and tell him what to do. He left the room in irritation, not even saying goodbye. But about a week after, again without being announced, he entered Swamiji’s study and finding him the same as before, threw on his desk a paper which told of his plans to donate an enormous sum of money toward the financing of a public institution…..This was Rockefeller's first large donation to the public welfare.”16
Yet another incident of Swami’s life bears testimony to the spiritual inspiration he gave to those he came across. One day a young man, who was the inmate of Bengal Theosophical Society, asked him the method of getting concentration while engaging in meditation which appeared to be impossible for him. He shared his personal worries regarding his incapability to get tranquility. He said: “still I sit in meditation, shutting the door of my room, and closing my eyes as long as I can; but I cannot find peace of mind. Can you show me the way?” Hearing his worries, Vivekananda sympathized with the young man and advised him:

*If you take my word, you will first of all have to open the door of your room and look around instead of closing your eyes. There are hundreds of poor and helpless people in the neighbourhood of your house; then you have to serve to the best of your ability…My advice to you is that, if you want peace of mind, you have to serve others in this way as well as you can.*

He strongly believed in selfless service to humanity as the path of liberation. Individuals, in any society, have to perform their duties at every stage of their life. True, duties may vary in accordance with individuals and their stages of life, but the merits depend on how they perform it. “Duty of any kind is not to be slighted. A man who does the lower work is not, for that
reason only, a lower man than he who does the higher work; a man should not be judged by the nature of his duties, but by the manner in which he does them.”  

All the members of a society are not of same mental make up and capacities. But duty is the medium through which one can realize his own self. “This world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong.” Among various paths for liberation, Swami regarded *Karma marga* or the path of action as the most important path for men.

He had spent his whole life to spread his humanistic ideals through out the country by helping people realize the ideal of ‘Universal brotherhood’ through the medium of religious and spiritual education. His mission was to direct human thoughts and actions towards ‘Universal good’ and generate ‘Universal Love’ which in turn unite mankind to realize the Vedantic ideal of ‘Unity of Existence’. “‘One must learn’, he said, ‘to put oneself into another man’s very soul.’”

What he actually desired was to build up a well balanced society in India which could satisfy its people’s material as well as spiritual needs through a harmonious combination of materialism of the West and spiritualism of the East without losing India’s spiritual identity. It also aimed at spreading the light of spiritualism in social, economic and political fields for re-establishing India’s spiritual civilization. It was with this vision in his mind he had founded Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 for spiritual awakening of the
people through spreading the light of religious and spiritual education in each and every corner of the land. In this way “He claimed to be a “greater reformer” than any of those associated with the social reform movement, because his aim was to touch all Indians, through love for them, and spread afresh the true religious message of Hinduism.”

Thus his social philosophy appeared to be a Universal gospel of service which was formulated through harmoniously blending the concepts knowledge, work and devotion. Thus writes Ramani Kumar Gupta: “This universal gospel of service embodies the future hopes and aspiration of mankind and represents in a remarkable degree the harmonious blending of knowledge, work and worship.”

**SOCIO-RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY**

Quoting Lord Buddha Vivekananda once said, “Argument is a desert and wilderness where one loses one’s way and comes to grief. Realization is everything.” He regarded religion as realization of the divinity of human soul. He says, “Religion is realization; not talk; nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion.” He believed that the essence of religion is none other that realization of the divinity in oneself through which he can view the divinity in the rest of the world which was taught by his Master. “Realization is the
only goal. When realization comes into the heart, all arguments cease and Divine Knowledge shines forth”, 25 he opined. Thus write his disciples:

Certainly it is not going beyond of just appreciation to say that the Swami’s paper on Hinduism was the most far-reaching and prophetic utterance in the history of religions, pointing out at it did the truth of Oneness, of Realization, and of the Divinity of Man. 26

The religious knowledge, according to him, should be rational and based on one’s direct experience. Swami used to say that religion results from direct perception. “Put in a homely way, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Try to realize religion, otherwise you will gain nothing,” 27 he said. He realized that the life-blood of Indian culture is religion mixed with social values. In a conversation with Shri Narasimha Kelkar, Editor of the Mahratta of Poona, he had mentioned the social, economic development of India thus: “No good would come of imitating the westerners’ political methods; but, if the traditional culture of India could be revived, something could be achieved. India had always effected her social and other developments through religion.” 28 For this reason he wished to construct a socio-religious philosophy which could meet the aspirations of Indians. His views on the Ideal of Universal Religion appeared in the journal Maha-Bodhi’s November 1896 issue thus:
In a society, there are various natures of men. Some are active working men, there is the emotional man, then there is the mystic man and lastly there is the philosopher. Vivekananda strikes the key note of his whole philosophy when he declares that the attempt to help mankind to become beautifully balanced in all these four directions, is his ideal of religion and this religion is called in India, Yoga... The religion which has a place for men of different inclination, may be the universal religion, and that religion is Vedanta.  

His concept of religion is quite different from the modern view of religion which tries to evolve God out of material man. He regarded different religions as the different paths which direct man towards the same goal. In order to unveil his divine nature, man has to cultivate spirituality in his very character itself. “We know that man has a body, eyes, and ears, and he has a spiritual nature which we cannot see. And with his spiritual faculties he can study these different religions and find that whether a religion is taught in the forests and jungles or India or in a Christian land, in essentials all religions are one.”  

And he called it ‘Universal Religion’.

Presenting the concept of ‘Universal Religion’ in his first address in the Parliament of Religion at Chicago in 1893, Vivekananda urged the need of
Religious Unity the world over by unifying the different religious faiths as a way towards ‘Universal Brotherhood’. Thus write his disciples:

*The Swami announced the universality of religious truths and the sameness of the goal of all religious realizations. And that he did so, was because he had sat at the feet of a Man of Realization, in far-off Dakshineswar, and had learnt from his Master, through both his teachings and his life, the truth that all religions were one, that they were all paths leading to the same goal, the selfsame God.*

He was not to develop a new religion by assimilating the ideals of different religions of the world but only to implement a new approach to discover the Universality behind world’s existing religions. He had accepted the infinite and eternal principle behind each and every existing religion. Because he believed that “All the different religions are but applications of the one religion adapted to suit the requirements of different nations.”

He felt that the primary reason for religious conflicts seen commonplace today is the lack of spiritual consciousness. In his letter to Mrs. Bull, his disciple, he wrote, “My Master used to say that these names as Hindu, Christian, etc, stand as great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man”. He believed that the fault is not with religion, but in interpreting it. “Religion is not the cause of India’s downfall; but the fact that true religion
was nowhere followed: for religion, when lived, was the most potent of all forces”  

Through popularizing the idea of *Universal Religion*, he aimed to inculcate the awareness of religious unity in the minds of the people and to avoid religious conflicts. He had mentioned about his conception of *Universal Religion* in the Parliament of Religions. “Contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns”, he said.

Through his concept of *Universal Religion*, Vivekananda tried to impart religious acceptance in the minds of the people all over the world and to built up a ‘Harmonious and peaceful Global Village’ with spirituality as its watch word. On September 27, in his address to the final session at the Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893, he said, “The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.” He also exhorted men to “Help and not Fight” because “Assimilation and not destruction” is in the natural order of universe. “Harmony and Peace” is the spiritual slogan that can bail humanity out of dissension”, the Swami said.

He viewed religion as a process of evolution of dynamic faith towards spiritual destiny and his effort was to link social ideas with religious
thoughts in the light of Neo-Vedantism. He wished to create a new
dimension and depth to religion so as to make the people view the world of
spiritual relations and make them aware of the concept of *Universal Self*
through disseminating the ideal of Unity of Existence in the Nature.

**NEO-VEDANTISM**

Vivekananda’s social philosophy was centered on the spiritual, metaphysical
and ethical teachings of Vedanta with its ideal of ‘Oneness of Universe’.
The pervasive spirit of his message was the sense of Oneness. “He insisted
that the realization of the Self – that is, becoming and being Divinity –
evitably lead to seeing Divinity manifest everywhere.”

The spiritual and religious training from his Master and rational approach to
*Vedanta* had helped him analyze its central message – the ‘Unity of Human
Soul’ with the aid of which he had established his ideas like ‘Universal
Oneness’, ‘Universal Brotherhood and ‘Universal religion’ among men. The
experiences which he gained from his master definitely served as an
essential factor in redefining *Vedanta* to suit the needs of the modern world.
Throughout his life time, he had taken effort to spread the message of his
Master on the essence of religion which was, not mere “Not compassion for
others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable
manifestation of God”
Learned in Vedanta, the Swami understood its practical applicability in the modern Indian society during his countrywide peregrination. Vedanta was to him the eternal panacea for all mundane ills, the most desirable form of applied philosophy. It was as worldly as it was spiritual, both combined in one. Thus said the Swami:

*The usual idea is that the practice of the knowledge of Vedanta demands a complete withdrawal from society and a rooting out of all such sentiments as love, devotion and compassion. Cherishing hatred of the world and of fellow creatures, thinking them impediments to spiritual attainment, the aspirant goes astray. But from those words of wisdom that the Master uttered in an ecstatic mood, I have understood that the ideal of Vedanta lived by the recluse outside the pale of society can be practiced even at home and applied to all aspects of daily life.*

Following the footsteps of his master, he began propagating the central teachings of Vedanta the world over, making it simple, popular and useful for humanity in satisfying the spiritual needs of individual and society. He wanted to turn the abstract monistic ideas into concrete and living reality by making it scientific and practical. Thus wrote Swami Vivekananda to Alasinga:
The dry Advaita must become living – poetic – in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogi-sm must come the most scientific and practical psychology – and all this must be put into a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life’s work.\(^{41}\)

He strongly believed that the regeneration of the country will be possible only through opening the treasure troves of Vedas and Upanishads to the common masses. Vedas are impersonal or \textit{apurusheya}. “The glory of Vedanta is that it does not depend on a person, or persons, it is based on principles. Hence, if there is any religion that can lay claim to universality, it is the Vedanta”, \(^{42}\) he said. His stern decision to make the hidden truths of Vedanta, the common property of all sections of Indian society is well reflected in his dialogues to his brother monks. “Ay, even if you, my brother –monks, stand in my way, I will go and preach among the Pariahs in the lowest slums”, he said. Thus he wished to make Vedanta the religion of mankind to solidify human unity. “Carry the light and the life of Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity that is hidden within every soul”, \(^{43}\) he exhorted. He was confident that, “If it be the will of God, the day will soon come when I shall proclaim this grand truth to the world at large … shall make it the common property of all the poor, the Brahmin and the Pariah”.\(^ {44}\)
A true Vedantin, he didn’t saw any difference in the very nature of men in society. Lecturing on ‘The Spirit and Influence of Vedanta’ at the Twentieth Century Club, Boston, he said, “When a man has reached the highest, when he sees neither man nor woman, neither sect nor creed, nor colour, nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being – then alone he has reached the universal brotherhood, and that man alone is a Vedantist.”

Thus through the concepts of ‘Universal Self’ and ‘Universal Brotherhood’, he had pronounced the Vedantic idea of ‘Oneness’ seen in all beings. His great contribution to the world was his interpretation of Vedanta in conformity with cultural and intellectual requirements of modern society.

**EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY**

The realization of the Spiritual Oneness rests on how much a society is educated, Vivekananda believed. He abhorred the educational system Europe imported to India, especially the English education that aimed to cultivate a group of invertebrate tail waggers of the British Empire. Education is the training that brings about the common good and anything that falls short of this end is not education, he believed. “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”, he said. It should cater to the all round progress of humanity and energize the mental, material and intellectual content. “The education which does not help the common mass
of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out the strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion – is it worth the name?”, 47 he asked. Education is a means of making one intellectually, physically, morally, socially and spiritually strong and perfect enough to preserve one’s own culture and tradition. He was aware of the fact that the current education system followed by modern educationists by adopting western modes can not help impart such strength and perfection in the character of modern youth. He severely criticized the practice of the Western modes of education in India which according to him was devoid of values and holistic vision. While talking to a disciple at Belur Math, he had mentioned about the defect of the present system of education. “The education that you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptics. You are working like machines merely, and living a jelly-fish existence.” 48 He was afraid that the western mode of education the Indian educationist followed would do away with the very purpose of education. It would impart negative attitudes towards life in the minds of India’s future generation. The Swami disparaged the educational system the British introduced in India thus:

A negative education or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death. The child is taken to school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grand father is a lunatic, the third thing that all
his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth that all the sacred books
are lies! By the time he is sixteen he is a mass of negation.49

This did not mean that he was unaware of the need of materialistic advancement in the filed of science and technology in a country like India walking towards the threshold of independence. In fact he favoured the implementation of Western Science and technology in the scheme of India’s education. He was only against the attitude of the modern youth who considered every thing western as good and the knowledge of material science and technology as the only goal of education. He insisted the modern Indian youth to assimilate oriental spiritualism with occidental materialism to widen vision and strengthen individual identity. History has proved how successful were the nations which adopted this principle of assimilation, Japan for example. He once said to a disciple, “There, in Japan, you find a fine assimilation of knowledge, and not its indigestion, as we have here. They have taken everything from the Europeans, but they remain Japanese all the same, and have not turned European; while in our country, the terrible mania of becoming Westernized has seized upon us like a plague.”50 Therefore he wanted the young generation to preserve the spiritual culture which is the very soul of their nation. And he had it that the scheme of education should help the students manifest the divinity within. In the letter to the Editor of Brahmavadin he wrote, “The mind of the man is an infinite reservoir of knowledge, and all knowledge, present, past or future, is
within man, manifested or non-manifested, and the object of every system of education should be to help the mind to manifest it.”

He was very much impressed by ancient Indian education that focused on man-making and character-building. ‘Brahmacharya’ was the earliest stage wherein the child at the school developed a sublime psyche under the supervision and care of his teacher. The task of education, according to Indian culture, is not only to upgrade the intellectual ability in the pupil, but to strengthen his mind through cultivating Spiritual vision and intrinsic values in him and to equip them to face the realities of life. Lecturing on ‘The Future of India’ at Madras on February 14th, 1897 he said, “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas”. Such system helps the individual not only to achieve intellectual knowledge, but also to attain moral and spiritual wisdom by cultivating the power of concentration through keen observation and practice.

He was proud of India’s teaching tradition with its teachers ready to sacrifice everything for their students. It was a great tradition to which his master Sri Ramakrishna belonged. The world has never perhaps witnessed such a great teacher-taught relation as the one between Vivekananda and his venerable Master. In fact Sri Ramakrishna was to him the real Master or Guru who
communicated himself to the Swami. Once speaking about Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda waxed eloquent on the quality of best teacher. “He alone teaches who has something to give, for teaching is not talking, teaching is not imparting doctrines, it is communicating.” The Swami, as he deemed it, was fortunate in getting such a teacher as Ramakrishna who got him in touch with the reality through direct experience. Ramakrishna too was confident that Vivekananda also would prove a good teacher to his disciples, he being spiritually illuminated with real experience. “It is only the illuminated 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”, opined his disciples. 

Vivekananda believed that knowledge arises in one’s own mind and the process of learning, according to him, is realization of truth by unveiling the ignorance by the process of assimilating the ideas. In this process, the role of the teacher is only to help him intellectually grow. He said, “You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant”. He says, “You cannot make a plant grow in soil unsuited to it. A child teaches itself. But you can help it to go forward in its own way. What you can do is not of the positive nature, but of the negative. You can take away obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature”. The teachers with simple living and high thinking inspire the pupils in their intellectual, social, and spiritual growth.
Talking to Shri Priya Nath Sinha, he mentioned the teacher’s role in the intellectual upbringing of the child. “You see, no one can teach anybody. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge – even in a boy it is so – and it requires only an awakening, and that much is the work of the teacher”. 57

Through unraveling and exposing the sublimities of ancient Indian educational system before the people, he zeroed in on the need of man-making and character-building education which the present era calls for. In this system individual gets the opportunity to practice self-control and concentration, strengthen his faith in him, sharpen his intellectual capacities and purify his heart. It helps one get self-realization. “Through education comes faith in one’s own Self, and through faith in one’s own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant.” 58

Vivekananda viewed that education is of immense value in social life of the individual since it cultivates social awareness and positive attitude towards life. He believed that a healthy education meets material as well as spiritual needs of the individual by strengthening his personality through the training of the Head, Heart and Hand. It also brings the individual into contact with the intellectual, moral and spiritual problems in social life and helps him swim against the social currents even. He regarded such education as never
ending, a continuous process from birth to death of an individual. It covers physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual aspects of life in different stages of life. According to him any system of education which does not serve this purpose cannot be deemed true education.

He strongly believed that each man is potentially divine, but this divinity is covered with ignorance. A good education can help man unveil the hidden spirituality and realize divinity within. Hence his view that education is the process of manifestation of the hidden perfection already present in man. He considered religion as realization of the divinity present in the very nature of man and education acts as the medium for making him perfect for realizing that divinity. For this reason, he preferred to make religion or dharma as the core of India’s educational system.

Vivekananda was critical of the pristine supremacy that kept the downtrodden masses away from India’s national main stream. The priestly hierarchy that prevailed for a long period led to the higher classes monopolizing wisdom and intelligence. It had sidelined the common masses, preventing them get opportunities for material as well as spiritual development in their struggle for existence. While speaking on the education India needs, he said, “The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again,
we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e. by spreading education among the masses”. He wanted to bring about the welfare of the community through educationally enlightening each and every member of the society, irrespective of caste and creed. He believed that the development of individuality and self-confidence among the common masses alone can bring in much social reform. Education purifies individual’s soul through spiritual awakening and helps him grow as much as possible, so that he could contribute his maximum for the spiritual welfare of the community he lives in. He stressed the need of a teacher who would equip the pupil with spiritual and moral strength and make him fit to lead a successful social life.

To carry out the real purpose of education in India, he had urged the modern educationists take steps to restructure it to cope with India’s traditional cultural heritage and help the individual on his way to spiritual development. He pointed out the need for developing an Indian system of education with Vedanta as its basis, which he hoped would induce a positive attitude in the pupil. He even went up to the extent of bringing about a synthesis of Western science and Indian spirituality. “What we want are western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto, and also Sraddha and faith in one’s own self”, he said.

Social philosophy of Swami Vivekananda is of much significance and relevance in the present national and international contexts, especially
against the backdrop of the decline in many walks of modern life. In modern India, morality and spirituality, the two watch words of Indian culture seem to be on the wane. India is now facing an acute crisis in retaining its identity of culture and spirituality with westernization and globalization bringing about negative impacts in the life style of its people. The current situation demands the population of India accept relevant practical social philosophy in order to lead their personal as well as social life in tune with the culture and heritage of the country. It is high time that Indians followed the teachings of Vivekananda which are good guidelines in moulding a nation and its society. He had developed a social philosophy, linking the social, moral, spiritual and cultural values of ancient India with the required modernity. In his social philosophy both the society as well as the individual have equal importance with both acting as mutually interacting and complementary poles of an integral whole. Concord was his religion and co-living his mantra. Preservation of Indian culture, he believed, was necessary to preserve the world’s culture. India and the world should live in harmony following the principle of give and take. Retaining one’s own cultural identity one must grow up to the world. This is the order of growth and progress, the Swami believed. Allow the world culture to supplement rather than supplant the national culture and imbibe the noble values found embedded in other cultures and grow rooted in one’s own identity, he exhorted his countrymen. Do not be dragged out of the circle of the national
culture while becoming enchanted and seduced by the western paraphernalia, he used to remind his people. His philosophy was based on the idea of the synthesis of universal religion and culture that aimed at developing a society wherein individual, nation and the world, without losing their identities, find their ultimate harmony and unity. His was a philosophy that aimed to develop unity out of diversities, coherence out of incoherence. It exhorted to put aside all discords for an emerging concord. Unity, harmony and concord formed the *triratnas* – three gems of the Swami’s thought. He was really the advocate of the global unity based on the principle of mutual acceptance among individuals and nations. For, unity and not disunity is the inherent order of the cosmos and whatever run in contrast to each other would be incongruous with this, he believed. In fact this is the core of what India has been teaching down the millennia. This is the real monism – *Advaita* which helps humanity know it’s inner and informing spirit, which Swami believed is the very purpose of life. He was the most ancient as well as the modern Vedantin whose life was a real dialogue between India’s past and present. His social philosophy is thus of all time value. One had better conclude with Dr. Radhakrishnan according to whom “It is essential, therefore, that we should remember what this great soul stood for, what he taught us. It is not merely a question of remembering it but trying to understand what he wished us to do. We should assimilate his
teachings, incorporate them in our being and make ourselves worthy to be citizens of the country which produced Vivekananda”.

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