THE AGE OF REFORM AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

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1

Swami Vivekananda remains one of the most enigmatic personalities of modern India when one tries to place him as a social activist in 19th century India. One of the key figures to have undertaken social service for national good with emphasis on spiritual growth and devotion to one's religion, Swami Vivekananda took a vow of asceticism in the late 1880s to focus on practical service and uplift of the poor.[1] As he himself said, "We are Sannyasins, who have given up everything […] to do the highest good to the world, everyone down to the lowest-this is our vow."[2] The paper does not look at Vivekananda as the spiritual ambassador of India in the West. The paper argues that Vivekananda inaugurated a new and rather interesting way of discovering India, a method that was built on direct action and accessibility to the masses. Using the words of George Williams, the paper tries to "penetrate through dual consideration of the hero legend created by well-meaning followers and of the camouflaging effect created by Vivekananda himself as he changed his patterns of ultimate concern during his lifetime".[3] It was work done at a more impersonal level. Vivekananda's was no conscious attempt to suggest change or reform but his works did revolutionize the practice of reaching out to the masses.

Swami Vivekananda was a late representative of the so-called Bengali Renaissance. The period in which Vivekananda lived and preached was riddled by cross currents of thought and practice and Vivekananda's life and labours prominently capture some of the tensions that came to characterize colonial Bengal in the closing years of the 19th century. Amiya P. Sen describes the tensions thus: there was the inevitable tension between the public engagement of a social activist and the reclusive detachment of a monk, between rational

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reformism and realizing the spiritual potentialities in man between political praxis and spontaneous patriotism, between philosophy and religion, scepticism and faith; between eagerness to situate oneself in a continuous tradition and personal intentions of radicalizing it.[4] Vivekananda's life and work seem to reflect the middle-class back tracking on social reform and a general disenchantment with organized politics.[5] The BrahmoSamaj in Bengal, which was really modernist in its approach, weakened faster in the 1870s.[6] It was followed by the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda Movement in the 1880s. Ramakrishna's appeal to the mind and emotions, through simple interpretations of Hinduism became immensely popular among the Western educated Bengalis, annoyed by their subjection to the drudgery of clerical jobs in foreign mercantile or government offices. Ramakrishna's teachings offered the possibility of an escape into an inner world of Bhakti, despite the binding disciplines of alien jobs. Thus, although in his teachings there is hardly any direct reference to colonial rule, there is however an open rejection of the values imposed by Western education and the routine life of a time-bound job or *chakri*.[7] The educated middle class in the 19th century often found the domain of reason to be oppressive, as it implied the historical necessity of the 'civilizing' colonial rule. In the teaching of Ramakrishna, the sub-ordinated middle class found the formulation of a new religion, which Partha Chatterjee says "appropriated", "sanitized", and "classicized" the popular traditions into a national religious discourse.[8] Vivekananda infused into this discourse a missionary zeal. He condemned the other reform movements as elitist and invoked the ideal of social service. The best way to serve God, he emphasized was to serve the poor people. *Do it only as a worship. I should see God in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I go and worship them. The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper, and the sinner!*[9]

Beckerlegge points out that Vivekananda's view of social service towards humanity should not be attributed to any simple chain of influence (such as from Unitarians or the BrahmoSamaj, or both), but rather that he was reacting to a broad range of influences. Vivekananda favoured a practical religion. "I do not believe in God that cannot give bread," roared the "patriot-prophet" of India.[10] He went on saying that "if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of

purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion, or whatever you may call it, will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function."[11] In Beckerlegge's estimation, Vivekananda tried to "transform" (the word frequently used) Ramakrishna's "ambiguous *sattvika* ideal[12] into a systematic and organized service for humanity carried out mainly by *sanyasis* (religious mendicants who have renounced the material world)."[13] His practical bent of mind led him to preach equality. He especially espoused the cause of the poor, the downtrodden, and the women. Swami Vivekananda's plans for providing organized and institutionalized service for India appear to date from 1892, though they took firmer shape in 1894 and were concretized with the establishment of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1897. The movement continued its service work after Vivekananda's death at the young age of 39 in 1902, and it is still heavily committed to providing organized service.

2

It appears that 'modern' in Hindu India is curiously interrelated with a monastic or an ascetic way of life and with monastic movements, both of which hardly seem to connote "modern" by Western definitions.[14] J. N. Farquhar, most famous for the classic work, *Modern Religious Movements in India* labelled as modern those movements such as the Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1928, that favoured "vigorous reform", that denounced caste injustices, and that rejected Hindu idolatry and other such "debased" Hindu practices and customs as Sati. Another type of modern religious movement is exemplified by the Ramakrishna Movement (after 1870) that sought a full defense of the old religions while at the same time adopting certain reformist concerns, such as denunciation of caste. This later type Farquhar identified as part of a counter reformation; an essentially reactionary position compromised by reformist values. The conflict between tradition and modern values in the thought of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and many others have been observed by Agehananda Bharati in his essay, "The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns" (1970): all of these men were representative of the process of change from traditional to modern ways of thinking and acting. In the same breath, Bharati talks about the *sadhus* as the most influential group who adopted modern elements to their thoughts without renouncing basic or traditional religious values. Yet the Hindu attitude to the *sadhus* as a composite of many diverse elements is one of ambivalence.The

modern Hindu disavows the 'old-fashioned, non-English speaking peregrinating or *ashram*-bound *sadhu* who does not contribute to modern life. Yet, all 'modernity' overtly or covertly admires and venerates the 'scientific', 'modern' man who wears monastic robes. Swami Vivekananda is an undisputed culture hero not simply of all modern Bengali Hindus. Modern Hindus derive their knowledge of Hinduism from Vivekananda, directly or indirectly.[15]

Swami Vivekananda was not an academic philosopher or theologian[16]. He considered himself first and foremost a learned monk, a religious reformer and a missionary[17]. In the late 19th century, both the terms, reformer and revivalist, were used pejoratively, observes Amiya P. Sen.[18] In Swami Vivekananda's own words:

> I must frankly tell you that I am neither a caste-breaker nor a mere social reformer. I have nothing to do directly with your castes or with your social reformation.For nearly the past one hundred years, our country has been flooded with social reformers and various social reform proposals. Personally, I have no fault to find with these reformers. Most of them are good, well-meaning men, and their aims too are very laudable on certain points; but it is quite a patent fact that this one hundred year of social reform has produced no permanent and valuable result appreciable throughout the country. … I am sorry to say that most of our modern reform movements have been inconsiderate imitations of Western means and methods of work; and that surely will not do for India; therefore, it is that all our recent reform movements have had no result. I do not, therefore, want any reformation. My ideal is growth, expansion, development on national lines.
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> I am no preacher of any momentary social reform. I am not trying to remedy evils; I only ask you to go forward and to complete the practical realization of the scheme of human progress that has been laid out in the most perfect order by our ancestors. I only ask you to work to realize more and more the Vedantic ideal of the solidarity of man and his inborn divine nature. [19]

He continues:

> The destructive plans of reformers have failed. My plan is this. To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. Where we differ is in the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth Therefore, my friends, my plan is to start institutions in India, to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our scriptures in India and outside India. Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready,

> but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. A hundred such and the world becomes revolutionized. [20]

Vivekananda then lays down the course of action for the countrymen to adopt. He made scathing criticism of his countrymen regretting that, "in spite of the greatness of the Upanishads, in spite of our boasted ancestry of sages, compared to many other races, I must tell you that we are… very weak. […]We are lazy, we cannot work; we cannot combine, we do not love each other; we are intensely selfish, not three of us can come together without hating each other, without being jealous of each other."[21] The remedy to this, Vivekananda points out, lies in cultivating strength. "First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita… You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger… Look upon every man, woman, and every one as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege."[22]

"There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing sannyâsins in our own country, going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organized as teachers of secular things also, they will go from place to place, from door to door, not only preaching, but teaching also. Suppose two of these men go to a village in the evening with a camera, a globe, some maps, etc. they can teach a great deal of astronomy and geography to the ignorant. By telling stories about different nations, they can give the poor a hundred times more information through the ear than they can get in a lifetime through books. This requires an organization, which again means money. There are enough men in India to work out this plan, but alas, they have no money! It is very difficult to set a wheel in motion; but when once set, it goes on with increasing velocity."[23]

In Vivekananda's messages, one finds an eminently practically nationalist meaning, employing martial tones to claim it as essential for the upswing of India because it nurtures physical and spiritual strength and builds self-confidence. Turning the focus of his monist metaphysics to how they can be practically applicable, he incorporates the engagement for suffering and needy humanity into the essential determination of religion.[24]

In his classic study, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1915), the missionary-scholar, John N. Farqhuar, deployed the term "revivalist" against those he accused of standing against the progress of Christian mission and opposing British rule in India.[25] Bharati identifies

Swami Vivekananda as the ideal of a scientific, modern man who is nevertheless, a monastic.[26] Vivekananda's gospel marked the awakening of man in his fullness and that is why it inspired youths to the diverse course of liberation through work and sacrifice.

Vivekananda regarded his practical Vedānta with its insistence on social practice in the form of aid and education programmes for the poor and the needy to be something fully new within Hinduism and in this respect emphasized how the traditional Vedānta needed to be further elaborated and refined. His concrete suggestions for the practical Vedānta did not, however, go beyond ideas and programmes of charitable welfare already long articulated and pursued in both India and elsewhere. Vivekananda's innovation, thus, resided in how he succeeded in harnessing Hindu monasticism for aid campaigns and education projects, whereby one aspect of this was to counteract Christian and Muslim proselytizing of the lower castes.[27] It was idea of *seva* or serving mankind that forms the crux of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy. "The mission of Swami Vivekananda," writes Bhupendranath Datta, "was to arouse the sleeping leviathan, that is, Indian society." This awakening was to be predicated on a comprehensive program of education of the masses, whose upliftment was to be accomplished by "preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of equality."[28]

Vivekananda was proficient in English and exposed to Western thinking, including the Orientalist Indology of Max Muller and Paul Deussen, the philosophies of Comte, Schopenhauer and Spencer, as well as the ideas and practices of the Freemasons and Christian missionaries. In his early years he was also member of the Brahmo Samaj, the syncretic Bengali organization that had engaged with Christian ideas and carried out philanthropy since the 1830s. As a result of these diverse influences available to him in colonial Bengal, Vivekananda's religious perspectives were understandably eclectic. Of course, the bedrock of Vivekananda's religion was Hindu, but here too he was notably attracted to more flexible Vaishnavite bhakti practices that were historically linked with Sufism, and he often referred to Buddhism. Beckerlegge feels that the *sanyasi* status gave Vivekananda the creative religious amalgam to support his vision of organized *seva* and, eventually, modern "Hinduism". Although there is no arguing that it was the social and political rupture caused by British colonialism that pushed Vivekananda to turn his eclectic body of ideas into a practice of organized service.

In all Vivekananda's speeches and writings, three ideas appear dominant. One was his sense of a supreme mission which almost appeared as a historical imperative. Second was his conviction of

the indestructibility of the "Indian soul" and the invincibility of Indian "spirituality." The third was nationalism which alone could become an effective and adequate instrument for the fulfillment of India's destiny. These ideas formed a composite theme which he reiterated wherever he went and spoke in India. He effectively used his interpretation of Indian history and culture and his observations of the Western world to make his message convincing, and to turn it into a new philosophy of Indian nationalism.[29]

Vivekananda said, "I am no politician, or political agitator. I care only for the spirit. When that is right everything will be righted by itself."[30] He asserted that he was a patriot and was compelled to say the things he was saying because he felt it was his duty to remind his countrymen about the state of affairs in the motherland and its civilization.[31] He recognized the diversities of India and the conflicts therein. There were different languages, religions, sects and regional societies often at cross purposes with each other. There was a need to discover a common basis which would help the people transcend those barriers of language and regional societies and weld them into a nation inspired by a vigorous and creative nationalism. He said, the only common ground that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion. That is the only common ground, and "upon that we shall have to build". Hence "the unity in religion, therefore is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India."[32] Therefore, the first plank in the first step that is to be hewn out of that rock of ages, is this unification of religion. He was convinced that "national union in India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune."[33]

Vivekananda found his life's mission in his work as a *sannyasi* discovering the forgotten glories of the spiritual tradition of India. He went to the Himalayas visiting on his ways Varanasi, Ajodhya, Lucknow, Agra and Vrindavan. Later, Vivekananda trekked through Rajputana, Gujarat, Bombay, Mysore, Malabar, Madurai and Rameswaram right up to Cape Comorin, the southern-most tip of Indian Peninsula. He visited the cottages of the poor, and the Untouchables as well as the palaces of the ruling chiefs, held discussions with erudite Sanskrit scholars singly or in Conference and made deep impression upon all classes of people, high and low, rich and poor, by his learning and scholarship, spiritual outlook, suavity of temper and urbanity of manners. Vivekananda gained the friendship and esteem, of several ruling chiefs, specially the Maharajas of Mysore and Travancore.[34] Swamiji spoke to all these about the necessity of spreading education among the masses and improving their economic conditions. His

extensive travels in India for five years, took him to centres of learning as he acquainted himself with diverse religious traditions and social patterns. Living primarily on *bhiksha* (alms), Vivekananda travelled on foot and by railway (with tickets bought by admirers). During his travels he met and stayed with Indians from all religions and walks of life: scholars, *dewans*, Rajas, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, *prayers* (low-caste workers) and government officials. Romain Rolland, thus, describes Vivekananda's experiences:

> He wandered free from plan, caste, and home…. And there was no single hour of his life when he was not brought in contact with the sorrows, the desires, the abuses, the misery and the feverishness of living men, rich and poor, in town and field; he became one with their lives, the great book of Life revealed to him what all the books in the libraries could not have done… the tragic face of the present day, the God struggling in humanity, the cry of the people of India and of the world for help…
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> He was not only the humble little brother who slept in stables or on the pellets of beggars but he was on a footing of equality with every man; today a despised beggar sheltered by pariahs, tomorrow the guest of princes, conversing on equal terms with Prime Ministers and Maharajahs, the brother of the oppressed, bending over their misery, then probing the luxury of the great, awakening care for public weal in their torpid hearts. He was as conversant with the knowledge of Pundits as with the problems of industrial and rural economy whereby the life of people is controlled, ever teaching, ever learning, gradually making himself the Conscience of India, its Unity and its Destiny.[35]

Continues Romain Rolland, thus:

> He received no less than he gave. His vast spirit never for a single day failed to widen its knowledge and its experiences and it assimilated all the rivers of thought scattered and buried in the soil of India for their source seemed to him to be identical. As far removed from the blind devotion of the orthodox who were engulfed in the muddy stench of stagnant waters as from the misguided rationalism of the reformers of the BrahmoSamaj, who with the best of intentions were busied in drying up the mystic foundations of hidden energy, Vivekananda wished to preserve and to harmonize them all by draining the whole entangled reservoir of the waters of a whole continent possessed by a deeply religious soul.[36]

The knowledge and experience that Vivekananda gathered during his all India travel proved to be a turning point in his career. Vivekananda freely admitted that India had fallen on evil days. There was poverty in the country, and there was lack of education.

There was political subjection and cultural humiliation. He was critical about the ignorance and superstition that had befallen the Indians. The rationalist in him plainly saw the reasons for India's degradation. He said, "India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word *mlechchha* and stopped from communion with others."[37] He derided on the religion of the cooking pot, of the caste system, of the abominable treatment given to the untouchables.[38] He also realized how even the so-called upper and educated classes, dazzled by the glory and greatness of Western nations, had totally forgotten the glory and greatness of their own ancient culture and how through foreign subjection for centuries they had lost their vigor of mind and body and had sunk to the level of slaves with no consciousness of the present degradation nor any hope for the future. He now had vivid glimpses of India that was, that is and India that he envisaged for the future. His own path was now clear before him. He became convinced of his master's saying that religion is not for empty bellies. From the life of a renunciator, engaged in pursuit of attaining Nirvikalpa Samadhi, he vowed to consecrate his life to the liberation of his countrymen. Talking about his own experiences to his brother monks in Bombay before sailing off for the United States of America, Vivekananda said, "I have now travelled all over India. But alas! it was agony to me my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses…it is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their sufferings. It is for this reason-to find more means for the salvation of the poor that I am now going to America."[39] On another occasion Vivekananda said, "I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my country men and that is why I went to America."[40] The Parliament of Religions gave Vivekananda the opportunity not only to "bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession if the few only, and make them popular, be the common property of all…"[41] It was also an opportunity to expose the nature of British imperialism to another Western nation, the efforts of the Christian missionaries in forcing the people of India to abandon the faith they had practiced through ages. Swamiji openly declared that the most urgent need for the Indians was the alleviation of hunger and not spirituality. He, therefore, sought help "for my impoverished people".[42] Thus, it was not spiritualism alone that took Vivekananda to the Western shores. There was a greater sense of

purpose behind his journey. For Vivekananda, worship came to be regarded as the school, or preparation, for higher stages of spiritual development. Thus, he hallowed the act of aid, and hallowed, too, the name of man.[43] It was a momentous task in India to be achieved, for the head and front of the demand made on a monastic order is that it produces saints. And the value of the monk who, instead of devoting himself to maintaining the great tradition of the super-conscious life, turns back to help society upwards, has not in the past been clearly understood. In the Swami's scheme of things, however, it would almost seem as if such tasks were to take that place in the spiritual education which had previously been occupied by systems of devotion.[44]

Vivekananda moved quickly to put his words of Hindu modernity into practical results in a programme that George Williams and others have titled "Practical Vedanta."[45] On May 1, 1897, Vivekananda assembled his fellow monks, nuns and lay disciples and founded an association known as the Ramakrishna Mission, which sought to use the talents and the energies of his monastic and lay followers to achieve a new awakening in India and to undertake religious, educational and philanthropic projects directed at social "uplift" rather than radical social reform. He was critical of the social reform program promoted by the Brahmo Samaj denouncing it as elitist and therefore, misdirected. Rather, social reform, Vivekananda argued, can be successful only if the masses of the poor and the downtrodden are educated by Western scientific and rational standards supplemented by spiritual training in Neo-Vedanta and are given a higher standard of living. The new direction toward selfless service to others, especially towards the poor, that Vivekananda had given to the monasticism of the Ramakrishna Movement was continued and strengthened by his successors. Gambhirananda provides an excellent insider's view of the history of Ramakrishna Matha and Mission through 1957.[46] Since Vivekananda's death the religious, the educational and the philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission have aided hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Indians, establishing a model for modernity within Hindu monasticism.

3

The reform movements of the 19th century, pioneered by the Indian elite maintained an intrinsic faith on the benevolent nature of colonial rule and relied more on legislation for imposing reform

from above. The character of the reforms was colonial, and the Indian reformers positions in a significant way mirrored the colonial mind and therefore also the ambivalence of the colonial policy planers. The dominant colonial assumption of the time was that religion was the basis of the Indian society and this religion was encoded in the scriptures. The colonial perception assumed a total submission of the indigenous society to the dictates of the scriptures. The civilizing mission of the colonial state was, thus, seen to lie in giving back to the natives the truths of their own little read and even less understood *shastras.*[47]

Our discussion of the age of reform, the advent of modernity all within tradition indicates the desire of the civil society to create an Indianness that is modern and national, yet recognizably different from the Western. Anticolonial nationalism, therefore, created its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society well before it begins its political battle within the imperial power. It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the outside, of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an inner domain bearing the essential marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, the greater is the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. Chatterjee cites the example of the early reformers of 19th century who looked to the colonial authorities to bring about reform of traditional institutions and customs. In the latter phase, the need for change was a strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting 'national culture'. The second phase coincided with the period of nationalism. This was also the time when Vivekananda's message of nation-building came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralized Hindu mind. Vivekananda's reform project was more traditionally oriented and drew in particular on resources from Brahmanical traditions, seeking to develop a Hinduism in keeping with the times. He was open to secular elements, adopting the line of thinking taken by the natural sciences and Enlightenment's ideas of criticism of religion and integrated them into his concept of religion. He decried the imitation of Western materialistic attitudesby the educated Indians of his day, though. In his programme of regeneration of India, he attached great importance to the revival of ancient learningto maintain the cultural identity intact. He wanted the classics to be

translated into the regional languages so that those knowledges revitalized the masses and, thus, bring about a reawakening of the dormant minds[48]. Vivekananda's personal struggles and desires were bound up in an inextinguishable passion for his country's good. He never proclaimed nationality, but he was himself the living embodiment of that idea which the word conveys[49]. He stood aloof from all special questions, whether of conservatism or reform; not because he sympathized with one party more or less than with the other, but because he saw that for both alike the real question was the recapture of the ideal, and its identification with India. On behalf of women and the people, alike, he held that the duty required of us was not to change institutions, but to put these in a position to solve their own problems. Vivekananda had a clear view of the underlying selfishness of capital and the struggle for privilege that characterized Western life. Yet he never doubted that for man, the world over, the coming age would be "for the People". And in this context, it becomes imperative to do away with the caste system. "We are to solve the problems of the Sudra," he said.[50] Social reforms, originally to be implemented together with the British colonial rulers, were no longer considered that pressing. Instead, the regeneration of the national culture was now accorded primacy, and it was to emanate from what he considers to be the core, i.e. religion, or more precisely a unified "Hinduism", the identity marker of which is to be the school of Advaita Vedānta.[51]

Vivekananda represented a creative synthesis of the old and the new, in which traditional and modern elements were in dynamic interaction. With regard to the idea of work, Vivekananda was both courageous and innovative. There was the willingness to 'help anyone even at the point of death without asking questions.[52]' There was greater innovativeness in the attempt to separate the path of karma from any belief in God, soul or other metaphysical speculation. Vivekananda had realized that the personal isolation of the *yogi* could be constructively combined with a life of social responsibility. Somewhat uniquely, therefore, Swami Vivekananda defined *karma yoga* as work towards public welfare. *Karma* was not simply about man's capacity to act but realizing his own great potentialities through activity. For Vivekananda strength, manliness and the power of human organization were qualities and accomplishments that could easily outweigh the virtues of religion in the commonplace understanding of the term. Vivekananda did not call for work abandoning all sense of purpose, but maintained that the true worker had his heart full of love and empathy. Non-attachment was not in respect to the end, but making any claims

upon the fruits thereof.[53] The redefinition of the notion of *karma* helps us to understand the ways in which Vivekananda's depiction of the life of a *sannyasi* was an active public one as opposed to the archetypal image of the world-renouncing recluse who retired from the realm of all material things. In this new capacity as social worker, the *sannyasin* was the hero capable of redeeming the "condition of India"[54]. The innovative public role formulated for the ascetic was explained by his brother Bhupendranath Datta, the Swadeshi activist as a historically necessary departure from orthodox notions.

"He organized Sadhus recruited from the middle class for social service scheme that he put forth. ….Formerly, the Christian missionaries did this work… Lastly came Swami Vivekananda to mobilize young monks for social service… the Sadhu of the Ramkrishna order lives out of the society as well as in it."[55]

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission became the vanguard of modernity within Hindu monasticism that sought reform compromised by revival, that demanded of its monastics a life of selfless service to others as well as spiritual enrichment of one's religious convictions and practices. Sadly, Swami Vivekananda died too young to bring about the awakening that he had envisioned.

Notes

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12. *'Sattvika'* humanitarian giving: disinterested charity with no expectation of reward, and no attachment to the fruits that come from the act of giving (pp. 105-13)
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