SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND NON-HINDU TRADITIONS

A UNIVERSAL ADVAITA

Stephen E. Gregg

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The Hindu thinker Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was and remains an important figure both within India and in the West, where he was notable for preaching *Vedanta*. Scholarship surrounding Vivekananda is dominated by hagiography and his (mis)appropriation by the political Hindu Right. This work demonstrates that Vivekananda was no simplistic pluralist, as portrayed in hagiographical texts, nor narrow exclusivist, as portrayed by some modern Hindu nationalists, but a thoughtful, complex inclusivist.

The book shows that Vivekananda formulated a hierarchical and inclusivistic framework of Hinduism, based upon his interpretations of a fourfold system of *Yoga*. It goes on to argue that Vivekananda understood his formulation of *Vedanta* to be universal, and applied it freely to non-Hindu traditions, and in so doing demonstrates that Vivekananda was consistently critical of 'low-level' spirituality, not only in non-Hindu traditions but also *within* Hinduism.

Demonstrating that Vivekananda is best understood within the context of '*Advaitic* primacy' rather than 'Hindu chauvinism,' this book will be of interest to scholars of Hinduism and South Asian religion and of South Asian diaspora communities and religious studies more generally.

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Frontispiece: A seated Vivekananda in a professionally staged photograph – probably Bangalore, February 1893. See Chattopadhyaya, R. *Swami Vivekananda in India: A Corrective Biography* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999) pp. 120–121.

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To my parents, who showed me the way
And to Helen, who is my journey's end.


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Abbreviations

Barrows	Barrows, J. H. (ed) The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Vols. I & II (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893)
CW	Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Vols. 1–8, 1999, Vol. 9, 1997)
Life	*The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Vol. I & II (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989)
MLB	Burke, M. L. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vols. I–VI (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1992)

1 Contexts and complications

The central aim of this work is to explore how Swami Vivekananda engaged with non-Hindu religious traditions and to examine how this affected his own interpretation and systematisation of Hinduism. This work demonstrates that Vivekananda was no simplistic pluralist, as portrayed in hagiographical texts, nor narrow exclusivist, as portrayed by some modern Hindu nationalists, but a thoughtful, complex inclusivist. His was a position which necessitated interaction with, rather than damnation of, the non-Hindu, and empathy for the universal human religious condition, rather than sympathy for individual traditions per se.

I will argue that Vivekananda formulated a hierarchical and inclusivistic framework of Hinduism, based upon his interpretations of a fourfold system of *yoga*. This framework valorised *Advaita* (a non-dualist Hindu tradition) and devalued aspects of Hinduism that were associated with what Vivekananda perceived to be 'low levels' of spiritual awareness, such as *Gauni Bhakti* (theistic devotion). I will further argue that Vivekananda understood his formulation of *Vedanta* to be universal, applying it freely to non-Hindu traditions. An exploration of his engagement with non-Hindu traditions is therefore essential to a full understanding of his 'Hindu' framework. In light of this, I will detail how Vivekananda applied his framework to non-Hindu traditions and, in so doing, will demonstrate that Vivekananda was consistently critical of 'low-level' spirituality, not only in non-Hindu traditions but also *within* Hinduism, thus refuting claims in some recent scholarship that Vivekananda was a Hindu chauvinist. I will argue that Vivekananda is best understood within the context of '*Advaitic* primacy' rather than 'Hindu chauvinism.'

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) was a Hindu raised within the middle classes of Bengali society, who received Western-style education in Calcutta and became a devotee of the mystic Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886). After Ramakrishna's death in 1886, Vivekananda wandered throughout India as a *sanyassin* (renouncer) before travelling to America in 1893, during which time he spoke at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. After the Parliament, Vivekananda embarked upon a lecture tour of America and Western Europe, attracting large audiences and a number

of Western 'converts' to *Vedanta*. He founded the Vedanta Society of New York in 1894[1] and published monographs and lectures in both New York and London, ensuring his place as the first high-profile Indian to preach *Vedanta* in the West. He returned to India to popular acclaim in 1897, before embarking on another tour of America and Europe from 1899–1900. He died in India in 1902.

Vivekananda and his legacy remain of central importance both within India and the West, long after his premature death at the age of 39. This continued importance is reflected in the central place his name occupies in contemporary Indian society and politics, in the continuing spread of Indian traditions to the West and in the burgeoning academic scholarship on his social and political significance in contemporary 'globalised' contexts.

Vivekananda is a source of pride as a 'Father' figure in India to this day. National Youth Day is celebrated annually on his birthday,[2] and the Vivekananda Memorial at Cape Comorin on the southernmost tip of India has grown from a small shrine to an international centre of pilgrimage. Numerous schools, hospitals and research centres are named after Vivekananda, and the annual publication of a best-selling calendar ensures that this high-profile Indian 'saint' is venerated through popular culture. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, founded by Vivekananda in 1897, remains one of India's highest profile charitable organisations. Providing famine relief, promoting human rights and women's rights, and running medical services, schools and orphanages, the Ramakrishna Movement is in many ways the embodiment of Vivekananda's vision of social service and religion.[3]

Vivekananda remains an influential figure in modern interfaith dialogue. Popular understandings of his performance at the Chicago Parliament, fuelled by hagiographical accounts, have placed Vivekananda at the centre of the genesis of the interfaith movement. Whilst this work will question this popular view, it remains the case that Vivekananda is consistently posthumously valorised for his role as a pioneer of modern approaches to religious dialogue.[4] Vivekananda is also associated with the growth of 'alternative spiritualities' in the West. De Michelis has provided a systematic survey of Vivekananda's influence on the growth of modern *yoga*,[5] and van der Veer notes that Vivekananda's "effort to systematize disparate notions of ascetic practice [i.e. *Yogas*] . . . is now India's main export article on the 'spirituality market.'"[6] Vivekananda is also credited with originating the popular notion of the East as a 'spiritual' society and the West as a 'materialistic' society – a theme that can be seen to have influenced later thinkers such as Radhakrishnan.[7]

Vivekananda remains an important cultural icon in contemporary manifestations of Hindu nationalism within right-wing Indian politics. Indeed, van der Veer notes that Vivekananda's dualistic construction of the 'material' West and the 'spiritual' East was the "source and inspiration for the RSS/BJP/VHP brand of Indian nationalism."[8] Importantly for this work, however, is Radice's note of warning that it is necessary for scholarship to

focus upon "Vivekananda's social and religious ideals, to rescue them from the distortions that were being worked on them by fundamentalists keen to co-opt Vivekananda to their cause."[9] Radice's comment is at the heart of this work's aim to contribute to this debate. I argue that a gap exists in the scholarship on Vivekananda, concerning his treatment of non-Hindu traditions which, if explored, may prove supportive of Radice's desire to *re*-appropriate Vivekananda from the clutches of Hindutva ideologues and activists.

Sources

Scholarship on Vivekananda relevant to this work falls into three main categories. First, there are biographical works on Vivekananda that provide an account of his life and times. The problem of hagiography undermines the validity of early biographies of Vivekananda. In recent years, however, several authors have published reliable texts detailing the life of Vivekananda. Most notable in this field are Narasingha Sil,[10] Amiya Sen[11] and Rajagopal Chattopadhyaya.[12] Whilst Sil writes from a psycho-analytical background, Sen and Chattopadhyaya write with a socio-historical understanding of the subject. This work aims to add to these recent biographical endeavours by detailing events that are not covered in detail by these works – in particular by analysing Vivekananda's speeches at Chicago, which are largely overlooked in modern biographies, suggesting that the legend surrounding Vivekananda's performance at Chicago is occasionally accepted rather uncritically, even by modern biographers. Indeed, an almost mythical narrative has emerged surrounding Vivekananda at the Chicago Parliament, which depicts Vivekananda as a 'champion of Hinduism' and/or as a proponent of a form of pluralistic religious dialogue that foreshadowed twentieth-century inter-religious discourse. I will argue that that neither of these views is borne out by the evidence.

Alongside biographical work, there is much extant literature exploring Vivekananda's formulation of 'practical *Vedanta*.' Among the early studies exploring this subject is Nalini Devdas's *Svami Vivekananda*,[13] where the author outlines Vivekananda's construction of a practical form of *Vedanta*. Devdas understands Vivekananda to have encompassed a diversity of Hindu traditions, including *bhakti* and *yoga* traditions, which he placed within a universalistic framework. Devdas examines Vivekananda's hierarchical understanding of religiosity, and includes a brief outline of Vivekananda's understanding of Buddhism. In the 1970s, George Williams[14] examined the sources of Vivekananda's religious authority and the evolving nature of Vivekananda's understanding of his own faith and his approach to various forms of 'Hinduisms.' Williams outlines Vivekananda's understanding of a universal principle of eternal religion, which leads to a practical form of *Vedanta*, and examines Vivekananda's relationship with different forms of Hinduism, including his view of scriptural authority and the role of the

Guru, highlighting the shifts in perspective that occurred throughout Vivekananda's life.

More recently, Vivienne Baumfield, in *Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta*,[15] provides a survey of the background influences to Vivekananda, from the Brahmo Samaj to the Positivist movement and the Theosophical Society. The latter part of the work concentrates upon Vivekananda's conception of ethical duty as the manifestation of Practical *Vedanta*, and explores Vivekananda's understanding of Christ, the Buddha and Mohammed. Anantanand Rambachan, in *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas*,[16] provides a well-argued and coherent account of Vivekananda's construction of a *yoga*-based path to realisation. Eloquently raising the problems of Vivekananda's re-interpretation of Sankara, this study is key in understanding Vivekananda's approach to, and treatment of, different *yogas* within an *Advaitic* tradition. Elizabeth De Michelis, in *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism*,[17] provides a systematic assessment of Vivekananda's construction of a fourfold *yoga* system of religion. Examining the influences upon Vivekananda and his treatment of *raja, bhakti, jnana* and *karma yoga*, De Michelis positions Vivekananda within the movement towards Western occultism and esotericism that was growing in late nineteenth-century America.

Missing in much of this scholarship is an engagement with Vivekananda's application of his religious framework to non-Hindu traditions. Devdas goes some way towards exploring this when she assesses Vivekananda's understanding of Buddhism. However, the scope of her investigation is limited to Buddhism, and she does not take into account Vivekananda's views on Christianity and Islam. Baumfield too takes a step towards examining Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions when she examines his views on such religious figures as Christ, the Buddha, and Mohammed. She however confines her study to his engagement with religious leaders and does not extend her research to investigate Vivekananda's perceptions of these 'other' traditions in their entirety – their respective followers, their shared beliefs and practices, and the changes undergone by these traditions over time. There is thus a crucial gap in the existing literature on the question of Vivekananda's engagement with traditions outside his own. This work, while drawing upon the insights of earlier studies, extends the scope of available research on Vivekananda by examining specifically how Vivekananda engaged not only with mainstream non-Hindu traditions but also with the alternative 'others' of Western spirituality.

Perhaps the most contentious issue in Vivekananda scholarship is the association of Vivekananda with modern forms of Hindu nationalism. As previously noted, van der Veer, amongst others, draws a connection between Vivekananda's view of an East/West, spiritual/material dichotomy and the emergence of Hindu nationalism in the Indian subcontinent. Basu's *Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse: Swami Vivekananda and New Hinduism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal*[18] makes a similar connection, comparing

Vivekananda's teachings with the political beliefs of contemporary public leaders in nineteenth-century Bengal. A number of scholars, however, have sought to rescue Vivekananda from what they perceive as misappropriation by Hindutva ideologues. Harilela, for instance, in *The Religious and Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda*[19] concentrates on the writings of Krishna Verma in the 1890s and the BJP political party in the 1980s and 1990s, who claim Vivekananda's legacy for a form of 'righteous terrorism' in an effort to produce an ideological brand of Hinduism. Distancing Vivekananda from such claims, Harilela argues that such views respond only to a narrow reading of Vivekananda's writings and speeches – a view supported by this work.

Of particular note in the 'rescuing' of Vivekananda from the claims of Hindu nationalists is the work of Gwilym Beckerlegge. In 'Saffron and *Seva*: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Appropriation of Swami Vivekananda,'[20] Beckerlegge highlights how the RSS and its associated political party the BJP have appropriated aspects of Vivekananda's message of social service to further their nationalistic social and political ideals. Highlighting the RSS's desire to promote what they understand to be the 'revivalist' message of Vivekananda's teachings, Beckerlegge suggests that this is best understood by separating the desired goals of Golwalkar[21] and Vivekananda as, respectively, positions of 'exclusivism' and 'inclusivism' towards Islam and Christianity; indeed Beckerlegge notes that "RSS writers ignore the positive comments that Vivekananda frequently made about Islam, and specifically about its social cohesion"[22] highlighting the "carefully tailored selectivity of the RSS's borrowing from Vivekananda."[23]

In 'Swami Vivekananda and the *sangh parivar*: Convergent or Divergent Views on Population, Religion and National Identity?'[24] Beckerlegge further articulates the appropriation of Vivekananda by the RSS, in their response to the percentage decline of Hindus within Indian census figures. Highlighting aspects of Vivekananda's approach to Buddhism and Islam, Beckerlegge demonstrates that "Vivekananda's thinking [was] . . . culled by ideologists of the Hindu Right" and that "the use made of Vivekananda by advocates of the Hindu Right constituted both misrepresentation and (illicit) appropriation when the symbolic power of Vivekananda has been invoked and deployed to suggest that their cause and his mission are compatible and mutually supportive."[25]

Similarly William Radice, in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*,[26] provides a highly relevant edited volume containing key articles by, among others, Tapan Raychaudhuri, Indira Chowdhury-Sengupta and Dermot Killingley. The focus of the volume, the result of a SOAS workshop in 1993, was to demonstrate that "any attempt to project the Swami as a Hindu revivalist, fundamentalist or communalist grossly contradicts the evidence."[27] The resultant volume provides key evidence for aspects of Vivekananda's performance at Chicago, his treatment of the concepts of 'East' and 'West,' and his relationship to Hindu nationalism. Raychaudhuri, for instance, notes that, in spite of the VHP claiming "the Patriot-Prophet

as one of their own" during the 1993 centenary celebrations of the Chicago Parliament, in fact "Hindu revival . . . was at best peripheral and for the most part antagonistic to Vivekananda's concerns."[28] He argues that in Vivekananda's view "Vedanta . . . transcended the limits of any particular religious or cultural tradition."[29]

Killingley's "Vivekananda's Western Message from the East" offers important insights into the East/West discourse and the context of Vivekananda's promotion of Hinduism to the West. Specifically focusing on Vivekananda's use of Western religious and cultural beliefs, Killingley highlights important themes such as Vivekananda's treatment of Jesus and the Buddha,[30] and the interaction of Vivekananda's religious worldview with science – issues I will address in relevant sections of Chapters 4 and 5. This work shares compatible aims with Killingley, agreeing that it is essential to explore both non-Hindu influences on Vivekananda, as well as Vivekananda's approach to Islam, Buddhism and Christianity, in studying his formulation of his religious framework.

This work will focus specifically on Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions in an attempt to analyse Vivekananda's view of Hinduism and its relationship to the religious 'other.' In so doing, I will distance Vivekananda from Hindu chauvinistic claims, instead locating him as a proponent of *Advaitic* primacy – a keen advocate not of Hinduism in its entirety but of *Advaita* in particular. It is hoped that, in so doing, Vivekananda may be lifted from the quagmire of colonialism, nationalism and fundamentalism that has clouded judgements on his character from the earliest barbed reports by Christian missionaries to his most recent misappropriation by right-wing Hindu parties.

The primary sources most crucial to this work are the lectures and writings, both public and private, of Vivekananda that have been compiled by the Advaita Ashrama publishing wing of the Ramakrishna Mission. Spanning nine volumes and approximately 5,500 pages, the *Complete Works*[31] are a problematic source for several reasons: First, the contents are not arranged chronologically and, although most epistles are dated, large sections of lectures or writings are undated. To clarify when and where Vivekananda made statements relevant to this work, I have accessed the scholarship of Mary Louise Burke[32] and Hohner and Kenny.[33] Second, notes taken by stenographers are often fragmented, for example in the case of a lecture appearing in one volume, and the subsequent question and answer session being found in a different volume. Third, the editing process is highly hagiographical. For example, the speech *My Master*, outlining Vivekananda's view of Ramakrishna, is placed sequentially with Vivekananda's major work on Jesus, *Christ, The Messenger*, despite being based on lectures given several years apart. Fourth, the *Complete Works* contain versions of Vivekananda's writings on *Bhakti, Jnana, Raja* and *Karma Yoga* that differ from editions published both during his lifetime and also posthumously in the early twentieth century. Indeed, an understanding of the provenance, editing and redaction

of early published works of Vivekananda is crucial when establishing the authority of sources and texts for this work – an overview follows.

Two published versions of Vivekananda's key *Bhakti Yoga* text exist to this day, plus variations of source material within the *Complete Works* in the form of lecture notes. E. T. Sturdy, Vivekananda's guide and host for much of his 1895 tour of England, published *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy Vol. II: Bhakti Yoga* in London in 1896.[34] Based on Vivekananda's lectures of 1895 and 1896, Sturdy's text is probably the closest documentation we have relating to Vivekananda's lectures, which appear largely unedited. Herein, however, lies the problem. Vivekananda had previously (probably in January or February 1896) promised publication rights to the Vedanta Society of New York, seemingly contradicting his personal message to Sturdy of 29th December 1895, when he sent Sturdy typed manuscripts, remarking that he "hope[d] they may be of some use."[35] Sturdy had taken this to mean that he should publish the works in England, the result of which was the now rare 1896 book. Its publication caused a minor sensation throughout Vivekananda's inner circle.

In a letter dated 17th March 1896, Vivekananda replied to Sturdy's news of his publication of the *Bhakti* lectures with a mixture of embarrassment and anger:

> I received your last [letter] just now, and it frightened me immensely. The lectures were delivered under the auspices of certain friends who paid for the stenography and all other expenses on condition they alone will have the right to publish them. . . . The friends here [New York] are furious at the idea of these books being published in England . . . legally, I am at a loss what to do. . . . The books have been so much re-arranged and changed that the American edition will not recognise the English one. Now pray don't publish these books, as they will place me in a very false position and create endless quarrel and destroy my American work.[36]

The Vedanta Society would publish their own 1897 version, which became the second available edition of the work titled *Vedanta Philosophy: Lectures by the Swami Vivekananda on Raja Yoga and Other Subjects*, which was edited by Sarah Ellen Waldo, acting in accordance with Vivekananda's wishes.[37]

Vivekananda was certainly right that the two texts differed somewhat – Sturdy's text is split into seven sections, without titles, with the exception of the final section on *Preparatory and Supreme Bhakti Yoga*, and the 1897 version is split into ten sections on *Bhakti*, and then ten further sections on *Para Bhakti* which were based on lectures given by Vivekananda between 27th January and 17th February in 1896. In the modern editions of the *Complete Works*, the *Bhakti* section of the 1897 *Raja Yoga* work is reproduced almost exactly in Volume III and the lectures on which Sturdy based his work are

reproduced, in Waldo's edited form, in Volume IV. A further stray document, the lecture notes from the 9th February 1896 lecture, appear in Volume II, again with differences from the Sturdy text which uses this lecture for its final section.

This therefore presents the problem of which text to take as the key source. Chronologically, the Sturdy version has priority, but it can also be argued that the Waldo edited lecture transcripts, and the Vedanta Society of New York publication, actually tell us more about Vivekananda, even if they are not his precise original words, as they offer a clearer picture of how he wished to manage his teachings and mission to the West. The answer, of course, is to examine both sources, as no text can be seen to be completely definitive. In this work, I will approach the sources with caution, referencing both the Sturdy and Waldo texts where appropriate, situating each of Vivekananda's comments in the context within which it was edited or reproduced.

Two major volumes on *Jnana Yoga* were printed, one published right at the end of Vivekananda's life in 1902 and one published posthumously in 1907, titled *Vedanta Philosophy: Lectures by the Swami Vivekananda on Jnana Yoga* and *Vedanta Philosophy – Jnana Yoga Part II: Seven Lectures by Swami Vivekananda*, respectively. Both were published by the Vedanta Society of New York, and are attributed to the editorship of Swami Abhedananda. Both texts are based primarily on lectures given by Vivekananda in 1896 – the 1902 volume relying on his London lectures of that year and the 1907 volume consisting mainly of his New York–based lectures. Problems abound, however, when the versions printed in the *Complete Works* are examined – here we find lectures printed out of order,[38] titles changed,[39] and a general confusion (as in much of the *Complete Works*) as to the chronology, method and context of Vivekananda's speeches – indeed, the 1907 work based on Vivekananda's New York lectures is split across Volumes I, II and III of the *Complete Works*. In addition, even within texts we see enormous difficulties, in that sections from the 1907 work are reproduced in the *Complete Works*, with publishing editors having – quite literally – cut and pasted paragraphs and whole sections, dissecting them and changing their order in the relevant chapter, often for no discernible reason and with no noticeable improvement of clarity. In addition to this, the 1902 text contains problems for analytical study in itself, as it is principally a primer text based on introductory lectures for Westerners new to Indian thought – it is in the 1907 text that we find Vivekananda's more insightful comments on *Jnana Yoga*, and it is upon this work, and the corresponding sections of the *Complete Works*, that I will concentrate.

The sources for *Karma Yoga* are better systematised than those of *Bhakti* or *Jnana* and are based primarily upon Vivekananda's lecture series of December 1895 and January 1896.

The original publication of *Karma Yoga* was organised by Vivekananda in conjunction with the Publication Committee of the Vedanta Society (New

York), under the auspices of Mrs Ole Bull,[40] who oversaw the first of Vivekananda's books to be published on 23rd February 1896, based upon the stenography of Mr J. Goodwin:

> It was on this [final] Sunday that the Swami's first volume appeared. For some time the lectures of one Sunday has been for sale on the book table the next Sunday in pamphlet form. Now a whole collection of lectures on Karma-Yoga was brought out in a large, thin, closely printed volume – very different from the edition published later. It was not very beautiful, but the workers were extremely proud of it.[41]

The provenance of *Raja Yoga* was complicated by a critical dialogue between Sturdy and the New York–based disciples. In Vivekananda's letter of 17th March 1896, referenced above with regard to *Bhakti Yoga*, Vivekananda is keen to point out to Sturdy that "The *Raja-Yoga* especially has been much altered and rearranged along with the translation of 'Yoga-Sutras of Patanjali.' The *Raja-Yoga* is in the hands of Longmans."[42] Having already published, and then withdrawn the unofficial version of *Bhakti Yoga*, Sturdy was more circumspect regarding Vivekananda's other winter lectures from 1895–1896, and *Raja Yoga* was to become a joint project between New York and London, although not without instances of disharmony.

The principle disagreement between Sturdy and the Publication Committee was one of expense. In his original reply to Vivekananda's letter of 17th March, Sturdy was keen to point out that his unauthorised texts were to have sold for 1s/1d,[43] whereas the American copies were projected to cost $1, which was the equivalent of 4s/2d,[44] a huge percentage difference.[45] This concern was similarly expressed in a follow-up letter on 31st March:

> If they [the American committee] are going to bring out books here [London] at any price much over I/–[46] they will be quite unread: people will not buy them. Books to be popular and tempt to purchase when the subject is new must be almost given away. Your friends here have had to be dissuaded from making a protest to the American Committee for having so entirely crippled your prospects for the coming season.[47]

Sturdy's letters caused dissent and consternation in New York, leading to an extended correspondence between Goodwin and Bull,[48] the conclusion of which was that Sturdy won out, and American plans for the publication of *Raja Yoga* ceased in April 1896. The text, edited under close supervision from Vivekananda himself,[49] was eventually published on 13th July 1896 with a remarkable quality – it had no registered copyright. So perturbed did Vivekananda seem to be by the argument over legal and moral rights by his disciples from either side of the Atlantic that he settled the matter swiftly in his own inimitable style. As he stated in a letter to Alasinga in October

1896: "You can very well get out a cheap edition of *Raja Yoga* if you like. I have not reserved any copyright on it purposely."[50]

With regard to secondary sources, Sil[51] separates recent works on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda into two distinct categories – hagiography and hermeneutics – and claims that only three dissertations and seven monographs written in recent years fall into the latter category.[52]

Hagiography, a distinct form of literature designed to glorify people categorised as saints, is common enough in the East and the West, and Sil has argued that the sponsored writings on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda – that is, those published by the Ramakrishna Movement – fit seamlessly into the Indian tradition of Medieval hagiography.[53] Writers such as Rolland[54] and Muller[55] also fit into this category, with their poetic eulogies of their subjects. However, it is important to note that a text is not hagiographic simply because it finds the actions or views of its subject praiseworthy. Hagiography is text with an agenda, for example, the glorification of a saint (for example, Ramakrishna), or the advancement of a political viewpoint seeking sponsorship from a historic figure (for instance, Vivekananda). Hagiography is an important tool in the socio-religious construction of identity for a given community or organisation – indeed, the object of hagiography is often to further the desired social, religious or political aims of the authors.

Hagiography, however, must not be viewed as intrinsically valueless source material. Much may be learned from the writings of those that are internal to an organisation or structure that is to be studied, as long as their standpoint and agenda is acknowledged. Also, with many prominent historical figures, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda being no exceptions, we are often reliant upon writings from an 'inner circle' (*antaranga*)[56] for biographical details, especially of the individual's childhood. Hagiography also informs us of the agendas of senior figures in the development of an organisation or movement, thus providing essential context and understanding for secondary academic writings on the subject. With this in mind, hagiography must be included in a scholar's source material on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, as long as the scholar appreciates the distinctive features of this genre. Among the primary sources accessed for this work include *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,[57] *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern and Western Disciples*[58] and *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*.[59] Clearly hagiographical in tone, these texts are used critically throughout this work, supported by appropriate secondary scholarship.

Sil's second category, that of hermeneutics – in which he includes academic monographs and articles published in peer-reviewed journals which represent etic viewpoints, in relation to the Ramakrishna Movement – must be understood both within its historical meanings and modern usage.

Simms has stated that "the task of hermeneutics is to discover meaning"[60] and the term has historically been applied specifically to the interpretation of texts,[61] although this conception was extended by the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) to "understand the general ground of

understanding itself."[62] Schleiermacher rejected traditional interpretations of holy texts and the existing sacred/profane dichotomy to articulate

> a hermeneutics in accordance with the notion of creativity, in which the work is understood as an expression of the creative genius of the author . . . thereby shifting attention away from the nature of the text itself to the nature of the understanding by which the text is read and interpreted.[63]

In so doing, Schleiermacher insisted upon a contextual understanding of the text as a "temporally conditioned object"[64] which must be understood within a process of movement between grammatical understanding – that is the author's use of language – and psychological understanding – that is an attempt to uncover the author's intention – in a process labelled the 'hermeneutical circle.' Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) extended the concept of the hermeneutical circle by arguing that it contained "the possibility of a primordial kind of knowing" which he understood as 'fore-structures.' Hans Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) labelled these fore-structures 'prejudices,' which he believed to be inevitable.[65] Indeed, Gadamer's conception of prejudices challenged notions of objectivity in understanding and meant that "every hermeneutical endeavour occurs . . . not in a vacuum [but] takes place as a historically mediated event."[66]

Specifically engaging with hermeneutical approaches to Hinduism, Sharma argues that "Western hermeneutics functions under a definition of religion which has been uncritically applied to Hinduism."[67] The basis of this is the application of Western hermeneutics which understands 'religion' as a 'unilateral' category of participation,[68] which is "separate from and separable from culture."[69] Further, Sharma argues that this categorisation is incompatible with much Hindu thought, which led to a tension between acceptance and resistance to this foreign concept when it was introduced into India during the British colonial period.[70] Subsequently, this tension gave rise to societal responses, "which might not have arisen in a purely Indian context"[71] which developed into aggressive forms of *Hindutva* ideology. This work will demonstrate how Vivekananda sat at the very heart of this tension between acceptance and rejection of these Western hermeneutical interpretations of 'Hindu' thought and practice, and will situate Vivekananda within a historical, political and socio-religious context. These categories are not rigid, but must be understood as relational categories that contain overlapping information and issues. Vivekananda's political context is of importance due to the context of colonialism in India as a whole, and also specifically within Bengal. The impact of British rule upon India shaped Vivekananda's economic and social opportunities, the place of his family in Bengali society, his higher education and his later engagement with non-Hindu traditions in general and with Christianity in particular. The socio-religious context in which Vivekananda must be understood includes

the changing and 'reforming' aspects of Hinduism, and the influence of 'non-Hindu' traditions of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. Vivekananda's engagement with Hinduism, in the light of earlier reformers, and the presence of a highly influential guru, conditioned his engagement with *Vedanta* and underpinned his formulation of a distinct notion of 'Hinduism' in the light of 'Hindu reformation' and Christian missionising.

It is therefore in regard to this political and socio-religious context that this work seeks to interpret Vivekananda's primary sources. The *Complete Works* have been approached thematically, and I have undertaken a close reading and analyses of selected readings relevant to Vivekananda's formulation of 'Hinduism,' and his approach to non-Hindu traditions. This approach has preferenced attention upon Vivekananda's statements about Hinduism (particularly in the West), his observations on individual religious traditions, his comments on the relationship between these traditions, and his reflections upon what he understood to be universal aspects of the human religious condition. The aim of this close reading and analysis is to clarify precisely what Vivekananda said about non-Hindu traditions in the light of his self-reflective understanding of Hinduism – an approach I believe to be particularly important with reference to Beckerlegge's observation upon the (mis)use of Vivekananda's writings and rhetoric subsequent to his death. This approach focuses in particular upon Vivekananda's public discourse, often in the form of class lectures or public speeches, and special use has been made of Vivekananda's 1895–1896 New York lecture series and his speeches at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. Although this work does include references to some letters or diary entries, no attempt has been made to systematically analyse the personal correspondence of Vivekananda with his devotees and correspondents. Likewise, there is also no systematic engagement with Vivekananda's writings to his Indian audiences. Although some sources written in Bengali have been accessed, through translations provided by suitable scholars, and some lectures given in India have been used where they support an understanding of Vivekananda's comments in the West, the focus of this work is the public projection of Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions, particularly to the West.

To this end, therefore, the opening part of this work aims to provide a clear context for Vivekananda, outlining relevant political and socio-religious influences from nineteenth-century Bengal which informed the cultural milieu within which Vivekananda's ideas developed. This is necessary to contextualise Vivekananda's thought within the milieu of British colonialism, Bengali Hindu-Muslim identity, and Hindu 'reform' movements which informed much of his early education, personal religious orientation and subsequent public discourse. Similarly, it is essential to contextualise Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions in the light of his relationship with his guru, Ramakrishna, not by accepting the standardised hagiographical narrative provided by the Ramakrishna Movement, but by examining

transitions and tensions between the 'master and pupil,' together with a close analysis of how Vivekananda used the 'Ramakrishna persona' in his projection of Hinduism to the 'Christian' West. The middle section of this work is based on a close textual analysis of Vivekananda's key writings upon Hinduism and also Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. By exploring Vivekananda's own understanding of 'Hinduism,' both in the light of earlier Hindu 'reformers' and also contemporaneous scholarship from the West, of which Vivekananda would have been aware, his ideas may be understood as 'historically mediated events.' This contextualisation of Vivekananda allows for a fuller understanding of his approach to non-Hindu traditions within his *Advaita*-informed universal understanding of the human religious condition. For this work, I have selected the non-Hindu traditions of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism for the following reasons.

As Flood has noted, "Christianity and missionary activity were bound up in the colonial enterprise"[72] and Vivekananda's education, *bhadralok* upbringing and subsequent career in the West ensured that he came into contact with a diversity of Christian worldviews throughout his life and work. Also, for Vivekananda, the person (or indeed, persona) of Christ formed an essential part of his discourse with the West, and engagement with Christian missionising was a constant theme in Vivekananda's writings. To this end, much of this work concentrates upon Vivekananda's (and Hinduism's) interaction with Christianity. Islam has been chosen due to the social and political relevance of the faith for Bengal at the time of Vivekananda's birth, and the relevance that Vivekananda places upon Islamic conceptions of religious and social unity. The place of Mohammed in Vivekananda's conception of spiritual leaders also places an emphasis on the importance of Islam, as Mohammed is treated rather differently from Jesus and the Buddha by Vivekananda, highlighting again the hierarchical nature of his understanding of religion. Buddhism has been chosen as it provides the clearest example of Vivekananda's tendency towards inclusivism highlighting the shape and nature of Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of religion which will be explored in this work. The person of the Buddha is also important to Vivekananda, as he is often valorised by Vivekananda in public discourse, particularly when being compared to other spiritual leaders. Importantly, Vivekananda also specifically spoke on Buddhism at the World's Parliament of Religions – indeed, Buddhism was the only religion other than Hinduism about which Vivekananda gave a specific speech, thus providing a specific example of how Vivekananda engaged with non-Hindu traditions in relation to Hinduism in practical discourse in the West. Interestingly, Buddhism also offers a counter to Christianity and Islam as, unlike these other traditions, it originated in India, which often affects Vivekananda's engagement with it, and it was also not a major religious demographic in Bengal at the time of Vivekananda, meaning that Vivekananda's treatment of Buddhism is somewhat reliant on his own historical interpretations, rather than contemporary engagement.

The final part of the work is a close study of Vivekananda's performance at the World's Parliament of Religions through an examination of the primary sources of the Proceedings of the Parliament, and also the body of secondary literature which surrounds this event. The chapter provides an important part of this work, as it examines the ways in which Vivekananda both presented Hinduism to the West, often in direct relation to Christianity, and also how he interacted with non-Hindu traditions in a practical environment of dialogue, monologue and discourse. I have also specifically included a close analysis of the speeches made by Vivekananda at the Parliament, which have received scant attention in recent biographies, in an attempt to demythologise Vivekananda's performance on the Chicago stage. Of course, it is important to contextualise Vivekananda's words and actions at Chicago within the wider proceedings of the event. To this end, I have provided a detailed discussion of the background to the Parliament, taking care to contextualise Vivekananda's approach to the event. I have also undertaken a close reading of the speeches of other representatives of 'Hinduism' at the Parliament, so as to compare and contrast Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism in direct relation to other Hindu voices at the Parliament. Further, I have completed a close reading of other speeches from participants at the Parliament which called for religious unity. This has been undertaken so as to contextualise Vivekananda's approach to the 'religious other,' highlighting his reliance upon his self-constructed hierarchical framework of religion.

Modern *Vedanta* and Hindu inclusivism

This section aims to introduce two major concepts that are utilised in this work so as to provide clarity for the reader regarding my use of the terms and their application to Vivekananda's religious thinking.

First, Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions is underpinned by a worldview inherited from a pre-existing but oft-reinterpreted Hindu philosophical position. Throughout this work, I will position Vivekananda within an *Advaita Vedanta* worldview, which is particularly important to Vivekananda's understanding of *bhakti* – a hierarchical understanding of which underpins Vivekananda's entire framework of religion – indeed, much of Vivekananda's argument for an evolving or hierarchical understanding of individual and societal religious awareness is based upon a clear progression from *Dvaita* (dual) to *Advaita* (non-dual) philosophical understandings of reality. It is therefore necessary to carefully explain these terms so as to clearly situate Vivekananda within this philosophical worldview, which I will attempt below.

Second, throughout this work, I purposefully position Vivekananda as an 'inclusivist.' Although in my conclusion I will defend Vivekananda from accusations of 'Hindu chauvinism' by positioning him within a category of *Advaitic* primacy, it is important to contextualise Vivekananda within wider

critiques of understandings of Hindu inclusivism. These, too, are outlined in the following.

Vivekananda sits within a line of high-profile Hindu sages, scholars and reformers who are categorised as representing a form of Hinduism labelled 'Neo-*Vedanta*' or 'Modern *Vedanta*' – indeed, Hatcher notes that "in the modern era, Vedanta has come to be widely associated by both Hindus and non-Hindus with the essential core of Hinduism . . . [and] . . . it is not unusual to find modern Hinduism construed as a species of 'neo-Vedanta.'"[73] Specifically, Vivekananda represents a form of *Advaita Vedanta*, which is perhaps the largest component of *Vedanta*, which has been represented subsequently by Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), amongst others. As early as 1860, the Oxford-based scholar Monier-Williams had argued for *Advaita* as the primary philosophical concept of Hinduism, a standpoint which perhaps explained the dominance that *Advaita* philosophy had on Western conceptions of Hinduism throughout the past century – indeed, *Advaita* is undoubtedly the best known of the various forms of *Vedanta*, particularly in the modern West, which has led to the mistaken understanding of *Advaita* as underpinning all Hindu thought. In this short section, I shall briefly explain the provenance and context of the term *Vedanta*, along with relevant associated concepts.

Vedanta literally means 'the end of the *Vedas*,' which are the foundational texts of Brahminical Hinduism. The *Vedas* are texts which focus upon knowledge of ritual and liturgical matters and which are accepted as *sruti* (the highest authority of text, meaning 'that which is heard'). The *Upanishads*, which include uses of the word '*Vedanta*'[74] are subsequent texts, written between 700 BCE and the early centuries of the Common Era, which are "the repositories of many of the theological and philosophical ideas which come to dominate later Vedantic thought."[75] Killingley has noted that:

> in later texts *Vedanta* refers to the Upanisads themselves, and to a body of thought which seeks to interpret certain key terms in the Upanisads such as *Brahman* ['ultimate reality'], *atman* ('self'), *isvara* ('the Lord'), and thereby show the way to salvation – that is, to freedom from samsara, the continuum of existence to which we are bound by karma and rebirth. This body of thought is what is usually referred to as *Vedanta* today.[76]

The *Upanishads*, therefore, may be understood as *Vedanta* in two ways: first, that they are the concluding texts chronologically, in relation to the earlier *Vedas*; and second, that they are understood to present the culmination of ideas developed in these earlier texts.

Of course, throughout the centuries, philosophers have variously understood the relationships between these interconnected concepts, with particular reference to *atman* and *Brahman*, which has led to different philosophical schools of *Vedanta*. For the purposes of this survey, the three largest

approaches will be summarised briefly, with notes referring the reader to wider treatments of the subjects.

Advaita Vedanta is most closely associated with the philosopher Sankara,[77] who lived c. 700 CE,[78] in Kerala in South-West India. *Advaita*, meaning literally 'non-dual,' is commonly used as an epithet for Sankara's teachings due to the philosophical view of the identity between *atman* and *Brahman*. Sankara taught a non-dual nature of *atman* and *Brahman nirguna* (without attributes) – in simple terms, ultimate reality, indeed all existence, is not fragmented, but unified, and any conceptions of difference are the result of *avidya* ('ignorance') which is caused by *maya* ('illusion') which "causes beings to view as multiple and differentiated what is in reality one."[79] This has important implications for conceptions of *isvara* – particularly in regard to achieving *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of *samsara*) – indeed, as Flood notes, *Advaita* devalues conceptions of *isvara*: "To see the absolute as the Lord is to maintain a distinction between self and absolute, which is to retain a vestige of ignorance which must finally be transcended. If reality is one, all distinctions must be illusory."[80] This, in turn, may be seen to underpin Vivekananda's approach to theism, his devaluing of *Gauni Bhakti* in particular and his understanding of *Advaitic* influences upon non-Hindu traditions.

Visishtadvaita Vedanta is the formulation of *Vedanta* codified by Ramanuja, a *Brahmin* from Tamil Nadu who lived c. 1037–1137 and who practiced *Vaishnavism*, or worship of *Vishnu*, often coming into conflict with *Saiva* members of the ruling class of the area.[81] The fact that Ramanuja was a devotee of *Vishnu* is of great relevance to his interpretation of *Vedanta* for, as Lipner notes: "[he] was a man of deep faith in God and wrote essentially as a theologian: that is, his main concern as a thinker was to reflect systematically on the nature of God and God's relation to the world."[82] Perhaps predictably, this focus on God meant that Ramanuja rejected the non-dual philosophy of *Advaita*, which understood existence (including deities) to be conditioned by *maya*, and therefore representative of *Brahman saguna* (with attributes). In response to this, Ramanuja reinterpreted *maya* as "the way in which God manifests reality of prakriti [nature]."[83] This reconception of deity and reality was based upon a qualified understanding of the relationship between *atman* and *Brahman*, which was compatible with a theistic understanding of reality, which had been rejected previously by Sankara. *Visishtadvaita* – meaning literally 'qualified non-dualism' – argued that *atman* and *Brahman* were not completely identical, but that distinct individual selves (*atmans*) are real, but exist as a part of *Brahman*. As Pandit has noted: "Visishtadvaita declares that Brahman possesses internal distinctions, since the conscious selves and the unconscious matter (prakriti) are His internal parts. Thus according to Visishtadvaita, Brahmin is the unity qualified by many internal parts or attributes."[84] This theo-philosophical reinterpretation allowed room for *bhakti* ('devotion') in the cosmology of Ramanuja, and thus validated theistic conceptions of *Vedanta*, in direct response to

Sankara. Importantly, Vivekananda uses this conception of *Vedanta* to formulate his understanding of Christian conceptions of incarnation and also places this philosophical view as the mid-point of his understanding of an evolutionary aspect to social forms of religious tradition.

Dvaita Vedanta is a philosophical/theological position formulated in response to *Advaita* and *Visishtadvaita* by Madhva. A native of Southern Karnataka, Madhva lived c. 1238–1317 CE,[85] and wrote commentaries on several *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Brahma Sutra* and the *Bhagavata Purana*.[86] Madhva's great departure from the pre-existing *Vedanta* traditions was to reject any notion of non-dualism, based on his reading of sacred scripture – indeed, "Whereas the Advaita tradition emphasizes the non-difference (*abheda*) between the self and the absolute, Madhva insists on their complete distinction. Difference or *bheda* is a cornerstone of his theology and scriptural interpretation."[87] This philosophical formulation allows for a strong understanding of theism, wherein "nothing can exist outside the Lord's will . . . [and] liberation is . . . a participation in the bliss of the Lord, attained through devotion (*bhakti*) to an icon and the Lord's grace."[88] Indeed, so important is the notion of divine grace to Madhva that he deconstructed the conception of *moksha*, or liberation, to involve differing levels dependent upon the intensity of each individual practitioner's devotion to the Lord.[89] *Dvaita*, for Vivekananda, represented the lowest common denominator of human spirituality and the step from which people could progress up towards higher spiritual truths. It was also clearly through a *Dvaitic* lens that Vivekananda understood Muslim theism.

These 'classical' interpretations of *Vedanta* have been reinterpreted over time. For the purposes of this study, the term 'modern *Vedanta*' refers to the philosophical worldview of a diverse set of nineteenth-century Indian reformers who sought to revitalise Hindu identity with reference to these classical sources of authority from Brahminical traditions. Hatcher has noted that

> the genealogy of modern Vedanta rightly begins with Rammohun Roy[90] [the nineteenth-century religious and social reformer who founded the organisation that would become widely known as the Brahmo Samaj] . . . who after 1815 initiated the project of making Vedanta modern through an ambitious program of translation, publication, and public debate.[91]

This was necessary due to the fact that "the Upanisads and Advaita Vedanta were little known in Bengal in Rammohun's time."[92] This public focus on *Advaita* gave rise to the term 'Neo-*Vedantists*' which was used by Christian missionaries in the 1840s as a derogatory name for the reformers of the Tattvabodhini Sabha[93] who were "bent on the modern revival of Vedanta."[94] This concentration on *Vedanta* took the specific shape of *Advaita Vedanta* in relation to Sankara. Of course, individual reformers understood the

philosophy variously, but non-dualism was clearly preferenced – for example, by Roy who presented "himself as an upholder of Advaita Vedanta [throughout his writings]"[95] and Keshub Chunder Sen who, Koar argues, "opted for the monistic path of the Vedanta"[96] after 1881. Indeed, so influential was this philosophical inheritance, within which Vivekananda firmly positioned himself, that "Advaita Vedanta, as interpreted by Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan and many others, is a familiar part of modern Hindu self-understanding."[97]

Paul Hacker first used the term 'inclusivism' in a 1957 article titled *Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Hinduism*, suggesting that the Hindu practice of 'doctrinal tolerance' was synonymous with what he described as an 'inclusivistic attitude.'[98] In 1964, Hacker furthered his conception of inclusivism by arguing that inclusivism was a 'typically Indian' hermeneutic.[99] This engagement with the term, by which he means "'claiming for, and thus including in one's own religion' or world view what belongs in reality to another, foreign competing system"[100] also led to the conclusion that inclusivism was essentially "a subordinating identification of other teachings with parts or preliminary stages of one's own religious system, which is thus presented as a superior structure, and an implicit anticipation of competing views."[101] Particularly relevant to this work is the fact that Hacker links this conception directly to Christian approaches to different religions – in other words, Hindu inclusivism and conceptions of 'Hindu unity' – which Hacker sees as a modern phenomenon, and a product of neo-Hinduism[102] – were formulated in direct response to "the Christian approach to other religions, which presupposes . . . a clear recognition of *others* in their *otherness*."[103]

As noted earlier, this work analyses Vivekananda as a hierarchical inclusivist. Cush and Robinson[104] too, perceive Vivekananda as an hierarchical inclusivist and describe Vivekananda's 'Hindu Universalism' as inclusive. Locating Vivekananda within an *Advaitic* framework, they argue that: "Advaita Vedanta . . . established a firm foundation on which Hindu universalism could be constructed by Neo-Vedantins. Invariably this involves an inclusivist view of Hinduism *extended beyond Hinduism* to encompass the truth and validity of all religions."[105] Furthermore, Cush and Robinson note that inclusivism tends towards the reconciliation of different worldviews "by building the diversity of claims into a single system . . . [and] such a system often takes a hierarchical form."[106]

Halbfass has further commented that "Vedantic 'inclusivism' is the very framework and basis for Vivekananda's encounter with the West"[107] and that Vivekananda was "committed to propagating Hindu principles beyond the borders of India and to utilizing their international recognition in his efforts to regenerate Hindu self-awareness and self-confidence."[108]

This work will examine these claims, with specific reference to Vivekananda's treatment of non-Hindu traditions in relation to his self-reflective formulation of a codified *yoga*-based construction of Hinduism. In so doing, it will be demonstrated that Vivekananda's inclusivism was not chauvinistically

hierarchical, but universal in its valorising of 'higher-level spirituality' and devaluing of 'lower-level spirituality' both within Hinduism and with respect to wider religious traditions.

Notes

1 Jackson, C. T. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) p. 28.
2 National Youth Day. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/topic/national-youth-day (accessed 01/10/18).
3 See in particular Beckerlegge, G. *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) and, for an 'insider' account, Lokeswarananda, Swami (ed.) *The Story of Ramakrishna Mission: Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Fulfilment* (Kolkata: *Advaita* Ashrama, 2006).
4 See, for example, Bharat's note: "The inspiration for [the interfaith movement] . . . is generally understood to have been the moment Swami Vivekananda addressed his 'Sisters and Brothers of America' at the first Parliament of World Religions in Chicago in 1893." Bharat, S. & Bharat, J. *A Global Guide to Interfaith* (Winchester: O Books, 2007) p. 4. It is important to note that the concept of 'interfaith dialogue' is a twentieth-century, largely Christian venture which manifested as a result of theological approaches to Christology and salvation, particularly influenced by the works of Rahner, Tillich, Hick, Knitter and D'Costa. Whilst this work examines Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions, it is important to understand this within his own context of Indian identity and interaction with Christianity in particular, rather than through later conceptions of 'interfaith dialogue' as a specific form of religious interaction, with which Vivekananda would not have been familiar.
5 De Michelis, E. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004).
6 Van der Veer, P. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994) p. 70.
7 See, for example, Radhakrishnan, S. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, 2nd edn. (London: Oxford University Press, 1940). It may be pertinent to offer a note on terminology at this juncture. Vivekananda's use of terminology such as 'spirituality,' 'religion' and 'Hinduism' was interchangeable and inconsistent throughout his public lectures and private letters. The words 'religion' and 'spirituality' are not endowed with consistent meaning and are often used as synonyms by Vivekananda. On occasions, Vivekananda does apply a specific meaning to the terms, linking 'religion' to sectarianism and low levels of philosophical understanding and 'spirituality' to *Advaita* and higher universal understandings of Truth. It must be stressed, however, that there is no systematic consistency in this approach. Such is the case with 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism.' Indeed, as Bose has noted, "there was no over-sensitivity to the word Hindu or Hinduism in Vivekananda. It was the content, not the container and the label fixed on it, that concerned him." Often, Vivekananda uses the word 'Hindu' when he clearly means '*Advaita*.' This work will contextualise Vivekananda's use of terms and will carefully use these terms in ways relevant to Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of religion. See Bose, N. S. 'Swami Vivekananda and the Challenge to Fundamentalism' in Radice W. (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 282.
8 Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, p. 70.

9 Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. vii.
10 Sil, N. P. *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (London: Associated University Press, 1997).
11 Sen, A. P. *Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000).
12 Chattopadhyaya, R. *Swami Vivekananda in the West* (New Delhi: KP Bagchi & Company, 1994) and *Swami Vivekananda in India: A Corrective Biography* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999).
13 Devdas, N. *Svami Vivekananda* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1968).
14 Williams, G. *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda: A Study of Religious Change* (Chico: New Horizons Press, 1974).
15 Baumfield, V. *Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta* (University of Newcastle upon Tyne: Unpublished PhD Work, 1992).
16 Rambachan, A. *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
17 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*.
18 Basu, S. *Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse: Swami Vivekananda and New Hinduism in Nineteenth-Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).
19 Harilela, A. *The Religious and Political Thought of Swami Vivekananda* (University of Hull: Unpublished PhD Work, 1996).
20 Beckerlegge, G. 'Saffron and *Seva*: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Appropriation of Swami Vivekananda' in Copley, A. (ed.) *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender and Sampraday* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009 [2003]).
21 Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, second leader of the RSS.
22 Beckerlegge, 'Saffron and *Seva*,' p. 54.
23 Ibid., p. 60.
24 Beckerlegge, G. 'Swami Vivekananda and the *Sangh Parivar*: Convergent or Divergent Views on Population, Religion and National Identity?' in *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2006) pp. 121–135.
25 Ibid., p. 133.
26 Radice, W. *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
27 Ibid., p. vii.
28 Raychaudhuri, T. 'Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 1.
29 Ibid., p. 2.
30 Killingley notes that the Buddha was made known to Bengali intellectuals by Western Indology. See Killingley, D. 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 144.
31 Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Vols. 1–8 1999, Vol. 9 1997). The *Complete Works* will be abbreviated to CW in references throughout this work.
32 Burke, M. L. *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vols. 1–6 (Calcutta: *Advaita* Ashrama, 1992). Hereinafter MLB.
33 Hohner, T. & Kenny, C. (eds.) *Chronology of Swami Vivekananda in the West* (Online Digital Edition) accessed online at https://vedanta.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Swami-Vivekananda-in-the-West-A-Chronology.pdf (accessed 01/10/18).
34 Vivekananda, Swami, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy, Vol II: Bhakti Yoga* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., Ltd, 1896).
35 Cited in Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, p. 114.
36 CW VIII, p. 374.

37 Vivekananda, Swami, *Vedanta Philosophy: Lectures on Raja Yoga* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1899 [1897]). See Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekannada in the West*, p. 84.
38 For example, *The Absolute and Manifestation* given on 21st October according to Hohner and Kenny's *Chronology*, appears after *Maya and Freedom* given on 22nd October. See CW II, pp. 118–143.
39 For example, *The Highest Ideal of Jnana Yoga*, which is chapter VI of the 1907 work, is included as a heavily edited article in the *Complete Works* under the title *Steps of Hindu Philosophic Tradition*. This confusion is consistent across the other sections of the 1907 work when reproduced in the *Complete Works*.
40 MLB III, p. 524.
41 Ibid., p. 527.
42 CW VIII, p. 374.
43 One English shilling and one English penny.
44 Four shillings and two pennies.
45 MLB IV, p. 114.
46 One shilling.
47 MLB, IV, p. 116.
48 Ibid., pp. 118–119.
49 Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, p. 88.
50 MLB IV, p. 241. A 'cheap edition' did indeed come out in Madras in 1898, which caused Sturdy much consternation regarding his relationship with his publishers and the economic losses associated with flooding the market with cheap alternatives of successful books. The incredible irony of this argument, given his own stance in his March letters of 1896, seems to have been lost on Sturdy.
51 Sil, N. P. 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Research: Hagiography versus Hermeneutics' in *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Oct., 2001) pp. 355–362.
52 Ibid., p. 355.
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54 Rolland, R. *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, trans. E. F. Malcolm-Smith (Calcutta: *Advaita* Ashrama, 1997 [1931]).
55 Muller, F. M. *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (Kolkata: *Advaita* Ashrama, 2001 [1951]).
56 Ramakrishna himself used this word to describe his inner circle of devotees – see CW VII, p. 413.
57 Gupta, M. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984 [1942]).
58 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Vols. 1 & 2, (Calcutta: *Advaita* Ashrama, 1989). Hereinafter *Life*.
59 Saradananda, Swami *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, Vols. 1–2 (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978).
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61 Sherma, R. D. & Sharma, A. (eds.) *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* (London: Springer, 2008) p. 1.
62 Ibid., p. 2.
63 Green, G. 'Hermeneutics' in Hinnells, J. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. 396.
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65 See in particular, Gadamer, H. G. *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer & Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2006 [1989]) Part II, Chapter 4, p. 268ff.
66 Sherma & Sharma (eds.), *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought*, p. 5.

67 Ibid., p. 11.
68 That is, that an individual may not belong to more than one religion at a time.
69 Sharma, A. 'The Hermeneutics of the Word "Religion" and Its Implications' in Sherma, R. D. & Sharma, A. (eds.) *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Toward a Fusion of Horizons* (London: Springer, 2008) p. 23.
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71 Ibid.
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74 Killingley, D. *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1993) p. 89.
75 Johnson, W. J. *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 334.
76 Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, pp. 89–90.
77 In addition to the works referenced in this section, see also: Ram-Prasad, C. *Advaita Epistemology and Metaphysics: An Outline of Indian Non-Realism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002) and Isayeva, N. *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
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85 Sarma, D. *An Introduction to Madhva Vedanta* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) p. 1.
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89 Sarma, *An Introduction to Madhva Vedanta*, p. 95.
90 Various spellings and forms are found for this transliterated name, common amongst them being Ram Mohan Roy, Rammohan Roy and Ram Roy. For the purposes of this work, the spelling used by Roy himself in his correspondence will be used. See Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 1 for details.
91 Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism, or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists*, p. 4.
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93 A reform society founded by Debendranath Tagore.
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2 Religion and reform in nineteenth-century Bengal

This chapter aims to provide a brief overview of the social, economic and religious factors that affected Bengali society in the nineteenth century, locating Vivekananda within this framework so as to provide a socio-historic context for Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions.

Vivekananda has been described as the founder of modern Hinduism and "the first great exponent of Indian nationalism."[1] However, no person is an ideology or a cultural/religious starting point unto themselves – truth claims, worldviews and ideologies, both social and philosophical, are necessarily conditioned by context – indeed, they are conditioned by a relational understanding of, and engagement with, society, community or identity. Therefore, any attempt to understand more fully a facet of Vivekananda's persona and teachings is inextricably linked to an understanding of the cultural setting that conditioned, shaped and influenced him.

This chapter is arranged into two major sections: (1) an overview of the social, political and religious context of nineteenth-century Bengali society and (2) an overview of the religious and social[2] reform movements of the time. Biographical notes are woven throughout each of these sections ensuring that a contextualised picture of Vivekananda is provided for the reader.

Nineteenth-century Bengal continues to evoke scholarly debate and interest disproportionate to other periods in the region's history. Indeed, Sen comments that "the interesting point about this period lies in its throwing up of an amazing variety of conflicting ideologies and opinion, some of which were juxtaposed in a rather intriguing relationship."[3] These 'conflicting ideologies' were a result of the tensions that arose between different sections of Bengal's society as a direct result of the context of colonialism, which brought about large-scale change for Indians in Bengal – particularly in legislation, education, economic opportunities (or lack thereof) and religious exchange and 'reform.'

Vivekananda must, therefore, be understood in the context of this period of social, political and religious change. Vivekananda's education, interaction with Christianity and Islam, and his encounter with 'reforming' aspects of Hinduism were all informed by the rapidly changing identity of Hindus within their own country, as a direct result of British rule. To this end, this

chapter will address key issues and provide historical context so as to avoid understanding Vivekananda in a vacuum. This is undertaken by providing a compact history of British involvement in Bengal, the role of British missionaries and the British influence on education. Aspects of Muslim identity and community in Bengal will then be examined so as to contextualise Vivekananda's later statements on Islam. The final sections of the chapter deal with the hugely influential 'Hindu reformers' of nineteenth-century Bengal, who played such a large part in moulding concepts of 'Hindu' identity and practice in the face of colonial contact, and in the light of whom Vivekananda's ideas must be understood.

Sir William Jones, the late eighteenth-century Sanskrit scholar, made the bold claim that "[Bengal had] fallen into England's lap while she was sleeping."[4] Although clearly an oversimplification of the case, it is plausible that the recapture of Calcutta in 1756 by Clive and Watson was as much related to Mughal concentration on Delhi, as to British operational success in a northeastern province that had become detached from Mughal administration. Bengal had, for some time before Clive's retaking of the area, been considered a stable property in the economic portfolio of India by both the British and the Mughal factions. Through an intelligent management of taxation and land revenues, started under Murshid Quli Khan (d. 1727) at the turn of the eighteenth century, Bengal, and particularly the Western area, became prosperous, which perhaps contributed to the British expansionist interest in the province through the middle decades of the century. However, by the 1770s, Bengal was detached from Delhi-based Mughal Imperialism, through no little help from the "quarrelsome European trading companies [that] were . . . seen as peripheral and parasitic appendages in the great scheme of Mughal hierarchy."[5] The most important of these companies was the British East India Company.

Founded on 31st December 1600, as the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into the East Indies, the corporation that is commonly known simply as the East India Company[6] was the most prominent of these 'quarrelsome European trading companies.' Established as a trading corporation with a Royal Charter from Elizabeth I, with the commercial purpose of monopolising trade and profits from the East Indies, the Company also served British colonial interests in an ever-crowded marketplace led by competing European nations. During its infancy, the Company held less than 10% of the trading capital of some of the competing nations' trade organisations, such as the Dutch East India Company,[7] which meant that the British needed to re-align their focus upon India itself, which was seen as a second-rate source for spices, rather than the East Indies. This re-alignment ensured British interest in the sub-continent, and Spear has argued that "without it there might well have been no British Empire in India."[8]

Subsequent British expansionism and interest in political rule in addition to purely commercial interests in North-East India can be seen to have been facilitated in part by the actions of the French, and in particular their leader

Joseph Dupleix (1697–1763). Originally stationed in Pondicherry in 1742, Dupleix had previously "served for two decades in the French factory of Chandernagar in Bengal, [and] was a very astute diplomat who knew how to play off Indian rulers against each other."[9] Through a systematic process of diplomacy and military interventionism, Dupleix had positioned himself as 'protector' of the rulers of Carnatic and Hyderabad, ensuring French domination in large swathes of northern and western India. This specifically political, rather than merely commercial, manoeuvring had an extraordinary effect upon the directors of the Company. As Keay has noted:

> They now recognised that Dupleix had changed the rules of European involvement in India. For 150 years the Company had been endeavouring to appease the existing political hierarchy; in three years Dupleix had simply usurped it. The English must either follow suit or leave the table.[10]

The English, rather emphatically, decided on 'following suit' and in 1751 laid siege to the southern French-controlled town of Arcot – a siege led by a young Company officer named Robert Clive. Despite a 56-day counter-siege, Clive held Arcot, although fighting in the area continued intermittently until August 1754 when Dupleix was recalled to France and a truce was called.[11] Clive also returned home from India in 1754, and unsuccessfully sought a seat in Parliament, which cost him his entire savings, necessitating his return to India in an attempt to re-establish his financial and social standing. He did this by gaining a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the army of the Company[12] – a career move that coincided with Muslim attacks upon British factories in Bengal. Immediately upon his return to India, Clive was instructed to support the Company's actions in Calcutta, which he managed successfully – including the relief of the British factories and the capture of the French factory in Chandernagar, despite a lack of support from British officers who "obeyed his orders only grudgingly."[13] Following this success, Clive was ordered to return to Madras, but he disobeyed this order and instead headed about 150 km north to directly challenge Siraj at Palashi on the banks of the Bhagirathi River. Subsequently known as the Battle of Plassey, this skirmish of only 3,000 of Clive's troops against a numerically superior force of the *Nawab*'s was decisive largely due to the betrayal of Siraj's troop commander Mir Jaffar, who changed allegiance on the battlefield.[14] This victory paved the way for British influence over politics in Bengal by appointing Clive to the Governorship of the 'Presidency' of Bengal in 1765. Clive was succeeded in 1771 as Governor of Bengal by Warren Hastings (1732–1818), an administrator with over 20 years of service to the Company, and who had previously been stationed in Calcutta and Kosimbazar.[15] Just three years later, in 1774, Hastings would become the first Governor-General of India – a role which was necessitated by the changing nature of the Company's role within India, and their relationship to the British government.

Marshall has noted that "within a few years of 1765 the East India Company was forced to accept intervention by the national government over the way in which it managed its Indian concerns."[16] This was formalised by Parliament with the East India Company Act 1773, more commonly known as the Regulating Act, which clearly established British Crown Sovereignty over the Company – indeed, Keith has argued that this was a political necessity for the British government as "it was now patent that the East India Company was no longer merely a company for the extension of commerce, 'but in reality a delegation of the whole power and sovereignty of this kingdom sent into the East.'"[17]

As a result, "supervision of the Company by the ministry"[18] was tightened through subsequent legislation, including Pitt's India Act of 1784 which established a London-based 'Board of Control,' consisting of "the Chancellor of the Exchequer, a Secretary of State, and four privy councillors holding office at royal pleasure, and appointed by the King."[19] A further Act of 1786 increased the powers of the appointed Governor-General, by this time Earl Cornwallis (1738–1805), who was notably the "first Governor-General appointed from outside the Company's service."[20] Under Cornwallis, the Company rule over their territories was "a highly professional administrative corps"[21] and large changes were enacted over Company domains – in particular Bengal, with the 1793 Permanent Settlement Law, which "bestowed the right of heritable and alienable private property in land on . . . the zaminders or landlords who had so far been only revenue collectors who could keep a certain percentage of what they managed to squeeze out of the peasantry."[22] According to De, the Permanent Settlement was a precise British manoeuvre designed "to encourage the new class of rich men in the city . . . to invest . . . [thus creating] . . . a new class of landholders attached to the British rule 'from motives of self-interest' and who would have 'no motive for wishing change.'"[23] These changes were to have a major impact upon Bengali Muslims, and subsequently upon Hindu/Muslim relations which would in turn underpin Vivekananda's views on Islam.

Under Cornwallis, the British saw India as an economic asset ripe for control. Stricter structures were in place regarding provincial administration, and larger amounts of money were invested in the maintenance of the army and police force.[24] Indeed, the economic restrictions upon India at this time also operated on the microscale of individual opportunity, as well as the macroscale of societal opportunity – in 1793, Cornwallis ruled that "all senior administrative positions [within the Civil Service] were restricted to Englishmen"[25] and that, in future, no native-born Indian may be appointed to any position that paid more than £500 per year.[26] In simple terms, India had become the economic playground of British rule, and the overwhelming majority of Indians were left disenfranchised from their own land and enterprise as never before.

Control of the Company by Parliament continued through a series of Charter Acts, including an 1813 Act which ended the Company's monopoly on all

aspects of trade with the exception of tea and the China trade.[27] The detail of this Act was precipitated by the financial difficulties of the Company following Lord Wellesley's reign as Governor-General from 1798–1805 during which time he pursued a 'vigorous policy of annexation'[28] which brought about an increase in territory for the Company, but also the associated administrative costs. A further Charter Act in 1833 renewed the Company's mandate for political and administrative authority for a further 20 years, but also further restricted the financial viability of the Company by removing the remaining trade monopolies and granting the Board of Control complete jurisdiction over the Company. This restriction upon the Company reflected a wider mood within Parliament to carefully assess the running of the Company, as part of a clear agenda to transfer power from the Company to the Crown. Philips notes that this decline in the Company's power can be directly related to their representation in Parliament, which had consisted of 103 members in 1806 but had fallen to 45 in 1834.[29] As if to concretise this flow of power away from the Company to Parliament, Mishra has noted that the 1833 Act allowed that "the territorial possessions of the Company were allowed to remain under its government, but were to be held 'in trust for His Majesty, his heirs and successors, for the service of the government of India.'"[30] The 1833 Act also largely reformed the legislative powers of British territories in India, streamlining five different strands of statute law by vesting "the power of legislation in India exclusively in the Governor-General."[31] A final Charter Act of 1853 was passed by Parliament, but with the new feature that the Company was not granted a set period of tenure – the act "simply provided that the Indian territories were to remain under the government of the Company, in trust for the Crown, until Parliament otherwise decided."[32]

Parliament 'otherwise decided' in 1858. Following the British alienation of the Jats, an agricultural horse-based people who had had their lands removed, and the resentment of the British by the Rajputs and Gujars in northern India whose lands had only recently been taken, the Company further invoked Indian ire by annexing the land of the Rani of Jhansi and the Nawab of Oudh in 1856.[33] These simmering tensions, coupled with the 'mutiny' of Indian soldiers at Meerut who refused to use British-issued cartridges that had been greased with ritually polluting animal fat, led to the financially and politically disastrous campaign subsequently labelled the Indian Mutiny of 1857. As Kulke and Rothermund have noted:

> The treasury was empty and the East India Company was at the end of its tether . . . they were faced with having to raise a good deal of capital in order to foot the bill for the whole affair . . . [and] they therefore gladly left India to the Crown and thus the company ceased to exist in 1858 after 258 years' chequered career.[34]

Despite the radical administrative reforms of Hastings, Cornwallis and their successors, from the first decades of the early nineteenth century, the

British presence in Bengal had come to be seen, in certain middle-strata social circles, as the lesser of two evils. Adherence to, and integration with British rule in the first half of the century led to an underlying passive support for colonial rule, as a means to an end for the accomplishment of a modern, forward looking Indian nationalist self-identity. As Sen[35] notes, many Bengali writers of this period wrote comparing the stability and progressiveness of the British rule favourably with the 'aggressive' and 'traditionalist' Mughal regime which had caused India to have "a history of enslavement and oppression"[36] and indeed, Vivekananda himself was to later write that: "We [India] had stopped advancing during Muslim tyranny."[37] This period saw a zenith of the Indian taste for Western knowledge and practice, as chronicled through the actions of contemporary reformers leading up to what would become a modernised, inwardly centred, but not inward looking, Indian sense of identity in the following decades.

Throughout this period, there remained a tension in the class system of Bengali society – the relationship between the ruling British and the newly emergent Bengali middle class, or *bhadralok*. The *bhadralok* came to be used as a term to describe the new social strata of people that embraced (within a variable spectrum) a fusion of both Hindu and Western cultural outlooks, from a position of relative economic comfort. Sinha has argued that this was a product of 'Victorianisation,' consistent with other social developments in British colonial lands at the time,[38] thus analysing the phenomenon within a largely Western conceptual framework. However, it should also be noted that Rammohun Roy observed that: "A class of society has sprung into existence, that were before unknown, these are placed between the aristocracy and the poor and are daily forming a most influential class."[39] The *bhadralok* can be seen to be a unique fusion, indeed an inculturation, of Western and Indian social, economic and philosophical ideals and ideologies.

Vivekananda (originally named Narendranath Datta)[40] was born on Monday, 12th January[41] 1863,[42] into a family belonging to the emergent middle class of Bengal. The son of a successful and wealthy lawyer, Viswanath Datta, and a traditionally devout mother, Bhuvaneswari Devi, Narendranath was, from birth, situated in an environment that was rooted firmly in traditional Hindu teachings, whilst at the same time conditioned and influenced heavily by an appreciation of social differences – particularly between Indian and Western social and religious beliefs and practices. Indeed, it can be argued that the social circumstances of Narendranath's birth were a by-product of cultural interaction, with his family belonging to a middle class that had developed from the group of Indian professionals, businessmen and intellectuals that had prospered under British administration and had been exposed to British systems of education. This environment in which Narendranath was to grow up displayed a constant tension between acceptance of British (Western) customs and a defence of Indian tradition – a theme that becomes important in Vivekananda's later writings.[43] Indeed, Kakar sees this 'cycle' of dialogue-tension-tradition as outwardly manifest throughout much of

Bengal at this time, and not just in individuals like Vivekananda's father who had embraced British reforms:

> Many of the more progressive members of the community who had not identified with the British in India, nevertheless saw in western scientific and rationalist world-view a means of purging Indian social institutions of the dead weight of tradition. But once the seeds of self-criticism had been sown among these sensitive Bengali intellectuals, it was not long before their uncritical emulation of the British developed into hyper-critical reverence for the Hindu tradition.[44]

Christian missionaries

Christian missionaries in India played an important part in Vivekananda's life – influencing his education and much of his public discourse. This section aims to outline the background of British Christian mission in nineteenth-century Bengal so as to contextualise Vivekananda's later comments on Christian missionaries, and also contains a very brief introductory section on the origins of Christian mission in India to contextualise the later British involvement.

Whilst some Christian traditions claim to have been active within India since 54 CE, when it is suggested that the Apostle Thomas may have visited India, there are no reliable surviving records to clarify such statements beyond 'tradition.'[45] Indeed, Neill notes that, whilst Gnostic scriptures point towards an historically plausible chronology for a Thomas narrative in first-century India, "it is important not to build on [this] a structure heavier than it will bear"[46] as much of the evidence "remains uncertain and conjectural."[47] Similarly scant records survive for a Syriac Church actively working in India, possibly from the third and fourth centuries, but this probably ministered to foreign Syriac speakers, rather than focusing on conversion of the indigenous Indian population.[48] Some centuries later there were sparsely documented visits to India by representatives of the Pope in the 1300s,[49] but it is with Portuguese expansionism in the late fifteenth century, that the first reliably documented history of Missions to India begins. Within a few short years of the explorer Vasco de Gama (c. 1469–1524) landing in Calicut,[50] Portuguese political and military dominance of the Indian Ocean ensured that "clergy and missionaries of various orders came to India in large numbers"[51] in an ideological spiritual conquest closely aligned to the ideology of political expansionism – indeed, "wherever the Portuguese flag flew, missionaries burning with zeal for the spread of Christianity appeared."[52] This Christian expansionism was represented by Roman Catholic Christianity and was focused upon the south of India, largely linked with the spice trade in places such as Kochin in Kerala. However, in 1630 Abraham Rogerius (d. 1649) arrived in India from the Netherlands, and published *The Open Door to the Hidden Heathen Religion* (1651) which was "the earliest European

account of Hinduism in Southern India"[53] and "the first translation of a Hindu work in Sanskrit to be made available in print to readers in the West."[54] Rogerius was followed by a further generation of Dutch missionaries, including Philip Baelde (1632–1671) and, with the exception of one outpost in Chinsurah, Bengal, the Dutch influence upon Indian Christianity was, like the earlier Catholic missions, largely focused upon the south.[55] Bengal, and the north of India, were largely to be the domain of 'British' forms of Christianity.

With the expansion of British trade power in India facilitated by the East India Company, so too came an increase in the interest of British Christianity in the sub-continent. It is important to note, however, the often uneasy relationship between the Company and the missionaries. Strong notes that "English Christianity made its first beachhead on the shores of the Indian subcontinent in the form of chaplains to the East India Company . . . in its factories established at Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay . . . in the late seventeenth century"[56] but this must be contextualised by the Company's view of the role of chaplains. At this time, the Company viewed Chaplains strictly within the limited role of tending to the pastoral and spiritual needs of their employees, rather than as apostles of Christianity or evangelists on behalf of wider British conceptions of Church, State and colonialism. The reason for this was purely economic, rather than being based on any theological objection. Indeed, Strong has noted that:

> The London-based directors of the company remained nervously mindful of the precedent of the decline of Portuguese power in India, which they attributed to that nation adopting a policy of European enculteration and support for Catholic missions. They did not wish to lose their opportunities for profit in such a manner, so throughout the eighteenth century the company's governing court of directors was the most anti-missionary force in the affairs of the British in India.[57]

In short, good government was stable government, and spiritual interference in corporate or governmental affairs was less than welcome. As Frykenberg has noted: "The political system that the East India Company constructed rested on the support of elite communities whose religious institutions could not be violated or treated as inferior lest their hundreds of thousands of adherents be alienated."[58] This ensured that, for many years, the Company fought specifically against the allowance of missionary activity within its Indian borders.[59] The logic was simple; disruption to the religious beliefs of the Indian people was likely to cause disruptions to the management and administration of the same people.[60] For this very reason, some of the earliest British missionaries arrived in India without the permission of the Company and largely lived illegally without the required licences.[61] The restriction on missionary activity was effectively lifted in 1833 when a clause in the Charter Act meant that "missionaries could enter India without licence,

and difficulties with regard to their residence and work were completely removed."[62] This change in legislation increased the number of missionaries in India, a number which had, in any case, been increasing through unofficial channels since the end of the previous century in response to Britain's changing political role in its colonies and former colonies.

This led to the 1786 arrival in Calcutta of David Brown, a young Company chaplain who had been influenced by the Anglican Evangelical theology of Charles Simeon at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge.[63] Where Brown differed from earlier Company clerics was in his interest in evangelising native Indians, as well as Company employees and Europeans, and this 'Evangelical remedy for India'[64] was most notably exercised by Claudius Buchanan. Buchanan (1766–1815) was a Company chaplain from 1797–1808, based at the Fort William College where he taught Greek and Latin. Having previously linked the themes of empire and Christianity in a sermon given in Calcutta in 1800,[65] Buchanan published an 1805 tract which laid out his method of approach: "every character of our situation seems to mark the present era, as that intended by Providence, for our taking into consideration the moral and religious state of our subjects in the East."[66] By this, Buchanan clearly meant that Providence had supported British expansionism due to Divine will, and it is clear from his writings that he "took for granted the beneficial nature of British rule in her colonial territory,"[67] believing that "British Christianity in India would not only keep Britons British and loyal, it would bring British civilization to the Indians themselves."[68] This, perhaps not unsurprising, attitude of Christian and British superiority is clear in Buchanan's writings, published in an updated form seven years after he had written them, as part of the campaign for free access for missionaries in the 1812–1813 Company Charter debate in Parliament.[69] In this explicitly propagandist literature,[70] accounts were openly derogatory in their reference to Hindu religious practices:

> The tower[71] here [Ishera, on the Ganges, Rutt Jattra, May 1807] is drawn along, like that at Juggernaut, by cables. The number of worshippers at this festival is computed to be about a hundred thousand. The tower is covered with indecent emblems, which were freshly painted for the occasion, and were the objects of sensual gaze by *both* sexes. One of the victims of this year was a well-made young man, of healthy appearance and comely aspect. He had a garland of flowers round his neck, and his long black hair was dishevelled. He danced for a while before the idol, singing in an enthusiastic strain, and then rushing suddenly to the wheels, he shed his blood under the tower of obscenity.[72]

It is perhaps not surprising that such descriptions of ecstatic Hindu devotion and worship elicited concerned responses from conservative nineteenth-century British clerics, particularly when used for political propagandist means, and Strong has noted that, even when missionaries took the time to

engage with Hinduism in a considered and systematic way "it was evident that Hindu religion was merely [seen as] . . . a dangerous and duplicitous lie designed to ensnare its adherents into the dominion of Satan."[73] Arriving in India at around the same time as Buchanan was, however, a slightly different breed of missionary – the Baptists – who would engage with Hindu voices in debate and discussion, rather than condemn Hindu belief systems as utterly corrupt and devoid of any merit.[74]

William Carey (1761–1834) arrived in India aboard a Danish ship at Calcutta on 14th November 1793. A year earlier, he had written a hugely influential tract in five parts called *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*,[75] which set out the justification for Christian missionary activity as a direct response to Jesus' commandment in Matthew 28:18–20.[76] To this end, Carey went to India as a representative of the Baptist Missionary Society,[77] where he operated a mission station from within an indigo factory at Malda, Calcutta.[78] A gifted linguist who spoke or read Greek, Italian, Dutch, Hebrew and French before arriving in India, Carey set about translating the Christian Scriptures into Bengali during the first five years of his stay in India and, following the Malda factory's closure in 1799, he left for the small Danish-controlled settlement of Serampore, just outside Calcutta.[79] Here, Carey was joined in 1799 by new missionaries, including Joshua Marshman (1768–1837) and William Ward (1769–1823), with whom Carey would achieve fame as the 'Serampore Trio,' and together they would be influential in a campaign against *Sati* (the practice of widow burning) and in the development of education in Bengal, both of which are addressed below. The Trio would also become famous for a fiery dialogue with Rammohun Roy.

Sati, meaning a 'virtuous wife,'[80] is used as the term to describe the immolation of a widow upon her husband's funeral pyre in a practice known as *sahamarana*, or 'dying together.'[81] Seen as an abomination by Christian missionaries, *Sati* was taken up as a cause by the Serampore Baptists in 1803, who instigated a systematic census of *Sati* practice within a 30-mile radius of Calcutta.[82] As a part of his research as a lecturer at the Fort William College, Carey collected writings from the *Sastras* on the subject.[83] The problem that the missionaries faced, with the conclusion of their study and the research of Carey was that, "the self-immolation of widows, though countenanced by Hindu law, was in no way commanded by it."[84] This viewpoint was also voiced by influential Hindus, including Rammohun Roy, who had argued that *Sati* was "not required by the best scriptural authority."[85] Potts notes that Roy's denouncement of *Sati* can be directly traced to the research carried out on behalf of Carey, and it was in response to this that Roy published, in 1818, his *Translation of a Conference Between an Advocate for, and an Opponent of, the Practice of Burning Widows Alive*,[86] an edition of which was published in England in 1820. This publication was in part responsible for the issue of *Sati* being debated in an 1821 session of Parliament, however few voices supported Joseph Hume (1777–1855), a Scottish

rationalist and radical who spoke passionately in Westminster on this issue. Indeed, when *Sati* was again debated in Parliament in 1823, in response to a petition presented by Thomas Fowell Buxton[87] (1786–1845) arguing for complete and immediate abolition, William Wilberforce[88] (1759–1833) was a lone voice of support.[89]

Despite these setbacks in England, the campaign against *Sati* continued on Indian soil, bolstered by publications from both Roy and the missionaries – particularly the printing of *Friend of India*, a quarterly journal which in 1822–1823 published a detailed case for the complete abolition of *Sati*, which was subsequently reprinted in England.[90] In 1828, a distinct change in approach from the British government came about with the appointment of Lord Bentinck as Governor-General, who, inspired by his 'active'[91] Christianity, consulted Western Orientalist scholars and Roy who, interestingly, did not recommend immediate abolition, as "such a step would 'give rise to general apprehension.'"[92] Bentinck ignored this advice and, following discussion with Carey, instituted a declaration outlawing *Sati* on 4th December 1829. Success had come, at last, to the reformers, and Potts has noted the important role of the missionaries in this: "It may be stated truly that no Baptists were responsible for Bentinck's act – this was Bentinck's alone – but it should fairly be recognized that they to a large degree were responsible for creating the climate of opinion which made his act come about. This was a first-rate achievement."[93]

This early social campaign, which saw the mobilisation of religious representatives (both Hindu and Christian), is useful in the context of Vivekananda's later comments upon religion and social action – particularly his conception of *karma yoga*, which was to find later embodiment in the concept of *seva* (service to humanity) in the charitable work of the Ramakrishna Movement. Here we can see an early example of Bengali religious leaders engaged in the social reform that Vivekananda would valorise in his later life. Particularly with regard to Roy, we can see an early example of a Hindu leader taking part in a campaign for social reform – the inheritance of which would inform individuals such as Vivekananda, over half a century later. It is therefore interesting to note the important part played in this reform by the Christian missionaries, in the light of Vivekananda's later comments on the conduct of missionaries in India, and to also explore one other area of engagement in reform by the missionaries – education.

Education under the British played a particularly important role in the shaping of Indian attitudes towards both Britain and Christianity.

The early Baptist missionaries played an important part in the development of education in Bengal, and Laird has noted how the Serampore Trio of Carey, Marshman and Ward founded a variety of schools – including the 1794 establishment of a boys' school in Madnabato by Carey, and the establishment of a larger school for 40 boys by Marshman at Serampore in 1800.[94] Indeed, as early as 1795, Carey had expressed a desire for "a plan for erecting two colleges . . . in each we intend to educate twelve lads, six Musselmen, and six Hindoos."[95]

The Charter Act of 1813 proved a pivotal moment in the history of British education in India. The Act sanctioned that money should be invested to promote "the revival and improvement of literature and the encouragement of the learned Natives of India and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British Territories in India."[96] The result of this resolution was that a 'Western' emphasis on scientific learning quickly took hold, helped in no small part by an indigenous faction of reformists who sought to move Indians closer to a Western ideal and outlook to minimise their chances of intellectual and social disenfranchisement. Syed Mahmood, a British-educated Bengali-Muslim, and a near contemporary of Vivekananda was, perhaps somewhat sycophantically, to state that:

> The origin, rise and progress of English education in India, and its gradual development into an important branch of administration of the State, constitute one of the most significant episodes, not only in the annals of India, but in the history of the civilized world.[97]

Further to the 1813 Charter Act, in 1835, Lord Macaulay (1800–1859), President of the General Committee of Public Instruction, stated that the aim of all education in India should be the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect."[98] The vehicle for achieving this aim was the promotion, above Sanskrit and Arabic,[99] of the English language. Indeed, "The 'impact' of the West . . . is mainly the study in the implications of Western education for society."[100] This was welcomed by missionaries such as Alexander Duff (1806–1878), the Scottish Presbyterian missionary who had founded the Scottish Church College in Calcutta in 1830, but not by the Serampore Trio. As Laird notes, Marshman wrote articles in the *Friend of India* periodical denouncing 'silly Anglomania'[101] and which, whilst generally supportive of the increase in funding for education in India, also expressed a desire that, along with English language teaching, colleges would be able to "combine with it a widely extended and judicious plan of Education for the People in the language of the People."[102] The government did not, however, act upon Marshman's advice, which is particularly regrettable, bearing in mind the breadth of curriculum offered in the Serampore schools,[103] and the subsequent narrowing of 'British' education in Bengal.

Bengal played a key role throughout this period of growth in English language and 'scientific' education. The first institution to allow Indians access to a Western medical education was the Calcutta Medical College. However, access to a wider educational syllabus came at a price for middle-class Indians – the structure of all courses and the exact content of syllabi were laid down by the British administration, and only text books prescribed as acceptable to the British were used. By the 1890s, Indian access to Western education had come to mean further Indian subjection to a colonial agenda. Middle-class Indian pupils were being drawn away from

their Indian heritage – indeed, "attempts to provide an education giving a more positive picture of India's past . . . were not encouraged by the British administration."[104]

This was the situation during Vivekananda's own college days. Whilst studying at the Scottish General Missionary Board (later known as the Scottish Church College), Vivekananda chose to take classes in Western philosophy, logic and psychology – in particular the work of Kant, Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill and Hume. There is, however, divergence of opinion as to the 'depth' of Vivekananda's engagement with these philosophers. Despite hagiographical claims that Vivekananda was described by William Hastie, the principal of his college as being "a genius. . . . I have travelled far and wide but have never come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German universities, among philosophical students,"[105] it is clear from this biographer's own admission that Vivekananda was not a class-topping student. He graduated in the modest second class after his initial examinations, and Sil has argued that this may have been due to his reading style – a 'quick-reading' method which, though the hagiographies equate it with the ability of a *srutidhar* ('one possessed with a prodigious memory')[106] – may, in fact, best be understood as a form of ineffectual 'skim-reading';[107] indeed, we are informed by Shailendranath Dhar that Vivekananda "did not probably study the actual works of the philosophers even in translations."[108] However, what can be seen is that Vivekananda, throughout his lecture tours in the West, referred to his Western style of education on a regular basis, however superficially he may have studied the philosophers in question, and that exposure to Western logic and philosophy was a part of the process which began to sow the seeds of certain tensions that would manifest in Vivekananda's later approach to non-Hindu traditions.

One such tension, directly relevant to Vivekananda's later interaction with non-Hindu traditions, was that between his enthusiasm for Western (often missionary-led) education services on the one hand, and his distaste for Christian missionising. Vivekananda's criticism of Christian missionary zeal directed towards Hindus (and in particular towards the lower castes) must be set against his attendance at an educational establishment run by the Scottish General Missionary. However, this tension between aspects of Western education deemed desirable, and elements of Western (Christian missionary) activity seen as undesirable, contributed in no small measure to shaping Narendranath's intellectual and religious orientation. As Rao has stated:

> the larger part of the 19th century, which witnessed the profound impact of Western thought, Christian missionaries and the consolidation of British political domination on Indian life and Hindu religion, led to a renewal of the emotional link with the country's past and emergence of a fierce pride in the national heritage, and an active concern with reforms in all walks of Indian life and thinking.[109]

Islam in Bengal

In the years immediately preceding Vivekananda's birth, 20% of the citizens of British India were Muslim,[110] and in Bengal this number was as high as 66% in the Eastern sectors.[111] Overall, during the first half of the nineteenth century, 40% of all of India's Muslims lived in Bengal.[112] Ahmed has noted, however, that the British had a tendency to treat the "Muslims as a separate political entity . . . almost like a monolithic community" ignoring differences in region, class and language.[113] It is noteworthy that this accusation may also be levelled at Vivekananda's treatment of Muslims – particularly with regard to his understanding of the Islamic *umma*, or community. This section aims to explore briefly the unique situation and importance of Islam in Bengal leading up to and including the nineteenth century, so as to contextualise Vivekananda's later comments on Muslims and Islam.

Whilst Muslim incursions into northern India were common from the thirteenth century onwards, and five subsequent centuries of Muslim rule under the Mughals meant that much of the ruling classes of India professed the Muslim faith, Eaton has noted that Bengal held a unique place in India as "among India's interior provinces only in Bengal . . . did a majority of the indigenous population adopt the religion of the ruling class, Islam."[114] This large-scale conversion of the indigenous peoples to the religion of the ruling political elite put into motion a process of religious and community identity outlined below, but it is relevant at this point to briefly note relevant scholarly opinion on this issue, as Vivekananda spoke on numerous occasions regarding the role of Islam in India, and particularly the issue of conversion/Muslim missionary activity.

Eaton, who dislikes the term 'conversion,' and prefers a three-stage process of inclusion-identification-displacement,[115] highlights three traditional views of Muslim conversion: 'The Religion of the Sword,' 'The Religion of Patronage' and 'The Religion of Social Liberation.'

The 'Religion of the Sword' theory is the oldest theory for the Islamisation of India, and rests on the use of military action to spread Islam. Probably dating from at least as early as the Crusades, this viewpoint was popular at the time of Vivekananda, which was "the high tide of European imperial domination over Muslim peoples,"[116] and can clearly be seen in numerous of Vivekananda's writings on Islam.[117] Eaton, however, dismisses this theory on the basis that

> if Islamization had ever been a function of military or political force, one would expect that those areas exposed most intensively and over the longest period to rule by Muslim dynasties . . . would today contain the greatest number of Muslims. Yet the opposite is the case.[118]

Indeed, Eaton notes that Bengal, with the highest percentage of Muslim converts, sat at the edge of Muslim expansion, and Delhi, with only around

10% Muslim population, was the centre of Islamic power and dominance in India.[119]

The 'Religion of Patronage' theory is simply refuted by Eaton. Based on the assumption that cooperation or assimilation with the prevailing ruling elite would bring about favourable political, economic or social conditions for the volunteering party, this theory has been favoured by "Western-trained secular social scientists"[120] who understand religion as a separable part of social identity and agency. Again, such a theory, whilst perhaps explaining low-level rates of conversion in the administrative centres of Muslim rule, goes no way to explaining the mass-conversion in Bengal and the Punjab.

Finally, the 'Religion of Social Liberation' theory is perhaps the widest-held theory of the Islamisation of India, and is based on the premise that the Islamic conception of the *umma* ('brotherhood') was an attractive alternative to the hierarchical Hindu caste system, offering instead a social and religious sense of equality to the downtrodden or oppressed. Valorising this concept of unity, it is perhaps unsurprising that "many Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals, and . . . countless journalists and historians of South Asia, especially Muslims"[121] have subscribed to this theory. Indeed, Vivekananda himself was to praise, above all else in Islam, the conceptions of unity, 'brotherhood'[122] and equality. Of course, this conception of equality is somewhat problematic. Eaton notes that "premodern Muslim intellectuals did not stress their religion's ideal of social equality as opposed to Hindu inequality, but rather Islamic monotheism as opposed to Hindu polytheism."[123] Also, no evidence exists to suggest that Muslim converts benefitted in social status – indeed, "most simply carried into Muslim society the same birth-ascribed rank that they had formerly known in Hindu society."[124] This conclusion has important implications for conceptions of Muslim communal identity, but it is interesting at this point to note that Ahmed also rejects the notion of *umma* as an all-encompassing notion of equality and acceptance, when he states that: "the notion of an Islamic *umma*, which categorizes Muslims all over the world as members of 'a community of believers' and rejects socio-territorial identity, is scarcely a meaningful 'community.'"[125]

Eaton therefore concludes that the process of conversion should be seen, not as a single act which is explainable by a specific theory – a view often represented in Vivekananda's public discourse on Islam – but as a malleable, and fluid process of inclusion-identification-displacement:

> By *inclusion* is meant the process by which Islamic superhuman agencies became accepted in local Bengali cosmologies alongside local divinities already embedded therein. By *identification* is meant the process by which Islamic superhuman agencies ceased merely to coexist alongside Bengali agencies, but actually merged with them, as when the Arabic name Allah was used interchangeably with the Sanskrit Niranjan. And finally, by *displacement* is meant the process by which the names of

> Islamic super-human agencies replaced those of other divinities in local cosmologies.[126]

Hardy has noted that early British histories speak well of the Mughal rulers, holding a respect for Moghul military and political successes of the past – particularly the occupation and rule of a major city such as Delhi.[127] It is also possible that the Company rulers saw in the Mughal administration an echo (or more accurately, a foreshadowing) of their own non-interventionist socio-religious policy for sound economic management of India for, as Eaton has noted: "The Mughal government was simply not interested in imposing or advancing religious causes . . . ultimately, the Mughals had conquered Bengal in order to augment the wealth of the empire, and not for the glory of Islam."[128] Indeed, this shared attitude towards the centrality of commerce in stable government meant that

> for the Muslim *elite* in northern India, British conquest meant the destruction of a way of life more than the destruction of a livelihood . . . In so far as Muslims were left by the decline of the Mughal empire in a position to become capitalists, they could prosper just as non-Muslims could prosper.[129]

The practice was not always aligned with this theory, however. Although in the early part of their rule, the Company had used Muslim officials to aid the judicial and taxation services, a 1781 ruling by Hastings replaced Muslim magistrates with British officials. This move removed Muslims from positions of authority, but many were still employed as law officers in junior positions.[130] Cornwallis's 1790 decision to abolish the *na'ib nizam*,[131] and remove Muslim judges did, however have a large impact upon the professional status of Muslims under British rule – many continued to be employed as 'native commissioners' right up until the 1830s but by 1856 only 54 out of the 366 higher earning employees of the Bengal judicial service were Muslims.[132] This disenfranchisement was also apparent with regard to land ownership and land rights.

Hardy has noted that "the Permanent Settlement [1793] meant, in the circumstances of eighteenth-century Bengal, the virtual closing of the door to landlordism to Muslims."[133] The simple rationale behind this, from the British viewpoint, was that they required collection of rents and taxes to be carried out by those best qualified, which favoured literate Hindus over the predominantly illiterate rural Islamic population. The effects of this were, however, wider than purely financial. Under Muslim rule, rural Muslim community landlords had been eligible to receive *la-kharaj* grants which obviated the need to pay revenue on land owned, in return for the provision of educational services to the local community. After 1793, this system of support was removed, so as to maximise returns from landholders, and Muslim community education suffered as a result.[134] This social and

economic disadvantage began an ever-growing division between tenant and landlord which further "tilted in favour of the landlord by the increase in Bengal's population in the nineteenth century, when human beings became cheap and land dear."[135]

A further issue affecting Muslim disenfranchisement under British Rule was the extent to which Muslims accessed English language education in the mid- to late nineteenth century. The low numbers of Muslim students attending British institutions has often been explained by three arguments: (1) that Muslims perceived Western education to be a conduit for underhand conversion to Christianity, (2) that all forms of secular education were rejected by Muslims seeking a traditional Islamic theological education, and (3) that the British favoured interaction with Hindus.[136] Focusing specifically upon this issue at the time of Vivekananda's own schooling, Aminur Rahim rejects these traditional arguments in favour of an economic argument for the lack of engagement by Muslim members of society. Arguing that the Company recruitment policy of only employing native Indians in low-level civilian bureaucracy removed any opportunities for social mobility, Rahim notes that higher education remained the preserve of the upper classes.[137] In particular, this meant the urbanised Hindu upper classes, as opposed to rural Muslim communities – and, of course, those who had access to such education were afforded further career opportunities under British rule, thus perpetuating the problem. As Rahim has concluded: "A colonial education system based on unequal opportunities widened the social and intellectual gaps between the Muslim farmers and the upper-caste Hindus. . . . These unequal conditions and opportunities led to the exclusion of Bengali Muslims from Western education."[138] Of course, this disenfranchisement of Muslims impacted upon the subsequent decades of the nineteenth century, and it is noteworthy that De has highlighted that, from 1884 onwards

> the Bengali 'Muslim Press' persistently focused the economic backwardness of the Muslims in comparison with the Hindus. They pointed out that most of the Zamindars, mahajans, businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and teachers, who formed a dominant group, were Hindus and the bulk of the peasantry was constituted by Muslim peasants.[139]

By the time of Vivekananda's adolescence in the 1880s, therefore,

> the Muhammedans [had] sunk so low, that even when qualified for Govt. employ they are studiously kept out of it by Govt. notification. Nobody takes any notice of their helpless condition and the higher authorities do not deign even to acknowledge their existence.[140]

It is noteworthy that the above reference to 'sinking low' could just as easily refer to events in Vivekananda's life, which happened at nearly the same time as the events outlined above.[141] In February 1884, Vivekananda's

father passed away suddenly and unexpectedly with heart failure, and Vivekananda was forced to walk from office to office unsuccessfully seeking lowly employment in humiliating circumstances – almost overnight, he had gone from a young man serving an apprenticeship at a law company to the head of a household compelled to earn and provide for others.[142] Indeed, "from comfort Naren was suddenly thrown into direst poverty, at times facing virtual starvation."[143] For Vivekananda, the theme of Indians suffering due to economic disenfranchisement was crucial to his attempt to unify disparate religious, geographical and linguistic elements of Indian society. It was central also to his formulations regarding religious and national identity in response to the West – indeed, the theme of Islamic brotherhood with India would be a major concern of Vivekananda's and form part of his later writings on non-Hindu traditions.

It is clear also that the events of the 'Mutiny' of 1857 were a turning point in the relationship between the British and the Muslim communities of Bengal. Whilst perceptive British commentators saw the 1857 uprising as predominantly Hindu-led, rather than Muslim-led, the social impact upon Muslim communities was devastating – both Delhi and Lucknow were largely deserted and, as Robinson has noted:

> the Mutiny uprising and its aftermath forms a watershed in the development of the ideas and attitudes of the Muslims of Upper India . . . after [the Mutiny] they were increasingly concerned to discover how best they could be Muslim under the new dispensation, whether it meant building ideological and institutional bridges between Islam and [the] West, or developing systems which could enable them largely to ignore Western civilization and the colonial state, or making a point of defending Islam wherever it was threatened in India and the world.[144]

Muslim reactions to British rule informed senses of Muslim identity and the place of Islam in Bengal. 'Reforming' or 'reactionary' aspects of Muslim society also created a context of change, not only within Muslim communities, but also between Muslim and Hindu communities in Bengal. These 'reactions,' which often resulted in ideological challenges to non-Muslims, as outlined below, impacted upon wider Hindu views of Muslims, and help to contextualise Vivekananda's later comments on Islam.

Perhaps the earliest systematic response to the deprivations of British rule within the Muslim population of India was provided by Saiyid Ahmad of Rai Bareilly (1786–1831). The son of minor administrators, Saiyid Ahmad worked from 1809 to 1818 as a trooper in the service of Amir Khan, chieftain of Pindari.[145] In 1821, following a brief residence in Delhi, Saiyad Ahmad undertook the *hajj* to Mecca, arriving in May 1822 and returning to India in November 1823.[146] The *hajj* appears to have been a watershed moment for Saiyid Ahmad, and upon his return he gathered together followers and began teachings, based upon his collected ideas, which had previously been

compiled by Shah Isma'il in Rai Bareilly – probably around 1820.[147] His collected followers, who quickly evolved into a capable mobile fighting unit, have become known as the *mujahidin*, and in 1826 Saiyid Ahmad declared a *jihad* against the Sikh ruler of the Panjab, which resulted in a *mujahidin* attack on Naushera, in which the Sikh forces were defeated. Saiyid Ahmad had collaborated with Pathan chieftains in his campaign against the Sikhs, and after victory declared himself *imam*. However, within just a few months, tribal factions created disunity between Saiyid Ahmad and the Pathan chieftains, and in January 1827, the *mujahidin* were defeated at a battle near Akora, forcing Saiyid Ahmad to retreat to the Pathan outer regions in an effort to regroup. In 1830, Saiyid Ahmad gained control of Peshawar, however the local tribesmen rebelled against a 'foreign' (albeit Islamic) leader and murdered many of Saiyid Ahmad's officials, forcing a hasty retreat. In May 1831, Saiyid Khan was killed, along with his commanders and much of his army, at Balakot on the Kaghan River.[148]

Whilst Saiyid Ahmad's campaigns were based in the North-West of the country, and whilst the target of his oppression was the Sikh-majority Punjab, his actions had a large impact upon British rule. Having been kept informed of developments by political agents based in the Punjab, the British "correctly gauged that his followers intended the eventual overthrow of British rule."[149] This prediction came true in 1839 when the Nizam of Hyderabad employed followers of Saiyid Ahmad to offer bribes to Company troops based in Hyderabad in hope of political gain, and was further realised when, in 1852, *mujahidin* and British troops actually clashed for the first time at Kotla in the Punjab.

A parallel movement to Saiyid Ahmad's *mujahidin* is that of the near contemporary Wahhabism which originated in Arabia. Clear ideological differences between the two movements existed – based on attitudes to *Sufism* which are outlined below – however there are some parallels in approach to British rule between the two movements.

Named after the eighteenth-century reformer and militia leader Abdul Wahhab, the primary aim of the movement was the creation of a society that was based wholly on the accepted precepts of the Islamic faith, which necessitated the cessation of relationships with non-Muslims.[150] Wahhabis sought to closely imitate the life of the Prophet and shunned modern innovations, linking their desire for religious reformation with the simultaneous requirement for political and social reformation. The decline of the Mughal Empire and the colonial expansion of Christian Europe were seen as a sign of the degeneration of traditional Islam, and the Wahhabis believed that a strong response to this problem would bring about a stronger Islamic society. In the context of such a forceful ideology, it is interesting that Vivekananda often characterises Islam as 'violent' or 'strong' – indeed, it is possible that his characterisation of Islam as the 'Religion of the Sword' may have been informed by these reactionary elements of Islam.

The leader of Wahhabism in the second half of the century changed the focus of the movement away from militant tactics. Nawab Addul Latif, a

childhood friend of Michael Madhusudan Datta, was a deputy magistrate in 1849, and in 1863 offered a prize for an essay competition on the subject of how Western science could aid Islamic education.[151] In the same year, Latif founded the Muhammadan Literary Society, which was to run for 20 years. This change in attitude saw the turning of the Wahhabi tide, and in 1868 the Wahhabi Trial saw the end of militant Wahhabism and the beginning of an era of co-operation with the British government, who were now seen by Latif to have changed India into a *Dar-ul-Islam* society once again.[152]

Hardy has commented upon the relationship between Wahhabism and Sayid Ahmad, noting that the message of Saiyid Ahmad is one infused with Sufism – indeed, he chose the name "*tariqa-i muhammadi*, the Muhammadan mystical path" for his movement, and his approach to *Sufism* was to purge it of impurities, rather than to remove it altogether from Muslim practice, which was the clear aim of Arabian Wahhabism, which attacked the *sufi* orders.[153] However, "Arabian Wahhabism no doubt helped turn Siayid Ahmad's thoughts towards an active military *jihad*"[154] and "although differing in detail, all Asian Muslim revivalists have shared a belief that the process of decay of Islamic societies could be reversed by a two-pronged ideological-nationalist thrust: against internal corruption and against external exploitation."[155]

It is interesting to note that this denigration of Sufism – seen as an 'internal corruption' – preferences dogmatic or doctrinal elements of Islam, in opposition to Sufism, which has historically been more open to religious synwork and Hindu-Muslim dialogue. In this way, it can be seen that these 'reactionary' or 'reforming' elements of Islam moved some Muslims away from the type of non-doctrinal spirituality preferenced by Vivekananda in his framework of religion towards a more concretised form of text-based, dogmatic religion, which Vivekananda would subsequently devalue. It is possible, therefore, that Vivekananda's comments on Islam were informed by these movements within Muslim communities in the generation before his birth.

Whilst Bengal felt the aftereffects of the waves of *mujahidin* and *Wahhabi* activity in other parts of India, one movement specific to Bengal was the Fara'izi movement. Founded in 1818[156] by the *Sufi* Haji Shariatullah, the name of the movement derived from *faraiz*, a term used to mean obligatory duties that are described in the Koran.[157] Shariatullah taught a "return to a more fundamentalist Islam, shorn of ritualistic appendages"[158] and classified India under the British as *dar-ul harb*. The social effects of this were immense – Shariatullah argued against *shirk*, a concept of acceptable support for Hindu rites, and *pir*, a form of worship of spiritual leaders, not far removed from some aspects of Hindu guru-tradition, both of which were very popular in Bengal.[159] In addition, Shariatullah emphasised "the Islamic principles of equality and the brotherhood of all Muslims. As a result, the Faraizis won fresh converts from the downtrodden sections of the local population."[160] Hardy notes how this approach was revolutionary in a Bengali context, and that Shariatullah demanded that congregational prayers and

celebration of Eid should not take place under British rule.[161] Crucially, however, Shariatullah did not argue for a *jihad* against the British, and simply concentrated upon his desire to purify Islam. However, Shariatullah's son Dudu Miyan (1819–1862) took up aggressive political action when he 'organised violent resistance' to the levy of taxes taken from Muslims which were spent on Hindu ceremonies.[162] Dudu died in 1862, having been accused by the British of almost every crime from theft to murder, but with no record of guilt due to lack of evidence.

Hardy has noted that "the militancy of Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly's and Dudu Miyan's followers was to have profound long-term effects on British political strategy in India. It helped to reinforce the British belief after 1857 that Muslims were by nature fanatical."[163] It is also apparent that this period in nineteenth-century Bengal had profound effects on the relationships between Hindus and Muslims.

It is clear that Muslim historians see the nineteenth century as a period of disenfranchisement for Muslims, excluded from Western education, quality employment and social engagement by not only the British rulers, but also the upper-class Hindu members of society who were better positioned to work with the British and 'benefit' from advances in education or social class. It is interesting to note at this juncture, however, the specifics of this issue within Bengal, and the impact this has on notions of community within Bengali Muslims, explained below.

De, in his article *The Social Thoughts and Consciousness of the Bengali Muslims in the Colonial Period*,[164] highlights the tension caused by the rise of the Hindu elite in nineteenth-century Bengal. Rejecting Hindu attempts to promote Hindu forms of identity and nationalism, the Muslim elite responded unfavourably to both the religious reforms and literary narratives emanating from upper-class Hindus. Indeed, "it must be admitted that [the] Hindu elite had a role in generating ill-feeling between the two communities . . . [and that] the educated Hindus considered India as the 'land of the Hindus only.'"[165]

Relations between Muslims and Hindus in nineteenth-century Bengal should be understood in both religious and sociological terms. Hardy has noted that

> Muslim reform movements . . . were essentially rejections of medieval Islam in India in favour of early Islam in Arabia . . . [they] went out and preached against the customs which so many Muslims shared with Hindus – intercession at the tombs of saints, consultation of Brahmins, even vegetarianism and aversion to the remarriage of widows.[166]

Herein, however, lay the problem. Divisions between Muslims and Hindus were often highlighted within the higher strata of society – the religious divisions outlined by Hardy above, are similar to the linguistic divisions which Engineer highlights when examining Saiyid Ahmad Khan's attempt to retain

Urdu as the court language of the Maharaja Kishan Prashad of Benares, which split along communal lines with the Muslims supporting Urdu and the Hindus supporting Hindi.[167] Such divisions, however, often did not exist at the lower levels of society – indeed,

> the Hindu and Muslim masses . . . were far more integrated both culturally and linguistically and their sense of separate identity was far more diffused. Their religious identities were also not very sharply defined, especially in rural and semi-rural areas. Their names, modes of dress, life-cycle rituals too were very similar.[168]

These factors support Eaton's theory of a unique process of religious identity and change within Bengal which is more akin to a system of religious synthesis, taking into consideration very specific cultural, linguistic, regional and economic factors, rather than a simplistic understanding of conversion or religious difference. To separate Muslims and Hindus, or indeed Muslims and the British, along pan-Indian lines would be to misunderstand the unique identity of Muslims in Bengal, which will now be briefly discussed.

This section has aimed to provide a brief overview of the place of Islam in Bengal leading up to and including the time of Vivekananda's birth. This is important so as to highlight the diversity of Muslim 'identities' within Vivekananda's lifetime. Interestingly, although Vivekananda at times differentiated between Protestant and Catholic Christians, and Buddhists from different countries, he almost exclusively engages with Islam as if it were a monolithic entity (particularly with regard to his valorisation of the concept of the *umma*). This highlights Vivekananda's tendency to simplify, or characterise, the traditions with which he interacts, or comments, in his public discourse.

The very concept of a 'Bengali Muslim' sense of identity, which sits at the heart of this narrative stream, must, however, be questioned, and the different types of Bengali Islam, depending on chronology, geography and economy must be appreciated.

As Eaton has noted, "In Bengal, as elsewhere, Islam was continuously reinterpreted as different social classes in different periods became dominant carriers, spokesmen, or representatives."[169] Specifically within Bengal, this differentiation was most apparent between the two classes of *ashraf* and *atrap*.

Ahmed describes the *ashraf* as the immigrant class (or descendants of immigrants) of Muslim, predominantly urban dwelling, that was associated with the political and theological ruling classes.[170] As opposed to this, the *atrap* were the class of Muslim that were predominantly rural-dwelling artisan or labouring classes who could trace their ancestry through localised Bengali communities.[171] Immediately, therefore, a tension is created in the conception of a 'Bengali Muslim' identity based on class, geographic location and ancestry. In addition to this, Ahmed argues that theological

tensions existed between those who wished to project a form of 'orthodoxy' for Islam in Bengal, often typified by the *ashraf*, and those whose faith involved large elements of syncretistic belief, conditioned by localised ritual, belief and practice, which was often typified by the *atrap*.[172] Finally, a tension existed between sections of the Muslim population of Bengal with regard to language – indeed, "the dominant social classes . . . categorized [Bengali] as a non-Islamic inheritance. This negative attitude towards Bengali language and culture affected the psyche of even the non-literate rural Muslims, and eventually came to be linked to the question of their social origin."[173] This rejection of any 'localised' forms of Islamic identity by elements within the higher social classes was a long-standing issue within Islam's relationship with Bengal – Eaton has noted that, during the Mughal period,

> the policy was the refusal to promote the conversion of Bengalis to Islam. Indeed, given the Mughal's negative sentiments toward Bengal's 'natives,' one should hardly expect otherwise. For Muslims in the imperial elite, their religion and their family and political contacts with North India served, in their own minds at least, to distinguish them from the delta's indigenous peoples.[174]

Political hierarchy ensured that immigrant communities of Muslims were well represented in urban areas up to and including the early part of British rule, but then, with the transference of power to the British, the *ashraf* community dwindled, and the *atrap* community became the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Bengal. Indeed, by 1872, Muslims accounted for over 70% of the population in the Eastern districts of Chittagong, Noakhili, Pabna and Rajshahi.[175] Of these Muslims, 63% depended on agriculture for their livelihood[176] – a livelihood that in itself began to form part of a new Bengali *Atrap* Muslim sense of identity. As Eaton has noted:

> To be a good Muslim, so it was believed, one must cultivate the earth, as Adam did. . . . Farming the earth successfully is the fundamental task of all mankind, not only because they themselves have also come from (i.e. were nurtured by the fruit of) the soil, but because it was God's command to Adam that he reduce the earth to the plough. It was by farming the earth that Adam obeyed God, thereby articulating his identity as the first man and as the first Muslim.[177]

Therefore, it may be seen that a process of identity building was occurring in the *atrap* community wherein they reclaimed a sense of true and noble Islam for themselves, which had been removed from their previous identity models by the dominant *ashraf* class. The *atrap* now formed the majority and their social and economic norms became the dominant form of Islam in

Bengal. Interestingly, however, theological movement occurred in the opposite direction. De has noted that, at the end of the nineteenth century:

> The process of Islamisation initiated by the Faraizi, Wahhabi . . . and other socio-religious groups of Bengal gave a cohesive character to Bengali Muslim society by removing un-Islamic ways of life. This was essential for its development. By the end of the nineteenth century, when the Muslim population out-numbered that of the Hindus in Bengal, the Muslim theologians put more emphasis on the process of rapid Islamization. . . . In course of time, the syncretistic tradition lost its ground to militant revivalist Islam. The folk tradition gradually declined in strength and vigour and failed to influence the Muslim Society in any way.[178]

This therefore has the effect of positioning Islam, during Vivekananda's lifetime, as a 'religious other' – largely eastern, agricultural and theologically 'conservative,' and therefore positioned in distinction to the western-urbanised Hindus of the cities of Bengal, and the 'reforming' elements of Hindu society, detailed in the next section, which would be so influential for Vivekananda.

Reform movements and reformist ideologies

The climate of change and instability within Indian society brought about by the British administration inevitably led to "codified and collective responses from Indian religious and political reformers . . . [which] galvanized concepts of 'Indian-ness' and 'Hindu-ness.'"[179] Indeed, as Raychaudhuri has stated: "nationalist thought in nineteenth century India is almost exclusively a Hindu past." He further argues that:

> despite pronounced ambivalence on the question of attitude to Muslims and the inheritance of Indo-Islamic culture, the relevant perceptions in nationalist ideology were certainly marked by negative attitudes [to Muslims], or at least a massive act of omission [of Muslim India].[180]

This is interesting as it is clear that claims for a meta-narrative concerning Hindu-Indian identity are problematic to say the least. The use of the term 'Hindu' as a religious category in British censuses of the nineteenth century was problematic – as Jones notes, "in the first Punjab census [1853] the Sikhs were included in the definition 'Hindu'"[181] and the provenance of 'Hinduism' as a Western construct of the nineteenth century has been much debated in recent scholarship.[182]

Despite these problems, nationalist sentiments were subsequently often premised on a newly emergent Indian-Hindu sense of identity, both religious and social, brought about as a result of, and as a reaction to, the ruling British administration. Nowhere was this more so the case than in Bengal.

The Brahmo Samaj is a name used to describe a movement containing five recognisably different, but contiguous, organisations formed during the nineteenth century by eminent members of Bengali society, which Hatcher describes as having had an "ongoing and very fluid . . . construction of . . . religious identity."[183] Starting with the Calcutta Unitarian Committee in 1823, the institution of the Brahmo Sabha in 1828, the Tattvabodhini Sabha in 1839, the Brahmo Samaj in 1843, the schismatic Adi Brahmo Samaj and Brahmo Samaj of India in 1866, and the further split in 1878 of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,[184] this movement represents perhaps the single most important collective expression of Indian Nationalism and Hindu Reformation in nineteenth-century Bengal. This 'movement' of organisations was highly influential for Vivekananda, both due to his attendance as a young man, and also in the legacy of the three main protagonists in the history of the movement – Rammohun Roy, Debendranath Tagore and Keshub Chunder Sen. These leaders provided a template for Vivekananda in his self-reflection upon his own Hindu roots, his interaction with Christian missionaries, his attitudes towards social and religious reform, and his subsequent approaches towards non-Hindu traditions.

Rammohun Roy, born in either 1772 or 1774,[185] the son of traditional Bengali Vaishnava Brahmin parents, was "an extraordinary intellectual who was one of the first modern social activists in India"[186] and perhaps the first modern Indian to use the newly emerging nineteenth century "opportunities for communication represented by printing, the use of English . . . [and] . . . the growing education system"[187] to form a 'national' or 'Hindu' sense of identity, in response to the prevailing British administration, through the medium of "political and legal matters, education, and religion."[188] In so doing, Roy forged a path of Hindu engagement with the ruling Christian elite and provided the model whereby future successors, including Vivekananda, could engage with non-Hindu traditions in general, and Christianity in particular, through printed and spoken public discourse. Also, Roy's inclusivistic attitude towards non-Hindu patterns of belief or worship, paved the way for future Hindu questioning and engagement of the 'religious other' – a path that would be well trodden by Sen and Ramakrishna in particular, both of whom we will subsequently address as influences upon Vivekananda.

Roy was educated within Muslim centres of learning – principally at the University in Patna, where he was influenced by the Mu'tazila rationalists,[189] and his religious ideas can be seen to draw upon Muslim, Deist, Utilitarian and Unitarian worldviews.[190] After his university education,[191] Roy worked as a money lender and land owner in Calcutta between 1797 and 1803, and also profitably dealt in shares of the East India Company's stock – indeed, Killingley has suggested that it was through lending money to the employees of the Company that Roy may well have first come into close contact with the British.[192] These commercial enterprises made Roy a wealthy man, and, from 1814 onwards, Roy dedicated himself to social and religious reform.

This post-commerce part of Roy's life was focused upon Calcutta, and as early as 1815 he met the Baptist missionary William Yates (1792–1845), who was to work with Carey on the Bengali translation of the New Testament.[193] Indeed, Killingley has noted that "quite early in his residence in Calcutta, Rammohun had conversations with Christian missionaries. It was sometimes thought that he was about to become a Christian, or even that he already was one."[194] This mis-categorisation of Roy by the Christian missionaries was largely down to the sympathetic view that Roy had toward monotheism and the person of Jesus, perhaps expressed during meetings with "Baptist missionaries, in Serampore and in Calcutta, and also other Christians, who saw in him a possible influential convert"[195] during the early part of his settling in Calcutta. Such hopes of conversion were in vain, however, and were clear misunderstandings of Roy's position. Influenced by eighteenth-century deist worldviews, Roy "disliked priestcraft, rites, and ceremonies, and theological speculation based on dogma, preferring to concentrate on the notion, rationally deduced, of one God, the creator and preserver of the universe, and in trying to discover the system of ethics most conducive to human happiness."[196] This necessarily impacted upon Roy's view of Jesus – a view which would be eloquently expressed in his 1820 work *The Precepts of Jesus*.[197]

The Precepts of Jesus, which was published without an author's name, was Roy's attempt to "separate the moral teachings of Jesus from a consideration of the events of his life, because he believed that this inevitably aroused doubts and endless unresolvable theological disputes."[198] Specifically, this meant that Roy used the narratives of the Gospels to focus upon the ethical teachings of Jesus, whilst at the same time removing all miracles and claims to Jesus' divinity.[199] Perhaps predictably, this publication caused a storm within missionary circles, and particularly the Baptist's of Serampore, with whom Roy had previously held cordial relations. Put simply, Roy's treatment of Jesus – which denied the doctrines of deity and atonement – attacked core Christian beliefs which the missionaries held to be necessary for the salvation of humankind. The subsequent controversy was played out through the medium of the printing press, and was initiated by a critical response to Roy in a book review written by Deocar Schmidt[200] in Joshua Marshman's *Friend of India* journal.[201] Roy responded to the missionary-sponsored criticism by writing *An Appeal to the Christian Public, in Defence of 'The Precepts of Jesus': by a Friend to Truth*.[202] As Killingley notes,[203] this response is written as if by a third party, so that it is not made clear to the reader that the author of *The Precepts of Jesus* and the 'Friend to Truth' are in fact the same person. The controversy over *The Precepts of Jesus* was to last three years, and centred on Marshman's critiques and Roy's responses, also written in the form of 'Appeals.' Roy's defence in the first *Appeal* centred on the fact that "the *Precepts* were selected by quoting sayings of Jesus which showed that salvation depends on conduct and not on beliefs"[204] This is particularly interesting, as this foreshadows a technique

used by Vivekananda whereby it is claimed that the essence of Jesus' teachings are separated from an understanding or utilisation of these teachings by Christians who claim Jesus' name. This can be seen in a letter written by Roy in September 1820, detailing the reasons behind *The Precepts of Jesus*: "I regret only that the followers of Jesus, in general, should have paid much greater attention to enquiries after his nature than to the observance of his commandments."[205] It is clear, therefore, with the publication of *The Precepts of Jesus*, that Roy was formulating a Jesus-figure which would 'fit in' to his reformed vision of Hinduism – a path that would also be trodden by both Keshub Sen (1838–1884, the third leader of the Brahmo Samaj) and Vivekananda. Potts has noted that the end of the *Precepts of Jesus* controversy marked an important change in the relationship between Christian missionaries and Hindu leaders, stating that:

> Before this time Roy had favoured the work of missionaries if for no other reason than that, as expressed in his first *Appeal*, "in proportion to the increase of their number, sobriety, moderation, temperance, and good behaviour have been diffused among their neighbours as the necessary consequences of their company, conversation, and good example." Soon afterwards, however, he had begun an all-out attack on the foremost proponents of Christianity in India – the Serampore Trio – using their greatest weapon, the pen.[206]

Roy's response to the Serampore Baptists should not be underestimated in its energising effect upon later Hindu leaders and their interaction with Christian missionaries – indeed, Potts concludes that "Roy . . . led the way for a multitude of successors in criticizing missionary evangelistic labours. Missionaries were opposed in both evangelical and social reform activities by the majority of Indian leaders with whom they came into contact."[207]

The Brahmo Samaj's roots may be traced to the establishment of the Calcutta Unitarian Committee by Rammohun Roy, Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846) and William Adam (1796–1881) in 1823. Tagore, "a most unusual man, displaying almost a romantic's zest for life combined with an amazing success in commercial ventures"[208] was, like Roy, a former employee of the British East India Company, who would number both Debendranath and Rabindranath Tagore as his direct heirs. Dedicated to the improvement of Indian society by ever closer links to Britain, Dwarkanath was responsible for the positioning of the Tagore family in the upper echelons of Bengal society, and was an enthusiastic supporter of Roy's reforms – indeed, he was "among a handful of stalwarts who went on attending meetings of the Brahmo Samaj after Rammohan's death . . . [and] it was Dwarkanath who paid the bills to keep the Samaj afloat during those lean years."[209] William Adam was a Scottish-born missionary who had travelled to William Carey's Baptist mission in Serampore in 1818. After his arrival, he became versed in Sanskrit and Bengali, working with Roy on a Bengali translation of the New Testament.

Through his contact with Roy, Adam re-evaluated his personal theology and resigned as a Baptist Missionary, before spending the rest of his life as a representative of Unitarianism in Calcutta, Canada, America and England.[210]

Kopf carefully positions this committee within the 'ideological kinship'[211] between Bengali intellectualism and Western Unitarianism, previously exhibited in Roy's 1820 *Precepts of Jesus*, through which Roy sought to reform society through a re-alignment of religious and social values and practices.

Roy was a nationalist reformer with a focus on education and religion; he believed that India's woes were directly linked to a servitude to caste, creed and superstition that was perpetuated by the Brahmin hierarchy of Indian society to the detriment of the ordinary man and all women. As Kopf has noted: "Rammohun attributed social evils in Hindu religion and society to the poisonous effect of 'idolatrous notions' which, by the middle period of Indian history, had completely undermined the pure Upanishadic belief in the 'unity of the Supreme Being as sole Ruler of the Universe.'"[212] For Roy, the social and political emancipation of the Indian people was expressly linked with a transformation in their religious attitudes, practices and customs – indeed, in a personal correspondence to Silk-Buckingham, on 18th January 1818, Roy insisted that: "It is necessary that some change should take place in their religion, at least for the sake of their political advantage and social comfort."[213] Roy was a strong advocate of Western education for all Indians, and worked hard for the emancipation of women, particularly through the abolishment of caste restrictions on women's rights and through the abolition of the practice of sati.[214]

Roy's most celebrated action within the embryonic reform movement in India was the formation of the Brahmo Sabha in 1828. Specifically a religious society, the Sabha realised Roy's belief in the intrinsic link between social and religious reform. The Sabha was a vehicle for reform, influencing, amongst other things, education, the linguistic place of Bengali in Indian administration, women's rights, and the rights of native Indians to a career within the Indian Civil Service.

The Brahmo Sabha (literally 'Divine Assembly')[215] can be seen to have been founded on principles influenced by Hindu, Christian and Muslim systems of thought.[216] Rejecting icon-based (*murti*) worship, polytheism, belief in *avatars* and the need for gurus, the Sabha was an attempt by the intellectual élite to revolutionise Hindu practice through rational change. Roy's religious position is an interesting study of a model that would appeal to Vivekananda in his later life. Although his radical interpretation of Hindu *puja* and *samskaras* was denounced by orthodox Hindus of his time, Roy always claimed to be a pure 'Hindu,' an identity-anchor which was also of importance to Vivekananda: "Let us be as progressive as any nation that ever existed, and at the same time as faithful and conservative towards our traditions as Hindus alone know how to be."[217]

The Brahmo Sabha was founded by Roy to remedy what he saw as the ills of contemporary Hinduism. Repulsed by image worship in particular (which

perhaps can be attributed to his Islamic education at Patna),[218] Roy borrowed from Unitarian traditions to alter Hindu religious worship to make it acceptable within the framework of his new Brahmoism. Hymns, prayers and readings from religious texts were used in services, concepts not foreign to Hindu ceremony, but very definitely *styled* in a Christian sense. Indeed, Biswas has noted that:

> [worship] consisted of three successive parts . . . recitation of the Vedas . . . in the closed apartment exclusively before Brahmin members of the congregation, reading and exposition of the Upanishads for the general audience, and singing of religious hymns. This would correspond exactly to the reading of the Bible, the sermon and the hymns of Christian worship, and on this point Rammohun's previous Unitarian contacts had certainly been of considerable help by providing him with a model of congregational worship which was alien to the spirit of Hinduism.[219]

The theological rationale behind such changes was borne out of Roy's desire for religion to be solely centred on a deity that could not be described in personal terms, or represented through images. For Roy, Hinduism had removed the focus of worship from the deity to the very mechanism of ritual itself: "living constantly amongst Hindus of different sects and professions, I have had ample opportunity of observing the superstitious puerilities into which they have been thrown."[220] Thus Roy, like Vivekananda after him, split Hinduism into True and False aspects. In order to legitimise his own version of 'True' Hinduism, Roy would often point out that half of the world's worshippers worshipped one formless God without using icons. He felt that there was no reason why Hindus should not do likewise.

For a leader who declared that Brahmos should not be hostile to any worshippers of other forms of worship, Roy continued to profess his distaste for image worship and to condemn what he saw as the 'immoral' myths centring on the gods and goddesses, which he saw as: "a continued series of debauchery, sensuality, falsehood, ingratitude, breach of trust, and treachery to friends."[221]

Rammohun Roy's formation of the Brahmo Sabha was largely realised by his determination to dynamically change what he perceived to be the Indian people's mindset on religion "for the sake of their political advantage and social reform."[222] Put simply, Roy believed that religious reform was the central tenet of social and political reform – the first step towards empowering the Indians politically and socially. To this end, Roy believed in a greater reliance on non-Hindu, Western, beliefs and education, and thus sought to *Westernise* the acts of worship within the Brahmo Sabha services, and here we come to the nub of Roy's agenda. His theological rationale was one that demanded complete devotional concentration on the deity – a deity that could not be described in personal terms, and could not be projected

through images. For Roy, popular contemporary Hinduism had inappropriately moved the emphasis of devotion away from the deity and onto the ritual itself.

His answer to this was twofold: to concentrate devotion on a formless God without the use of icons, and to achieve this without regard to sect or creed, through a fusion of the world's great religious traditions. This approach may be labelled pro-syncretic pluralism (see below), outlined and defined by Roy's desire to create a universal religion. To some extent, he was successful – the Sabha regularly attracted Christian and Muslim attendees, and the concept of universal brotherhood was expounded within his ceremonies.[223]

The son of Dwarkanath Tagore, Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) sits as one of the most influential members of the Bengali *Badhralok* in the middle part of the nineteenth century. Raised within the upper ranks of Bengali society, in no small thanks to his father's social climbing, Debendranath was influenced in his adolescence above all by his paternal grandmother, a devout Vaishnava.[224] At the age of 18, and coinciding with his father's journeying to Allahabad on business, the matriarch of the family became gravely ill. In the absence of his father, Debendranath stayed with his dying grandmother and, in his autobiography *Atmajivani*, recalls how, on the eve of her death, he experienced an overwhelming sense of religious bliss (*ananda*) which, as Hatcher explains: "unable to account for an earthly cause of his bliss, Debendranath concluded it could only be a gift from God."[225] Following his grandmother's death, Debendranath "fell into a deep and extended meditation on the religious life" and within a year, he had taken up the study of Sanskrit and the Epics, including the *Mahabharata*.[226] In a useful summary of Debendranath's position as this stage in his life, Hatcher notes that:

> Debendranath's narrative gives us the impression that he eventually concluded that God must be utterly beyond the realm of the senses and forms. He reasoned that God can have no body, no feelings, no earthly attributes. This being so, how could he endorse his own family's traditions of image worship . . . ? He simply could not. His spiritual understanding had arrived at a point where he could no longer countenance what he took to be the irrational superstition and sensual idolatry of Hinduism.[227]

Following on from the premature death of Roy in Bristol in 1833, Debendranath Tagore, positioned effectively within Bengali society, and with a religious outlook largely in alignment with Roy, took up the mantle of Indian social reform and the nationalist movement through the formation of the Tattvabodhini Sabha in 1839.[228] This new society was closely aligned to the ideas of Roy's Sabha and, in 1843, Debendranath himself became a Brahmo.[229] Indeed, so close were the links between the Tattvabodhini

Sabha and the Brahmo Samaj that the two organisations formalised their links when the Sabha merged with the Calcutta Brahmo Samaj in 1859.[230] It is noteworthy, however, that Debendranath initially established an independent organisation, in the form of the Tattvabodhini Sabha, to continue Roy's ideals of reform, rather than immediately aligning himself with the post-Roy Sabha/Samaj. Kopf argues that: "It seems likely that in the early period Debendranath preferred to interpret Rammohun's legacy in a culturally apologetic manner, without becoming encumbered with the universalist Unitarian aspects of the Brahmo Sabha. The objectives of the Tattvabodhini Sabha leave little doubt as to the reason why it was created . . . [indeed] the Sabha gave expression to 'grave concern about terribly rapid progress of Christianity.'"[231] However, caution must be noted. Writing a generation after Kopf, Hatcher notes that "there is little in Debendranath's version of events [i.e. from his autobiography] to suggest that opposition to Christianity was a primary – or even a particularly relevant – factor in the creation of the Sabha."[232] Indeed, in noting the previously quoted passage regarding Debendranath's desire to propagate a 'culturally apologetic' message of reform, Hatcher argues that

> whereas Kopf thinks this was Debendranath's way to more effectively defend Hinduism from Christianity, one might equally argue that the Sabha initially sought to distance its own reformist message from the taint of missionary polemics into which Rammohan had been so forcefully drawn.[233]

Given Hatcher's interpretation of Debendranath's desire to avoid missionary polemic, there is a slight irony upon tracing the subsequent history of the Tattvabodhini Sabha and their interaction with missionaries. Indeed, throughout much of the 1840s and 1850s, Debendranath, through the Sabha, forged a new sense of Indian (and specifically Bengali) nationalism via a systematic review of Indian history and the promotion of the Bengali language.[234] By appealing on the one hand to a classical sense of identity and conservatism, and on the other to the application of this identity for the promotion of Indian reform ideals, the Sabha appealed greatly to the educated Bengali classes of the day, and promoted an implicit sense of Bengali identity and nationalism. This new attitude, or movement, amongst the Bengali educated circles, emboldened the Sabha to face their social critics head on, and in the 1840s and 1850s, Tagore led successive campaigns challenging the role of Christian missionaries in India and their conversion of legal minors from Hinduism to Christianity.[235] Indeed, Kopf specifically links the growth of the Tattvabodhini Sabha with the requirement to counter missionary propaganda:

> In 1840, a Tattvabodhini School was set up to combat Duff's[236] own school. . . . A Tattvabodhini Press was established which had as its

> earliest main task the reprinting of all Rammohun's works. Then, in 1843, a newspaper was started . . . which has the negative task of combating missionary propaganda and the positive function of education fellow Bengalis.[237]

Under Tagore, the Brahmo Samaj underwent changes in its religious identity, first and foremost in its interpretation of the Vedas. Following Roy's assertion that Brahmoism was a direct link to the pure religion of the Vedas, Tagore commissioned four students to seek from Benares the orthodox interpretation of the Vedas and Upanishads.[238] This resulted in a 'notable doctrinal change' within the Samaj, as "rationalists like Akshoykumar Datta . . . found themselves unable any longer to believe in any *apaurusheya sastra* (revealed scripture) and ultimately Debendranath also was convinced of the truth of this standpoint."[239] The Brahmo Samaj officially abandoned belief in Vedic infallibility in 1851.[240] Whilst this theological manoeuvring represented a giant step away from traditional Brahminical interpretations of the Vedas, it is clear that this break from tradition was welcomed within certain (narrow) religious circles in Bengali society; as Das has commented: "Brahmoism came to be regarded as the National Religion of educated Hindus."[241] It is important to note, however, that the religious and philosophical reforms that took place within nineteenth-century Bengali society actively changed the lives of only a very small number of people, and often specifically only the newly emergent middle class, or *bhadralok*. Traditional village Hinduism, throughout the lifetimes of Roy and other Samajists, continued the practice of *bhakti* worship and *murti* worship as it had for centuries. The philosophical reforms of an elite few were of little consequence to the everyday religious rituals of the majority of village-dwelling Hindus in Bengal. Indeed, as Flood has noted: "Roy, a highly educated intellectual, did not really understand the deep devotion to deities of the rural poor."[242] It is particularly interesting that Vivekananda should later echo Roy's dislike of *bhakti*-driven worship, although a clear distinction is that Vivekananda would argue that such devotion may be used as a catalyst, or stepping stone, towards higher spiritual truths.

Despite the foundations laid by Roy and the stability and status offered by Tagore, the rise of the Brahmo Samaj movement was not a totally smooth one. Tagore was a member of one of the highest-ranking families of Bengal – he stood for reform and the empowerment of Hindus and Hinduism, but was all the while inhibited by his conservative background and loyalty to the hierarchical structure of Hindu society. This inevitable conflict between 'progress' and traditional values came to a head with the arrival of a new Indian reformer, who was to have a particular influence upon Vivekananda.

Keshub Chunder Sen (1838–1884) was born into a wealthy family in Calcutta in an environment and upbringing saturated with Western influences. His grandfather, Ram Comul Sen, was an early member of what Kopf describes as "the earliest modernized intelligentsia"[243] of Bengal, and he was

later to hold the position of Chief Native Manager of the Government Mint in Calcutta – a position he would hand down to his son, and Keshub's father, Peary Mohun Sen. Keshub attended the Hindu College, attaining the status of only a 'mediocre' scholar,[244] but soon afterwards, in 1857,[245] found time to start a debating and discussion society called the Sangut Sabha.[246] Literally meaning 'The Believer's Association,' this society met weekly, and soon extended from talks and debates into direct action – indeed, soon after the formation of the Sangat Sabha, Sen and many of his fellow members' "militancy led them to abandon caste and the sacred thread, to practise temperance, and work for the equality of women."[247] It was at one of these meetings that Sen first met Debendranath Tagore, who entered the debating room "'attended by liveried servants' . . . surrounded by a 'massive stalwart of Brahmos' who 'wore long gold chains and impenetrable countenances.'"[248] Despite this over-elaborate display of status, which could perhaps have been intimidating for the young Sen, Kopf argues that "the attraction between Keshub and Debendranath, which appears to have been instantaneous, was in part that of a son in search of a father. Keshub, who was twenty at the time,[249] while Debendranath was forty, had lost his own father when he was ten."[250]

Soon after meeting Debendranath, Sen's interest in current affairs, and his strong interest in Western philosophy, attracted him towards the Brahmo Samaj, which he joined almost immediately, becoming almost a co-opted member of the Tagore family – indeed, in September 1859, Sen left his wife and family, without the courtesy of telling them, so as to travel with Debendranath on a 40-day cruise to Ceylon.[251] By 1859, Sen was the society's joint secretary, and he held the society in reverence and proselytised to the extent that, in 1862, he founded two publications (the *Indian Mirror* and the *Dharmatattva*) to support his already influential lecture tours.[252] Sen held Tagore in high regard and avowedly followed his program of religious and social reform. However, splits started to appear in the fabric of the Samaj when Sen wished to take further, quicker, steps than Tagore, along the path to reform.

Sen sought not just to support, but to actively encourage, the removal of caste-barriers and the remarriage of widows.[253] Indeed, in 1862, Sen arranged a secret intercaste marriage, and then in 1864, he sponsored "an intercaste marriage that was also a widow remarriage, and did so publicly. The more conservative Brahmos were shocked and orthodoxy horrified."[254] He also published two journals specifically regarding women's education and produced newspapers aimed at village dwellers. In the 1860s he led a campaign aimed at making Hindi the official language of India, a step further than any other contemporary figure in the reform movement.

It was not, however, simply the speed of reform, which began to show cracks in the relationship between Sen and Debendranath, but the limits to the reforms – and things came to a head following a freak cyclone in October 1864, following which Samaj meetings had to be held in the Tagore house, as the Samaj building had been damaged in the atrocious weather. Jones reports how, during these meetings, Debendranath would allow members to

wear the sacred thread,[255] thus re-establishing a caste hierarchy – an action which publicly and explicitly undermined Sen's beliefs and actions regarding the removal of the caste system.[256] Sen's response was swift and decisive. In 1865, he withdrew his support (and supporters) from Debendranath and the wider Brahmo Samaj, and this split was formalised just a year later when, on 15th November 1866, Sen established the Brahmo Samaj of India. Tagore's response was to regroup with his (dwindling) remaining followers into the Adi Brahmo Samaj.[257]

For Sen, the split with Tagore effectively sealed his reputation as the dynamic leader for the reforming youth of Bengal. As Jones notes:

> Keshab Chandra Sen emerged from the break with Tagore as a dramatic leader who appealed to young Bengali Hindus in revolt against contemporary religion. During the 1860s and 1870s a stream of recruits, often fleeing their families and their own excommunication, flowed towards Calcutta. Under Sen's tutelage, the Samaj won converts primarily from the villages and towns of eastern Bengal. . . . By 1868, sixty-five Samaj branches were operating in the eastern section of the province; almost all of them allied to Keshab's movement.[258]

However, it was not to last. In 1872, the Brahmo Marriage Act was passed by the Calcutta legislature in an attempt to appease pressured lobbying from leading Brahmos to provide a marriage ceremony which legalised the already existing Brahmo civil ceremony and simultaneously removed Hindu rituals from the orthodox ceremony that were anathema to the reformed post-Roy theology of the Brahmos. The result of this was that, whilst Brahmos achieved their aim of establishing their right to marry on their own terms, they did this, not by reforming the Hindu system, but by being classified as outside that 'Hindu' system by the legislature. Prior to this legal enactment, the Brahmo Samaj had, under Tagore, shown a desire to balance 'Hindu' and 'Brahmo' religious identities when, in 1861, Tagore's eldest daughter Sukumari was married according to reformed rights set down by the Samaj. In short, this amounted to a following of the orthodox ritual, but with idolatrous aspects removed.[259] The 1872 Act had ensured that minimum prescribed ages for brides and grooms were set at, respectively, 14 and 18 years of age. It was therefore something of a shock to many senior Brahmos when, in February 1878, Sen announced that his daughter, who was under the age of 14, would marry the Maharaja of Cuch Bihar. Whilst technically not breaking the 1872 Brahmo Marriage Act, due to it being celebrated with traditional Hindu rites, the ensuing marriage caused an irreconcilable fracture in the relationship between Sen and many of his followers. In specifically ignoring the social reforms of his own movement, and in celebrating a ceremony which included 'idolatrous' aspects of worship, Sen effectively very publicly disowned his own movement and disciples. For Sen's supporters, who had loyally followed him away from the original Samaj, this was

too much. A third society was formed by Sen's disillusioned supporters, on 15th May 1878, named the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj.[260]

In response to this schism, Sen collected together his still-remaining core of devotees and realigned his religious vision to be explicitly multi-faceted and multi-faith in inspiration. Three years previously, in 1875, Sen had assigned a study task to each of his closest disciples, who were charged with researching each of the great religions, concentrating specifically upon the founders of the faiths. This led to a subsequent series of seminars which examined Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism.[261] This diversity of approach to humankind's religious outlooks can be seen to have been seeded in the mid-1860s when Sen had immersed himself in the sacred texts of other religions, especially those of Christianity, prior to his exploring Western social practice on visits to England. The result of this continuing interest in non-Hindu traditions, coupled with Sen's enforced organisational shift following the break-away of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj led to Sen establishing the Nava Vidhan, or 'New Dispensation' in January 1881.

The Nava Vidhan, which explicitly used iconography from Hindu, Christian and Muslim traditions, may be understood within Sen's familial tendency towards *Vaishnavism*. Having grown up within a *Vaishnava* household, Sen's interest in devotional aspects of worship, despite the 'official' line of the Brahmo Samaj, never quite disappeared. Indeed, during the 1860s, Sen became very close to Bijoy Krishna Goswami, a young Brahmo who had been brought into the movement by Debendranath, and who had enthusiastically thrown-off his own sacred thread, and followed Sen into the Brahmo Samaj of India. Despite following Sen in the 1866 split, Goswami's unhappiness with the Brahmo movement at the time of the schism led him to revert to the study of *bhakti* elements of Hindu tradition – in particular the tradition of Chaitanya. Ultimately, this led to Goswami's movement away from the Brahmo organisation, and he studied under Brahmananda Paramahansa, and then accepted disciples of his own, whilst practicing under the name Swami Hariharananda Saraswati. His focus was the study of *yoga, bhakti* and the worship of *murtis* of Radha, Krishna and Durga.[262]

Jones has noted that Gowsami's "drift away from Brahmo ideals toward a revival of orthodox Vaishnava *bhakti* paralleled Keshab Chandra Sen's own path" – a path that was to manifest itself in a carefully collated multi-faith inspired movement, under the title of the New Dispensation.

In about March 1875,[263] Sen had become heavily influenced by Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, and particularly his truth claims, understood to transcend religious divisions, which echoed the Samaj's non-sectarian standpoint – a standpoint that has led Kopf to describe Sen as "the supreme universalist of his time."[264] Interestingly, French comments on the problematic nature of Sen's and Ramakrishna's relationship: "The richness of their relationship is unfortunately somewhat diminished by the persisting partisan claims by the followers of each as to who influenced whom."[265] French then proceeds to

quote the personal reminiscence of a third party regarding the relationship, published in a Vaishnava journal in 1893:

> Keshab Chander Sen used to tell his friends that he was gradually making him [Ramakrishna] a convert to Brahmoism; Ramakrishna, on the other hand, told us that he was gradually bringing Keshab Chandra back to Hinduism! . . . As a matter of fact, both were right and they influenced one another.[266]

In spite of contested claims regarding authority and influence in this relationship, what is clear is that Ramakrishna and Sen complemented each other's approaches in attempting to understand diverse religious traditions. For Sen, this was most apparent in his 'Pilgrimages to the Saints,' which will now be addressed.

In 1880, Sen had led a procession through Calcutta 'in the Vaishnava style,'[267] but which also contained mixed iconography from Hindu, Christian and Muslim traditions, and even included a Salvation Army band, which resulted in over 5,000 people attending, many of whom fell prostrate in front of Sen, in ecstatic worship, announcing the 'arrival' of Sen as a major devotional prophet or leader in how own right.[268] Kopf notes, however, that this beginning to the movement which was to be codified into the Nava Vidhan the next year, was, for Sen, only half the equation for the renewal of Hindu-inspired, multi-faceted religion. Indeed, as he had done in 1875, Sen sought out the systematic study of religious leaders from non-Hindu traditions and, throughout 1880, Sen "worked feverishly, preparing for the . . . 'pilgrimages' to the saints, elaborately staged devotional seminars designed to trace the history of human crises and the role of ethical and religious reformers as saviours during these periods."[269] This major undertaking, which did not involve physical travel to the countries in question outside of India, included week-long seminars on Greece at the time of Socrates, Palestine and the Buddha (before which, Sen did travel on a physical pilgrimage to the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya). Kopf has stated that "through textual research, meditation, and careful reflection, Keshub sought an empathy with a given reformer that would erase the barriers of temporal and cultural distance."[270] It is also clear that, having undertaken these devotional pilgrimages, Sen sought to erase barriers of sectarian or doctrinal difference in his New Dispensation.

Post 1881, Sen seems to turn away from social action and reform to specifically focus upon religious unity; however this distinction is too literal. In a Hindu understanding of *dharma*, conceptions of religion and society are fused and, in the same vein as Roy's understanding of the links between social action and religious reform, so Sen sought social unity through the fusing of religious identities. Kopf argues that "Keshub had learned from the saints that social improvement was impossible without moral transformation"[271] and Koar notes that this seeking of religious unity led Sen, by 1881, to adopt a monistic form of Vedanta theology, which valorised unity above

all else.[272] The direct, and very practical, result of this was Sen's inclusion of the Christian Eucharist into the ceremonies of the Nava Vidhani March of 1881 – a practice designed not to Christianise Hinduism, but to provide a new synwork of religious traditions, and to "express the functional equivalence of most sacramental rituals."[273] Sen had previously used the person of Christ to seek to draw together disparate worldviews when, in a lecture titled *That Marvellous Mystery – The Trinity*, he rejected missionaries' calls for an exclusive right to Christ, and instead countered with the promotion of an Asiatic Christ, accessible to the adherents of many faiths:

> I deny and repudiate the little Christ of popular theology, and stand up for a greater Christ, a fuller Christ, a more eternal Christ, a more universal Christ. . . . This is the Christ who was in Greece and Rome, in Egypt and India. In the bards and the poets of the Rig Veda was he. He dwelt in Confucius and in Sakya Muni.[274]

Indeed, Sen was to use the person and persona of Jesus Christ consistently throughout his lecture tours and writings – often as a way of uniting disparate worldviews. In this respect, three of Sen's lectures stand out as particularly important – the 1866 *Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia*[275] (delivered in Calcutta); the 1870 *Christ and Christianity*[276] (delivered in London); and the 1879 *India Asks – Who Is Christ?*[277] (delivered in Calcutta). From these lectures and writings, Scott has argued that it is possible to see a change in Sen's approach to the person of Jesus, and the category of *avatara*. Up to, and including 1866, Scott argues that Sen categorised "Jesus as a great man, but following 1866, he proclaimed Jesus as 'one with God and humankind,' stressing his 'divine humanity.'"[278] Neufeldt is careful to note, however, that Sen was consistent in attributing a notion of superiority to Jesus above 'normal' humans,[279] and this is linked to his conception of *avatara*.

The recurrent themes in Sen's writings and lectures on Jesus were fourfold: (1) a concentration on the ethical teachings of Jesus; (2) the criticism of Christian missionaries; (3) the concept of the Asiatic Christ; and (4) his own interpretation of the Trinity. These points will now be addressed in turn.

(1) In *Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia*, Sen is very careful to highlight the ethical teachings of Jesus as the pinnacle of his life and message, in particular noting the doctrines of forgiveness and self-sacrifice.[280] In a similar vein to Roy's *Precepts of Jesus*, his interest surpasses specific sectarian or creedal supernatural understandings of Jesus to concentrate on what he understood to be the heart of his message. Similarly, in *Christ and Christianity*, Sen notes that a true understanding of Christ may only be achieved through living ethically, rather than following dogmas: "If I were to test a Christian's sincerity and fidelity, I should not inquire into his dogmas, but simply analyze the blood that courses through his heart, to see if every drop of that blood is not Christ's blood, whether it does not contain that spirit of resignation which says 'Thy will be done.'"[281]

(2) It is important, however, to contextualise Sen's comments on Christian ethics within the nineteenth-century confrontation between Colonial Christianity and the Indian population, within which Sen found himself. In a clear foreshadowing of Vivekananda's later comments, Sen is quick to distance the missionaries active within India during his lifetime from the pure ethical teachings of Jesus. Whilst a superficial reading of *Jesus Christ: Europe and Asia* may suggest that Sen was pleased with missionary activity in India – "Fortunately for India, she was not forgotten by the Christian missionaries, when they went about to preach the Gospel . . . while, through missionary agency, our country has thus been connected with the enlightened nations of the West."[282] – it is apparent that Sen differentiates between the *ideal* of missionary activity represented by the few – "The many noble deeds of philanthropy and self-denying benevolence which Christian missionaries have performed in India . . . are treasured in the gratitude of the nation"[283] – and the actual conduct of the majority of missionaries in India. In a particularly damning note, Sen highlights that fact that:

> Christian missionaries have . . . gradually multiplied, and Christian Churches have been founded in all parts of the country. The total number of native converts to Christianity has been estimated at 154,000. . . . The number of foreign missionaries in India is 519, and the sum annually spent on mission is £250,000.[284]

Aside from the not-inconsequential 'dig' that a quarter of a million pounds a year (equivalent today to £148 million)[285] was being spent on converting a mere 0.051% of the Indian population,[286] Kopf argues that Sen is here exposing "missionaries as advocates of British imperialism rather than as champions of Christ's gospel."[287] Indeed, Sen specifically highlights the conduct of the missionaries as being manifestations of the British Colonial attitude towards Indians: "Alas! Instead of mutual good feeling and brotherly intercourse, we find the bitterest rancour and hatred, and a ceaseless exchange of reviling, vituperation, and slander. . . . Among the European community in India, there is a class who not only hate the natives with their whole heart, but seem to take a pleasure in doing so."[288]

(3) In so distancing the missionaries from the pure ethical teachings of Christ, Sen was specifically manoeuvring his dialogue so as to position the person of Jesus within his own specific terms. In a direct response to the (mis)conduct of the British and the Missionaries with their "All-wise and All-merciful Providence,"[289] Sen creates a picture of Jesus, not as European or British, but as distinctly Asian:

> If . . . our Christian friends persist in traducing our nationality and national character, and in disturbing[290] and hating Orientalism, let me assure them that I do not in the least feel dishonoured by such imputations. On the contrary, I rejoice, yea, I am proud, that

> I am an Asiatic. And was not Jesus Christ an Asiatic? (Deafening applause.) Yes, and his disciples were Asiatics, and all the agencies primarily employed for the propagation of the Gospel were Asiatic. In fact, Christianity was founded and developed by Asiatics, and in Asia. When I reflect on this, my love for Jesus becomes a hundredfold intensified; I feel him nearer my heart, and deeper in my national sympathies.[291]

The purpose of this reorientation of the prevailing British Christian Jesus of nineteenth-century muscular Christianity was twofold – first, it allowed an Indian national consciousness to respond to the subjugation of British rule by deconstructing a symbol at the heart of the British claim to political and religious superiority over India, and second, it allowed Sen to align social response and reform in India in a political environment along religious ideological lines. By claiming Christ for India, Sen was carefully constructing an identity for Jesus that used him as a unifying concept between Europe and Asia – a process Sen referred to as 'denationalization':[292]

> In Christ we see not only the exaltedness of humanity, but also the grandeur of which Asiatic nature is susceptible. To us, Asiatics, therefore, Christ is doubly interesting, and his religion is entitled to our peculiar regard as an altogether Oriental affair. The more this great fact is pondered, the less I hope will be the antipathy and hatred of European Christians against Oriental nationalities, and the greater the interest of the Asiatics in the teachings of Christ. And thus in Christ, Europe and Asia, the East and the West may learn to find harmony and unity.[293]

(4) Of course, Sen's ethical and socio-religious understandings of Jesus must also be contextualised within his theological framework of the person of Christ. To this end, Sen's views on the place of Jesus in relation to Christian conceptions of the Trinity are relevant. Pape notes that interpretations of Sen's understanding of the Trinity are wide and contradictory[294] – Zaehner[295] and Boyd[296] both position Sen within full acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity (with little attempt to qualify the details), and Chettimattam sits at the opposite end, understanding Sen to view Jesus as a 'mere man.'[297] Instead of these extremes, Pape argues that "Sen roundly denies that Christ is God in any ontological sense . . . for it is against the idea of Christ as an incarnation of God the Father that he usually militates."[298] Specifically examining the relationship of Jesus to the Godhead, Pape's comment highlights the importance of Sen's understanding of Jesus as "an embodiment of the ideal of God's son – one whose knowledge, submission, and love for God was unique and which provided a perfect example of 'Divine Humanity.'"[299] Crucially for Pape, Christ is the "end product of a process of evolution, extending from the

> beginning of creation, through the lowest forms of life, right up to the creation of man. And Christ is the perfection of humanity. . . . Evolution does not stop with Jesus, for he has made it possible for others to become sons of God like him."[300] For Sen, therefore, Jesus was not born into the world as an 'incarnation' of Deity, but was one who achieved or attained the perfect essence of 'sonship' with the Divine in the form of self-sacrifice and ethical love. In this understanding of Jesus, Sen was highlighting the importance of personal experience of God as a method of unifying diverse religious traditions with the Godhead.

Sen therefore stands apart from the wider Brahmo rejection of *avatara* with a 'complex'[301] understanding of the person of Christ – indeed, as Kopf notes: "Keshub's image has been controversial . . . Unitarian Christians . . . hailed [him] as their own . . . [and] his Indian critics have for generations reviled him simultaneously as 'Jesus-lover,' revivalist follower of Ramakrishna, tool of British imperial bureaucrats, false prophet and self-seeking hypocrite and opportunist."[302] The truth is almost certainly somewhere between these two extremes. Indeed, Barker makes the important point that "Sen's Christology may be better understood as having been influenced not so much by Christianity but by distinctive features of the Brahmo Samaj itself,"[303] noting links between the primacy of a transcendent God and a move, initiated by Tagore and taken up by Sen, in emphasising the primacy of religious experience, rather than text or doctrine.[304]

As reflected in Sen's discussions on Jesus, Kopf has argued that "primarily among the objectives of the dispensation was to bring Asia and Europe together. 'We want Europe to enter into the Heart of Asia and Asia to enter into the mind of Europe.'"[305] The New Dispensation was Sen's attempt to provide unity to the diversity of human religious expression. When asked why the world needed a New Dispensation, he replied: "All the old churches exclude and deny one another claiming a monopoly of truth and salvation . . . [but in] the New Temple . . . is a catholicity which embraces all space and all time."[306]

Despite the factions within the organisation of the reform and nationalist movement within Bengal during Sen's leadership of the Brahmo movement, Sen can be seen to have made a significant contribution to religious reform and 'Hindu' identity. As Richards has stated: "Sen's contribution to the development of Indian thought was important not so much for the consistency of his teaching as for the enthusiasm, eloquence and emotional intensity he brought to propagating the ideals of the Brahmo Samaj and the Brahmo Samaj of India."[307]

Majumdar notes that Vivekananda was "born at a time when Keshab Chandra was at the height of his power, and the Brahmo Samaj exerted a potent influence on English-educated Bengalis."[308] The hagiographies[309] further inform us that the young Vivekananda participated enthusiastically within the Brahmo Samaj from an early age, and Kopf notes that the young

Narendranath attended meetings and joined in with the forms of worship, being particularly attracted to the Brahmo songs.[310] Although biographies do not give an exact date of Vivekananda joining the organisation, it must have been prior to the 1878 schism with Sen, as documents relate to his 'transfer' to the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, and Williams notes that Vivekananda celebrated Brahmo rituals as late as March 1885, four years into his relationship with Ramakrishna.[311] Vivekananda can therefore be understood to have been active within the Brahmo movement, to a greater or lesser extent, from around the age of 15 to 22.

At the time of the 1878 split away from Sen, Vivekananda identified himself with the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj,[312] although not for theological reasons. Sil notes that it was a purely pragmatic decision based on the fact that "he found a better scope for personal advancement and prominence as the principal singer in the Sadharan Samaj, whereas he would have to face competition at the Adi Samaj where the pride of place went to the well-known singer Vishnuchandra Chakravarti."[313] However, there was a growing tension between Vivekananda's own theology and that of the society. Both the young Vivekananda and the society believed in a formless God with attributes (as opposed to the attribute-less Absolute of the *Advaita Vedanta*), but unlike the other members Vivekananda believed that God would answer prayers and could be perceived through human cognition – for the young devotee, God must be realisable if life is not to be futile. As Burke has summarised: "He accepted the doctrine of a formless God with attributes, but unlike many other Brahmos, desired to *see* Him, as it were, face to face; to him religion was of as little use as intellectual learning if it did not bring him into direct contact with the very heart of reality."[314] It is interesting and important to note this theological position of the young Vivekananda, as it is somewhat removed from his later stance as a committed proponent of *Advaita Vedanta*, which I will argue in Chapter 3 was his reaction to Ramakrishna's devotional approach to both Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions.

Also of note at this point are the tensions that existed between Vivekananda and the Brahmo Samaj – or perhaps more accurately, tensions within Vivekananda's self-perception of his relationship with the Brahmo Samaj. Williams has noted that "the impression is left after an examination of later accounts by Svami Vivekananda that the Brahmo Samaj was of little consequence for him. However, quite the opposite impression comes from studying the contemporaneous documents left by those who knew his beliefs at the time."[315] Williams justifies his viewpoint with a helpful and systematic comparison of Vivekananda's stance in relation to the nine-point declaration of belief issued by the Brahmo Samaj in 1910, clearly demonstrating the influence of the Brahmos upon Vivekananda.[316] Whilst Vivekananda may have been defiant in his criticism of the Brahmos on numerous occasions,[317] it is clear that the universalist philosophy of the Brahmo Samaj had a definite influence on Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions. Indeed, Kopf states that "though future events built on Vivekananda's alleged

discipleship under Ramakrishna have obscured the actual influences in his early development, contemporary evidence points clearly to the formative importance of Keshub and Brahmoism."[318] On this matter, Sen notes a clear link between Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions, and that of Keshub Chunder Sen, in this instance using their approaches to Christ as an example: "It was Keshub who quite succinctly separated the universal message of Christ from the muscular Christianity of the West and surely in Vivekananda's claim (in 'Christ the Messenger')[319] that as an Oriental himself, Christ was better understood by Orientals, there are echoes of Keshab's celebrated address in 'Jesus Christ, Europe and Asia' (1866)."[320]

De Michelis also explicitly links Vivekananda with his religious inheritance received from the Brahmo Samaj through a four-part understanding of the development of *Neo-Vedantic yoga* in the nineteenth century, tracing a route through Roy's publication of *Vedantasara*[321] in 1815 (*Neo-Vedantic* Enlightenment), through the work of Tagore (*Neo-Vedantic* Romanticism), the work of Sen (*Neo-Vedantic* 'Spiritualism') through to Vivekananda's publication of *Raja Yoga* in 1896 (*Neo-Vedantic* Occultism).[322] De Michelis concludes by arguing that: "Vivekananda's debt to the Brahmo Samaj cannot be overstated. . . . A careful study of the evidence shows that, the inspirational role played by Ramakrishna notwithstanding, Vivekananda was moulded by the formative influence of Neo-Vedanta rather than Ramakrishna's Hinduism."[323] This statement has great relevance for the current work for, although I will link Vivekananda's religious development to both Ramakrishna and the Brahmo Samaj, I will do so by carefully re-evaluating Vivekananda's treatment of 'Ramakrishna's Hinduism' and the way in which Vivekananda interpreted this in both his understanding of Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions, and also in his projection of this understanding to the West.[324]

It is noteworthy, however, to examine the form of relationship that different Brahmos had with non-Hindu traditions, which I would summarise as 'pro-syncretic.' By 'pro-syncretic' I mean the *purposeful* merging of aspects from two or more traditions with the express purpose of creating a third newly identifiable tradition or practice, which, although situated outside the normative boundaries of the two original traditions, is still recognisably related to them.[325]

In this way, it is possible to understand Roy's transformation of Brahmo worship, through his links with the Unitarians, and Sen's pilgrimages to the Saints and the universalism of the New Dispensation as pro-syncretic approaches to the treatment of Hinduism in relation to non-Hindu traditions. There is, however, a striking limitation to this form of pro-syncretic practice. Put simply, the desire to create a harmonious Universal Religion, taking what is perceived to be positive aspects from different traditions and fusing them into a newly formed faith, actually stopped the possibility of meaningful dialogue between existing traditions. It is ironic indeed that social and religious reformers such as Roy and Sen, strongly convinced of

the moral goodness of their visions, should create new religious entities that essentially blocked effective dialogue between adherents of different traditions, by disregarding the identities and structural boundaries of those very same traditions. In essence, Roy and the subsequent leaders of the Brahmo Samaj were simply adding another sectarian form of religion to the spectrum of human religious traditions. (We will see later that this is the polar opposite of Vivekananda's approach to this problem, but the Samaj's influence on Vivekananda is noteworthy.) Indeed, so entrenched was this view within the Brahmo Samaj that P. C. Mazoomdar spoke at length, on the stage at Chicago, on the society's commitment to the harmonisation of all prophetic teachings, demonstrating that a pro-syncretic approach to religious pluralism was still at the core of the Brahmos' thinking 60 years after the death of its instigator.[326]

Although not originating from within Indian philosophy (at least, not in a strictly historical or geographical sense), The Theosophical Society was to have an impact on Bengali religious life, not to mention upon the young Vivekananda, who employed an ex-member of the Society as his stenographer and confidant, and also engaged in disparaging public discourse with representatives of the Society before and during the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Created in New York in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and Henry Olcott (1832–1907) and William Judge (1851–1896), the Society was centred on Blavatsky's claim to be in contact with *Mahatmas* from Tibet, particularly spirit guides called Koot Hoomi and Morya. With little interest shown in New York, the Society moved to India, where Blavatsky declared that the movement would support the religious traditions of the native peoples and be the 'sworn enemies' of the Christian missionaries.[327] This support was crucial in Theosophy's acceptance into Indian society and benefits were reaped on both sides of the relationship: "It is indeed largely due to the Theosophical Society and its uncritical adulation of all things Hindu that Hinduism has been able not only to shake off its previous inferiority complex but to face the other great religions of the world at least as an equal."[328]

The central tenets of the Theosophy Society may be summarised as follows: (a) belief in the existence of the Divine, (b) the view that the Divine has planned the path of the universe from the beginning, (c) that this cosmic process is real, and not the product of *maya*, (d) that this process may be called evolution, (e) that this process is cyclical, (f) that every soul is part of the absolute, (g) that *karma*, both positive and negative, directs the individual soul, (h) that each soul is reborn through different stages of existence and that (i) through co-operation with this cosmic law, the soul may grow and gain illumination.[329] Crucially, these teachings were based on Blavatsky's insistence that her contemporaries who labelled themselves as orientalist scholars were misunderstanding eastern traditions by concentrating on exoteric, rather than esoteric truths. As Bevir has noted:

> Blavatsky identified Brahmanism with her own monotheistic, immanentist, and mystical cosmology. Contrary to the view of several prominent orientalists, she argued that Indian religions taught that there was one divine principle. Whilst exoteric Buddhism and Hinduism undeniably presented the faithful with a number of different images of the divine . . . esoteric Brahmanism taught that these different images all depicted aspects of the one supreme principle. Thus, "despite their apparent Polytheism, the ancients – those at the educated class at all events – were entirely monotheistical."[330]

An important doctrinal view in relation to the above precepts is the belief of the existence of Adepts of this religion – not earthly *sannyasins*, but agents working under Divine guidance for the good of humanity as part of the Theosophical Great Hierarchy.[331] Indeed, this belief in the importance of lauded Divine souls was apparent in the actions of the most famous convert to Theosophy, Annie Besant who, in later years, groomed a young Indian boy to be the great Messiah of Theosophy.[332]

It is not difficult to imagine how this style of religious system would appeal to devotees within India, with so much philosophical thought 'borrowed' from ancient Indian systems of thought – indeed, Jackson has stated that: "At a time when Western nations seemed to be riding the crest of history, educated Asians were electrified to encounter Westerners such as Blavatsky and Olcott who championed the superiority of the religious wisdom of Asia."[333] Clearly, this 'championing' of Asia forms a large part of Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions in the West, and it is noteworthy that this cause was foreshadowed by Theosophy. Indeed, De Michelis has noted that as early as 1880, Blavatsky was formulating a hierarchical distinction between lower *hatha yoga* and higher *raja yoga*, within a wider framework which "amalgamates *Raja Yoga*, Patanjali's *Yoga*, Vedantic *Jnana Yoga* and 'self-mesmerisation' by stating, effectively, that they are all the same."[334] Here, then, is a clear foreshadowing of Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism into four neatly packaged *Yogas*, aimed precisely at engaging Western audiences with Eastern traditions, which will be explored in Chapter 4.

The Society was dealt a severe blow, however, in 1885 when Blavatsky's psychic phenomena, which were the bedrock of evidence for her religious system, were judged to be fraudulent by a representative of the Society for Psychical Research.[335] This controversy aside, Theosophy nevertheless gained a strong foothold within Bengali religious society, and was an influence well into the twentieth century. Indeed, Vivekananda came into contact, and conflict, with the Theosophical Society and its members on a regular basis – a dialogue of conflict which tells us much about Vivekananda's own approach to Hindu identity and religious dialogue.

A major piece of primary evidence we have relating to Vivekananda's dislike for the Theosophists comes from an undated collection of papers found amongst his writings, and entered into the *Complete Works* under the

delightfully ambiguous heading of *Stray Remarks on Theosophy*.[336] We can surmise that these were presumably written after the Theosophical controversies of the mid 1880s, taking into account Vivekananda's age at the time of the events, and the fact that the notes contain very direct and damning criticisms of Theosophy. Indeed, the attempts of Blavatsky et al (and at this time in the history of the Society, Annie Besant in particular) to fuse Gnostic truths from different traditions, particularly those from Buddhist and Hindu sacred knowledge, into a newly codified and structured religious movement, received short shrift from Vivekananda.

In a theme that is developed later in Vivekananda's comments on major world religions, we see the separation of original spiritual truths from the manifestations of sect, ritual and follower, and the claim of the East's superiority to the West, based on the former's supposed 'spirituality.' Whilst Vivekananda makes positive comments on the spiritual basis of Theosophy – for example: "Mrs Besant means well at least – and nobody can deny her perseverance and zeal" and "We have no wish to disparage the good work of the Theosophical or any other society"[337] we clearly see that Vivekananda views Theosophy as a faddish sect, which offers nothing new to Indian thought. Indeed, it seems that Vivekananda is trying to rescue Hindu spirituality from being hijacked by Theosophy:

> This Indian grafting of American Spiritualism – with only a few Sanskrit words taking the place of spiritualistic jargon – Mahatma missiles taking the place of ghostly raps and taps, and Mahatmic inspiration that of obsession by ghosts. . . . The great Hindu nation, the majority of whom have clearly seen through the Theosophical phenomena from the start . . . have enough religious teaching and teachers amidst themselves even in this Kali Yuga, and they do not stand in need of dead ghosts of Russians and Americans.[338]

In a report of Annie Besant's speech on the occasion of the twenty-first anniversary of the Theosophical Society, *The Hindu* newspaper of 29th December 1896 notes Besant's positive comments about Vivekananda's reception at the Chicago Parliament and also makes reference to Vivekananda previously visiting the Theosophical Lodge in England.[339] Here, however, we find the intrinsic difficulties in evaluating Vivekananda's complex relationship with the Theosophists. That Vivekananda was closely related to the movement, both by association and dialogue, can be hardly refuted, indeed, Vivekananda's host and guide for much of his time in England was E. T. Sturdy, who had been a high-ranking member of the Society from 1886 to 1891, and who had even established a Theosophical Lodge in New Zealand in 1888.[340] However, it is perhaps crucial that Sturdy became disenchanted with Theosophy (or more specifically the Society) after Blavatsky's death in 1891, and spent much of his later years attempting to distance himself from Theosophical readings of Indian sacred knowledge – even moving to

Almora in the Himalayas in 1893 to practise the true calling of *sannyasa*.[341] Shortly after Sturdy's return to England, he wrote to Vivekananda in 1895 to seek a meeting – and it is interesting that in this letter Sturdy felt obligated to distance himself from the Society:

> You must already know that the leader of the Theosophical Society in America is given up to false claims of association with Mahatmas and is leading the people there on a wrong path. . . . I hope that your good work in America will not be spoiled by identification with the Theosophical Society. . . . I am too ardent a lover of the pure adwaita philosophy of India not to be jealous when I see it threatened in its interpretation by Western bias or Western charlatans.[342]

We can see in the Theosophical Society's blending of Eastern and Western spirituality echoes of the Brahmo Samaj's approach to religious dialogue. Indeed, similarities between the two organisations exist on several levels including: (1) Both used Hindu elements to their worship, doctrine and practice – Godwin has noted how "there was a brooding presence in the background of India . . . that surpassed that of the West"[343] which influenced Blavatsky enormously – in fact to the point where Olcott became uneasy with her pursuit of all things Indian.[344] Blavatsky also explicitly praised Roy in an 1881 publication stating that he was "one of the purest, most philanthropic, and enlightened men India ever produced."[345] (2) Both organisations appealed to truths held within the Bible – indeed, whilst Roy had previously edited the Gospels to publish *The Precepts of Jesus*, so too did Theosophy reinterpret the Bible through a lens of their own making, with a particular focus upon the 'hidden' messages of the Bible that had been partially revealed by Blavatsky herself in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*: "The New Testament indicates the fact of the existence of . . . [an] inner aspect [to spiritual truth] time and time again. . . . The Bible is a valid part of this ancient wisdom."[346] (3) Both organisations enculturated the person of Jesus – whilst Roy saw Jesus as an ethical figure, and Sen variously understood him as a spiritual teacher and God-man, Blavatsky "like most nineteenth-century radicals . . . had no quarrel with Jesus the Nazarene, whom [she] calls 'the great Socialist and Adept, the divine man who was changed into an anthropomorphic god.'"[347]

Here, again, we see the fusion of different religious claims to knowledge being propounded as a new movement distinct from established religious traditions. We should, therefore, not be surprised that Vivekananda's response to the Theosophical Society, whilst more polemical, is not far removed from his (albeit slightly more respectful) criticism of the pro-syncretic dialogue attempts of the Brahmo Samaj – indeed, perhaps his more combative treatment of the Theosophists can be traced directly to Vivekananda's first-hand experience of Theosophical Exclusivism; in *My Plan of Campaign*, a talk given in Madras on 10th February 1897, Vivekananda recalls his initial days

at the Chicago Parliament, when he petitioned the Theosophists to help 'pave the way' for him by supporting his credentials as a speaker:

> I called on the leader of the Theosophical Society. Naturally I thought he, being an American and a lover of India, perhaps would give me a letter of introduction to somebody there. He asked me, 'Will you join my Society?' 'No,' I replied, 'how can I? For I do not believe in most of your doctrines.' 'Then, I am sorry, I cannot do anything for you,' he answered. That was not paving the way for me.[348]

Here, we see the Theosophists, in Vivekananda's view, receding into doctrinal exclusivism and sectarianism – some of the manifestations of religion that Vivekananda despised most, and therefore it is no surprise that we find Vivekananda at odds to their approach to dialogue at the Chicago Parliament.

The last movement to be briefly examined in this section is also a non-Indian movement which nonetheless has proved immensely influential in the religious and philosophical development of nineteenth-century Bengal. This influence was the Positivist movement of Auguste Comte.

Comte (1798–1857), a Frenchman, created a complex philosophical system which aimed to arrange human society according to his own scientific principles. This system, which evolved into a movement with some socio-religious manifestations, became known as the Religion of Humanity, and was centred on the belief that all human societies passed through three stages of philosophical evolution. First, there was the Theological Stage, where a society assumed that a divine being governed their world, second there was a Metaphysical Stage, where people begin to explain phenomena as being governed by transcendental forces, and then third there is the Positivist Stage, where society stops looking for an ultimate cause.

Comte declared India to be in the Polytheistic phase of this structure, a sub-division of the Theological Stage which correlates to Roy's call to reform those elements of Hinduism that he (Roy) labelled as 'superstitious.' Such movements are part of what Forbes has noted as the development of a Bengali self-identity in the 1860s as a response to 'old' Hinduism and 'new' approach to the West.[349] Forbes has further commented that, in this decade, Bengal discovered a 'new spirit of criticism'[350] which saw the acceptance of Western ideas, but not the want or need to imitate Western practice or institutions, suggesting, in a Positivist understanding, that India was beginning to critique the Theological Stage – a necessary step in progression to the Metaphysical Stage. It was at about this time that Bengali became an established and acceptable literary language in its own right, which strengthened *bhadralok* concepts of identity – a sense of identity which Sinha has noted was supported by the Positivist movement at this time: "Positivism in India served the same purpose as the English version of the philosophy in reinforcing the urge for stability at a time when the traditional religious values had been shaken."[351]

Positivism, however, was not based on *bhadralok*-inspired understandings of Hinduism, or a Western scientific worldview, but on the thoughts and interpretations of Comte as an individual. This ensured that, despite his claims for a scientific basis to his philosophy, no such basis may be claimed by Positivism. Other problems that beset the organisation included criticisms of Comte's personal life, which included a marriage to a reformed prostitute, several bouts of certified insanity and a non-consummated love affair with a woman that he would elevate to goddess status.[352]

Positivism took hold within sections of Bengali society, perhaps due to the ceremony-centred activities of the movement (including 81 public holidays of worship and two hours per day of personal prayer) that may have appealed to some Hindu traditionalists. Comte himself stated that these acts were required to meet "man's need for ritual, ceremony and symbolism"[353] – a statement that sounds very similar to Vivekananda's later insistence upon the need for *Gauni Bhakti* as a starting point to progress towards what he understood to be higher spiritual truths. This theme is taken up in Chapter 4.

Primary amongst the Bengali Positivists was Jogendrachandra Ghosh, who wanted to create a systematised Positivist approach to Indian society. Ghosh saw Indian society as essentially theocratic, so reasoned that an ideal society could be based upon a Brahminical structure. The primary rationale behind this retrospective style of reform was Ghosh's belief that Comte's philosophy could strengthen India by helping to preserve the continuity of her traditions, thus providing a milieu in which Indians could, and indeed should, "repel all domestic disturbances of Western origin."[354] Sinha has provided a succinct description as to why Positivism was able to take hold in those Bengali circles that were not attracted to the more Westernised forms of reform: "Basically, Positivism was a highly intellectualised form of conservatism and represents the passivity of Victorian approach to the question of social change."[355] It is noteworthy that, throughout his representation of Hinduism to the West, a theme within Vivekananda's writings and lectures was the importance of remaining true to one's own tradition and roots.

Baumfield has suggested that Positivism can be viewed in four different manifestations – first a "church which accepts and promotes all Comte's beliefs and performs sacraments"; second, a form of Positivism that accepts Comte's methodology and conclusions but "rejects the Comtist church and accompanying dogma as a betrayal of that methodology"; third, as a "general movement in nineteenth century thought, sharing many aspects of Comte's methodology but not necessarily reaching the same conclusions"; and finally a "normative attitude determining what can be known through the application of reason."[356] Baumfield aligns Vivekananda with the third of these manifestations; Vivekananda was particularly influenced by Positivism during his Presidency College days and also by his friendship with Satish Chandra Mukerji, and his reading of the works of Herbert Spencer. Indeed, Baumfield notes that Vivekananda was particularly interested in Spencer's method of reasoning – "the synthetic approach of bringing into harmony

diverse strands of human experience"[357] – an approach which can be seen throughout Vivekananda's later writings, including those on religious dialogue; and which Hatcher has described as fitting perfectly into the "eclecticism of [Bengal] Renaissance discourse."[358]

This chapter has attempted to position Vivekananda within a specific historical and cultural milieu by outlining key historical influences upon nineteenth-century Bengali society and examining key leaders and movements that impacted upon both Vivekananda's religious and social outlook and also wider Bengali society. From this, several inferences may be made. (1) Vivekananda's Western education, and the place of missionaries in Bengal, created tensions and conflicts in Vivekananda's evaluation of the place of Christianity in society. Hindu self-perceptions at this time in Bengal are clearly linked with Christian attitudes towards Hindus, a theme which would shape much of Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions. (2) Vivekananda's understanding of Islam must be seen in the context of the mixed identities of the Muslim communities in Bengal, the aftermath of the Wahabi trials in the 1860s, the disenfranchisement of the Muslims in British India, and Hindu-Muslim relations and understanding of conversion to Islam in India. (3) *Advaitic* principles were important aspects of elite Hindu reform movements, such as the Brahmo Samaj, which in turn formed an important part of Vivekananda's subsequent thinking. The Brahmo Samaj influenced Vivekananda at a very formative stage of his life, challenging his theology and offering up alternative worldviews. Crucially, it also offered an example of a systematic approach to non-Hindu traditions, including Roy's syncretism and Sen's important practical forms of pluralistic approaches to non-Hindu practices and beliefs. (4) The Theosophical Society represented not only a link between religious views of the East and the West, but also sought to systematise their religion by formulating a system using *yoga* in a reworking of spirituality that finds clear echoes in Vivekananda's later work. (5) The Positivists, with whom Vivekananda came into contact at college, understood the human religious condition to be both stepped and evolving – key themes in Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism, which will be examined in Chapter 4.

Each of the influences can be seen in Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism and his approach to non-Hindu religious traditions, which is explored in Chapters 4 and 5. Prior to that, however, it is necessary to explore arguably the single greatest influence upon Vivekananda during the seminal years of his adolescence – his guru, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. The next chapter will explore their relationship and, crucially, will also examine Vivekananda's treatment of Ramakrishna after his death.

Notes

1 Gupta, S.C.S. *Swami Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism* (Calcutta: Mansai Press, 1984) p. xi.
2 I have noted elsewhere that a strict separation of 'religious' or 'social' causes in an Indian nineteenth-century context is a misunderstanding of an Indian

worldview, stating that "the dialogue of theology and politics is often indistinguishable." See Barker, G. A. & Gregg, S. E. *Jesus beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 155.

3 Sen, A. P. *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal 1872–1905: Some Essays in Interpretation* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 3.
4 Sir William Jones, quoted in Keay, J. *A History of India* (London: HarperCollins, 2000) p. 383.
5 Ibid., p. 385.
6 Hereafter, 'Company.'
7 Spear, P. *A History of India*, Vol. 2 (London: Penguin, 1978 [1965]) p. 65.
8 Ibid., p. 66.
9 Kulke, H. & Rothermund, D. *A History of India* (London: Routledge, 1990 [1986]) p. 225.
10 Keay, J. *The Honourable Company: A History of the English East India Company* (London: HarperCollins, 1993 [1991]) p. 289.
11 Ibid., p. 290.
12 Kulke & Rothermund, *A History of India*, p. 228.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., p. 229.
15 Ibid., p. 233.
16 Marshall, P. J. *The New Cambridge History of India II. 2: Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India 1740–1828* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 [1987]) p. 99.
17 Keith, A. B. *A Constitutional History of India 1600–1935* (London: Methuen & Co., 1936) p. 68.
18 Ibid., pp. 70–71.
19 Ibid., p. 95.
20 Marshall, *The New Cambridge History of India II.2*, p. 122.
21 Ibid., p. 101.
22 Kulke & Rothermund, *A History of India*, p. 246.
23 De, A. 'Bengali Intelligentsia's Attitudes to the Permanent Settlement' in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 5, No. 8 (Mar., 1977) p. 19.
24 Sen, A. P. *Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 4.
25 Jones, K. W. *The New Cambridge History of India III. 1: Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 17.
26 Hardy, P. *The Muslims of British India* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 37.
27 Keith, *A Constitutional History of India 1600–1935*, p. 127.
28 Mishra, V. B. *Evolution of the Constitutional History of India (1773–1947)* (New Delhi: Indira Composing Works, 1987) p. 14.
29 Philips, C. H. *The East India Company 1784–1834* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968 [1940]) p. 299.
30 Mishra, *Evolution of the Constitutional History of India (1773–1947)*, p. 17.
31 Ibid., p. 18. It should be noted that there were checks on the power of the Governor-General, including a power of veto by the Board of Control. See Mishra, *Evolution of the Constitutional History of India (1773–1947)*, p. 19.
32 Ibid., p. 21.
33 Kulke & Rothermund, *A History of India*, p. 253.
34 Ibid., p. 255.
35 Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 2.
36 Raychaudhuri, T. 'Muslims and Islam in Swamiji's Vision of India: A Note' in Dasgupta, R. K. (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago: A Commemorative Volume* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna

Mission, 1994) p. 322. See also Dhar, P. N. 'Bengal Renaissance: A Study in Social Contradictions' in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan., 1987) p. 41.
37 Cited in, Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 89.
38 Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal: Aspects of Social History* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965) chapter 6.
39 Ganguly, P. C. 'Raja Rammohan Roy' in Gupta, A. (ed.) *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, 1977) p. 14.
40 Occasionally transliterated as Narendranath Dutt, the more common Datta will be used here.
41 The day of the Hindu festival of *Makarasamkranti*.
42 The time is given as 6:33 a.m. by the hagiographies – *Life* I, p. 11.
43 See, for example, CW I, p. 24 & 366 and CW IV, p. 190.
44 Kakar, S. *The Inner World: A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).
45 Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, p. 153.
46 Neill, S. *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to* AD *1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) p. 28.
47 Ibid., p. 48.
48 Ibid., pp. 41 & 49.
49 Ibid., pp. 72–73.
50 Thomas, P. *Christians and Christianity in India and Pakistan: A General Survey of the Progress of Christianity in India from Apostolic Times to the Present Day* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1954) p. 44.
51 Ibid., p. 47.
52 Ibid., p. 50. Neill also notes the importance of spiritual, as well as materialistic, goals for the Portuguese, when he wryly sums up the focus of their expansionism as "Crusade, Curiosity, Commerce, Conversion, Conquest and Colonisation, in that order." See Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, p. 87.
53 Roderic Bowen Archive: University of Wales, Trinity St David, accessed online at www.uwtsd.ac.uk/rbla/online-exhibitions/thomas-phillips-exhibition/17th-century/abraham-rogerius/ (accessed 01/10/18).
54 Neill, *A History of Christianity in India*, p. 380.
55 Ibid., p. 384.
56 Strong, R. *Anglicanism and the British Empire c.1700–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p. 120.
57 Ingham, *Reformers in India, 1793–1833: An Account of the Work of Christian Missionaries on Behalf of Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) 2, 10 cited in Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, p. 121.
58 Frykenberg, R. C. 'Christian Missions and the Raj' in Etherington, N. (ed.) *Missions and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) p. 107.
59 Baago notes that the East India Company's opposition towards missionary activity was often challenged at the highest levels of administration: "In 1806, when the East India Company officially opposed missionaries, Lord William Bentinck wrote, 'Our first wish must be to see the followers of Mahomet and of Brahmah embrace Christianity.'" See Baago, K. 'Review: Colonialism and Christian Missions [Neill]' in *Indian Church History Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1967) p. 165, cited in Downs, F. S. *Christianity in North East India: Historical Perspectives* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1983) p. 49.
60 The missionaries themselves, who sought to distance themselves from political rule, concentrating on spiritual, rather than administrative goals, often shared this viewpoint. As Downs has noted: "The missionaries did not see their primary purpose as being agents of the colonial powers; their primary purpose was the propogation of the Gospel." Downs, *Christianity in North East India*, p. 50.

61 Ingham, K. *Reformers in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956) p. 6.
62 Gupta, H. L. 'The Christian Missionaries and Their Impact on Modern India in the Pre-Mutiny period' in Prasad, B. (ed.) *Ideas in History: Proceedings of a Seminar on Ideas Motivating Social and Religious Movements and Political and Economic Policies During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries in India* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1980) p. 57.
63 Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, p. 123.
64 Ibid., p. 157.
65 Ibid., p. 158.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 159.
68 Ibid., p. 161.
69 Ibid., p. 157.
70 Buchanan, C. *Christian Researches in India* (London: T. Cadell & W. Davies, 1812).
71 The platform on which the *murti* of the deity is transported.
72 Buchanan, C. *Christian Researches in India*, p. 37. Italics in original. Examples abound throughout this polemic literature – another scene is described, thus: "After the tower had proceeded some way, a pilgrim announced that he was ready to offer himself as a sacrifice to the idol. He laid himself down in the road before the tower as it was moving along, lying on his face, with his arms stretched forwards. The multitude passed round him, leaving space clear, and he was crushed to death by the wheels of the tower. A shout of joy was raised to the God. He is said to *smile* when the libation of the blood is made. The people threw cowries, or small money, on the body of the victim in approbation of the deed. He was left to view a considerable time, and was then carried by the *Hurries* to the Golgotha, where I have just been viewing his remains. How much I wished that the Proprietors of India Stock could have attended the wheels of Juggernaut, and see this peculiar source of their revenue." (Italics in original). Buchanan, *Christian Researches in India*, p. 28.
73 Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire*, p. 170.
74 Laird helpfully notes that not all Missionaries were like Buchanan – a common attitude amongst missionaries at this time was a "literal understanding of Genesis: Adam was the ancestor of all mankind, and he had originally worshipped God rightly, but since the Fall his descendents had deviated in various ways from the true religion. Missionary-minded Christians were therefore ready to detect traces of God's original revelation in Hinduism, but they believed that it had become hopelessly corrupted during the passage of time." See Laird, M. A. *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793–1837* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) p. 55.
75 Carey, W. *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians, to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1891 [1792]).
76 "Then Jesus came to them and said, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (New International Version).
77 Cross, F. L. (ed.) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957) p. 236.
78 Ibid.
79 Porter, A. *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) p. 15.
80 Johnson, W. J. *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 293.

81 Ibid. For a very useful modern survey of relevant writings on *sati* within contemporary scholarship, see Menski, W. 'Sati: A Review Article' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (1998) pp. 74–81.
82 Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal*, p. 58.
83 Ingham, *Reformers in India*, p. 45.
84 Ibid.
85 Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal*, p 58.
86 Bound within Ghose, J. C. (ed.) *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 3 (Calcutta: Srikanta Roy, 1901) p. 121ff.
87 Buxton, the son of a Quaker mother, was a close friend of the Quaker reformer Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845) and an ardent slavery abolitionist.
88 Wilberforce had previously led the campaign which resulted in banning of the sale of slaves within the British Empire, under the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which in turn led to full Abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which was given Royal Assent just one month after Wilberforce's death.
89 Potts, *British Baptist Missionaries in India*, p. 149.
90 Ibid., p. 150.
91 Ibid., p. 153.
92 Ibid., p. 154.
93 Ibid., p. 156.
94 Laird, M. A. *Missionaries and Education in Bengal 1793–1837* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) pp. 63–64.
95 Ibid., p. 63.
96 Stat. 53 Geo. III, Cl. 155 sect. 43. Quoted in Spear, *A History of India 2*, p. 126.
97 Mahmood, S. *A History of English Education in India* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1895) p. 1.
98 Quoted in Baumfield, V. 'Science and Sanskrit: Vivekananda's Views on Education' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 196.
99 Robinson Sirkin and Sirkin note that, in historical explorations of this dialogue between Anglicists and Orientalists "some people are reluctant to accept the idea that the issue was not English vs. Vernacular, but English vs Sanskrit/Arabic. [However] the impracticability of the vernaculars for higher education, and the excessive delay that would result from the use of the vernaculars as the medium of instruction, were generally agreed upon by both parties." See Robinson Sirkin, N. & Sirkin, G. 'The Battle of Indian Education: Macaulay's Opening Salvo Newly Discovered' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jun., 1971) p. 409.
100 Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, p. 91.
101 Laird, M. A. 'The Contribution of the Serampore Missionaries to Education in Bengal, 1793–1837' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (1968) p. 107.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid., pp. 97–98.
104 Baumfield, 'Science and Sanskrit,' p. 197.
105 Cited in Sil, N. P. *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (London: Associated University Press, 1997) p. 30.
106 Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1989 [1953]) p. 6.
107 Sil, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 30.
108 Quoted in ibid.
109 Rao, V.K.R.V. *Swami Vivekananda: The Prophet of Vedantic Socialism* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1979) p. 6.

110 Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 6.
111 Ibid., p. 3.
112 Copley, A. *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 67.
113 Ahmed, R. 'The Emergence of the Bengal Muslims' in Ahmed, R. (ed.) *Understanding the Bengal Muslims: Interpretative Essays* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 18.
114 Eaton, R. M. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996 [1993]) p. xxii.
115 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, p. 269.
116 Ibid., p. 113.
117 See Chapter 5.
118 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, p. 115.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., p. 116.
121 Ibid., p. 117.
122 The archaic gender-exclusive style of language is here used to be consistent with Vivekananda's own vocabulary.
123 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, p. 117.
124 Ibid., p. 118.
125 Ahmed, 'The Emergence of the Bengal Muslims,' p. 2.
126 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, p. 269.
127 Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 32.
128 Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, p. 183. This point is also made by Hardy, who notes the acceptance of non-Muslim chiefs and tribal leaders into the *zamindar* system to facilitate economic progress. See Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 15.
129 Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 34 & 31.
130 Ibid., p. 36.
131 An elected local governor.
132 Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 38.
133 Ibid., p. 43.
134 Ibid., p. 40.
135 Ibid., p. 45.
136 Rahim, A. 'The Political Economy of English Education in Muslim Bengal: 1871–1912' in *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (1992) p. 309.
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140 Letter to the Persian journal *Durbin* in 1869. Cited in Wadud, K. A. 'The Mussalmans of Bengal,' in Gupta, *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance*, p. 476.
141 For a hagiographical account, see *Life*, Vol. 1, pp. 120–123.
142 Ibid., p. 122.
143 Ibid., p. 120.
144 Robinson, F. *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 139.
145 Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, p. 51.
146 Ibid., p. 52.
147 Ibid., pp. 51–52.
148 Ibid., p. 52.
149 Ibid., p. 54.
150 This stance was challenged by several high-profile Indian Muslims, who "tried to pacify the British indignation . . . by publishing *fatwas* declaring that the British

occupation over India did not convert the land into *Dar-ul-Harb* and [that] it was not lawful to wage war against the British." Such challenges included a speech at the Mohammedan Literary Society of Calcutta, in November 1870, by Maulawi Karamat Ali, a direct disciple of Saiyid Ahmad. See Rizvi, S.A.A. 'Ideological Background of the Wahhabi Movement in India in the XVIII and XIX Centuries' in Prasad, *Ideas in History*, p. 93.

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154 Ibid.
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156 Dhar, 'Bengal Renaissance,' p. 38.
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165 Ibid., p. 24.
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175 Ibid., pp. 119–120, based on 1872 census figures.
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180 Raychaudhuri, 'Muslims and Islam in Swamiji's Vision of India,' p. 322.
181 Jones, K. W. 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census' in Barrier, N. G. (ed.) *The Census in British India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1981) p. 78.
182 See in particular, Pennington, B. K. *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Oddie, G. A. 'Hindu Religious Identity with Special Reference to the Origin and Significance of the Term "Hinduism," c. 1787–1947' in Bloch, E., Keppens, M. & Hegde, R. (eds.) *Rethinking Religion in India: The Colonial construction of Hinduism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010); Fitzgerald, T. 'Who invented Hinduism? Rethinking Religion in India' in Bloch, et al., *Rethinking Religion in India*); Sweetman, W. '"Hinduism" and the History of "Religion": Protestant Presuppositions in the Critique of the Concept of Hinduism' in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 15 (2003) pp. 329–353 and

Sweetman, W. 'Unity and Plurality: Hinduism and the Religions of India in Early European Scholarship' in *Religion*, Vol. 31 (2001) pp. 209–224.

183 Hatcher, B. A. *Bourgeois Hinduism, Or the Faith of the Modern Vedantists: Rare Discourses from Early Colonial Bengal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 63.

184 Kopf, D. *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) pp. xxi–xxii.

185 Killingley, D. *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1993) p. 1.

186 Sarma, D. *Hinduism: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) p. 301.

187 Killingley, D. 'Modernity, Reform, and Revival' in Flood, G. (ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) p. 515.

188 Ibid.

189 Mu'tazilah was a school of philosophy 'founded' by Wasil ibn Ata (d. 748), which was influential throughout Basra and Baghdad, now in modern-day Iraq, from the eighth to the tenth centuries. The central argument of the philosophy is that the Koran is created, and so cannot be co-existent/co-eternal with God. This renders reason, and not sacred tradition or priestly precedent, the final arbiter in philosophical argumentation. See *Philosophia Islamica* 'Mu'tazilah' accessed online at www.muslimphilosophy.com/ei2/mu-tazila.htm (accessed 01/10/18).

190 Sarma, *Hinduism*, p. 301.

191 A word of caution should be noted. This section follows a traditional narrative of Roy's education, but Killingley notes that: "There are stories, based on contemporary memoirs, of Rammohun's being sent to Patna for education in Arabic, and to Calcutta or Benares for Sanskrit. There is nothing unlikely in this, though if we attempt to reconcile it with the story of Rammohun's leaving home at fifteen or sixteen after a religious dispute with his family, his education becomes suspiciously rapid." See Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 6.

192 Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 6.

193 Ibid., p. 7.

194 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

195 Ibid., pp. 110–111.

196 Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal*, p. 53.

197 Bound within Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 3, p. 1.

198 Laird, *Missionaries and Education in Bengal*, p. 53.

199 Roy was not the first to publish an 'alternative' version of the New Testament. Just 16 years earlier, Thomas Jefferson had, quite literally, cut up a version of the four Gospels "forming an improved version of the New Testament to his liking." This 1804 text, titled *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth* has not survived in entirety, but a later 1820 work, titled *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* was published and is known popularly known as the Jefferson Bible – the text retells a redacted chronological narrative of the New Testament, removing any claims for the supernatural, including miracles, divinity or claims to resurrection. See, Jefferson, T. *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth: Extracted Textually from the Gospels in Greek, Latin, French, and English* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904 [1820]). Quotation taken from Zastoupil, L. '"Notorious and Convicted Mutilators": Rammohun Roy, Thomas Jefferson, and the Bible' in *Journal of World History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (September 2009) p. 415.

200 Schmidt, sometimes written as Schmid, was a German missionary who had encountered Roy's works in London before leaving for India, and read them

in a favourable light. However, upon meeting Roy in India, Schmidt believed Roy's Unitarian-informed understanding of Christianity to be an aberration. See, Zastoupil, L. '"Notorious and Convicted Mutilators": Rammohun Roy, Thomas Jefferson, and the Bible,' p. 405.

201 Goel, S. R. *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters (AD304 to 1996)* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1996) p. 49.
202 Ghose, *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 3, p. 85ff.
203 Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 120.
204 Ibid., p. 141.
205 Letter of Rammohun Roy, dated 5th September 1820 from Carpenter, M. *The Last Days in England of the Rajah Rammohun Roy* (London: 1866) cited in Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 139.
206 Potts, D. E. *British Baptist Missionaries in India: 1793–1837* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) p. 239.
207 Ibid., p. 241.
208 Ibid., p. 162.
209 Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, p. 35.
210 Hill, A. 'William Adam' in *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography* (Unitarian Universalist Historical Society) accessed online at http://uudb.org/articles/williamadam.html (accessed 01/10/18).
211 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 11.
212 Roy, R. *Translation of the Cena Unpanishad*, Vol. CLX of *India Office Library Tracts*, pp. iii–v. Cited in ibid., p. 14.
213 Quoted in Ganguly, 'Raja Rammohan Roy,' p. 9.
214 See in particular, *Translation of a Conference between an advocate for, and an opponent of, the practice of burning widows alive, from the original Bungla* (1818), bound within Ghose (ed.), *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 3, p. 121ff.
215 Macdonell, A. A. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary with Transliteration, Accentuation, and Etymological Analysis Throughout* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929) p. 334 accessed online at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/romadict.pl?query=sabha&display=simple&table=macdonell (accessed 01/10/18).
216 Flood, G. *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 252.
217 CW III, p. 174.
218 Islamic influences upon Roy are a noteworthy area of study. In 1802, Roy studied Arabic at Murshidabad, which resulted in the publication of his first book – *Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhideen* ('Gifts for Monotheists'), which was "a critique of polytheism and show[ed] the deep influence of Islam on Ram Mohun's religious views." See Naravene, V. S. *Modern Indian Thought* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978) p. 21. For a deeper treatment of the *Tuhfat*, see Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, pp. 45–55.
219 Biswas, D. K. *The Brahmo Samaj: Its History and Principles* (n.p., n.d.) accessed online at www.thebrahmosamaj.net/history/history.html (accessed 01/10/18).
220 Roy, (int. Iup: EW 73) quoted in Killingley, *Rammohun Roy in Hindu and Christian Tradition*, p. 63.
221 Roy, (Def2: EW 112), quoted in Killingley, ibid., p. 74. It is, of course, vital to see Roy's approach to reform of image worship in the context of the nationalist reforming agenda. Chandra has noted that: "The nineteenth century witnessed a cultural-ideological struggle against the backward elements of traditional culture, on the one hand, and the fast hegemonizing colonial culture and ideology on the other. The initial reforming efforts represented the former. In the religious sphere they sought to remove idolatry, polytheism and priestly monopoly of religious knowledge and to simplify rituals. They were important

not for purely religious reasons but equally for their social implications. They contributed to the liberation of the individual from conformity born out of fear and from uncritical submission to the exploitation of the priests." Chandra, B. et al. *India's Struggle for Independence 1857–1947* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1988) p. 87.

222 Cited in Ganguly, 'Raja Rammohan Roy,' p. 14.
223 Biswas, *The Brahmo Samaj*, n.p. accessed online at www.thebrahmosamaj.net/history/history.html (accessed 01/10/18).
224 Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, p. 35.
225 Ibid., p. 37.
226 Ibid., pp. 37–38.
227 Ibid., p. 38.
228 Biswas, D. K. 'Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha' in Gupta, A. (ed.) *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, Bengal, 1977) p. 34.
229 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. xxi.
230 Biswas, 'Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha,' p. 35. It is noteworthy, however, that Debendranath believed that the two organisations should not have merged at an earlier stage – after his 1843 initiation into the Brahmo Samaj, Hatcher notes that Debendranath specifically focused his energies upon the Tattvabodhini Sabha as well as the Brahmo Samaj, probably to orientate the movement into alignment with the teachings of Roy, and thus to enable his own movement (the Tattvabodhini Sabha) to claim Roy as a 'founder,' providing provenance and authority to the ideals and work of the Sabha. See Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, p. 39.
231 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 162.
232 Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, p. 87.
233 Ibid., p. 88.
234 Biswas, 'Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha,' p. 39.
235 Although perhaps most famous during this period for his doctrinal reformation of the Brahmo Samaj, with particular regard to the non-infallibility of the *Vedas*, Tagore's drive for social reform should not be underestimated. Biswas has noted that: "He had succeeded in assembling on the platform of the *Tattvabodhini Sabha* almost all the socially progressive elements in the country. . . . [And] after the extinction of the *Sabha*, the Brahmo Samaj remained one of the chief collaborators . . . in this field [of social reform]." Biswas, 'Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha,' pp. 42–43.
236 That is, Alexander Duff, the Presbyterian missionary who had been 'welcomed' to Calcutta by Roy in 1830. See Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 45–46.
237 Ibid., pp. 162–163.
238 Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 152.
239 Biswas, 'Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and the Tattvabodhini Sabha,' p. 37.
240 Hatcher, *Bourgeois Hinduism*, p. 61 (Table 3.1).
241 Das, J. 'The Brahmo Samaj,' in Gupta, A. (ed.) *Studies in the Bengal Renaissance* (Calcutta: National Council of Education, Bengal, 1977) p. 487.
242 Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 254. It is interesting that Kopf also notes that this disconnection with the masses was to be a legacy issue following Roy's death. Again citing the Unitarian influences upon Roy's religious views, Kopf states that: "The Unitarian attack on orthodoxy was, in fact, an attack on the religion of the masses, where unity of God was most grossly humiliated and violated. Unitarianism provided Rammohun and his successors with a thinking man's reformation, and the attempt to transmit the new religion to the unintellectual, uncritical masses left the Bengali reformers in a great dilemma." See, Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 12.

243 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 253.
244 Ibid., p. 252.
245 The date of the institution of the Sangat Sabha is given variously – Kopf gives the date of 1857, whilst Jones gives the date 1860. See, Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 254 and Jones, K. W. *The New Cambridge History of India III.1: Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 34.
246 Richards, G. *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism* (London: Curzon Press, 1985) p. 37.
247 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 34.
248 P. C. Majumdar, quoted in Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 255.
249 This dates this meeting to 1858, making Kopf's date for the institution of the Sangat Sabha more plausible than Jones's.
250 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 255.
251 Ibid., p. 256.
252 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 37.
253 Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 153; Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 35.
254 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 35.
255 The symbolic accessory, called the *Yajnopaveetam*, worn by Brahmin boys after their initiation into the *Samskara* (life stage / right of passage) of *Upanayana*.
256 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 35.
257 Literally, 'original' Brahmo Samaj.
258 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, pp. 35–36.
259 See, Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884). www.thebrahmosamaj.net/founders/keshub.html (accessed 01/10/18).
260 Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, p. 37.
261 Ibid.
262 Ibid., p. 40.
263 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 264.
264 Ibid., p. 204.
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266 Basu, S. P. & Ghose, S. B. (eds.) *Vivekannada in Indian Newspapers, 1893–1902* (Calcutta: Dineshchandra Basu Basu Bhattacharyya and Co., 1969) p. 389. Cited in French, *The Swami's Wide Waters*, p. 32.
267 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 269.
268 Ibid.
269 Ibid., p. 270.
270 Ibid., p. 271.
271 Ibid.
272 Koar, J. *Naba Vrindaban* (New Brindaban, in the sense of New Jerusalem). Sind Naba-bidhan Mission, n.d. Cited in Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 272.
273 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 272.
274 Sen, K. C. *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, Vol. 2 (London, Paris, New York & Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1904) p. 32.
275 Sen, K. C. *The Brahmo Samaj: Four Lectures by Keshub Chunder Sen Reprinted from the Calcutta Editions with an Introductory Preface by Sophia Dobson Collett* (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1870) pp. 1–36.
276 Sen, K. C. *Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit Edited by Sophia Dobson Collett* (London: Strahan & Co., 1871) pp. 233–258.
277 Sen, K. C. *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, 2nd edn. (Calcutta: The Brahmo Tract Society, 1886) pp. 279–305.

278 Scott, D. *Keshub Chunder Sen* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, 1979) pp. 34–35, cited in Neufeldt, R. 'Hindu Views of Jesus' in Coward, H. (ed.) *Hindu-Christian Dialogue* (New York: MaryKnoll Orbis, 1989) p. 164.
279 Neufeldt, 'Hindu Views of Jesus,' p. 164.
280 Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 29.
281 Sen, *Keshub Chunder Sen's English Visit Edited by Sophia Dobson Collett*, p. 248.
282 Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 16.
283 Ibid.
284 Ibid., p. 14.
285 Based on comparative average earnings. See www.measuringworth.com (accessed 01/10/18).
286 Based on an estimated population of 300,000,000. For population figure estimates, see www.populstat.info/Asia/indiac.htm (accessed 01/10/18).
287 Kopf, D. 'Neo-Hindu Views of Unitarian and Trinitarian Christianity in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Case of Keshub Chandra Sen' in Sharma, A. (ed.) *Neo-Hindu Views of Christianity* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988) p. 111.
288 Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 17–18.
289 Ibid., p. 16.
290 This quotation is taken from Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 25–26. In his later edited work, Scott uses the word 'distrusting' which may well make better sense. See Scott, *Keshub Chunder Sen*, p. 64.
291 Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 25–26.
292 Ibid., p. 26.
293 Ibid.
294 Pape, W. R. 'Keshub Chunder Sen's Doctrine of Christ and the Trinity: A Rehabilitation' in *Indian Journal of Theology*, No. 25 (Apr.–Jun., 1976) p. 55.
295 Zaehner, R. C. *Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 154, cited in ibid.
296 Boyd, R. *Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* (Madras: CLS, 1975) p. 34 cited in ibid.
297 Chettimattam, J. B. *Dialogue in the Indian Tradition* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1969) p. 149 cited in ibid., p. 56.
298 Pape, 'Keshub Chunder Sen's Doctrine of Christ and the Trinity,' p. 59.
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301 Neufeldt, 'Hindu Views of Jesus,' p. 163.
302 Kopf, 'Neo-Hindu Views of Unitarian and Trinitarian Christianity in Nineteenth Century Bengal,' pp. 106–107.
303 Barker, G. A. *Jesus at the Borders of Belief: A Phenomenological Test of a Pluralist Christology* (University of Wales, Lampeter: Unpublished PhD Work, 2007) p. 300.
304 Ibid.
305 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 275.
306 Ibid.
307 Richards, *A Source-Book of Modern Hinduism*, p. 38.
308 Majumdar, *Swami Vivekananda: A Historical Review* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999 [1965]) p. 13.
309 For example, *Life*, Vol. 1, pp. 55–56.
310 K. K. Mitra *Krishna Kumar Mitrer Atma Charit*, p. 155, cited in Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, p. 205.
311 Williams, G. *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda: A Study of Religious Change* (Chico: New Horizons Press, 1974) p. 10.
312 Whilst the hagiographies claim that Vivekananda's name appears in the original 1878 membership list of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, Williams notes that it

was much more likely that Vivekananda joined in 1879, which was the year of his parent's return to Calcutta. Williams, *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda*, p. 11.

313 Sil, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 34.

314 MLB I, pp. 3–4.

315 Williams, *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda*, p. 11.

316 Ibid., pp. 11–15.

317 Vivekananda was damning of the Brahmos on numerous occasions – particularly memorable sentiments include: "its [the Brahmo Samaj's] religion was not worth a cent and so it must die out" (CW VII, pp. 468–469) and "the Brahmo Samaj . . . and other sects have been useless mixtures; they were only voices of apology to our English masters to allow us to live!" (CW VIII, p. 477). Of particular interest are two letters written in May 1894, in which Vivekananda distances himself from Sen, stating that "I *never* identified anyway with Mr. Mazoomdar's party chief. If he says so, he does not speak the truth." Also, "The Brahmo Samaj . . . spread in Calcutta for certain time and then died out. I am not sorry, neither glad that it died. It has done its work – viz social reform. Its religion was not worth a cent, and so it must die out. . . . I am even now a great sympathiser of its reforms; but the 'booby' religion could not hold its own against the old 'Vedanta.'" (CW VII, pp. 468–469). Clearly, Vivekananda is here locating *Vedantic* truth claims above any manifestation of sectarian truth claims, a hierarchy which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 3.

318 Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj*, p. 205.

319 CW IV, pp. 140–152.

320 Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 7.

321 Published in 1815, this was a Bengali language summary of tracts from the *Brahmasutrabhasya*. An English language version was published the following year under the title *Translation of an Abridgment of the Vedant*.

322 De Michelis, E. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004) pp. 45–50. For a further discussion of De Michelis's interpretation of Vivekananda's *yoga* philosophy, see Chapter 4.

323 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 49.

324 See Chapters 3, 4 and 6.

325 It is, of course, the case that all religious traditions are syncretic in their formulation of doctrine, practice and ideology, in relation to wider society and the diversity of the human religious experience. I, therefore, purposefully include the prefix 'pro' in my terminology to highlight the desire for such a process to occur as an active transformation of a religious movement, rather than simply occurring as a passive transformation as part of naturally evolving identities in relation to wider societal and religious changes. For an interesting discussion regarding the wider use of this term in the study of religion, see Stewart, C. & Shaw, R. (eds.) *Syncretism / Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synwork* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994).

326 Braybrooke, M. *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, (New York: Crossroad, 1992) p. 33.

327 Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 160.

328 Ibid., p. 161.

329 Jinarajadasa, C. 'What Theosophists Believe' in Bhattacharyya, H. (ed.) *The Cultural Heritage of India, Vol IV: The Religions* (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2001 [1956]) pp. 641–643.

330 Bevir, M. 'The West Turns Eastwrad: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994) p. 759. The quotation at the end of this reference is from Blavatsky, H. P. *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of*

Ancient and Modern Science and Theology, 2 Vols. (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1972) Vol. 1 p. 23.

331 Also known as the Great White Brotherhood, this understanding of 'cosmic masters' has influenced a diversity of religious traditions in the twentieth century, including The Church Universal and Triumphant, The Aetherius Society and the I AM tradition.

332 The child was named Jiddu Krishnamurti, and was the son of Jiddu Narayaniah, an employee of the Theosophical Society at their headquarters in Adyar. See Tingay, K. 'Theosophy and Its Heirs' in Sutcliffe, S. J. & Bowman, M. (eds.) *Beyond New Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) p. 45.

333 Jackson, C. T. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) p. 6.

334 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 178.

335 Zaehner, *Hinduism*, p. 160.

336 CW IV, pp. 317–319.

337 Ibid., p. 317.

338 Ibid., p. 318.

339 Basu, S. P. *Swami Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian News (1893–1902)*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1997) p. 103.

340 MLB III, p. 214.

341 Ibid., p. 216.

342 Ibid., p. 218.

343 Godwin, J. *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) p. 307.

344 Ibid., p. 317.

345 *The Theosophist* II/6 (1881) cited in ibid.

346 *Theosophy and Christianity* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Society in America, n.d.) pp. 2–3.

347 Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 292.

348 CW III, p. 209.

349 Forbes, G. H., *Positivism in Bengal: A Case Study in the Transmission and Assimilation of an Ideology* (Calcutta: Minerva, 1975) p. 9.

350 Ibid., p. 6.

351 Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, p. 115.

352 Forbes, *Positivism in Bengal*, p. 7.

353 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

354 Ibid., p. 117.

355 Sinha, *Nineteenth Century Bengal*, p. 118.

356 All quotations from Baumfield, 'Science and Sanskrit,' p. 203.

357 Ibid., p. 204.

358 Hatcher, *Eclecticism and Modern Hindu Discourse*, p. 48.

3 Master and pupil

> He used generally to teach dualism. As a rule, he never taught Advaitism. But he taught it to me. I had been a dualist before.[1]

There can be little doubt that the most important spiritual influence upon Narendranath was his rather brief[2] relationship with Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. Sponsored[3] biographies of each of these men contain large tracts with regard to their relationship and hundreds of articles, books and a number of theses make up a wealth of biographical literature. Key hagiographical sources for the modern understanding of Ramakrishna include Mahendranath Gupta's *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, known in English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*[4] and Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, translated as *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*.[5] Particular care must be taken when using the *Kathamrita*, for, as Kripal notes,[6] the original diaries compiled by Mahendranath Gupta (often referred to by his pen-name 'M') have never been made available to the public, and even a simple reading of the Bengali original highlights problems with the translation and careful editing by the text's translators into English. This work aims to use these hagiographical sources critically.

This chapter is split into two main sections: (1) an overview of Ramakrishna's life in relation to his tutelage of Vivekananda, including analysis of key aspects of Ramakrishna's character and religious outlook and (2) an examination of Vivekananda's treatment of the 'Ramakrishna persona' in his representations of Hinduism to the West.

Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya, later to be known as Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, was born of a high caste (Brahmin) but poor family in Kamarpukur, a village in the Hooghly district of Bengal, on 18th February 1836.[7] His parents were Khudiram Chattopadhyaya and Chadra Devi, and he had three siblings: a brother and two sisters.

Stories of Ramakrishna's spiritual childhood abound, including various tales of visions, held to be true instances of contact with the Divine, at a very young age. The most famous story from the sponsored biographies[8] is of a 'spiritual ecstasy' encountered whilst walking along a path between paddy

fields. Looking up at the sky, Gadadhar saw a large dark thundercloud, which spread to cover the whole sky, and, as it did, a flock of white cranes flew across the cloud. It is reported that Gadadhar fell to the ground at this point, passing out of consciousness, as the contrast between the dark cloud and white birds had launched the boy into a state of 'indescribable joy.' Shortly after this, Gadadhar's father died, and the child was said to have withdrawn into solitude, and would often spend hours alone contemplating the impermanence of this earth.[9] Although possibly an inflated claim for a seven-year-old child, it is probable here that the hagiographers are inserting a narrative foreshadowing – the death of his father would have had a severe impact upon the young boy, and was to shape his path, along with that of his older brother, towards work in Bengal and, subsequently, into the Priesthood at Dakshineswar.

Seven years after the death of his father, Gadadhar moved to Calcutta on the insistence of his older brother, Ramakumar, who had moved there the previous year to attempt to improve the financial situation of the family. Ramakumar was engaged in various priestly duties, such as interpretation of *Smriti* for ritual disputes, and also spent time teaching Sanskrit.[10] Gadadhar's duties were to act as priest for several wealthy Calcutta families, and it was in this role that his devotional *sadhana* became apparent. Indeed, it seemed that Gadadhar was more concerned with decorating the images of the household deities and singing religious songs for hours on end than in the book learning that his brother was trying to encourage. As French has noted: "Ramakrishna . . . was still averse to what he termed 'bread-winning education' and much of his time was spent in spiritual pursuits little reached by the modern aspects of Calcutta culture."[11]

The two brothers continued their very different approaches to priestly duties over the next couple of years, and then, in 1855, Ramakumar was invited to work at the newly opened Dakshineswar temple complex situated four miles north of Calcutta. Built by a local benefactress, Rani Rasmani, the temples, dedicated to *Siva, Radhakanta*[12] and *Kali*, were having problems attracting priests due to the low caste status of Rasmani.[13] Ramakumar answered the call, with an eye to the financial rewards, but Gadadhar was hesitant, remembering his late father's refusal to accept gifts from *Sudra* in their home village. It is interesting to contemplate whether Gadadhar's ultimate decision, albeit hesitant, to join the temple, was an early indication of his eventual transcendence of caste-distinctions and ultimate catholicity, or a simple acceptance of economic need.

During his apprenticeship, Gadadhar became more and more infatuated with the goddess *Kali*, and soon abandoned his traditional priestly duties in favour of what Sarkar has described as a 'passionate and wayward Sadhana.'[14] Many around the young priest felt him to be insane, but Rasmani stood by her charge and organised a deed of endowment to cater for his needs. Paradoxically, here was a man opposed to the acceptance of gifts from lower classes, but happy to live off the financial support of a lower

caste patron. Such examples of seemingly contradictory actions and words are manifold in the life of Ramakrishna.

Another such intriguing ambiguity can be seen with respect to his approach to Keshub Chunder Sen and the Brahmos. The two had met briefly in 1855, when Ramakrishna had recognised Sen as being a Brahmo of particular spiritual depth,[15] but it was in 1875 that Ramakrishna felt the need to visit Sen during a period of *samadhi*.[16] The sponsored biographies tell a tale of Ramakrishna tentatively approaching Sen and his disciples, asking them if it was true that they had seen a 'vision of God.' The story ends with Ramakrishna himself going into *samadhi* and showing the Brahmos that he was able to achieve a higher level of spiritual awareness than others. Clearly this is an attempt by the hagiographers to show that the Brahmos, although the foremost religio-philosophical movement in India at that time, were inferior in spirituality and God-knowledge to Ramakrishna. There is, here, an intriguing question over whether Ramakrishna's interest in the thoughts and works of Sen helped to promote the Brahmo movement, or whether the primary beneficiary from the relationship was Ramakrishna himself who, it could be argued, was in some way brought from obscurity into renown through his relationship with Sen.[17] Either way, the relationship with Sen, which was to last around 30 years, is indicative of Ramakrishna's dealings with the Calcutta *bhadralok*.

Ramakrishna is often described as an illiterate, village Brahmin priest, yet he drew both his disciples and confidantes from Western-educated, middle-class Bengal. Two more seemingly opposite backgrounds would be hard to find. Indeed, clashes of ideology abounded, for example with Sen with regard to the Brahmo's program of social reform, to which Ramakrishna was opposed on issues such as child marriage. However, such an extreme view of Ramakrishna and his followers is not entirely helpful – indeed, it can be argued that Ramakrishna was not the 'anti-book learning' figure often projected in the literature. As a child growing up in a Brahmin household, Gadadhar would have been encouraged to learn the stories and teachings of the Hindu epics and great texts. As a child, he is reported to have organised plays and performances based on the great tales,[18] and as an adult he displays a great deal of knowledge of the teachings of Ramanuja, Chaitanya and the *Bhagavata*[19] and also from contemporary poetry.[20]

The fact remains, however, that Ramakrishna's appeal to and popularity among the *bhadralok* opened up a potential minefield of discrepancies in his approach to religion and society. Rosselli has described Ramakrishna's approach to religion thus: "No two ways about it: Contemptus Mundi was Ramakrishna's theme"[21] and this lack of engagement with social reform was subsequently to be a major difference between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.[22]

This can be most clearly seen in Ramakrishna's particular calling to the *Chakri* of nineteenth-century Bengal. The *Chakri* were a sub-classification of the lower-middle-class educated workforce, and the term is used especially

to designate those who worked in low-paid administrative positions for the colonial rulers. Sarkar claims that "Chakri . . . is crucial for understanding Ramakrishna and situating him within the overall context of colonial domination."[23] Indeed, his relationship with his *Chakri* devotees (and here one must remember that Vivekananda himself sought 'lowly paid' office work when his father died and the family was in financial ruin)[24] is a dominating theme in Ramakrishna's teachings. The highest-ranking *Zamindars* of Calcutta did not pay Ramakrishna much attention[25] and it was through the medium of farming-based parables that Ramakrishna communicated his teachings to the culturally liminal *Chakri*. Interestingly, Sen disagrees with Sarkar on this issue, noting that: "His strong ridicule of *chakri* . . . as some kind of bondage could acquire a radical anti-colonial edge and yet Ramakrishna had not even a superficial understanding of the important connections between colonialism and the demeaning world of *chakri*."[26]

Foremost in Ramakrishna's teachings to devotees male, female, *Chakri* or *bhadralok*, was his catholic approach to different spiritual traditions. Based upon a *bhakti* framework, Ramakrishna saw all forms of and paths to the divine as valid, as long as they were followed with genuine devotion.[27]

Ramakrishna's religious identity

Perhaps the biggest challenge for scholars studying Ramakrishna is the task of locating him within an identifiable religious category. Western scholarship relies heavily on terms and descriptions and categories, particularly when it comes to comparative studies of religion. The varied forms of worship and various schools of philosophy that have existed in India for several millennia were combined in Western minds into the convenient category of 'Hinduism' in the nineteenth century. The positive locating of a person or tradition within a given category provides a stability and surety of direction when organising approaches to a subject.

Thus it is that, for decades now, scholarship has been constantly at odds with itself to determine an appropriate category for Ramakrishna. The traditional view of Ramakrishna, as put forward in the writings sponsored by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is that he "provided his followers with a message for the world which was at once simple and yet in line with that classical Vedanta of Sankara."[28] This will be examined more fully in the section below in connection with Vivekananda's interpretation of Ramakrishna's teachings, but its mention serves as a useful starting point for a brief summary of the debate that has arisen as a result of scholars' dissatisfaction with this categorisation.

Ramakrishna was brought up in a *Vaishnava* household with *Raghuvira*[29] as the appointed deity of the family. His ecstatic 'mad *sadhana*,' devotional duty and submission, and his love of religious songs and poetry all suggest a *bhakti* orientation, and indeed, this is the conclusion reached by Sil[30] and Raab.[31] However, it must be remembered that Ramakrishna spent most of

his life as an ecstatic devotee of *Kali*, so would it be possible to label the mystic a *Sakta*?

Ramakrishna's teaching *Yata Mat Tata Path* – 'as many paths as there are beliefs' – is traditionally understood within the Ramakrishna Movement to be the summary of Ramakrishna's view that humanity may attain true spiritual knowledge through various religious paths. Indeed, it was from Ramakrishna's experience of realising that different paths may all lead to the same point of absolute knowledge of the divine that Ramakrishna "derived his doctrine of *dharma-samanvaya* or 'harmony of religions' which he described as *yata mat tata path*."[32] This therefore suggests an inherent catholicity of belief that may point towards an understanding of, and agreement with, *Vedantic* teachings based on a system of *Advaita*. Yet, Ramakrishna was also insistent on the 'otherness' of the deity, as a divine figure to approach and to worship with absolute submission and devotion, suggesting a more dualistic *bhakti* orientation. I will argue in the second part of this chapter that this latter aspect of Ramakrishna was problematic for Vivekananda, and that this led to his systematic cultural re-interpretation of the Ramakrishna persona in the West.

The second major area of debate, and one that is much more controversial than the religious categorisation of the Paramahamsa, concerns Ramakrishna's sexuality. Married to Sarada-Devi when she was just five years old, but not taking her into his life until she was 14 years of age, Ramakrishna seemed to abhor sexual union,[33] was blatantly misogynistic,[34] and seems to have preferred the company of young men rather than women. This has led several scholars to question Ramakrishna's sexuality, particularly with reference to the homoerotic in his life, although at this stage, it would be wise to note that both Sil and Kakar[35] believe that a conceptualisation of Ramakrishna as a plain and simple homosexual would be ultimately misleading.

The foremost work on Ramakrishna's sexuality is *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna*, by Jeffrey Kripal. Kripal's central work is his 'discovery' of hidden 'secret talks' in the text of M's *Kathamrita* that have not, in Kripal's opinion, been correctly translated by Nikhilananda. Kripal suggests that these 'secrets' pertain to Ramakrishna's homoerotic feelings and actions towards his young male disciples, and that the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have deliberately expunged them from the canonical record of Ramakrishna's life. This is supported by Sarkar's research, which suggests that these 'secret matters,' which often relate to *Tantric* teachings, were only included by M in the later volumes of the *Kathamrita*, "when Ramakrishna's reputation as pre-eminent saint of the *Bhadralok* had become unassailable."[36] The book was met with wide academic approval in the West, but has caused a great controversy within India, where there were calls for it to be banned.[37] Swami Atmajnanananda, in a text that surely fits into Sil's category of "hagiography with a vengeance,"[38] states that Kripal "consistently misreads situations, takes events out of their cultural context, assumes attitudes and beliefs without

justification, and allows his fertile imagination to conjure up incidents for which there is no concrete evidence."[39] It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the opinions regarding Kripal's work are neatly polarised into the two camps of devotee and academic – Roland, who also shares Kripal's psycho-analytical approach, criticises the methodology of the work, suggesting that Kripal's conclusions are too abrupt and definitive to sit comfortably in a traditional psycho-analytical framework.[40]

However it is interpreted, it remains true that sexual identity and power are central to any understanding of Ramakrishna's psyche. Ecstatic union with *Kali*, an almost pathetic dependence on Narendranath and other young male disciples, and the androgynous nature of his selected persona all amount to a complex character. It is a matter of debate as to what extent Ramakrishna himself would have been 'aware' of his sexual nature. Sil[41] quotes Ramakrishna regarding his apparent homoerotic relationship with Vivekananda, worrying what people would subsequently think of him, but such examples of frank examination of the relationship by Ramakrishna himself are rare, and, as noted before, both Sil and Kakar dismiss the notion of Ramakrishna being a plain and simple homosexual in the first instance.

A linked area with respect to the psyche and actions of Ramakrishna is that of gender – specifically in relation to androgyny and transvestism. Ramakrishna's misogyny, mentioned above, is often linked to another of his behavioural traits – that of dressing as a woman. The sponsored biographies talk of what may be called a 'female *sadhana*,' where Ramakrishna dressed as a woman for prolonged periods of time, and even claims to have ovulated.[42] Sil[43] suggests that we must look to Ramakrishna's childhood to explain such behavioural patterns, pointing towards the young Gadadhar's relationship with the women of his village, who would take to 'play acting' with him as Krishna and themselves as the *Gopis*. The sponsored biographies suggest that this came about due to Gadadhar's femininity, with his interest in the arts, and his lack of sexual arousal when he saw the women of the village bathing in the communal pool.[44] It is possible that the women saw no sexual threat in the young Gadadhar, but, as Sil has noted,

> what the women of Kamarpukar did with the ecstatic by treating him as their Krishna while pretending to be his Gopis . . . is anybody's guess. It is quite reasonable to speculate that these experiences led him to consider women as voluptuous and immoral.[45]

Raab[46] has suggested that we should not look to some childhood trauma or experience for Ramakrishna's transvestism, but that we should look at his devotional *sadhana*. By placing himself within a woman's 'body,' Ramakrishna could effectively rid himself of male desires: "perhaps Ramakrishna wished to think of himself as a woman in order to elevate his spiritual nature beyond male carnality."[47] Indeed, Ramakrishna's

transvestism and gender play should be understood within the wider context of Bengali Vaishnavism and alternative modes of body consciousness. McDaniel notes that there is a concept of reciprocity within Bengali *bhakti* traditions, where a religious rite or action includes "both seeing the deity and being seen"[48] which leads to "bodily transformations involved in *bhakti* ecstasy, when the person consciously creates or suddenly discovers a spiritual body (*sidda deha*)."[49] This form of devotional worship, based upon the *Bhagavad Gita* 9:29 ("those who worship me with devotion, they are in me and I am in them"),[50] provided Ramakrishna with a theological rationale for his transvestism, where he "practiced two forms of Vaisnava practice, called *vatsalya* and *madhurya bhavas* . . . [and during this time] he forgot that he had a male body . . . he saw himself as a woman and mother."[51] Specifically modelled on the love of the Gopis for Krishna in Bengali *Vaishnavism*, Goldman understands these actions as an example of the "great preponderance of instances of transsexualism in India" which forms a "prominent place in the realms of mythology and religion . . . of . . . India."[52] Indeed, Vivekananda himself mentions this theme in his lecture *Human Representations of the Divine Ideal of Love*, given in New York on 17th February 1896, when he states "God is our husband. We are all women; there are no men in this world; there is but One man, and this is He, our Beloved."[53]

Despite, or indeed perhaps because of, the level of academic debate and devotional emotion that this subject brings about, it is impossible not to examine this side of Ramakrishna's personality. This section has aimed to provide a context for the debates surrounding Ramakrishna, so that the latter section of this chapter, which is focused upon Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Ramakrishna, may be understandable within the subsequent debates and controversies.

In later life, Vivekananda would state, "To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions, was the mission of my Master."[54] Whilst this statement must be read in the context in which it was spoken,[55] and thus must be seen as Vivekananda's re-reading of Ramakrishna, it is certainly the case that Ramakrishna sought spiritual truth in a variety of religious traditions. The hagiographies concentrate upon Ramakrishna's Muslim and Christian *sadhana*s,[56] but Stark has also noted the importance of Ramakrishna's approach to Buddhism.[57] According to the hagiographies, a category into which Stark's work must also fall,[58] these interactions demonstrate Ramakrishna's deep knowledge and experience of non-Hindu traditions, although recent academic commentators have shown rather more caution in labelling Ramakrishna as a religious pluralist.[59]

The famous mantra of Ramakrishna's catholicity, *Yata Mat Tata Path*, is not startlingly original, but fits into the *bhakti* tradition of Hinduism reflected within the *Bhagavad Gita*,[60] and may not have even been "a solemn pronouncement about the truth-claims of the world's great religions."[61] For

Ramakrishna, divine consciousness was derived from complete submission to a path of devotion, with realisation dependent not on the system or path in question, but on the approach, aptitude and integrity of the devotee.

To this end, Ramakrishna spent much of his 'mad sadhana' in pursuit of religious truth through a variety of paths. Indeed, Sarkar has described Ramakrishna's 'religious experimentation' as a 'striking feature'[62] of these years. During this time, Ramakrishna claimed to have experienced God through different religious traditions, including Islam (1866) and Christianity (1874).[63] It would be a mistake, however, to see this as a thorough interpretation of these traditions.

Ramakrishna's teacher in Islam was a Sufi mystic by the name of Govinda Rai,[64] and it was clearly this mystical link, much more eminent in Sufism than in other forms of Islam, that would have attracted Ramakrishna.[65] The sponsored biographies insist that, so strong was Ramakrishna's devotion to the Islamic ideal, during this period, that he "dressed as a Mussalman and repeated the name of Allah . . . [and] he forgot the Hindu gods and goddesses – even Kali – and gave up visiting the temples."[66] However, interestingly, the reports go on to say that, when Ramakrishna had achieved a vision of Mohammed, he saw that he had passed again into communion with *Brahman*. Here, then, is an example of Ramakrishna encompassing a non-Hindu tradition within a Hindu worldview, or philosophical viewpoint. Clearly, it is not possible to remove cultural grounding from the interpretation of religious experience, and the language used by the sponsored biographies in this instance shows that, no matter how open Ramakrishna's views were on non-Hindu religions, he would revert to explanations of ultimate reality within a Hindu framework. Indeed, "clearly, he [Ramakrishna] believed that the Islamic and the Hindu paths do not converge at the realization of one God."[67]

Similar stories regarding swift realisations of the divine within Christianity appear in the sponsored biographies.[68] Interested by the Bible readings of Sambhucharan Mallick, a devotee from Calcutta, Ramakrishna became fascinated by the life and works of Jesus. In only the fourth day of his Christian *sadhana*,[69] Ramakrishna is said to have beheld Christ, with whom he realised his oneness, as he had previously experienced with "Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Radha, Krishna, Brahman and Mohammed."[70] Again, the sponsored texts talk of this realisation leading to an experience of *samadhi* where communion with *Brahman* is achieved. Thus again, we find Ramakrishna, not unsurprisingly, returning to a Hindu framework for his teachings and theology.

Ramakrishna had no Buddhist teacher from whom he learned Buddhist spiritual techniques but, interestingly, the hagiographers link his spiritual practice to that of the Buddha. Stark equates the enlightenment of the Buddha with *nirvikalpa samadhi* – the ultimate aim of *Advaita Vedanta*, and further argues that the Buddha was a practicing *jnana yogi*.[71] The aim of this re-alignment of the Buddha is to ensure that Ramakrishna, through his *Advaitic* training under Totapuri, is presented as the Buddhist par excellence,

albeit through a Vedantic lens. This Vedantic assimilation of Buddhism, and the subsequent positioning of Ramakrishna within this framework, is explicit in the following statement by Swami Nirvedananda:

> Advaita Vedanta . . . practically comprehends Buddhism so far as both the method of spiritual discipline and the goal are concerned. . . . Both discard the Personal God and all dualistic thoughts and forms of worship with equal emphasis. . . . Then regarding the goal, the nirvana of the Buddhist . . . corresponds to the nirvikalpa Samadhi of the Advaitin. . . . So Ramakrishna, . . . through his Advaita practice . . . had mastered both the method and the aim of Buddhism up to a point of perfection.[72]

It is noteworthy that Ramakrishna's approach to Buddhism, as reported by his devotees, is an exercise in reductionism – the Buddha, and Buddhism are seen only as concepts to be explained within Hindu vocabulary and philosophy, and even then only as supporting statements to validate the truth claims of Hinduism. Barker has noted this tendency in pluralistic approaches to religious dialogue, arguing that "all-encompassing theological syntheses have been infamous for privileging the data closest to the heart of the synthesizer,"[73] and this is clearly the case with Ramakrishna. To underline this point, this brief section will end by quoting Ramakrishna himself on the person of the Buddha:

> "There is not the least doubt about the Lord Buddha's being an Incarnation. There is no difference between his doctrines and those of the Vedic *Jnanakanda*." When told that the Buddha was called an atheist, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Why atheist? He was no atheist – only he could not speak out his realizations.[74] Do you know what 'Buddha' means? To become one with the 'Bodha,' the Supreme Intelligence, through deep meditation, to become Pure Intelligence itself."[75]

Ramakrishna and Narendranath

During their brief acquaintance, from November 1881 to August 1886, Ramakrishna influenced Narendranath more fully than any other person in his life. However, in many ways the two would appear diametrically opposed – the 'illiterate' Ramakrishna with his ecstatic devotion for Kali, and Vivekananda with his Western education and eagerness to embrace modern reform movements of nineteenth-century Bengal in an attempt to distance himself from what he saw as the baggage of some aspects of Hindu belief, customs and tradition. This apparent incompatibility between their belief systems at the beginning of their relationship was one that was to intensify their influence upon each other during their subsequent interaction, and is reflected in Vivekananda's later comment: "Let none regret that

they were difficult to convince! I fought my Master for six long years, with the result that I know every inch of the way."[76]

A detailed examination of the complex relationship between Master and disciple is a full study in itself, and is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, this chapter will highlight key areas regarding philosophy and dialogue that are pertinent to Vivekananda's approach to Hinduism and his approach to non-Hindu traditions.

The foremost change that occurred in Narendranath's fundamental belief system as a result of his approach to Ramakrishna was his reversion to an understanding of a more traditional form of Hinduism.[77] As a student influenced heavily by Western philosophy and attracted to modern reformist movements in India,[78] many of Narendranath's views were initially diametrically opposed to those taught by Ramakrishna. For instance (a) Narendranath had chosen to follow the monotheistic tendencies of the Brahmo Samaj, whilst Ramakrishna followed a multi-faceted *sadhana* encompassing aspects of polytheistic *bhakti, tantra* and *Visishtadvaita Vedanta*; (b) Narendranath was reluctant to believe the value of Ramakrishna's trances and the benefit of a guru-pupil relationship; and (c) Narendranath believed image worship to be blasphemous, whilst Ramakrishna valued it highly in his relationship with Kali.[79] His encounter with Ramakrishna forced Vivekananda to reformulate his conception of Hinduism, and to interact with other religions, crucial factors of which I will explore in the next two chapters.

It can be argued that Ramakrishna brought Narendranath back into the traditionalist fold of Hindu belief, away from the modern reforming philosophies of movements such as the Brahmo Samaj.[80] In so doing, Vivekananda's view of religious dialogue was reshaped. The Brahmo Samaj was influenced heavily by the interfaith readings of its leaders – Sen drew heavily on Christian, Islamic and Buddhist texts when preparing sermons and worship patterns for the society, and one of the central tenets was a belief in a non-creedal monotheistic Ultimate Reality. Roy himself had been hugely influenced by his Muslim education and his desire to provide a pro-syncretic arena for worship. However, far from creating opportunities for religious dialogue, these very leaders who wished to embrace a diversity of religious traditions, actually stifled religious differences-in-identity, and thus the opportunity for meaningful dialogue, by creating a neutral middle ground that, in effect, represented and recognised no existing religious creed. As opposed to this, Ramakrishna seemingly promoted the personal exploration of a diversity of religious systems that were foreign to the individual in a form of immersive engagement with the given tradition in the course of, for instance, an Islamic or Christian *sadhana*. However, caution must be noted. Whilst Ramakrishna immersed himself in 'foreign' religious systems, Kripal has noted that his interpretation of them simply gave an opportunity for "a preeminently Hindu lesson [to be] drawn from an allegedly non-Hindu event."[81] Indeed, for Ramakrishna, if *Brahman* is all, yet interpreted differently, then *Brahman* must be the source of all

religions, which are different only because of different interpretations of the same reality, and must therefore be understood through a Hindu lens which locates the essence of each of these unique and diverse traditions within a specifically Hindu worldview.

This philosophical pluralism exerted a unique influence on Narendranath when substantiated with a form of experiential pluralism – the active engagement in belief systems other than one's own. Ramakrishna taught Narendranath that one should not view different religions in relation to one's own concept of a 'true' form of worship or belief (as the Brahmo Samaj had done) but that each religion should be viewed *in and for its own sake*, therefore leading to acceptance, rather than patronising tolerance or outright exclusion – whether consciously as in the case of the Christian missionaries or unconsciously as in the case of the leaders of the Brahmo Samaj. This theme of respecting each religion's own place in the vast spectrum of religious traditions was a strong theme in Vivekananda's stance at the Chicago Parliament:

> The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or 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.[82]

It is clear that this approach of Ramakrishna, based on the concept of *Yata Mat Tata Path*, heavily influenced the young Vivekananda. In this respect, three areas of interaction between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are of particular relevance: (1) the place of images; (2) the role of *avatara*; and (3) the emphasis on *Advaita*. These issues will now be addressed briefly in turn.

(1) Ramakrishna convinced Narendranath of the benefit of image worship (*murti-puja*) as a valid form of a comprehension of the divine. At first opposed to such a view as blasphemous, Narendranath was later to defend Hinduism against claims of 'heathen' polytheism and image worship in the face of criticism from Christian missionaries.[83] It appears, therefore, that Vivekananda's defence of Hinduism and his desire for a universalistic approach to religious custom and practice relates directly to the issue of image worship as a form of religious practice. However, key ideas sit uneasily within this framework when weighed against the larger picture of Vivekananda's religious and social ethics. Vivekananda consistently defended Hinduism against Christian missionary claims that images are worshipped instead of a God, and repeatedly defended image worship as a legitimate means of realising the divine. However, Vivekananda also repeatedly stated that such practice was only to be seen as a limited form of spiritual awareness – the key for the practitioner was to detach themselves from the ceremony and physical nature of

such *puja*: "Idolatry in India does not mean anything horrible. It is not the mother of harlots. On the other hand, it is the attempt of undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truths."[84]

(2) A further area of religious thought in Vivekananda's later life that can be linked in part to Ramakrishna's guidance is the idea of the *avatar*. A popular topic in his lectures and teachings, Vivekananda drew heavily on Ramakrishna's views in this area. The term *Avatar* translates as 'descent' or 'down-coming' and is sometimes problematically[85] translated as 'incarnation.' Hardy very usefully defines *avatar* as a "'descent' into the world of man . . . not due to the laws of rebirth and *karma* . . . but entirely as the result of Visnu's free will."[86] This is helpful as it contextualises the concept of *avatar* within specific Indian theological traditions. By the eighth century of the Common Era Vishnu's *avatars* were enumerated within a semi-standardised list of ten figures, for whom *avatar* status was generally claimed.[87] Hardy breaks this list down further by suggesting three types of included figures: (1) appropriated deities with pre-existing origins and mythologies, (2) appropriated heroes or minor deities who have been 'deified' by their inclusion into the *avatara* structure and (3) the fabrication of figures who were required to complete the coherent *avatara* system, in line with *Vaishnava* cosmology – particularly *Kalki*, the future *avatar* who will usher in the end of our present cosmic cycle.[88] Whilst, therefore, the origins of much *avatar* theory in India is understood as "Visnu's entrances into the constraints of space, time and matter"[89] different philosophical traditions have variously understood and applied the concept. Parrinder notes how divisive the issue of *avatar*, and specifically the key verses of chapter four of the *Gita*, have become, commenting on the difficulties that non-dualist philosophies have with the transcendent element of *avatar* theology.[90] Indeed, Parrinder notes that Sankara largely passes over these passages in his commentary of the *Gita* with minimal comment. Furthermore, in addition to 'traditional' *Vishnu*-orientated concepts of *avatar*, there are also *Siva*-centred stories, for example from the *Kurma Purana*,[91] and also more modern conceptions of *avatar*, which identify key *gurus* or religious leaders as a "manifestation of a deity in a particular physical form."[92]

Initially sceptical of the concept of *avatar*, perhaps reflecting the influence of the Roy-inspired elements of the Brahmo Samaj, Narendranath did not initially accept Ramakrishna as an *avatar*.[93] Reluctant, also, to accept Ramakrishna's insistence that he (Narendranath) was an embodiment of an 'eternal companion' to Ramakrishna,[94] Narendranath accepted this to be the case when exposed to heightened ecstatic experiences through the deepening of the Guru-disciple relationship.[95]

Ramakrishna saw each of the great religious teachers as an incarnation of the divine in the form of an *avatar*. In this list he included Krishna, Jesus, the Buddha and Mohammed. For Vivekananda, these

avatars held the key to the human comprehension of the divine – if we are to recognise the divine nature of humankind, we must recognise the human nature of the divine. Indeed, Vivekananda argued that, without such an anthropomorphic view of the divine, we, as humans, would be unable to grasp such an abstract concept:

> Thus, man has been worshipping God through men all the time, and must do so as long as he is a man. He may cry against it, struggle against it, but as soon as he attempts to realise God, he will find the constitutional necessity of thinking of God as man.[96]

(3) It is clear that the sponsored biographies of the Ramakrishna Movement label Ramakrishna as an *Advaita Vedantin*, whose inspired teachings were proclaimed to the world by Vivekananda.[97] The reality is somewhat different. As Sen has noted:

> Though this is nowhere explicitly mentioned in standard sources on his life, Ramakrishna's position is indeed quite similar to the Vishishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism) school of Ramanuja. The religious metaphors that he uses, for instance, to denote the willing and complete self-surrender to God, are identical to those used by certain sections within the Sri Sampradaya, the Vaishnav school founded by Ramanuja. . . . Like the Vaishnavas he maintained that, given the utterly decadent state of human existence in Kali Yuga, Bhakti and not Jnana (gnosis) or Karma was the easiest and the most universally valid road to God.[98]

This discrepancy originates in the treatment of the Ramakrishna persona by Vivekananda after Ramakrishna's death in 1886. Put simply, one sees that Vivekananda was re-writing the very character of Ramakrishna so as to further his own social and religious framework of ideas. As Sil has stated: "Vivekananda . . . decided to present his spiritual master to the world in a new light – not as the divinely mad devotee of Kali and Krsna but as a Vedantin, the inspiration behind Vivekananda's grand plan for Hindu missionary enterprise."[99]

Much of Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Ramakrishna's teachings was also an active re-alignment of his Master's social thinking. As stated above, Ramakrishna could not, in any real sense, be seen to be deeply interested or involved with contemporary political or social reform, but this simply would not do for the energetic young Vivekananda. Ramakrishna, with his asocial behaviour, blatant misogyny and deprecatory view of the *Sudra* was, in a few words, turned into "the saviour of women, saviour of the masses, saviour of all, high and low."[100]

Thus, turned from a mystic into a teacher, a *Bhakta* into a *Vedantin*, a misogynist into an emancipator of women, and a social non-combatant into a reformer, Ramakrishna had one last journey to make in the interpretations

of Vivekananda, and given the latter's initial reaction as a young devotee to Ramakrishna, this is somewhat surprising. Upon Ramakrishna's death, Vivekananda declared him to be the greatest of all *avatar*s, the holiest man who had ever lived. Indeed, through a systematic re-working of both his own attitude towards Ramakrishna's *avatar* status, and of the texts and evidences for this, Vivekananda ensured that "if Ramakrishna appeared as a mere bhagaban ('God') to most of his devotees and disciples, he had become something more – bhagabaner baba (literally meaning 'God's Father'), greater than God – at the hands of the 'cyclonic' Svami."[101] Nowhere was this more apparent than in Vivekananda's projection of Ramakrishna to the West.

Vivekananda's Ramakrishna: religious identity and religious censorship

In this short section, I want to argue that Vivekananda's representations of the Ramakrishna persona to the West involved a careful translation and reinterpretation of the cultural meanings associated with Ramakrishna.

As outlined in the previous section, recent scholarship on Ramakrishna has tended to concentrate on a psycho-analytical exploration of Ramakrishna's character,[102] and/or on the categorisation as an advocate of a specific traditional Hindu *marga* – as a *sakta, bhakti* or *tantric*.[103] Here, I will focus more on the *nature* of Ramakrishna's religious experiences, rather than on the possible causes or sources, so as to be able to specifically examine Vivekananda's reaction to, and reinterpretation of, these experiences and teachings during his mission to the West.

I will argue that Vivekananda produced a 'sanitized' account of Ramakrishna's religious experience and behaviour, more suited to Vivekananda's interpretation (or perhaps projection) of Western understandings of communion with the divine, and that uncomfortable aspects in Ramakrishna's behaviour were systematically edited out of Vivekananda's projection of his Master, not just to re-orientate the Paramahamsa into a Neo-Vedantic mould of Vivekananda's making, as scholars such as Sil have claimed,[104] but as part of Vivekananda's construction of a new form of exportable Hinduism.

Many of Ramakrishna's religious experiences are recorded in Mahendranath Gupta's *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, known in English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*[105] and Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna Lilaprasanga*, translated as *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*.[106] Using these sources, Sil[107] points out the physical nature of Ramakrishna's spiritual ecstasies, which often involved the guru jumping up, falling down, slapping his head and shouting loudly. On one occasion on 11th March 1885, Mahendranath Gupta described him thus: "While descending from the first floor . . . [he] was full of God-consciousness, as if drunk. While descending

from the steps the Master was beside himself in his mood. Naren[108] tried to hold his hands lest he should fall down."[109]

On the 19th October 1884, Ramakrishna was attending a ceremony at the offices of the Brahmo Samaj in Sinthi, North Calcutta when a disciple started to sing and play the drums:

> Sri Ramakrishna danced, intoxicated with divine love. Many times he went into Samadhi.[110] He stood still, his eyes fixed, his face beaming. . . . Coming down a little from the state of ecstasy, he danced again like a mad elephant. . . . [It was] an indescribable scene. The exquisite and celestial dance of a child completely filled with ecstatic love of God and identified heart and soul with the Divine Mother![111]

And during a performance of the play *Chaitanyalila*[112] at the Star Theatre in September 1884, Ramakrishna is recorded as having entered *samadhi* several times, swept away by the drums of the orchestra, when he would cry out during the performance, and weep profusely.[113] Such 'outbursts' by Ramakrishna, despite not being inconsistent with what Kinsley describes as "the madness of the Saints,"[114] is likely to have sat uncomfortably with the middle- and upper-class Westerners who made up the bulk of Vivekananda's audiences and followers in America and Europe.

The overt physicality of Ramakrishna's religious experiences was not, however, limited to the Master himself. Kripal has drawn attention to what he believes to be mystical and erotic links between Ramakrishna and his inner circle of devotees, which he further suggests have been systematically censored in Western translations by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.[115] One such example of this is Kripal's translation of the original Bengali text of Mahendranath Gupta, which he claims shows that Ramakrishna would place his foot into the lap of one of his devotees whilst in *samadhi*, with the lap of a cross-legged male being, in Kripal's view, synonymous with their genitals. Kripal believed this to be one of the 'secret signs' of the repressed homosexual nature of many of Ramakrishna's religious experiences, although this has been disputed strongly by the hagiographical writings of Swami Atmajnanananda.[116]

A further example of both the physical, as well as the heterosexual or homosexual nature of Ramakrishna's religious experiences occurred on 11th March 1885. Having left his disciple Balaram's house, the party walked to the house of Girish, a playwright and actor who had recently been introduced into Ramakrishna's circle when, upon entering the house, Ramakrishna spontaneously ejaculated.[117] In the original Bengali version, Gupta simply states that he does not understand the meaning of this and that it must be 'God's language.'[118] Although no details of any response to this specific incident from the young Vivekananda, who was standing next to Ramakrishna at the time, have survived in extant literature, Vivekananda's description of his reaction to another physically centred moment of religious fervour shared with Ramakrishna is noteworthy:

> [His] touch at once gave rise to a novel experience within me. With my eyes open I saw that the walls and everything in the room whirled rapidly and vanished into nought, and the whole universe, together with my individuality, was about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious void . . . I was terribly frightened and thought that I was facing death. Unable to control myself, I cried out, "What is this you are doing to me? I have my parents at home."[119]

Here, then, is a primary source of Vivekananda being physically and emotionally uncomfortable with the physically centred ecstasy of his Master, a position which may well underpin his reinterpretation of Ramakrishna to a 'genteel' Western audience.

Further to Ramakrishna's periods of *samadhi* that are recognisably Hindu in nature, he is also famous for his religious experimentation with Islam and Christianity. Again, these periods of ecstatic devotion contain vivid language, imagery and unusual custom and practice. The scene that follows, using Kripal's translation of the *Kathamrita*, recalls one of Ramakrishna's religious visions during the time of his practice of Muslim rites, customs and practices:

> One day I saw that consciousness is one – nondifferent. At first it was shown to me that there were many people and animals – within that there were babus, Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a cremator, and dogs. Moreover, a bearded Muslim man was standing there with a plate of rice in his hand. He gave the mouths of everyone a little of this rice from the plate. I also tasted a little.[120]

In this description, the sharing of food with non-Hindus and polluting 'untouchables' is a transgression of Hindu caste rules,[121] demonstrating that *advaitic* non-difference transcends social divisions and differences. It is noteworthy that, in describing Ramakrishna as sharing in the fellowship of a highly irregular gifted meal, it is the Muslim character that facilitates this crossing of boundaries. This example may well link to both Vivekananda's promotion of Ramakrishna's catholicity of belief, and also to Vivekananda's praise for Muslim concepts of brotherhood. Interestingly, though, Vivekananda finds no place for such visions when promoting his Master's projected Neo-Vedantic image of universalism to the West. Indeed, in his lecture titled *Mohammed*,[122] given on 25th March 1900 in San Francisco, and in which he praises Islam above all for its belief in equality and brotherhood, this episode from Ramakrishna's religious experience, which could serve admirably to reinforce Vivekananda's message, is completely absent.

During November of 1874, the hagiographies describe Ramakrishna becoming infatuated with "an irresistible desire to learn the truth of the Christian religion"[123] leading to a three-day period of *samadhi* that reached its zenith thus:

> At last . . . the Master saw, while walking [in the garden], that a marvellous god-man of fair complexion was coming towards him. . . .

> Very soon the person approached him, and thereupon from the depth of the Master's pure heart came out with a ringing sound, the words, "Jesus the Christ! The great *Yogi*, the loving Son of God, one with the Father, who gave his heart's blood and put up with endless tortures in order to deliver man from sorrow and misery!" Jesus, the god-man, then embraced the Master and disappeared into his body and the Master entered ecstasy, lost normal consciousness and remained identified for some time with the omnipresent Brahman with attributes. Having attained the vision of Jesus thus, the Master became free from the slightest doubt about Christ's having been an incarnation of God.[124]

This ecstatic vision of Jesus shows the, quite literal, merging of the persons of Ramakrishna and Christ – indeed, Nikhilananda states that at this point in his life "Sri Ramakrishna realized his identity with Christ, as he had already realized his identity with Kali, Rama, Hanuman, Radha, Krishna, Brahman, and Mohammed."[125] And so, when we turn to the writings of Vivekananda on the subject of Christ, and his Master, we could reasonably assume that such an episode would merit a mention – indeed, how could such an important episode not be included in an exposition of his views on Ramakrishna and Christ to a largely Christian audience in the West? Yet again, however, we find Vivekananda falling silent on the issue of this particular religious experience. When Vivekananda delivered his lecture *Christ the Messenger*[126] on 7th January 1900 in Los Angeles, we do not find any mention of his Master's vision. Further, in *My Master*,[127] a text based on two lectures delivered in 1896, we again find no direct description[128] of any of Ramakrishna's claimed religious experiences, even though they would surely act as dynamic examples of Vivekananda's belief in the catholicity of human spirituality, and the important place that his Master held in his realisation and proclamation of his own 'Ideal of a Universal Religion.'[129]

Therefore, whatever the reason behind Ramakrishna's religious visions and experiences, be it homoerotic leanings, as suggested by Kripal, or some element of childhood sexual trauma, as suggested by Sil,[130] it is quite clear that there is a systematic cleansing, or sanitising of Ramakrishna's religious experiences and actions by his followers – a recognisable process by which events or ideas unpalatable to a Western audience are carefully erased. For a moment, it may also be useful to clarify the chronology of this filtration of Ramakrishna's religious experiences. Whilst the *Lilaprasanga* and the *Kathamrita* were composed, or translated, a number of years after Ramakrishna's death,[131] the personal correspondence and dialogues of Swami Vivekananda took place only a few short years after Ramakrishna's passing, and nowhere is this systematic filtration clearer than in the writings and thoughts of Vivekananda himself.

Sil has described Vivekananda as transforming "Ramakrishna from a religious ecstatic to a religious eclectic"[132] and an exploration of Vivekananda's

censoring of Ramakrishna's religious experience substantiates the point. Indeed, in a letter to his South Indian disciple Alasinga, dated 30th November 1894, Vivekananda asks that a biography of Ramakrishna be written, but that Alasinga should ensure that they "avoid all irregular indecent expressions about sex etc. . . ., because other nations think it the height of indecency to mention such things, and his life in English is going to be read by the whole world."[133] This passage is clear enough in demonstrating Vivekananda's desire to adapt and translate religious modes and values between cultures, but it is particularly illuminating when it is matched with the words of Vivekananda's Bengali text *The East and the West*, in which the following story is related, aimed firmly as an attack on the Christian missionaries of the day:

> The Chinese are the disciples of Confucius, are the disciples of Buddha, and their morality is quite strict and refined. Obscene language, obscene books or pictures, any conduct the least obscene – and the offender is punished then and there. Now, in the Bible there are some passages so obscene as to put to shame some of the Puranas of the Hindus. Reading those indecorous passages, the Chinamen were so exasperated against Christianity that they made the point of never allowing the Bible to be circulated in their country. . . . I hear that the missionaries have now printed an edition, leaving out the objectionable parts.[134]

It seems, therefore, quite clear that Vivekananda had no qualms whatsoever about undertaking the systematic reworking of his Master's persona and message, even though he criticised others – in this instance the Christian missionaries – for doing much the same.

This reworking of Ramakrishna's meaning and message outlines a key feature of Vivekananda's projection of religious ideals to the West. We find a rejection of Ramakrishna as an ecstatic, devotional *Bhakta* specifically because this was an image less palatable to Western audiences that that of a Neo-*Vedantic* guru, who preached the unifying greatness of the *Vedanta* philosophy. Matchett has commented on this precise issue by arguing that a tension exists concerning *bhakti* in the relationship between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.[135] Clearly situating Ramakrishna within a *bhakti* framework of belief, Matchett notes that Vivekananda saw *bhakti* as merely a stepping stone to higher spiritual truths. For Matchett, this manifested itself in the difference in approach to *experience* between Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. She argues that in Vivekananda's view:

> it was Ramakrishna's experience rather than his teaching which appeared to be important. First of all, the Muslim and Christian phases of his Sadhana seemed to demonstrate that the Sanatana Dharma could show itself superior to these alien monotheisms – not by proving them wrong, but by finding a place for them on the lower levels of an edifice designed and built on Hindu principles.[136]

Clearly, this statement has implications, not only regarding Vivekananda's treatment of *bhakti* traditions, but also with reference to his approach to non-Hindu traditions. We find further evidence of Vivekananda's devaluing of *bhakti*, in a conversation he held, probably with a disciple named Sharat Chandra Chakravarty – possibly in the summer of 1898.[137] The opening gambit of the dialogue is of such importance, that I will quote it here at length:

DISCIPLE: Pray, Swamiji, how can Jnana and Bhakti be reconciled? We see followers of the path of devotion (Bhaktas) close their ears at the name of Shankara, and again, the followers of the path of knowledge (Jnanis) call the Bhaktas fanatics, seeing them weep in torrents, or sing and dance in ecstasy, in the name of the Lord.

SWAMIJI: The thing is, all this conflict is in the preliminary (preparatory) stages of Jnana and Bhakti . . . there is no difference between supreme Bhakti and the supreme Jnana.[138]

The disciple, who clearly lacks no courage in his quest for spiritual knowledge, then challenges Vivekananda with a seemingly obvious question: "But I have heard that Bhagavan Shri Ramakrishna used to sing the name of God very much?"[139] In reply, Vivekananda does not supply a direct answer on the relationship between 'supreme *bhakti*' and 'supreme *Jnana*,' instead arguing that Ramakrishna was a unique case, saying: "what comparison can there be between him and ordinary men?"[140] Vivekananda's focus at this juncture seems to be on representing Ramakrishna as having existed on a different plane to normal humans. In the closing section of the dialogue, when the disciple asks if Vivekananda sees Ramakrishna as an *avatar*. Vivekananda responds to the disciple by arguing that the term *avatar* is insufficient to describe Ramakrishna, and that Ramakrishna was greater than Krishna, Buddha and Jesus, all of whom were *avatars* named by the student.[141] It is perhaps noteworthy that, having separated Ramakrishna from simplistic understandings of *avatara*, Vivekananda gently guides the student away from an area with which he seems uncomfortable, by stating: "Let us, however, drop the subject now; more of it another time."[142]

We might infer from this that Vivekananda was ill at ease with Ramakrishna's ecstatic devotion during his "passionate and wayward Sadhana"[143] and could only accept or legitimise Ramakrishna as an ecstatic by placing him in a supra-human plane. Indeed, we should be reminded of the previously referenced statement that he had "fought [his] Master for six long years"[144] when describing their theological relationship. In the end, something of this incompatibility of approach had to give, and it was Ramakrishna's ecstatic religious experiences that were left, purposefully and intentionally, on the cutting-room floor of Vivekananda's reworking of a Hindu identity for the West.

This chapter has sought to outline the ways in which Vivekananda's approach to Ramakrishna informed his attitudes towards both Hindu philosophy and ritual and towards non-Hindu faith traditions. It is clear that there existed key divergences between master and pupil on a range of religious issues, but that Vivekananda also developed his religious understanding under the tutelage of Ramakrishna. Both these convergences and divergences are relevant to Vivekananda's subsequent teachings. The second section of this chapter aimed to provide clear evidence that Vivekananda reworked the Ramakrishna persona after Ramakrishna's death so that the newly established image more fully suited Vivekananda's projection of Hinduism on a world stage. The main foci of these arguments may be summarised in a few statements.

(1) 'Troubling' aspects of Ramakrishna's personality were devalued by Vivekananda. Sexuality, overt physicality and gender relations are devalued or ignored in Vivekananda's subsequent representation of Ramakrishna. Vivekananda also devalued Ramakrishna's links to *tantra* and *bhakti*, privileging his links to *Advaita*. This led to a specific censoring of Ramakrishna's religious experiences, which are devalued by Vivekananda in his representations to the West, even though he valorises Ramakrishna's direct realisation of reality (*brahmajnana*) which he would subsequently praise in, for example, Jesus and the Buddha. (2) Ramakrishna influenced Vivekananda in his 'openness' to non-Hindu traditions, seeking *Brahman*-centred truth claims during his Muslim and Christian *sadhanas*. It is noteworthy that, despite the appearance of universalism, Ramakrishna (and Vivekananda after him) retained a Hindu-centred understanding of those other traditions. (3) Ramakrishna ensured that Vivekananda, post-Brahmo Samaj, understood the benefits of *murti, puja* and *avatara*. Vivekananda would subsequently incorporate these as 'starting points' in his formulation of Hinduism even though he devalued them in relation to his conception of higher-order religion.

Vivekananda realised that to achieve his aim of representing Hinduism to the world, he would need to undertake a systematising exercise; I have outlined in this chapter how he undertook this in relation to Ramakrishna. The next two chapters of this work will now engage in a survey of Vivekananda's treatment of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity to demonstrate how Vivekananda systematised his approach to Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions in the light of the influences explored in both this chapter and the previous chapter.

Notes

1 Vivekananda 're-telling' the influence of Ramakrishna. CW VII, p. 414.
2 The relationship lasted from 1881 to 1886. As if to highlight the shortness of this period, it is noteworthy that the only surviving photograph of the two of them together is one taken after Ramakrishna's death, at the funeral. No photographs survive of the two men together during life. See Chattopadhyaya, R. *World's*

Parliament of Religions, 1893: Participants from the Indian Subcontinent and the 1993 Parliament (Calcutta: Minerva, 1995) unpaginated photo prior to title page. Details: 'Sri Ramakrishna's mortal frame after his passing, surrounded by his devotees and admirers, 16th August, 1886' outlined in ibid., p. ix.

3 That is, those published or sponsored by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, or the Institute of Culture, a research and publishing wing of the Ramakrishna Movement.

4 There are two widely accessible translations in English: Gupta, M. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1984 [1942]) and Gupta, M. *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita: According to M. (Mahendra) a Son of the Lord and Disciple*, trans. D. P. Gupta (Chandigarh: Sri Ma Trust, 2005).

5 Saradananda, Swami *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, Vols. 1–2, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978).

6 Kripal, J. *Kali's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p. 3.

7 Nikhilananda, Swami *Sri Ramakrishna: A Biography* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1953) p. 2.

8 See, for example, ibid., p. 3 and Schiffman, R. *Sri Ramakrishna: A Prophet for the New Age* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Institute of Culture, 1994) p. 9.

9 Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 3.

10 Ibid., p. 6.

11 French, H. W. *The Swami's Wide Waters: Ramakrishna and Western Culture* (New York & London: National University Publications, 1974) p. 27.

12 A form of Vishnu.

13 Sarkar, S. 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*: Ramakrishna and His Times' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (July 18, 1992) p. 1546.

14 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1546.

15 Isherwood, C. *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1986) p. 159.

16 A period of supra-conscious religious experience, linked in *Advaita* to true *brahmajnana*, or 'God-realisation.'

17 It is, at the very least, certain that Sen's relationship with Ramakrishna ensured that the latter was thrust into the public domain. As French has commented, the "first public notice of Ramakrishna in a periodical of the time appears to have been in an article by Keshab in *The Indian Mirror* of March 28, 1875, titled 'A Hindu Saint.'" French, *The Swami's Wide Waters*, p. 26.

18 Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 5.

19 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1551.

20 Rosselli, J. 'Sri Ramakrishna and the Educated Elite of Late Nineteenth Century Bengal' in *Contributions to Indian Sociology (NS)*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (1978) p. 199.

21 Ibid., p. 205.

22 The noteworthy area of *seva*, service to humanity, lies outside the scope of this work, although it is central to the religious identity and mission of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission founded by Vivekananda in his *guru*'s name. The authoritative work on this subject is Beckerlegge, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

23 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1544.

24 *Life* Vol. 1, pp. 120–121. Sil also quotes Vivekananda: "I had to look for [a] job even before the period of mourning was over. I went from office to office barefoot and hungry, carrying an application for a job . . . but I was unsuccessful

everywhere." See Sil, N. P. *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (London: Associated University Press, 1997) p. 38.

25 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1548.

26 Sen, A. P. *Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 11.

27 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1553.

28 Matchett, F. 'The Teaching of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekananda' in *Religion*, Vol. 11 (1981) p. 171.

29 A form of Rama.

30 Sil, N. P. 'Is Ramakrishna a Vedantin, a Tantrika or a Vaishnava? A Examination' in *Asian Studies Review*, Vol. 21, Nos. 2–3 (Nov. 1997) p. 223.

31 Raab, K. A. 'Is There Anything Transcendent about Transcendence? A Philosophical and Psychological Study or Sri Ramakrishna' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 63, No. 2 (2001) p. 328.

32 Bhajananda, Swami, *Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2008) p. 12.

33 Ramakrishna confessed to Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar that "If my body is touched by a woman I feel sick . . . the touched part aches as if stung by a horned catfish." Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 965, cited in Sil, N. P. *Ramakrishna Revisited: A New Biography* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998) p. 63. Note that the translation given here is Sil's which differs slightly from Nikhilananda's.

34 Examples are legion. See in particular, Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited*, pp. 63–83. Tellingly, this area of Ramakrishna's character serves as an example of selective translation on the part of the sponsored biographies. During a discussion on barriers to *Yogic* knowledge, Ramakrishna states that 'women and gold' are the main distractions. Sil translates the comment as follows: "What is there to the body of a woman? Only such things as blood, flesh, fat, entrails, worms, piss, shit, and the like." Similarly, the translations of the *Kathamrita* sponsored by the Sri Ma Trust, translate the comment as "blood, flesh, fat, intestines, worms, urine, faeces and so on." Nikhilananda's translation simply omits any references to bodily waste. See, Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited*, p. 65; Gupta (trans.), *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, p. 33; and Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 113. It is interesting to note that this discussion lies at the heart of a complex issue regarding Ramakrishna's use of the Bengali phrase *kamini kanchana* – translated by Nikhilananda as 'women and gold,' but translated by D. P. Gupta as 'lust and greed.' Of course, if *kamini kanchana* is a barrier to spiritual progress, the place of women (which is presumably only relevant to male heterosexual understandings of sexuality) becomes problematic for the sponsored biographers.

35 Parsons, W. 'Psychoanalysis and Mysticism: The Case of Ramakrishna' in *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2001) p. 357.

36 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1553.

37 Radice summarises the controversy thus: "it was inevitable that the growing emphasis on the erotic aspects of Ramakrishna's visions would eventually cause a storm of outrage in the still quite prudish atmosphere of Calcutta . . . the storm – when it broke – fell with pent-up force on [Kripal] . . . and there have been calls for it to be banned in India." See Radice, W. 'Kripal, Jeffrey: Kali's Child . . . [Review]' in *Bulletin-School of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of London*, Vol. 61 (1998) p. 160. Radice further notes that N. P. Sil, whose writing Radice describes as 'mischievous' actually contributed to this controversy, whilst concealing "the fact that his own [1991] book had been an out-and-out attempt to debunk the saint." Ibid., p. 160.

38 Sil, N. P. 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Research: Hagiography versus Hermeneutics' in *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (Oct., 2001) p. 358.
39 Atmajnanananda, Swami 'Scandals, Cover-Ups, and Other Imagines Occurrences in the Life of Ramakrsna: An Examination of Jeffrey Kripal's *Kali's Child*' in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 1, Pt. 2 (Aug., 1997) p. 402.
40 Roland, A. 'Ramakrishna: Mystical, Erotic, or Both?' in *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Spring, 1998) p. 33.
41 Sil, N. P. 'Vivekananda's Ramakrishna: An Untold Story of Mythmaking and Propoganda' in *Numen*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1993) p. 42.
42 Goldman, R. P. 'Transsexualism, Gender and Anxiety in Traditional India' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 113, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1993) p. 384.
43 Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited*, pp. 35–36.
44 Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 5–6.
45 Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited*, p. 38.
46 Raab, 'Is There Anything Transcendent About Transcendence?,' pp. 332–333.
47 Ibid., p. 332.
48 McDaniel, J. *The Madness of the Saints: Ecstatic Religion in Bengal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989) p. 3.
49 Ibid.
50 Mascaro, J. *The Bhagavad Gita* (London: Penguin, 1962) p. 82.
51 McDaniel, *The Madness of the Saints*, p. 97.
52 Goldman, 'Transsexualism, Gender and Anxiety in Traditional India,' p. 376.
53 CW III, p. 96.
54 CW IV, p. 187.
55 That is, during lectures given in New York and London in 1896, which were explicitly aimed at situating Hinduism within a universal, exportable framework of philosophy.
56 See, for example, Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 33–35.
57 Stark, C. *God of All: Sri Ramakrishna's Approach to Religious Plurality* (Cape Cod: Claude Stark, Inc., 1974) pp. 52–67.
58 A devotee within the Ramakrishna Movement, Stark dedicates his self-published volume to Swami Akhilananda.
59 For example, Cush, D. & Robinson, C. 'The Contemporary Construction of Hindu Identity: Hindu Universalism and Hindu Nationalism' in *DISKUS*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994) accessed online at http://jbasr.com/basr/diskus/diskus1-6/CUSH_ROB.TXT (accessed 01/10/18).
60 Chapter 4, Verse 11. Of course, the *Gita* has been interpreted by various commentators as primarily an *Advaita* text (Shankara) and a *bhakti* text (Ramanuja and Madhva). However, it is its interpretation as a *bhakti* text that would appear to be most consistent with the original.
61 Matchett, 'The Teaching of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekananda,' p. 179.
62 Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1552.
63 The descriptions of Ramakrishna's experiences of these two religious traditions are here kept intentionally short, as the second half of this chapter engages more fully with specific claims to religious experience during these periods in Ramakrishna's life.
64 Rai (sometime transliterated as Gobinda Ray) was a recent convert to Islam, and Saradananda admitted that he did not know whether or not Rai carried out all expected Muslim social customs, highlighting the 'light' touch that Ramakrishna would have experienced with this rather superficial exposure to Islam. Indeed, Nikhilananda states unequivocally that Ramakrishna was not "formally initiated into their [i.e. non-Hindu] doctrines" and Saradananda describes Rai as something akin to a peripatetic religious seeker 'thirsting after truth' when he

notes that "having studied various religious doctrines and come in contact with different religious communities, he was at last attracted by the liberal doctrine of Islam." See Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 57 and Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. 1, pp. 298–299. Concerning the convert-status of Rai, Kripal also wittily notes that "one would be hard pressed to find a less Muslim name than *Gobinda* (an appellation of Krsna)." See Kripal, *Kali's Child*, p. 165.

65 Nikhilananda specifically mentions Ramakrishna's participation in 'Islamic devotions.' Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 55.
66 Ibid.
67 Mriganananda, Swami *Yata Mat Tata Path: Hindu Aikyer Bhitti* (Jadavpur: Srisatyananda Devayatan, 1994) cited in Sil, 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Research,' p. 355. This statement must be clarified – the meaning here is not that the same Ultimate Reality cannot be found through diverse religious traditions, but that the doctrinal, sectarian, understandings of deity remain specific to each tradition.
68 Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 58.
69 It should be noted that the hagiographies attribute the swiftness and success of Ramakrishna's practice of Christianity to the influence of Kali – indeed, "scarcely had that desire [to follow Christianity] arisen in his mind when the Divine Mother fulfilled it in a marvellous way and blessed him." Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. 1, p. 338.
70 Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 56.
71 Stark, *God of All*, pp. 56–57.
72 Nirvedananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renissance* (Calcutta: RMIC, 1940) pp. 94–95, cited in Stark, *God of All*, p. 58.
73 Barker, G. A. & Gregg, S. E. *Jesus Beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) p. 4.
74 Note that here the Buddha is viewed as somehow limited, in direct contrast to Ramakrishna, who of course, is viewed by his devotees as being perfectly able to 'speak out his realizations.'
75 Ghanananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message* (London: Ramakrshna *Vedanta* Centre, 1970) pp. 92–93, cited in Stark, *God of All*, p. 68.
76 Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, pp. 196–197.
77 Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda*, p. 27.
78 *Life*, I, p. 55.
79 Sil notes the reminiscences of Mahendranath Datta, Vivekananda's younger brother who noted Vivekananda's objection to visiting Ramakrishna in the first instance by stating: "He is a worshipper of idols and so how could he be a nice fellow?" Mahendranath Datta, *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir Jivaner Ghatanavali*, Vol 1, p. 15, cited in Sil, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 36.
80 Again, Sil notes the writings of Mahendranath Datta who recalled that Vivekananda could initially see no point in visiting Ramakrishna, as he has learned all he needed from Mill, Hamilton and Locke: "'What does he know?' Narendranath inquired . . . 'If he could feed me *rasagolla*, well and good, otherwise I'll fix that ignorant bum by boxing his ears.'" Mahendranath Datta, *Ramakrishner Anudhyan*, p. 25, cited in Sil, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 36.
81 Kripal, *Kali's Child*, p. 169.
82 CW I, p. 24.
83 See Chapter 6.
84 CW I, pp. 17–18.
85 By problematic, I here mean that a Christian phrase is sometime used by commentators to interpret a Hindu phenomenon, thus blurring the meaning by using a comparative methodology, rather than seeking to understand the term within a Hindu perspective using Hindu terminology.

86 Hardy, F. *The Religious Culture of India: Power, Love and Wisdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 298.
87 Ibid., p. 39.
88 Hardy, *The Religious Culture of India*, p. 299.
89 Ibid., p. 303.
90 Parrinder, G. *Avatar and Incarnation* (London: Faber & Faber, 1970) pp. 50–53.
91 Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 156.
92 Johnson, W. J. *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 39.
93 Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda*, p. 28. The view that Ramakrishna was an *avatar* is the 'official' view of the Ramakrishna Movement to this day. See, for example, Tapasyananda, Swami *Sri Ramakrishna: Life and Teachings* (Mylapore: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002) p. 34.
94 Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 199.
95 French also notes that Vivekananda only accepted his role as a spiritual successor to Ramakrishna a few days before the latter's death. See, French, *The Swami's Wide Waters*, pp. 44–45.
96 CW II, p. 42.
97 See, for example, Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 134.
98 Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 15.
99 Sil, 'Vivekananda's Ramakrishna,' pp. 45–6. It is interesting to note that Vivekananda also wished to suppress narratives concerning miracle-claims surrounding Ramakrishna – see also p. 54.
100 Sil, 'Is Ramakrishna a Vedantin, a Tantrika or a Vaishnava?,' p. 213.
101 Sil, 'Vivekananda's Ramakrishna,' p. 57.
102 See in particular Kripal, *Kali's Child*, and Sil, N. P. *Ramakrsna Paramahamsa: A Psychological Profile* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991).
103 See, for example, Sil, 'Is Ramaskrishna a Vedantin, a Tantrika or a Vaishnava?.'
104 Sil, 'Vivekananda's Ramakrishna.'
105 Originally recorded in Bengali by Mahendranath Gupta, now published Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*.
106 Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*.
107 Sil, *Ramakrsna Paramahamsa*, pp. 100–103.
108 This is the shortened form of Vivekananda's pre-monastic name.
109 Translation Sil, *Ramakrsna Paramahamsa*, p. 103.
110 Higher spiritual consciousness. In the *Advaita* [non-dual] system of philosophy, this is a point at which the individual realises their oneness with the unity of existence.
111 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 632. Note: the 'Divine Mother' is Kali, the Goddess whom Ramakrishna served at his temple complex in Dakshineswar, North Calcutta.
112 *Lila* = Sanskrit 'play.' This play recounted the childhood of the Hindu Saint Chaitanya.
113 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, pp. 553–557.
114 Kinsley, D. '"Through the Looking Glass": Divine Madness in the Hindu Religious Tradition' in *History of Religions*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (May, 1974) p. 286.
115 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 4.
116 Atmajnanananda, 'Scandals, Cover-Ups, and Other Imagines Occurrences in the Life of Ramakrsna.'
117 Sil, *Ramakrsna Paramahamsa*, p. 103.
118 Cited in ibid., p. 104.

119 Cited in Sarma, D. S. 'The Experience of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa' in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Mar., 1927) p. 200.
120 Kripal, *Kali's Child*, p. 268. The original diary entry of Mahendranath Gupta is dated 7th September 1883, and alternative translations are given in Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 282 and Gupta, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, Vol. 3, pp. 81–82.
121 Whilst many historians and commentators have tended to use the term 'caste' as a catch-all regarding Indian/Hindu social and religious hierarchy, Killingley is careful to distinguish between *Varna* and *Jati*. *Varna*, the traditional fourfold classification of society into the division of *Brahmin* (Priest) *Ksatriya* (Warrior) *Vaisya* (Merchant) and *Sudra* (Serf) should be understood as being textually based, originating in the *Purusa Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*, and representing a fixed number of divisions with an immovable hierarchy, which is a specifically Hindu tradition. *Jati*, the "indefinite number of divisions in South Asian society, characterized by heredity, endogamy, commensality, an actual or attributed common occupation, and actual or attributed peculiarities of diet" should be understood as being a complex network of changeable hierarchies and practices, based on observation of South Asian society, where *jati* is a pan-Asian social concept, which is not limited to Hindu traditions. See Killingley, D. 'Varna and Caste in Hindu Apologetic' in Killingley, D., Menski, W. & Firth, S. (eds.) *Hindu Ritual and Society*, STIMW 2 (Newcastle upon Tyne: Grevatt & Grevatt, 1991) pp. 9–11.
122 CW I, p. 483.
123 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 34.
124 Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, Vol. 1, p. 339.
125 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 34.
126 CW IV, pp. 138–153. It is particularly interesting to note that the Advaita Ashrama press, official publishers of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, have edited this lecture so as to appear next to Vivekananda's text *My Master*, even though the texts are based on lectures given four years apart. This deliberate sequencing ensures sections on Ramakrishna and Christ are coupled together when read by a predominantly Western, Christian-orientated, audience.
127 CW IV, pp. 154–187.
128 A lengthy period of Ramakrishna's *samadhi* is alluded to in *My Master* (*CW* IV p. 169), but no details are given, and from the text it appeared as if he was simply in deep prayer – no description is entered into at all.
129 This phrase is taken from the title of a lecture given by Vivekananda on 12th January 1896 – his 33rd birthday.
130 Sil, *Ramakrishna Revisited*, p. 38.
131 The *Kathamrita* was originally published in five volumes between 1897 and 1932, and was not translated until as late as 1942. The *Leelaprasanga* was published in Bengali between 1911 and 1918, but was not published in translation until 1952.
132 Sil, 'Vivekananda's Ramakrishna,' p. 38.
133 CW V, p. 53.
134 Ibid., p. 503.
135 Matchett, 'The Teaching of Ramakrishna in Relation to the Hindu Tradition and as Interpreted by Vivekananda.'
136 Ibid., p. 179.
137 Chattopadhyaya notes that Chavkravarty was only initiated as a disciple by Vivekananda on 3rd May 1897, meaning it is highly unlikely that this conversation took place before this date. The year 1898 is suggested as it is feasible that

this dialogue occurred during the July–September 1898 session in Almora. See Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in India*, p. 232.
138 CW V, pp. 384–385.
139 Ibid., p. 389.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
142 Ibid.
143 See Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and *Bhakti*,' p. 1546.
144 Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, p. 197.

4 Formulating Hinduism

> Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta Philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Each one is necessary.[1]

Several commentators have analysed Vivekananda's construction of Hinduism in recent scholarship[2] and this work will not be replicated here. The aim of this chapter is not to outline the shape of Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism but to explore its nature with specific reference to his approach to non-Hindu traditions. It is, of course, crucial to do this in cultural and historical context.

In her recent work *A History of Modern Yoga*,[3] De Michelis situates Vivekananda's teachings in the context of his audience and their needs. De Michelis focuses on Vivekananda's formulation of a fourfold *yoga*-based teaching as the crux of a modern, teachable, exportable form of Hinduism. She describes this as Vivekananda's 'turn West,'[4] which she argues must be seen as Vivekananda's move to engage with what he saw as the Western obsession with occultism, resulting in Neo-*Vedanta* becoming "fully engaged in the shaping of New Age religion."[5] For De Michelis, the purpose of this codified fourfold structure was to ensure that "a reinterpreted, simplified and modernized Vedanta was presented as the exemplary form of 'Universal Religion,' capable of catering for all religious needs through different types of Yoga."[6] In this chapter, I will briefly outline each of these *yogas*, whilst highlighting the relevant themes present in Vivekananda's formulation of a *yoga*-based Hinduism. The themes explored are (1) systematisation; (2) privileging of non-dualism; (3) hierarchisation; (4) inclusivism and universalism; (5) the use of science; and (6) ambiguities and inconsistencies.

Systematisation

Vivekananda constructed a fourfold system of *yoga* designed to encompass all paths to the Divine – a formulation of Hinduism as a strong, coherent and workable religious philosophy which enabled Vivekananda to project Indian ideals to the West, in his attempt to promulgate a relationship based

on Indian equality with (and at times superiority to) the West, rather than colonial subservience. To this end, Vivekananda created a fourfold structure for human religious practice. Vivekananda's basic use and understandings of the *yogas* is given in this section, and then relevant lectures and writings are referred to in the specific analysis in subsequent sections of this chapter.

The first of the *yogas* is *bhakti*,[7] which is intense personal devotion to a chosen deity, often translated as 'devotion'[8] or 'love,'[9] and the term has come to be associated with the ritualistic elements of Hindu religion. Perhaps a fuller understanding of the term is gained from the translations "being a part of . . . belonging to . . . attachment"[10] which emphasise the relational aspect of the term. Lipner also describes *bhakti* in similar terms when he speaks of *bhakti* as deriving:

> from the root bhaj, meaning 'to share, to share in, to share with.' So, in this meaning, in the context of a personal relationship, it has a strong connotation of mutuality, of mingling, even on occasion to the point of a kind of co-penetration; the whole person, not least the eternal side, is involved in this communicative relationship.[11]

The second *yoga*, that of *jnana*, is often translated as 'knowledge/knowing,'[12] and is central to Vivekananda's *Advaitic* philosophy. More precisely translated as 'true or superior knowledge,'[13] *jnana* was, for Vivekananda, the superior way to rid the self of *avidya*, or ignorance. Rambachan maintains that Vivekananda denies the importance of *sruti* texts in attaining this knowledge, relegating them in favour of personal experience, arguing that "for Vivekananda, sruti is not a self-validating source of knowledge."[14] In Hinduism, *Sruti*, often translated as 'that which is heard,' is traditionally understood to mean texts which have been revealed to seers or *rishis* and are therefore "a direct, uncreated, and eternal transmission of a non-human power."[15] In Brahminical orthodoxy, this classification of scriptures includes the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. In contradistinction to the *Sruti* texts, are the *Smriti* texts ('that which is remembered') which are "regarded as having been mediated through human authorship"[16] and include the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana, Puranas* and the *Dharmashastras*. Therefore, it may be seen that his reluctance to revert to *sruti* as authority follows logically from Vivekananda's devaluing of doctrine, text, symbol and ritual – Rambachan argues that, for Vivekananda, the removal of *avidya*[17] is paramount. To achieve this, Vivekananda sets out the necessary criteria for a follower of *jnana*: first, complete renunciation from the fruits of work and all associated enjoyments; second, complete control of the mind, that is holding it steady in the search for equilibrium by philosophical reasoning, knowledge and Will alone; and third, *titiksha* – the bearing of all miseries without complaint.

The third *yoga, karma*, which is closely associated with Vivekananda's conception of *Jiva-seva*, or personal service, became of enduring importance in his response to the 'physical, intellectual [and] spiritual'[18] needs of his

contemporary India and "his attempt to mobilize Hindu society."[19] Outlined by Beckerlegge as a form of 'social service,'[20] *seva* can be loosely understood as an act of charity inspired by religious values. The desired result of *seva*, for Vivekananda, was the reviving of a homeland weakened by colonial rule, and the means for this revival was *karma yoga*. Vivekananda explicitly links this *yoga* to the Sanskrit *kri*, meaning action, in which he formulates a *yoga* of work leading to knowledge – a perception of action, both personal and cosmic, which ensures that, in Vivekananda's understanding of the term:

> we are all doing Karma all the time. I am talking to you: that is Karma. You are listening: that is Karma. We breathe: that is Karma. We walk: Karma. Everything we do, physical or mental, is Karma, and it leaves its marks on us.[21]

This understanding of *karma* as an individual process of action should also be contextualised within a cosmic understanding of the concept which argues that "everyone is conditioned and determined by his conduct [action]"[22] and that this conditioning is played out in *samsara* – the cycle of life, death and rebirth to which we are tied through our actions. Reichenbach notes that "the law of karma is variously described by different authors as identical with, parallel to, or an application of the law of universal causation,"[23] which affects the rebirth of individuals. Crucially, however, "it is held that actions which are not performed out of desire for the fruits have no karmic consequences"[24] – and as it is the karmic consequences which tie the reborn individual to the cycle of *samsara*, by performing selfless acts, the individual may be able to achieve *moksha* (liberation from *samsara*). Detachment from the fruits of our labour, which is the first characteristic of *karma yoga*, therefore underpins Vivekananda's understanding of *karma* on a metaphysical level, for he links the actions of individual lives with *karmic* build-up over multiple lifetimes. Specifically mentioning Jesus and the Buddha in this respect, Vivekananda argues that their importance and spiritual standing is a result of the *karmic* accretions of many lives.[25]

This 'work' or action is interpreted by Vivekananda in a relativistic way – correct action (*kri*) in one society or social circumstance, may well be incorrect in another, for example the practice of cousins marrying.[26] This social example leads Vivekananda to view *karma* as a relative concept, inextricably linked with individual circumstance:

> However men and women may vary individually, there is a unity in the background. . . . Our duty is to encourage every one in his struggle to live up to his own highest ideal, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the truth.[27]

For Vivekananda, *karma* is located within the personal framework of individual *dharma* or *sva-dharma* and the social framework of *varnashramadharma*,

in a practical effort to balance personal spiritual development and social religious harmony[28] – indeed, Carpenter sees this as a key role of *karma yoga*.[29] Vivekananda stated:

> The Karma-Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God . . . because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory, the very same problem to which the Jnani applies his reason and inspiration and the Bhakta his love.[30]

The fourth *yoga*, that of *raja* was, for Vivekananda, 'the method of religion'[31] – the practice of meditation that lay at the heart of all religious searching. Central to Vivekananda's framework of *raja yoga* (literally 'Royal *yoga*')[32] is his understanding of 'realisation,' a concept that both De Michelis and Rambachan argue lies at the heart of Vivekananda's Neo-*Vedanta*.[33] Understood by Vivekananda to mean a direct and personal understanding of an *Advaitic* conception of reality,[34] this concept is crucial to the current study as it underpinned Vivekananda's view of authority in religious traditions, both in personal religious experience and in communal textual or revelatory claims for authority, which necessarily affected his approach to non-Hindu traditions.

Raja yoga is best understood as a form of practice, or method, in attaining religious realisation through control of the material body and the immaterial mind. As such, it is different to the other formulated *yogas* of Vivekananda's fourfold typology, in that it transcends *bhakti, jnana* and *karma* by "essentially [being] a psychological method that practitioners of the other three paths employ."[35] The practice is linked by Vivekananda to the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali, which he describes as "the highest authority and [the] text book on Raja Yoga."[36] Vivekananda's use of Patanjali is, however, eclectic to say the least – by his own admission, the second half of *Raja Yoga* is based upon 'a rather free translation'[37] of Patanjali's aphorisms which "avoid[s] technicalities as far as possible, and . . . keep[s] to the free and easy style of conversation."[38] As Sen has also stated,[39] Patanjali is far closer to the *Samkhya* system of philosophy than *Advaita*, thus providing a further example of Vivekananda's eclectic use of sources, as we have already seen in his formulation of other *yogas*.[40] In addition to Patanjali, Vivekananda uses the *Kurma Purana* as a source of authority, on which he bases his text '*Raja Yoga in Brief*,' which appears as the last chapter of the first half of *Raja Yoga*.[41] Confusingly, this work adds little to an understanding of the *practice* of *raja yoga*, as it simply gives the mythological background to Vivekananda's conception of *raja yoga*.

Further to Vivekananda's use of Patanjali in his formulation of *raja yoga*, De Michelis highlights the themes of *prana*[42] and *samadhi*[43] in Vivekananda's interpretation of *raja yoga*.[44] The formulation of a *prana* model of *raja yoga*, which Vivekananda understood as "the vital force in every being"[45] is based upon a systematic attempt to legitimise religious and

philosophical views with links to empiricism and naturalism, rather than supernaturalism. Indeed, in the preface to *Raja Yoga* (1896) Vivekananda states that:

> The idea of supernatural beings may rouse to a certain extent the power of action in man, but it also brings spiritual decay. It brings dependence; it brings fear; it brings superstition. It degenerates into a horrible belief in the natural weakness of man. There is no supernatural, says the Yogi, but there are in nature gross manifestations and subtle manifestations. The subtle are the causes, the gross the effects. The gross can be easily perceived by the senses; not so the subtle. The practice of Raja-Yoga will lead to the acquisition of the more subtle perceptions.[46]

Whilst it is important to outline the shape of Vivekananda's understanding and framework of a *yoga*-based form of Hinduism, it is equally important, in the context of the current study, to focus upon the most relevant sections of that framework. As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the immediate focus must be on the nature of the framework with specific reference to its implications for approach to non-Hindu traditions. To this end, there will be a heavy concentration on *bhakti yoga* and *jnana yoga*, as Vivekananda's understanding of these two religious paths, and their relationship to each other, lies at the heart of his approach to non-Hindu traditions. Relevant examples from *karma yoga* and *raja yoga* will be offered throughout the text as supportive, or contextualising evidence where appropriate.

Privileging non-dualism

All publications produced by the Ramakrishna Math and Mission subsequent to Vivekananda's death have firmly positioned Vivekananda within an *Advaita Vedanta* philosophical framework,[47] and modern scholarship[48] is in agreement that Vivekananda should be seen within a Vedantic framework, and indeed as one of the principal propagators of the Vedantic philosophy that has become known as Neo-*Vedanta*.[49] Neo-*Vedanta* is the phrase used to describe a major stream in the Hindu reform movement of the nineteenth century, often manifested in the social action and religious practices of key Hindu figures from Roy onwards which provided "a strong ideology to link into Indian nationalism . . . and the construction of Hinduism as a world religion."[50]

Here, then, Vivekananda must be located within a specific philosophical tradition. It is clear that Vivekananda's writings are not unique in origin, but that they represent the progression of his thoughts and actions in accordance with those who have gone before. Principal to Vivekananda in this respect was Sankara, whose work on *bhakti* and *jnana* is of particular relevance.

Suthren Hirst categorises into two the common conclusions reached with regard to Sankara's treatment of *bhakti*:

> The first implies that *bhakti* is of minimal interest to Sankara because his overriding concern is with *jnana*. . . . The second . . . identifies *bhakti* as 'the sentiment of love' or some such notion and contends that this is fully present in Sankara's writings.[51]

The first of these positions often betrays a superficial reading of Sankara – providing an oversimplified conclusion based on Sankara's avoidance of the actual term *bhakti*. The second position provides for a wider understanding of *bhakti*, based on deconstructing a monolithic view of its meaning. This is crucially important in the exploration of Vivekananda's use of *bhakti*, for we shall see that Vivekananda distinguishes the different aspects of *bhakti*, creating a hierarchy between these and also between preparatory stages of *bhakti* and *jnana, karma* and *raja*.

Importantly, Suthren Hirst concludes that it is the *relationship* between *bhakti* and *jnana* that is of importance to Sankara, and it is here that we find a foreshadowing of Vivekananda's use of a hierarchical approach to the two *yogas*.[52] For Sankara, *bhakti* is a path to a true higher knowledge, situated within, and culminating in *jnana*. This position is best explained in terms of the distinction Sankara makes between *saguna Brahman* (Ultimate Reality with qualities) and *nirguna Brahman* (Ultimate Reality without qualities).

It has been noted that for Sankara the terms *saguna Brahman, saguna upasana* and *saguna vidya*[53] fall within "that domain of misconception (*avidya*) where we are still bound up with actions, factors and their results, the realm of ritual and meditation, not the realm of liberating knowledge (*vidya*)."[54] For Sankara, this 'misconception' lay at the root of vastly popular *bhakti* traditions within his society – especially the Tamil *Bhakti* traditions which flourished during the reign of Narasimhavarman II Rajasimha (c. 690–c. 728).[55] Rather than dismissing *bhakti*, or indeed suggesting a dual-reality of *Brahman* as Lott has argued,[56] Sankara was here positioning the newly emergent devotional movement within his *Advaitic* framework, viewing it as a stepping stone to true *vidya*. Indeed, he argues that:

> the real issue for the Advaitin teacher is to draw the pupil from such conventional experiences to ultimate realization, through the proper interpretation of sruti, and this can only be done through the very concepts and language that must eventually be left behind.[57]

Indeed, it is through Sankara's insistence on the usefulness of *bhakti*, and not its denial, that we find a direct link to Vivekananda. According to Suthren Hirst, Sankara saw *bhakti* as a condition that "leads naturally . . . to the knowledge of ultimate reality as non-different."[58] Suthren Hirst argues that

Sankara "does not philosophize in a cultural vacuum,"[59] but was developing a strong *Advaitic* apologetic through his commentaries, in direct response to the contemporaneous growth in temple worship and popular devotion. The same process can be said to be at work in the case of Vivekananda. In the previous chapters, I have situated Vivekananda within an inherited religious worldview, and the impact of this is perhaps never clearer than in his treatment of *bhakti* – indeed, Williams has previously outlined the effect of the Brahmo Samaj upon the young Narendra's approach to worship and belief, concluding that it instilled a definite distaste for *puja*-orientated practice.[60]

I will now turn to Vivekananda's treatment of *Vedanta*, in the light of his Sankara-influenced heritage. A detailed breakdown of the *Vedantic*, and specifically *Advaitic* framework within which Vivekananda framed his religious philosophy,[61] cannot be the focus of this work as it is a full study in itself.[62] It is, however, essential to view Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions within this Vedantic tradition. To this end, there follows a brief exploration of one of Vivekananda's key speeches on *Vedanta* – '*The Vedanta Philosophy*'[63] – which was originally delivered on 25th March 1896 at the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Society.

The speech, reportedly given in the presence of such luminaries as William James and Charles Lanman,[64] provides a simple summary of *Vedanta*, with an undeniable slant towards *Advaita*. When discussing the "three existences of the universe – God, soul, and nature,"[65] we find Vivekananda claiming that the *Advaita Vedantins* have "nearly the whole range of the Upanishads in their favour, [and they] build their philosophy entirely upon them."[66] It seems fair to say that this statement would not be supported by *Vishishtadvaita* or *Dvaita* commentators but, as we see time and again, Vivekananda is returning to his own interpretation of religion, and specifically *Vedanta*, using this as a framework for his approach to non-Hindu traditions.

Vivekananda's speech, which is only around 3,000 words and is not likely to have lasted more than 15 to 20 minutes at most, goes on to briefly outline concepts of *Maya, Jivanmukti* and *Sat, Cit* and *Ananda*, but at all times frames them in an *Advaitic* mould – indeed, at one point Vivekananda describes followers of Shankaracharya as the only 'Advaitists proper.'[67] The discussion which followed Vivekananda's talk is in many ways more illuminating than the brief speech itself. The following question and answer are particularly revealing:

Q – Is the Advaita antagonistic to dualism?

A – The Upanishads not being in a systematised form, it was easy for philosophers to take up texts when they liked for their system. . . . Yet we find all the different schools of thought in the Upanishads. Our solution is that the Advaita is not antagonistic to the Dvaita (dualism). We say the latter is only one of three steps. Religion always takes three steps. The first is dualism. Then man gets to a higher state, partial non-dualism.

> And at last he finds he is one with the universe. Therefore the three do not contradict but fulfil.[68]

From this brief exchange, we are able to see the way in which Vivekananda is clearly systematising and valuing different approaches to the Divine – this statement advocates a clear three-stage path to true Divine knowledge. Indeed, Vivekananda's scheme to some extent is reminiscent of fulfilment theology (which was also used, much to the distaste of a number of Hindus, by Christian writers such as Farquhar in later years)[69] when he claims that *Vedanta* is the culmination of lesser systems of thought.[70] In another such exchange at the Harvard session, Vivekananda's reply is again illuminating: "Q – What is the Indian idea of the Christian Faith? A – That it is very good. The Vedanta will take in every one."[71]

This inclusivistic yet hierarchical approach to faith systems is crucial to the current study,[72] for in these statements we see the kernel of Vivekananda's inter-religious philosophy which underpins his entire approach to non-Hindu traditions. Beckerlegge has noted[73] Devdas's description of Vivekananda's 'ladder theory' of religions, by which is meant the progress through stages of understanding, as outlined in the three-step process used by Vivekananda in the above Harvard quotations. Devdas's work,[74] whilst focused upon the specifics of Vivekananda's Hindu framework of philosophy is useful for the current study as it emphasises the reflective nature of Vivekananda's philosophy. Vivekananda's hierarchical view of faith systems projected both inwardly regarding his construction of a Hindu framework and outwardly in his approach to non-Hindu traditions, and in this respect, Vivekananda can be located within a recognisable Hindu milieu of hierarchy and relativism, about which Van der Veer,[75] Dumont[76] and Hacker[77] have commented.

Hierarchisation and inclusivism

The previous section has highlighted how Vivekananda invariably brings his argument back to the superiority of a monistic, *Advaita Vedanta* interpretation of reality. In doing this, Vivekananda uses a consistent system of ranking between *margas*, or paths to the divine, which results in a form of Hierarchical Inclusivism in favour of *Advaita*. By Hierarchical Inclusivism, I mean a system of thought which valorises one philosophical or religious approach above others, but that accepts the presence of spiritual or religious truths within other traditions, *in relation to one's own tradition*. This is best exampled by detailing Vivekananda's formulation of *bhakti yoga*.

For Vivekananda, the central theme of *bhakti* is one of divine love – the adoration of the Godhead by the devotee to the exclusion of all else. However, he is aware that individuals in their fragile spiritual condition are not capable of such adoration, and so we see Vivekananda conceptualising *bhakti* as comprising different levels.[78] The two basic levels in this scheme are those of *Gauni Bhakti* and *Para Bhakti*.

The digital Bengali–English and Sanskrit–English dictionaries of the University of Chicago translate *Gauna*, respectively, as 'minor, unimportant, secondary'[79] and 'subordinate, secondary.'[80] The word is used by Vivekananda in his writings in place of Sankara's *saguna bhakti*, and is defined by Vivekananda himself as 'preparatory'[81] level devotion – an interesting description, as it immediately informs us that there must, for Vivekananda, be a higher level to which one should aspire – *Para Bhakti* – at once introducing a hierarchy within *bhakti* and its relationship to *moksha*. Equating with the concept of *saguna*, *Gauni Bhakti* is used by Vivekananda to describe the devotional aspect of religion that is reliant upon images, symbols and rituals.

Vivekananda maintains that the secret to *bhakti*'s appeal for most devotees is its basis in emotion. In the same way that Vivekananda saw divine love in all aspects of life, so he saw raw human emotion throughout all of our existence, which is why he believed *bhakti* was a natural path for humans to take – the secret was to channel this emotion to the love of God. Vivekananda maintained that there was nothing intrinsically wrong with passions, feelings and emotions – they are not signs of human frailty or vulnerability; it is just that people tend to direct their power and influence towards mundane, or human things. Vivekananda advocated focusing one's emotional energy on God, and to explain this, he used an analogy: "The same fire that cooks a meal for us may burn a child, and it is no fault of the fire if it does so; the difference lies in the way in which it is used."[82]

Arguing in favour of popular *bhakti*, Vivekananda states that:

> In order to attain to the state where we can realise [the true nature of God], we must pass through the concrete – just as you see children learn through the concrete first – and gradually come to the abstract. . . . We shall have to begin now in the concrete, through forms and words, prayers and ceremonies . . . and then step by step, we shall come to the abstract understanding.[83]

Therefore, according to Vivekananda, if we understand that the *Devas* and personifications are themselves but conduits for the true ultimate reality of *Brahman*, then these can be a useful starting point for spiritual growth.

Even while advocating this form of *bhakti*, Vivekananda stressed that spiritual aspirants should not remain at the *Gauni* level of understanding but should progress to the *Para Bhakti* stage of spiritual engagement.

Para Bhakti is translated by Vivekananda as *bhakti* in its 'supreme forms.'[84] For Sankara, this was the concept of a *nirguna* comprehension of *Brahman*, or specifically *Isvara*. Indeed, in Sankara's commentaries, "the line between lower and higher Brahman is not clear. Or to be more precise, it is the highest or supreme Brahman who is deemed to be both subject of knowledge and of some meditations."[85] In his works, we therefore find Sankara locating *saguna* (*Gauni Bhakti* in Vivekananda's vocabulary) within the framework of a *nirguna* (*Para Bhakti*) understanding of reality – indeed, for Sankara the *nirguna*

understanding always supersedes any *saguna* conception of reality. We will see in the following section that Vivekananda, with his value-laden use of 'supreme' instead of *nirguna*, and his oft-repeated distinction of 'higher and lower,' builds upon this hierarchical relationship between the two levels/types of *bhakti*, which forms the basis of his approach to non-Hindu traditions.

A close reading of Vivekananda indicates that he believed that the ritualistic devotion categorised as *Gauni Bhakti* served a strong purpose – he believed it was the starting point from which humanity could grow spiritually. However, Vivekananda was concerned greatly that humans would become spiritually stunted if they did not see beyond the limits of this approach. Vivekananda therefore stated that to progress towards *Para Bhakti*, or the higher ideal of *bhakti*, humans must realise several truths.[86] First, they must not reduce ultimate reality or *Brahman* to a human level, through focus on the *Devas* or *murti* of choice, but should use the images as a means for understanding *Brahman*'s omnipresence. Second, spiritual aspirants must not be restricted by human-made religious distinctions, but must see all religious experience as valid and true in its communion with God. Third, aspirants must undertake to perform *istha-nishtha*;[87] "steadfast devotion to the chosen ideal,"[88] and Vivekananda believed this should be done in two important ways – through a true understanding of the concept of Love, and through true dedication to a renunciatory ideal.

The theme of renunciation is particularly important throughout all of Vivekananda's writings, and he sees it as one of the unifying themes of the world's religious traditions. Vivekananda believed renunciation to be at the core of Jesus' and the Buddha's teachings, and his own Guru, Ramakrishna, was to Vivekananda an example of the ideal renouncer. In the New York lecture given on 27th January 1896, Vivekananda even went as far as describing renunciation as the true meaning of all religions: "This is the stepping-stone and the real centre and the real heart of all spiritual culture – renunciation. This is religion – renunciation."[89]

For Vivekananda, the path towards renunciation for the *Bhakta* was reflective of humankind's spiritual and social growth as a whole, and it is on this journey that we need to realise detachment from all texts, symbols, temples, churches, *avatars*, incarnations, sects and nationalities. Vivekananda argued that when *Para Bhakti* is practised, all of these things become unimportant as we concentrate all our energies on loving God. It was by releasing the baggage of all of these human constructions and categories, in Vivekananda's opinion, that we may be able to fully love God and realise our oneness with God. Again, quoting from the 27th January lecture: "Forms vanish, rituals fly away, books are superseded; images, temples, churches, religions and sects, countries and nationalities – all these little limitations and bondages fall off by their own nature from him who knows this love of God."[90] The use of the terms 'limitations' and 'bondages' is a clear statement of Vivekananda's hierarchical view of the usefulness of *Gauni*-level spiritual and sectarian practices.

In his lecture on the 3rd February 1896, Vivekananda stated that love for God was manifest in three ways.[91] First, there is a 'reverence' for God – a sensation that could be equated with Ninian Smart's later notion of the 'sense of the sacred'[92] or with Rudolf Otto's seminal notion of the 'Idea of the Holy.'[93] Vivekananda equates this with the feeling described by devotees who visit temples or churches, or who are in the company of holy men or women, and also argues that this is present in all religions; indeed, arguing that it is 'natural for the human heart'[94] to pay reverence in this way as it is part of our human nature to react to this spiritual sensation. Second, Vivekananda describes a love that takes pleasure specifically in God – *priti*, which concentrates our sense-perceptions, not on materialistic matters, but on God: "What is wanted of the Bhakta is this very kind of intense love which has, however, to be directed at God."[95] For Vivekananda, this act of directing love towards God plays an important part in the process of lessening the importance of the Self and turning towards the ideal of renunciation, which marks an important step on the 'progress' of the spiritual adherent within Vivekananda's hierarchical system. Third, Vivekananda outlines the manifestation of love labelled *viraha* – the sense of intense misery at the absence of a loved one. It is this feeling that Vivekananda argues that the *Bhakta* needs to reach in order to attain an understanding of *Para Bhakti*, for only someone who feels absolute misery at not having attained or experienced God can fully concentrate their energies on the divine. This concentration on God is then taken a step higher when the *Bhakta*'s life itself is maintained only for the sake of God – when the *Bhakta* considers life only beautiful and worthy on account of their love for God, and thus achieves the renunciatory ideal of *Para Bhakti*.[96]

In Vivekananda's ideal scheme, the *Bhakta* moves from *reverence* of God, through *pleasure* in God to a sense of misery if we do not achieve *knowledge* of God – a condition that could be described as 'neediness' for the divine. Vivekananda also describes at some length what he understands as true love, or devotion. First, Vivekananda states unequivocally that love should have no bargaining element – the devotee should seek nothing in return for their love – it should be unconditional; indeed, this is the very centre of the difference between *Gauni* and *Para* in that the former is self-centred (selfish) and the latter is other-centred (selfless). It is therefore clear from this discussion of the finer details of *Para Bhakti* that Vivekananda believed that the lower stages of *Gauni Bhakti*, such as petitionary prayer and human concern regarding worldly matters, would not qualify as true love for the Divine. Second, Vivekananda argued that love can have no fear, for fear of God negates true love – if you fear something you cannot truly love them – love will be clouded by this fear. Third, Vivekananda argues that the object of our love should have no rival – the devotee must concentrate wholly on God.[97]

Vivekananda, in his lecture of 17th February 1896,[98] describes the gradual shift in the aspirant *Bhakta*'s knowledge of, or attitude to, God.[99] In the first stage, *Shanta Bhakti*, Vivekananda describes the human mind as calm and

collected – without the madness or ecstatic devotion that comes later, and at a stage of spiritual development where the devotee has seen beyond mere symbols or ceremonies, but has not fully realised the intense love of God. Vivekananda notes this as a perfectly valid stage of spiritual development, as long as the devotee acknowledges the transitory nature of this stage. Second, there is *Dasya Bhakti*, the stage where the individual views himself or herself as a servant to the Lord. There remain problems with 'lower-level' spiritual aspirants approaching *Dasya Bhakti*, however, notably that devotees may seek reward, or praise for their work for the Lord, and that they see their 'master' as 'other' or 'separate.' Vivekananda leads us to the next stage of understanding, which is *Sakhya Bhakti*, where God is seen as a friend. This is different from the view of God as hierarchical master, as Vivekananda explains:

> Just as a man opens his heart to his friend and knows that the friend will never chide him for his faults but will always try to help him, just as there is the idea of equality between him and his friend, so equal love flows in and out between the worshipper and his friendly God.[100]

Here we see an elucidation of Vivekananda's belief in the equality of the Self and God – the first steps in the realisation of humanity's divine nature as one with God.

After viewing God as a friend, Vivekananda states that the devotee must learn to see the divine as a child, a stage labelled *Vatsalya-Bhakti*. Vivekananda stated that it was essential to view God in these terms as it represented further progression from the unacceptable view of God as a figure to be feared or revered:

> To conceive God as mighty, majestic, and glorious, as the Lord of the universe, or as the God of gods, the lover [devotee] says he does not care. It is to avoid this association with God of the fear-creating sense of power that he worships God as his own child. The mother and the father are not moved by awe in relation to the child; they cannot have any reverence for the child. They cannot think of asking any favour from the child.[101]

In the final stage, the devotee relates to God as a lover – the stage labelled *Madhura Bhakti*:

> What love shakes the whole nature of a man, what love runs through every atom of his being – makes him mad, makes him forget his own nature, transforms him, makes him either a God or a demon – as the love between man and woman? In this sweet representation of divine love God is our husband. We are all women; there are no men in this world; there is but One man, and this is He, our Beloved. All that love which man gives to woman, or woman to man, has here to be given up to the Lord.[102]

Vivekananda here creates an essential model of the perfect love between the sexes, where the man and woman become spiritually of 'one body.' Each partner loses his or her own nature as an individual and becomes one with the lover, thus reflecting Vivekananda's non-dualistic theology.

At this point of attaining true knowledge of God, the *Bhakta* would cease to see divisions of any kind. Immersed in the love of God, they would see that there are no differences in the universe between its constituent parts, and in human terms, the *Bhakta* would understand what Vivekananda described as the truth of the brotherhood of humanity:

> All rivers flow into the ocean. Even the drop of water coming down from the mountain side cannot stop its course after reaching a brook or a river, however big it may be; at last even that drop somehow does find its way to the ocean.[103]

For Vivekananda, *bhakti* was a path, valid within his hierarchical framework, the ultimate purpose of which was the renunciation of individuality and egotism, of all human trappings and creations, and the realisation of one's own nature as one with God. *bhakti*, in this scheme, should lead beyond devotion to an immanent deity with attributes (*saguna Brahman*, linked with *Gauni Bhakti*), and culminate in devotion to, and love for, a transcendent deity without attributes (*nirguna Brahman*, linked with *Para Bhakti*). Crucially, Vivekananda believed that humans were predisposed to *Gauni Bhakti* on their path towards *Para Bhakti*, and this allowed room for a plurality of religious paths, as outlined in Vivekananda's words in a short lecture titled '*Bhakti or Devotion*' first given in New York on 9th February 1896:

> And yet how people fight among themselves, calling one another idolaters! In other words, each says, his idol is right, and the others' are wrong. Therefore, we should get rid of these childish notions. We should get beyond the prattle of men who think that religion is merely a mass of frothy words, that it is only a system of doctrines; to whom religion is only intellectual assent or dissent; to whom religion is believing in certain words which their priests tell them; to whom religion is something which their forefathers believed; to whom religion is a certain form of ideas and superstitions to which they cling because they are their national superstitions. We should get beyond all these and look at humanity as one vast organism, slowly coming towards the light – a wonderful plant, slowly unfolding itself to that wonderful truth which is called God – and the first gyrations, the first motions, towards this are always through matter and ritual.[104]

Interestingly, there is a missing sentence at the end of this quotation, which appears in the Sturdy edition of the lecture notes, but not in the above quoted section from the *Complete Works* – it reads: "are always through

matter and ritual. We cannot help it."[105] This suggests that, within Vivekananda's framework of human spirituality, it was utterly unavoidable that humans should go through a stage of spirituality within a *Gauni Bhakti* framework – indeed, that ritualistic and material conceptions are the starting point of all traditions and individuals.

Crucially, Vivekananda's view of *Gauni Bhakti* as a necessary early step in the spiritual path also affected his understanding of non-Hindu traditions. De Michelis's suggestion[106] that Vivekananda's fourfold *yoga* system was created as a direct response to the needs of his Western audiences has important implications at this point. If the principal intent of the fourfold teaching method was the propagation of a re-invented universal form of Hinduism, based on a hierarchical inclusivist framework, it would necessarily have a huge impact on how Vivekananda would approach non-Hindu traditions. If Vivekananda was to promote the *ideal* of a universal religion, it was surely the *Gauni*-based elements of religion that had to fall by the wayside, for text, ritual, symbol and doctrine were all firmly based on human constructions of religious ideas, which promoted creedal and sectarian elements of religion, and which, Vivekananda argued, led to fanaticism.[107] To this end, we see in Vivekananda's promotion of a fourfold *yoga* system both the attempt to universalise Vedantic teaching, outlined more fully in a subsequent section, but also the intention to form a hierarchy of spiritual truth. In practical terms, if an approach to religion, or specifically an approach to 'other' religions was *Gauni Bhakti*–based, it would necessarily revert to sectarianism and creedal defensiveness, but if the approach was *Para Bhakti, karma* or *jnana*-based, it could arrive at the unity that Vivekananda argued could only be reached through higher spiritual knowledge.

Despite the intrinsic hierarchy within his *yoga* formulation, therefore, it is clear that Vivekananda intended his system to be inclusive – a crucial step towards a framework for approaching non-Hindu traditions. This inclusive nature meant that 'lower' forms of spirituality could be seen as stepping stones towards a higher spiritual ideal. Indeed, in his writings on *bhakti* Vivekananda argued that the human tendency to re-form abstract concepts as concrete manifestations of the divine was intrinsic to human nature, and unavoidable in all religions. He was highly critical, for example, of Islamic rejection of incarnational theology, claiming that the Muslim reverence for saints amounted to essentially the same 'lower-level' religious practice and emotional journey for the Muslim devotee.[108]

Universalism and evolutionism

For Vivekananda, the hierarchical inclusivistic approach to a framework of religion, which starts with an appreciation of *Gauni Bhakti* as the first step, was also applicable beyond the religious experience of his fellow Hindus. The formulation of an *Advaitic* framework of human religiosity must, by its very nature, make universal claims. In this section, I will (1) address

universal claims made by Vivekananda and (2) note the context of these claims within the evolutionism apparent in his *yoga* framework.

Vivekananda argued that all signs, symbols, texts and ceremonies were essentially only a medium through which humans could channel divine knowledge or awareness. He further argued in his 9th February 1896 lecture that it was

> vain to preach against the use of symbols, and why should we preach against them? There is no reason why man should not use symbols. They have them in order to represent the ideas signified behind them. This universe is a symbol, in and through which we are trying to grasp the thing signified, which is beyond and behind. The spirit is the goal, and not matter. Forms, images, bells, candles, books, churches, temples, and holy symbols are very good, very helpful to the growing plant of spirituality, but thus far and no farther. It is very good to be born in a church, but it is very bad to die in a church.[109]

For Vivekananda, acknowledging the fact that it was 'very good to be born in a church' was a tacit acceptance of a form of universal human spirituality that is very much centred on *bhakti*. Whilst acknowledging the universality of *karma yogins* (he included Jesus and the Buddha in this category), Vivekananda saw *Gauni Bhakti* as the lowest-common-denominator of human spirituality which was prevalent throughout all faith systems, simply because it appeals to base human emotions and is the simplest *yoga*. Vivekananda explicitly stated this in a lecture given in Hindi at Sialkote, Punjab, sometime between the 1st and 4th November 1897: "*Bhakti* is more easily attained than *Jnana*. The latter requires favourable circumstances and strenuous practice . . . but *Bhakti* can be more easily practised by persons in every condition of life."[110] The first edition of a sponsored biography even describes this lecture as being specifically aimed at 'the people,'[111] which fits well with Vivekananda's view of *Gauni Bhakti* as the religious tool of the masses.[112]

Of course, for Vivekananda, this universal reliance on *Gauni Bhakti* was problematic. In a lecture given at Madison Square Garden, New York, on 9th February 1896, which appears in both the *Complete Works* and the Sturdy edition, he stated that:

> The idea of a Personal God has obtained in almost every religion, except a very few. With the exception of the Buddhist and the Jain . . . although they have no Personal God, [they] worship the founders of their religions in precisely the same way as others worship a Personal God.[113]

Vivekananda argued that this was because it is essential for the human condition to internalise and make concrete abstract conceptions of God. For every abstract philosophical conception of Divine Reality, people create a

symbol, perform a ceremony or write a text that becomes designated as holy. Vivekananda saw the value in this, but was consistently critical of devotees whose spiritual awareness did not progress beyond the use of symbols; he even describes symbols, texts and ceremonies as the 'kindergarten of meditation' in a California lecture on 18th April 1900.[114] Of course, the specific danger for Vivekananda was that spiritual adherents would remain within their 'kindergartens,' thus reinforcing their doctrinal and sectarian identities and prejudices, which would, in Vivekananda's view, stunt spiritual growth at the individual level, and lead to fanaticism at societal level.

With Vivekananda's view of *Gauni Bhakti* as a universal human phenomenon stated consistently throughout his writings, it is interesting to note that he also sees this universal application of his religious framework in examples specific to *karma yoga* and *raja yoga*.

With regard to *karma yoga*, Vivekananda argues that: "Whether one is Christian, or Jew, or Gentile, it does not matter,"[115] and that: "Every man should take up his own ideal and endeavour to accomplish it. That is a surer way of progress than taking up the other men's ideals, which he can never hope to accomplish."[116] Clearly echoing the teachings of the *Gita* concerning performance of one's own *Dharma*,[117] Vivekananda is here also expressing the validity of different traditions, as he did on the stage of the Chicago Parliament two years prior to this series of lectures on *karma yoga*.[118]

This statement underlines Vivekananda's view of sect-orientated religion – that it is a point of departure, an origin, from which the individual may progress. However, the journey, which is clearly formulated by Vivekananda in a hierarchical understanding, also necessitates the jettisoning of the very point from which we began. Vivekananda is consistent in his opinion that sectarian approaches must be surpassed to achieve any deep engagement with spirituality. This is demonstrated in Vivekananda's treatment of higher levels of *karma yoga*, which he argues transcend boundaries of sect and creed[119] by embodying a shared ethical truth, representative of each of the major religions: "[an] idea of duty which has been universally accepted by all mankind, of all ages and sects and countries, and that has been summed up in a Sanskrit aphorism thus: 'Do not injure any being; not injuring any being is virtue, injuring any being is sin.'"[120] Vivekananda further adds that:

> we ought to remember . . . that we should always try to see the duty of others through their own eyes, and never judge the customs of other peoples by our own standard. I am not the standard of the universe. I have to accommodate myself to the world, and not the world to me.[121]

In making these comments, Vivekananda is privileging a transcendent universalism over sectarian particularism in his valorisation of *karma yoga*, even while acknowledging cultural differences in conceptions of 'duty.'

Vivekananda's universal application of his framework of religion also relates to his claims regarding *raja yoga*. As Rambachan has noted[122]

Vivekananda holds the view that all religions are based upon direct experience of a universal truth:

> Christ said that he saw God; the disciples said they felt God; and so forth. Similarly, in Buddhism, it is Buddha's experience. He experienced certain truths, saw them, came in contact with them, and preached them to the world. . . . Thus it is clear that all religions of the world have been built upon that one universal and adamantine foundation of all our knowledge – direct experience.[123]

In Vivekananda's view, therefore, the experience of ultimate reality had to be subjective, personalised and contemporary – and this is best exemplified in his writings on *raja yoga*. Indeed, in his lecture of 25th January 1896, Vivekananda explicitly argues that there is no external source for claims to *samadhi* by religious leaders, as *samadhi* is seen as the internalisation of divine knowledge:

> We find, in studying history, one fact held in common by all the great teachers of religion the world ever had. They all claim to have got their truths from beyond, only many of them did not know where they got them from. For instance, one would say that an angel came down in the form of a human being . . . another says that a Deva . . . appeared to him. . . . But this is common that all claim that this knowledge has come to them from beyond, not through their reasoning power. What does the science of [*Raja*] Yoga teach? It teaches that they were right in claiming that all this knowledge came to them from beyond reasoning, *but that it came from within themselves*.[124]

This understanding of the nature of revelatory insight begs the question, as a whole: how does the individual spiritual aspirant, or communal faith society reach the higher levels of Vivekananda's framework? It is interesting to note that he addresses this question at the societal level by arguing with what might be described as a framework of spiritual evolutionism, and at the individual level by pointing to the role of the guru, to which we will now briefly turn.

Drawing almost certainly upon his own intense (and not unproblematic) relationship with Ramakrishna, Vivekananda argued that *Gurus* could offer devotees what dry texts and ceremonies could not. He believed that *Gurus* communicated the spirit of religions, rather than just empty ritual, performing a function that he described as 'transmitting'[125] spirituality, which empowered and enabled devotees to act spiritually. This was contrasted by Vivekananda with ceremony and text, which he believed could only lead to the ability to speak spiritually – indeed, he described holy texts as the 'dry bones of religion.'[126] For Vivekananda, right practice was more important than right belief – after all, according to Vivekananda, creeds, dogmas and

the codified belief systems of religious institutions were all human concepts and therefore a barrier to a true understanding of the divine (*vidya*).[127]

However, it was very important to Vivekananda that a devotee chose a Guru based on his/her right and proper conduct, rather than any external influences such as fame or politics. To this end, Vivekananda set out three qualities that devotees should seek in a Guru.[128] First, the Guru should have a vast knowledge of the spirit (rather than the content) of the scriptures. Again, here we see Vivekananda devaluing the Bibles, Vedas and Korans of text-based religion – a true Guru would see beyond these words to teach the spirit which lies behind all of these texts. Second, the Guru should be sinless – and Vivekananda believed this was essential in the realm of religious teaching:

> If a man wants to teach me something of dynamics, or chemistry, or any other physical science, he may be anything he likes, because what the physical sciences require is merely an intellectual equipment; but in the spiritual sciences it is impossible from first to last that there can be any spiritual light in a soul that is impure.[129]

Third, the Guru needs to be motivated in an appropriate way. Vivekananda was highly critical of any religious teachers who accept money,[130] and he held no truck with people who sought fame. He believed that a true Guru was one who worked simply out of a love for humankind at large: "God is love, and only he who has known God as love can be a teacher of godliness and God to man."[131]

On the societal level, Vivekananda draws parallels between the individual aspirant's progress to higher levels of realisation and the evolution of human societies towards states of greater insight. In Vivekananda's view the human starting point for comprehending reality was to create an anthropomorphic conception of God. Vivekananda argued that this understanding of God was an essential stage in the process of human spiritual development; he often employed a simplistic model of progressive spiritual development to illustrate this. According to this model, in the early stages of human spiritual development, God is removed from humanity, and a figure to be feared. He often cited the Christian 'Father in Heaven' concept as an example. In the middle-stage of our human spiritual development, he argued, God is attributed human form. In the final stage there is the realisation that there is no difference between God and Self.[132] Of course, this represents the spiritual hierarchy present, for Vivekananda, in *Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita* and *Advaita*.

We see Vivekananda extolling the virtues of the first stage in his lecture of 23rd December 1895:

> Therefore it is absolutely necessary to worship God as man, and blessed are those races which have such a 'God-man' to worship. Christians

> have such a God-man in Christ; therefore cling close to Christ; never give up Christ. That is the natural way to see God; see God in man. All our ideas of God are concentrated there.[133]

Vivekananda argued that philosophical concepts such as omnipotence and omnipresence are impossible to truly fathom, challenging his Western audience on 9th February 1896: "All of you have been taught to believe in an Omnipresent God. Try to think of it. How few of you can have any idea of what omnipresence means!"[134] For Vivekananda, therefore, it was necessary for humans to conceive of the absolute in anthropomorphic terms, which included the concept of *Ishvara* as a concrete manifestation of ultimate reality. In the 1897 *Raja Yoga* text, Vivekananda stated: "True it is that we cannot have any idea of the Brahman which is not anthropomorphic, but is it not equally true of everything we know?"[135] However, at numerous junctures in his lectures, Vivekananda warns against the worship of *Devas* or personifications of *Brahman* as an end unto itself, arguing that this practice of ritualistic *bhakti* is of very limited spiritual use.

Indeed, in his rejection of *bhakti*-based religion, Vivekananda argued that divine reality, higher knowledge, superconsciousness or realisation were all linked with an understanding of an immanent divinity or reality which "progressively unfolds its creative potential."[136] Crucially, however, this understanding of divinity should not be limited to traditional Western, or even Hindu, concepts of deity. As De Michelis notes: "Vivekananda's 'gods,' 'sages' and 'saints,' however, should not be mistaken for the categories of Hindu or Christian doctrine and theology usually referred to by these names: Vivekananda's 'divinity' is rather a state of advanced human development, a further evolutive [*sic*] condition in which the potential of humanity is truly fulfilled."[137]

Similarly, in his lecture, 'The Highest Ideal of *Jnana Yoga*,'[138] given on 12th February 1896, Vivekananda argues for a staged development, or evolution, of religious thought within humanity:

> The first group of religious ideas . . . – I mean recognised religious ideas, not the very low ideas, which do not deserve the name religion – all include the idea of inspiration and revealed books. . . . The first group of religious ideas starts with the idea of God. . . . Along with that, at a later stage, comes the idea of soul – that there is a body, and something inside this body which is not the body. This is the most primitive idea of religion that we know. We can find a few followers of that in India, but it was given up very early.[139]

This argument may well refer to the evolutionism of E. B. Tylor (1832–1917). However it should be noted at this stage that Vivekananda appears slightly confused as to whether, in the evolutionist scheme, theism[140] or animism came into existence first. He seems to suggest that a conception

of deity preceded animism, which would run counter to Tylor's theory. This does, however, offer another example of Vivekananda comparing and contrasting 'higher' Indian, and specifically *Advaitic* forms of spirituality, with lower forms. This technique is used when Vivekananda equates Hindu deities (*devas*) with the 'angels' in Christianity and Islam: "In the lunar sphere[141] the Jiva [the real essence of humanity] becomes what we call a god, or what the Christians or Mohammedans call an angel."[142] This is notable, as Vivekananda then goes on to argue that this is part of a mythological framework, which also includes doctrines of heaven and hell, from which he is very keen to distance his own particular form of Vedantic thought: "In the Vedas, there is no mention of hell. But our Puranas, thought that no religion could be complete, unless hells were attached to it, so they invented all sorts of hells . . . the higher Vedantic philosophy [*Advaita*] says this cannot be."[143]

This reference to 'the higher Vedantic philosophy,' a phrase intact in both the *Complete Works* and the 1907 text, is important as Vivekananda gives a very brief overview of *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita* and *Advaita*, with a clear staged development/progression of spiritual hierarchy towards *Advaita*: "These are the three steps which Vedanta philosophy has taken, and we cannot go any further, because we cannot go beyond unity. When a science reaches a unity, it cannot by any manner of means go any further. You cannot go beyond this idea of the Absolute."[144]

In summary, it can be seen that Vivekananda was universal in his valorisation of a hierarchical understanding of religiosity beyond his own Hindu tradition. Vivekananda saw common elements of human spirituality within non-Hindu traditions, particularly at *Gauni Bhakti* levels of spirituality, and sought to locate them within his own framework. Necessarily, therefore, Vivekananda also positions non-Hindu traditions within the evolutionism of his framework, which views *Gauni Bhakti* as a stepping stone for higher spiritual truths.

Legitimisation of *Advaita* by science

Throughout his lecture series outlining his various *yogas*, Vivekananda consistently appeals to modern, Western, science as a means of supporting *Advaitic* truth claims, and thus as a means of legitimising non-dualism.

Vivekananda's lecture *The Sankhya Cosmology*, first given in New York on 18th December 1895,[145] is reproduced in the *Complete Works* as *Cosmology*.[146] Here, Vivekananda emphasises what he sees as the 'scientific' validity of *Vedanta*, and asserts the superiority of the Orient over the Occident – a theme that occurs throughout Vivekananda's engagement with the West.

> We all know the theories of the cosmos according to the modern astronomers and physicists; and at the same time we all know how woefully

> they undermine the theology of Europe, how these scientific discoveries that are made act as a bomb thrown at its stronghold; and we know how theologians have in all times attempted to put down these researches. I want here to go over the psychological ideas of the Orientals about cosmology and all that pertains to it, and you will find how wonderfully they are in accordance with the latest discoveries of modern science; and where there is disharmony, you will find that it is modern science which lacks and not they.[147]

Vivekananda outlines the Vedantic view of nature (compared to the European 'scientific' view known to his Western audience) as *Prakriti* and *Avyakta*. *Prakriti*, Vivekananda argues, is synonymous with 'nature,' but *Avyakta* is that from which all nature emanates, or manifests – *Avyakta* is undifferentiated existence, borne from a complete harmony, or equilibrium, of the three *gunas* (Vivekananda uses the word 'forces,' presumably to limit the amount of technical Sanskrit with which he was bombarding his audience) – *Sattva* (Balance), *Rajas* (Repulsion) and *Tamas* (Attraction).[148] It is important to note here that Vivekananda makes sure that his audience is aware that *Tamas* – attraction – is the lowest order of nature, as this underpins his distaste for devotion/worship within religion and also his insistence on the importance of renunciation as vital to religious truth – a common theme in his lectures, as we have seen.[149]

Vivekananda's lecture on 21st December 1895, in which he links control of *prana* to "Mind-healers, Faith-healers, Spiritualists, Christian Scientists, Hypnotists, etc."[150] is an example of how he incorporated newly emergent pseudo-scientific[151] spiritual traditions within his wider Hindu framework: "If you boil all their theories down, the residuum will be that [i.e. *prana*]. It is the one and the same force they are manipulating, only unknowingly. They have stumbled on the discovery of a force and are using it unconsciously without knowing its nature, but it is the same as the Yogi uses, and which comes from Prana."[152]

These comments not only support Vivekananda's view that systems of thought such as Christian Science or Spiritualists share a core heritage positioned within the centre of Vivekananda's *Advaitic* teachings, they also firmly place these Western traditions in an unwitting or unenlightened position within this framework, fully echoing Vivekananda's consistent hierarchical form of inclusivism, which was so important in his act of identity-formation when projecting Hinduism to the Christian West.

De Michelis expands on Vivekananda's inculturation of pseudo-science within Western spiritual movements by noting that his understanding of them is saturated by Mesmeric theory,[153] which was popular and widespread in the USA at the time of his visit. Arguing that Vivekananda further developed an inheritance of a concept of a 'divine breath'[154] from the Theosophical tradition, De Michelis concludes that this unconscious inculturation largely shaped Vivekananda's understanding of *prana* as a force

for healing.[155] Indeed, in his lecture of 21st December 1895, titled *Prana*, Vivekananda explicitly stated:

> There is a mistake constantly made by Faith-healers: they think that faith directly heals a man. But faith alone does not cover all the ground. There are diseases where the worst symptoms are that the patient never thinks that he has that disease. That tremendous faith of the patient is itself one symptom of the disease, and usually indicates that he will die quickly. In such cases the principle that faith cures does not apply. If it were faith alone that cured, these patients also would be cured. It is by the Prana that real curing comes.[156]

Vivekananda's treatment of *raja yoga* also uses pseudo-scientific concepts and language in its attempt to legitimise his framework of spirituality. Based primarily upon his understanding of post-Darwinian evolutionary thought, Vivekananda is constantly seeking to explain his system of *raja yoga*, at the *prana* level, in scientific terms. Specific examples include his referencing of Humphrey Davy,[157] his references to human biology and its links to *Yogic* theories,[158] and his discussion of atoms and electricity to elucidate *Yogic* understandings of the *Muladhara, Sahasrara* and *Manipura* in his lecture of 4th January 1896.[159]

This reliance, albeit only partial, upon a pseudo-scientific basis for his framework demonstrates Vivekananda's attempts to make his teachings compatible with the prevailing cultural milieu of his target audience. The fusion of differing religious ideas and the comparison of scientific method and *yogic* practice were more than simple lip service to the sciences – they are specific and deliberate attempts to fit disparate worldviews and philosophies into Vivekananda's developing and emerging fourfold framework of religious understanding. In a question and answer session held at Harvard in March 1896, Vivekananda embraces Darwinian evolutionism by acknowledging the central concept that "we are changing from one species into another,"[160] but then immediately interprets this through a Vedantic, hierarchical lens:

> In the matter of the projection of Akasha and Prana into manifested form and the return to fine state, there is a good deal of similarity between Indian thought and modern science. The moderns have their evolution, and so have the Yogis. But I think the Yogis' explanation of evolution is the better one.[161]

Rambachan has noted that Vivekananda wanted *raja yoga*, above any of his other *yogas*, to be seen as a scientific route to *brahmajnana*,[162] and this can be seen in Vivekananda's insistence upon the derivation of knowledge through observation as the principal underlying criterion of *raja yoga*. As part of Vivekananda's attempt to locate a specifically Eastern philosophy

within the cultural milieu of nineteenth-century America, the comparison with newly emergent scientific procedures and methodologies provided Vivekananda with a useful benchmark against which his newly formed philosophical framework could be judged, however superficially. To this end, we therefore find numerous specific comparisons, in addition to the simple allusions mentioned above, of scientific method and the central tenet of *raja yoga*, as exemplified by this excerpt from Vivekananda's lecture of 14th December 1895:

> There is only one method by which to attain this knowledge, that which is called concentration. The chemist in his laboratory concentrates all the energies of his mind into one focus, and throws them upon the materials he is analysing, and so finds out their secrets. The astronomer concentrates all the energies of his mind and projects them through his telescope upon the skies; and the stars, the sun, and the moon, give up their secrets to him.[163]

The importance of this statement is the stress upon concentration – linked explicitly to realisation, the logical conclusion for Vivekananda of impersonal observation of the absolute – as the basis of not just *raja yoga*, but of the scientific method. Again, we see Vivekananda's attempt to validate his *Advaitic* system of *yoga* through eclectic means: "Physically, this universe is one: there is no difference between the sun and you. The scientist will tell you it is only a fiction to say the contrary."[164] It is also interesting to note at this point that the fact that Vivekananda linked science and *yoga* through a common basis in method and practice is, of course, fully compatible with his argument for an experiential, or practical form of religious life, as advocated in his writings on *Karma Yoga* and Practical *Vedanta*.[165]

Vivekananda and nineteenth-century Western scholarship

The previous sections of this chapter have sought to examine Vivekananda's use of evolution, hierarchy and science, in relation to his systematisation of Hinduism, so as to provide the context for the next chapter, which details the application of this religious framework in his treatment of non-Hindu traditions. Of course, Vivekananda's ideas and formulations must be understood in relation to the intellectual milieu of the nineteenth century in which he was writing and speaking, and this section aims to highlight key influences on Vivekananda's treatment of evolution/evolutionism, hierarchalism, and, briefly, textual criticism.

I have previously mentioned hagiographical claims to the academic ability of Vivekananda during his student days (see Chapter 2), and also counter-claims from contemporaries who questioned his academic engagement with Western philosophers whose work formed part of the curriculum for Vivekananda's studies. Taking an overview of Vivekananda's public life in

addition to his formal schooling it is, however, apparent that he was aware of, and made full use of, contemporaneous theories concerning religion and society. Perhaps the most important of these was theories of evolution.

Killingley has noted that, in India, the influence of Darwin's publication of *Origin of Species* was limited to those who had access to British education,[166] and Vivekananda certainly refers to Darwin on numerous occasions in his speeches and writings. Interest in Darwin was part of a wider Indian engagement with science, which was often "seen as a set of findings rather than a set of methods . . . [such that] the scientific claims of Auguste Comte's Positivism, as well as of the various systems which went by the name of Darwinism, seemed accepted uncritically."[167] The use to which Darwinian theory was put in India, is therefore of interest – especially its use by Christian missionaries.

The anglophile nature of much colonial education policy provided a milieu in which Western scientific advances could be used to shore up pre-existing notions of Christian superiority over Hindu traditions and peoples. As early as 1844, Alexander Duff valorised secular and scientific knowledge over aspects of Indian culture in the hope of familiarising students with not only academic advances, but also in the hope of preparing the way for the conversion of Hindus to Christianity.[168] At this time, British missionaries and educationists sought to highlight a dichotomy between the relationships of Christianity and Hinduism to scientific advances, valorising Christianity and devaluing Hinduism[169] In a post-Darwin environment, many Indian-based Christians specifically saw "science as part of European culture from which India would benefit, and as a form of natural revelation which would not conflict with Christianity but would strike a fatal blow at Hinduism."[170] Predictably, Hindus rejected this conclusion, and found themselves able to formulate effective responses as "there [was] no body of scripture common to all Hindus that could be said to be contradicted by modern knowledge."[171] Indeed, responses by, or on behalf of, Hindus often recognised greater compatibility between Hindu cosmology and science, than scientific compatibility with Christian doctrine. Underpinning much of the Hindu response was the work of F. Max Muller who argued for an evolutive understanding of human knowledge of the Divine – indeed, Muller argued that in a tri-partite examination of Hindu scriptures:

> The earliest part of the Veda, the hymns addressed to many gods, . . . was the childhood of the Vedic religion; the next, the Brahmanas, which discuss details of ritual, was 'the busy manhood'; and the last part, the Upanishads, a wise and highly respected old age.[172]

Killingley has noted that "Indian culture was particularly receptive to evolutionary theory because of its perceived affinities with various systems of ancient Hindu cosmogony and cosmology"[173] and this attitude is clear in the writings of Vivekananda. Indeed, Singleton has noted that "Vivekananda's

evolutionist aspirations seeped inexorably into his formulations of practical Yoga and from there into virtually all the refashionings of Yoga that appeared in the modern period, irrespective of their cultural or national provenance."[174] In *Discourses on Jnana-Yoga*, Vivekananda argued that Hindu cosmology pre-empted Western concepts of Darwinian evolution, stating: "The idea of evolution was to be found in the Vedas long before the Christian era; but until Darwin said it was true, it was regarded as a mere Hindu superstition."[175] It is interesting to note, however, that Vivekananda was not completely accepting of Darwin's theories and ideas, and this is largely due to his perceptions of differences between Western and Eastern cosmologies.

Darwin's theory outlined a linear process of evolution based on the principles of natural selection and the 'survival of the fittest' popularised by Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) some years earlier. Vivekananda, however, understood Darwin within a Hindu worldview, which had a cyclical cosmology, and which did not understand evolution as linear.[176] The Hindu paradigm also required 'room' for a spiritual element to the human progressive condition, which Singleton has labelled 'Spiritual Darwinism.'[177] This necessitated two major additions in Vivekananda's understanding of the theory of evolution – spirituality and 'involution.' In a position which perhaps reflects the influence of T. H. Huxley (1825–1895),[178] Vivekananda focuses upon the possibility of an ethical aspect for an 'improving' form of evolution which made possible social moral progress. In so doing Vivekananda highlighted (or, arguably, created) a notion of human spirituality relevant to evolution. Countering Darwin, he argued that: "In the animal kingdom we really see such laws as struggle for existence, survival of the fittest, etc., evidently at work. . . . But in the human kingdom, where there is the manifestation of rationality, we find just the reverse of those laws."[179] Killingley notes that Vivekananda understood the 'reverse of those laws' to mean the laws of morality – a law which Vivekananda argues only exists in potential form in animals, but is realised in humans. Indeed, "the human struggle is not for survival but for spiritual perfection."[180]

The second major difference between Darwin's original work, and Vivekananda's understanding and application of it, lies in the concept of 'involution.' 'Involution' was Vivekananda's way of making compatible the seemingly incompatible Western-linear and Hindu-cyclical cosmologies. By this term he means that "the process which science calls evolution is only one half of a cycle which is eternally repeating itself: the other half is the reverse of the process, involution, meaning a change from complex organisms in which consciousness is fully manifest to simple ones in which it is completely hidden."[181] The crucial aspect of this for the current work is that this necessarily means that lower forms of spirituality must exist in lower forms of life *which have the potential to become higher forms of life with higher understandings of spirituality*. Here, then is an example of Vivekananda valuing lower levels of spiritual existence, as a stepping stone to higher levels of

spirituality, consistent with his treatment of *Gauni Bhakti*.[182] The pinnacle of Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of Hinduism, as outlined in the previous sections of this chapter, was pure *Advaita*, and Vivekananda understood this to be completely compatible with theories of evolution: "the doctrine of physical evolution preached in the Western world . . . tells us that the bodies of the different animals are really one. . . . We had that idea also."[183] Indeed, Vivekananda even uses evolution to justify his conception of realisation of divinity-within-humanity as the pinnacle of *Advaitic* spiritual awareness: "In the animal the man was suppressed, but as soon as the door was opened, out rushed the man. So in man there is the potential god, kept in by the locks and bars of ignorance.[184] When knowledge breaks the bars, the god becomes manifest."[185] In therefore bringing both a form of spiritual morality and philosophical monism into his understanding of evolution, Vivekananda was positing a superior 'spiritual' Hindu understanding of evolution over an inferior 'animalistic' Western understanding of evolution.[186]

Raina and Habib have noted that "in the nineteenth century . . . theories of biological evolution ran in parallel with theories of social evolution . . . [and that] . . . theories of social evolution were nourished by the rhetoric of progress."[187] In the West, this often took the form of Social Darwinism,[188] a collection of ideas which Vivekananda was particularly resistant to,[189] probably because it was sometimes used to justify Western cultural or political imperialism.

In the West one particular theory of religion introduced a notion of spiritual hierarchy based on a concept of evolutionism in thought – that of E. B. Tylor. Edward Burnett Tylor was born a Quaker[190] and did not attend mainstream university education due to poor health. Instead, he travelled to Central America where he met the archaeologist Henry Christy, with whom we travelled to Mexico, where they undertook research on the *Anahuac* people[191] which led to his first publication *Anahuac: Or Mexico and the Mexicans Ancient and Modern* (1861). Four years later, Tylor published *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization* (1865) which "up to a point . . . may be regarded as an attempt to solve the old ethnological problem [of human unity] in a new temporal context using evidence derived from the history of 'the complex whole which we call Civilization.'"[192] Stocking notes, however, that Tylor's central argument in *Researches* "had a manifestly developmental import . . . [insisting] on the psychic unity of mankind and the progressive rather than degenerative character of human history."[193]

Published in 1871 in two volumes, Tylor's greatest work was *Primitive Culture*,[194] which outlined Tylor's key application of evolutionist theories of culture and religion in a three-staged progression of animism-polytheism-monotheism.[195] For Tylor, human religiosity can be traced to primitive peoples having dreams, which were understood as evidence for an object outside the body – an animation, or soul.[196] This conception of an external agency was then projected beyond the individual body to the cosmos, in the form of

external deities, rather than internal souls, and the final stage of this progression was the assumption of a single all-powerful deity, as understood in the Abrahamic faiths, and particularly Christianity. For Tylor, the system within which this conception of religious evolution sat was a cultural theory based on "unilinear evolutionism, antidegenerationism, humanism, progressionism, and idealism"[197] which was linked to Muller's evolutive understanding of child-like primary phases of religion leading on to more spiritually mature phases. Opler has described Tylor's hierarchalism as "unmistakably what is termed social or cultural Darwinism."[198] Indeed, in Tylor's own words:

> It is a harsher, and at times even painful office of ethnography to expose the remains of crude old cultures which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction. Yet this work, if less genial, is not less urgently needful for the good of mankind. Thus, active at once in aiding progress and in removing hindrance, the science of culture is essentially a reformer's science.[199]

This 'progressive' view of spirituality may well have underpinned much of Vivekananda's thinking regarding his hierarchalism, and the evolutive nature of his stepped-spirituality – indeed, Vivekananda's treatment of *Gauni Bhakti* is remarkably similar to Muller and Tylor's insistence that simplistic spirituality may lead to more advanced religious conceptions.

Finally, in this section it is necessary to briefly contextualise Vivekananda's treatment of scripture, and particularly Christian scriptures, which will be explored in the next chapter, within the newly emergent nineteenth-century development of Biblical Criticism.

Biblical Criticism is the umbrella-term used to describe a series of changes in academic approaches to the Bible in universities in Europe, and predominantly Germany and Britain, in the nineteenth century, in response to English Deist attacks on the Bible and changing "German conceptions of Biblical authority from the mid-eighteenth century."[200] This change precipitated a spectrum of new approaches to the Bible as a historical, mythological or socio-political document. One vitally important publication in the history of Biblical Criticism during the nineteenth century was *Essays and Reviews*,[201] a collection of seven essays published in 1860 written by senior Churchmen which was so influential that Altholz has stated: "The intellectual crisis of Victorian faith was a tale of two books. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* . . . [and] a composite volume of biblical criticism, *Essays and Reviews*."[202] Indeed, so great was the storm surrounding *Essays and Reviews*, which contributed to "the ongoing culture wars over the appropriate nature of British higher education and the place of religion in it"[203] that it received more contemporary press attention than Darwin's book, which was published four months earlier.[204] *Essays and Reviews* largely supported the academic and historical interpretation of the Bible as a document to be analysed, rather than a text to be 'deified,' and included, for instance, Badon

Powell's (1796–1860)[205] contribution rejecting miracles, and Rowland Williams's (1817–1870)[206] essay denying the predictive nature of Old Testament prophecies. The contributors to *Essays and Reviews* "believed that accurately interpreting the Bible required education . . . [so that] 'the critical interpretation of Scripture comes in and exercises a corrective influence on its popular use.'"[207]

In the light of this crucial conversation regarding diverse approaches to the Bible, it should be noted that Vivekananda's use of the Gospels was unrelated to the rise of Biblical Criticism in the nineteenth-century European universities. Tonini describes Vivekananda's knowledge of the Gospels as 'quite extensive,'[208] although Huff notes that this knowledge is "limited by his pre-critical biblical hermeneutic and his impatience with academic methods."[209] Tonini further notes that "critical studies on the Gospels seem to be of little interest to"[210] Vivekananda, and highlights Vivekananda's speech *Christ, The Messenger*, where he boldly stated:

> It does not matter at all whether the New Testament was written within five hundred years of his birth, nor does it matter even, how much of that life is true. But there is something behind it, something we want to imitate. To tell a lie, you have to imitate a truth, and that truth is a fact. You cannot imitate that which never existed. You cannot imitate that which you never perceived. But there must have been a nucleus, a tremendous power that came down, a marvellous manifestation of spiritual power – and of that we are speaking.[211]

Clearly, this approach is consistent with Vivekananda's treatment of scripture as a manifestation of human spirituality, rather than a direct method of *brahmajnana*, concerning Vivekananda's treatment of *sruti*.

Ambiguities and inconsistencies

Vivekananda's universal, inclusivistic hierarchy of *yogas* is not, however, without problems. Concerning *bhakti yoga*, Rambachan notes that: "Vivekananda's entire presentation of *bhaktiyoga* is descriptive, and, while he claims that the method leads directly to *brahmajnana*, there is very little discussion of how this is brought about."[212] Rambachan further points out that Vivekananda sees divine grace as an important part in the development of *bhakti* from lower levels to the spiritually superior *Para-Bhakti*: "Forms vanish, rituals fly away, books are superseded. . . . Divine grace thus loosens the binding bolts and bars of the soul, and it becomes free."[213] This notion of grace blurs the division between *Gauni* and *Para Bhakti*. Whilst it is clear that a reliance on rituals, books and forms is linked with *Gauni Bhakti*, it is nowhere explained by Vivekananda how *Para Bhakti* can be separated from the notion of grace, in its role of advancing the aspirant, presumably from a *saguna* to a *nirguna* understanding of reality. The important question of

how divine agency and human agency can both play a part in the shift from *Gauni Bhakti* to *Para Bhakti* remains unanswered. This issue is taken up by Rambachan, who examines a short section from the question and answer session following Vivekananda's address to the Graduate Philosophical Society at Harvard, which I have briefly explored above. The relevant section reads: "Q – Can salvation (mukti) be obtained without grace of God? A – Salvation has nothing to do with God. Freedom already *is*."[214] This again highlights the problem of the path from *Gauni Bhakti* to *Para Bhakti* not being explained clearly and consistently by Vivekananda. It is not clear here whether grace – divine agency – has a role to play; and if it does, then whose grace is implied, as *Para Bhakti* necessarily negates *devas* and conceptions of deity in its *nirguna Brahman* framework.

Rambachan further notes:

> that the movement from the duality of *bhaktiyoga* to nonduality is a natural and inevitable progression is not at all clearly demonstrated in these passages [i.e. Vivekananda's comments on the relationship between *Gauni Bhakti* and *Para Bhakti*]. In fact, these passages seem to occur only in the context of his general presupposition that all religious quests will eventually end in nonduality and in the context of the progressive development of doctrine that he claims to be able to trace in the Vedas.[215]

Crucially, Rambachan goes on to state: "The discovery [Vivekananda argues] of nonduality occurs at the stage of *parabhakti*, but, from his own descriptions, even at this level there is a clear distinction between the worshipper and worshipped."[216]

Similarly, Vivekananda's treatment of *karma yoga* is not without its problems – especially concerning its relationship both to his *Advaitic* framework and to his fourfold *yoga* framework. Whilst there are several lectures in which Vivekananda highlights the importance of *karma yoga* as a distinct vehicle of spiritual progress, even describing it at one point as 'concretised philosophy,'[217] his claim to have "found that, in the end, all these four paths converge and become one"[218] presents difficulties. Vivekananda clearly means by this statement that each of the paths (*yogas*) is an independent route to *moksha*. However, as Rambachan has noted, there is a danger that Vivekananda's conception of *karma yoga* becomes so conflated and all-encompassing, that it ceases to be a distinct path to *moksha*.[219] Rambachan further notes:

> The unresolved paradox is that, in his presentation of *karmayoga*, he assumes that one cannot attain self-knowledge unless one is perfectly selfless. In fact, in spite of the fact that he does not acknowledge it and that he claims that *karmayoga* as a path involves neither doctrine nor dogma, the *karmayoga* that he presents is intelligible only in the doctrinal context of Advaita.[220]

Stating explicitly that *karma yoga* is an equal path to *moksha*,[221] Vivekananda then contradicts this assertion, when he states that: "perfection can never be attained by work."[222] Often, Vivekananda also positions *karma yoga* as a more popular path than *jnana*, occasionally linking *karma* and *bhakti*.[223] In this respect, Vivekananda links *karma* with both *Gauni Bhakti* and also with *Para Bhakti*, when he states that: "Real existence, real knowledge, and real love are eternally connected with one another, the three in one: where one of them is, the others also must be; they are three aspects of the One without a second – the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss."[224]

Vivekananda further complicates the relational aspect of *karma yoga* with the other *yogas*, as he implies that *jnana yoga* can be seen as higher than *karma yoga* within his conceptual framework. In *Freedom*, Vivekananda again separates those who practice *jnana yoga* with those who practice *karma yoga*:

> The first is the path of Jnana-Yoga, and is characterised by the refusal to do any work; the second is that of Karma-Yoga, in which there is no cessation from work. Everyone must work in the universe. Only those who are not perfectly satisfied with the Self, whose desires do not go beyond the Self, whose mind never strays out of the Self, to whom the Self is all in all, only those do not work. The rest must work.[225]

The crucial aspect of this quotation for the current study is the linking of the concept of work with the mundane. We are told that everyone must work *in* the universe, not a statement concerning the totality of work, but a declaration that all work links us to the universe which, in Vivekananda's *Advaitic* framework, is a product of *Maya* and the illusion of duality. This therefore positions Vivekananda's concept of work in the lower ranges of his hierarchical framework of *yogas* – indeed, he specifically states that *jnana yogins* are removed from this mundane necessity. It can be argued that this implicit hierarchical arrangement within the relationship of *jnana* and *karma* follows the position of Sankara, who saw that *karma yoga* was useful as a 'consistent course towards liberation'[226] (which requires other *yogas* to aid the aspirant) rather than a direct path to liberation (which does not require other *yogas*), and indeed that "*Karma Yoga*, which involves the performance of actions, albeit without attachment to its fruits, eventually leads to *jnana yoga*, which requires the renunciation of all action."[227] This echoes Vivekananda's stance on the development from *Gauni Bhakti* to higher forms of spirituality, and provides another example of the 'stepping-stone' approach that Vivekananda uses in his framework of religious paths.

At this point, it is also important to acknowledge internal inconsistencies within Vivekananda's treatment of *samadhi*. Rambachan picks up specifically upon this point, when he argues that "there is a constant tension in Vivekananda's writings between his portrayal of *samadhi* as a state in which the mind still obtains and one in which it ceases to exist."[228] Put simply, if

at the point of *samadhi*, the superconscious state of being, the ego, is lost, then there can be no human conception of what *samadhi* actually is. Vivekananda himself explains this from personal experience:

> One day in the temple-garden at Dakshineswar Shri Ramakrishna touched me over the heart, and first of all I began to see that the houses – rooms, doors, windows, verandahs – the trees, the sun, the moon – all were flying off, shattering to pieces as it were – reduced to atoms and molecules – and ultimately became merged in the Akasha. Gradually again, the Akasha also vanished, and after that, my consciousness of the ego with it; what happened next I do not recollect.[229]

The difficulty of this is that, if there is no knowledge of the state of *samadhi* that is comprehensible within our limited human condition, on what criteria can Vivekananda judge truth claims from various religious persons throughout history? We see Vivekananda explain away religious experiences as partial or ignorant truths[230] as a part of his attempt to explain "the quaint mixture of truth and superstition in religion,"[231] but in reality, Vivekananda is systematically moulding all claims to direct religious experience, be they by Ramakrishna, Jesus or the Buddha, into his hierarchical *Advaitic* framework.

This chapter has detailed Vivekananda's formulation of a systematised Hinduism – a Hinduism which served the dual purpose of creating both a strong sense of identity at home within the colonial context, and also an exportable revision of Hindu religious ideals to the West. The main arguments may be summarised as follows:

> Vivekananda formulated Hinduism within a four-fold *Yoga* system, privileging non-dualism in a reinterpretation of Sankara's stance. He hierarchised his system, creating an inclusivistic hierarchy where progress for the individual aspirant was both possible and desirable. He applied this hierarchisation universally to the human religious condition – indeed, this universalism was itself part of the evolving, hierarchical context of Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism, ensuring 'lower' stages of spirituality were valued as 'stepping-stones,' rather than devalued as being in some way redundant. Vivekananda was, however, very clear to criticise those aspects of Hinduism that he saw as 'lower level' spirituality; rather than make simplistic claims for Hinduism in its entirety, he valorised specifically the non-dualism of *Advaita*, which for him constituted ultimate and eternal truth. He also attempted to link his *Yogas* to science and pseudo-science in a manner reminiscent of newly emergent spiritual traditions in North America, highlighting his desire to formulate a modern and relevant representation of *Advaitic* Hinduism. Finally, Vivekananda's system was not without its problems; however this should be understood in the context of a prolific writer and speaker

who created an evolving body of work left unfinished due to his death at the age of 39.[232]

Vivekananda's formulation of a hierarchical, universal and inclusivistic framework of Hinduism has clear and definite implications for his approach to non-Hindu thought systems. Due to the universalistic nature of Vivekananda's framework, religious truths, for Vivekananda, apply to all traditions and are not simply limited to Hinduism. Once Vivekananda had established his hierarchical system of human thought as a universalist framework of human religiosity, it inevitably impacted upon his views on sectarianism, doctrine, ritual and practice, not to mention holy men and women, texts and claims to revelation within non-Hindu traditions. The next chapter will analyse, in the light of Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism, his approach to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

Notes

1 Vivekananda, personal correspondence to Alasinga, 6th May 1895. CW V, p. 81.
2 Baumfield (*Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta*) and Raychaudhuri, T. 'Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism' in Radice, W. (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) are notable examples.
3 De Michelis, E. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004).
4 Ibid., p. 119.
5 Ibid., p. 121.
6 Ibid., p. 123.
7 This introductory passage on *bhakti* is intentionally brief, as an examination of *bhakti* forms a major part of the subsequent sections of this chapter.
8 Zaehner, R. C. *Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 7.
9 Pandit, B. *The Hindu Mind: Fundamentals of Hindu Religion and Philosophy for All Ages* (New Delhi: New Age Books, 2004 [2001]) p. 429.
10 Macdonell, A. A. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary with Transliteration, Accentuation, and Etymological Analysis Throughout* (London: Oxford University Press, 1929) p. 193 accessed online at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/romadict.pl?query=*Bhakti*&display=simple&table=macdonell (accessed 01/10/18).
11 Lipner, J. *Hindus: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2002 [1994]) p. 308.
12 Johnson, W. J. *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 157.
13 Macdonell, A. A. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 99 accessed online at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/romadict.pl?query=*Jnana*&display=simple&table=macdonell (accessed 01/10/18).
14 Rambachan, A. *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994) p. 63.
15 Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 309.
16 Ibid.
17 *Avidya*, literally 'not-knowledge' is understood to be the ignorance which inhibits humanity's perception of a non-dual reality.

18 Beckerlegge, G. *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy of Service: A Study of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 234.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., p. 54.
21 CW I, p. 29.
22 Deutsch, E. S. 'Karma as a "Convenient Fiction" in the Advaita Vedanta' in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Jan., 1965) p. 3.
23 Reichenbach, B. R. 'The Law of Karma and the Principle of Causation' in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct., 1988) p. 399.
24 Ibid.
25 CW I, pp. 30–31.
26 Ibid., pp. 36–37.
27 Ibid., p. 41.
28 Ibid., pp. 41–42.
29 Carpenter, D. 'Practice Makes Perfect' in Whicher, I. & Carpenter, D. (Eds.) *Yoga: The Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2003) pp. 44–45.
30 CW I, p. 111.
31 CW VIII, p. 155.
32 Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 257.
33 See De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, pp. 127–146 and Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, pp. 94–95.
34 Vivekananda often uses the terms realisation and *brahmajnana* interchangeably. See, for example, CW VI, p. 505, CW VIII, p. 12 & CW II, p. 174.
35 Sen, A. P. (ed.) *The Indispensable Vivekananda: An Anthology for Our Times* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006) p. 49.
36 Vivekananda, Swami *Yoga Philosophy: Raja Yoga, or Conquering the Internal Nature, also Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms with Commentaries* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896) p. ix.
37 Ibid., p. x.
38 Ibid.
39 Sen, *The Indispensable Vivekananda*, p. 49.
40 This, of course, is not a characteristic unique to Vivekananda – eclecticism and syncretism are to be found throughout much Hindu discourse.
41 Vivekananda, *Yoga Philosophy*, pp. 87–94.
42 "Vital breath / Life-force" Johnson, *Oxford Dictionary of Hinduism*, p. 241.
43 "absorbed concentration – a state of higher consciousness, free of karmic or material bonds, which is the result of practising yoga." Ibid., p. 281.
44 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 151.
45 CW I, p. 150.
46 Vivekananda, *Yoga Philosophy*, pp. viii–ix & CW I, p. 122.
47 Examples are numerous, but to illustrate the point, see Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography*, pp. 71–76 and Majumdar, R. C., *Swami Vivekananda: A Historical Review* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1999) pp. 95–98.
48 See, for example, Raychaudhuri, 'Swami Vivekannada's Construction of Hinduism,' p. 2 and Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 2.
49 See, for example, Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, pp. 258–259 and Waite, D., *Back to the Truth: 5000 Years of Advaita* (Winchester: O Books, 2007) pp. 379–381.
50 Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, p. 259.
51 Suthren Hirst, J. G. 'The Place of *Bhakti* in Sankara's *Vedanta*' in Wener, K. (ed.) *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism*, Durham Indological Series No. 3 (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993) p. 117.
52 In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita*, Sankara analyses the key verses of chapter 12 that relate to the promotion of *bhakti* over *jnana* by arguing that:

"there is no *need* to say that those who contemplate the Imperishable are the best, because they are one with the Lord. . . . In other words, true *Bhakti* for Sankara must be related to a correct Advaitin understanding of the nature of the Supreme Self." (Suthren Hirst, 'The Place of *Bhakti* in Sankara's *Vedanta*,' p. 125). The relevant verses are 1–7. with the specific question being asked in verse 1: "Arjuna said: Those who are thus constantly disciplined, and revere Thee with devotion, and those also who (revere) the imperishable unmanifest – of these which are the best knowers of discipline?" Edgerton, F. (trans.) *The Bhagavad Gita* (Cambridge, MA & London: Harvard University Press, 1978 [1944] p. 51).

53 Meditation on a form with qualities.
54 Suthren Hirst, J. G. *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta: A Way of Teaching* (Abingdon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005) p. 119.
55 Mahallingam, T. V. *Kancipuram in Early South Indian History* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1969) cited in Ibid., p. 26.
56 Lott, E. *Vedantic Approaches to God* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1980) p. 122, cited in Ibid., p. 119.
57 Lott, *Vedantic Approaches to God*, cited in Ibid., p. 120.
58 Ibid., p. 140.
59 Ibid., p. 139.
60 Williams, G. *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda: A Study of Religious Change* (Chico: New Horizons Press, 1974) pp. 12–13.
61 See for example, *The Vedanta Philosophy, Vedanta as a Factor in Civilisation, The Spirit and Influence of Vedanta* (CW I, pp. 357–365 and 383–392) and *The Vedanta Philosophy and Christianity* (CW VI, pp. 46–48).
62 Indeed, as outlined in the introduction of this work, it has been the object of study within recent works by, for example, Ramabachan (*The Limits of Scripture*) and Baumfield (*Swami Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta*), which underpin this present work.
63 CW I, pp. 357–365. The discussion that followed the talk is separately published in CW V, pp. 297–310.
64 MLB IV, p. 92. It seems that Vivekananda and William James became close associates, as suggested by James's original intention (which did not, however, come to fruition) to write an introduction to *Raja Yoga* (published in 1896). See MLB IV, p. 120.
65 CW I, p. 362.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 363.
68 CW V, p. 299.
69 See, Farquhar, N. *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Interestingly, Farquhar makes good use of quoting Vivekananda, but predominantly with regard to nationalism and reform in India – see pages 455 and 456, for examples.
70 CW V, pp. 81–82.
71 Ibid., p. 301.
72 This theme of hierarchical inclusivism was also prevalent throughout Vivekananda's earlier series of talks held at Thousand Island Park in the summer of 1895, which described the monistic thought as the highest stage of spiritual development, with monotheism as a lower stage (CW VII, p. 100).
73 Beckerlegge, G. *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 43.
74 Devdas, N. *Svami Vivekananda* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1968).
75 Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994).

76 Dumont, L. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications*, trans. Mark Sainsbury (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970 [1966]).
77 For an excellent summary of Hacker's position, see Halbfass, W. *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988) p. 80ff.
78 *Shanta Bhakti*, *Dasya Bhakti*, *Sakhya Bhakti*, *Vatsalya Bhakti* and *Madhura Bhakti*.
79 Biswas, S. *Samsad Bengali-English Dictionary*, 3rd edn. (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2000) p. 321 accessed online at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/romadict.pl?page=139&table=biswas-bengali&display=utf8 (accessed 01/10/18).
80 Macdonell, A. A. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*, p. 86 accessed online at http://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/romadict.pl?query=gauna&display=simple&table=macdonell (accessed 01/10/18).
81 CW III, p. 33.
82 CW III, pp. 73, 96 & Vivekananda, Swami *Vedanta Philosophy: Lectures on Raja Yoga* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1899 [1897]) p. 305.
83 CW III, p. 36 & Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy–Vol II: Bhakti Yoga* edited by Sturdy (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co. Ltd, 1896) pp. 55–57 (minor linguistic changes).
84 CW III, p. 43.
85 Suthren Hirst, *Samkara's Advaita Vedanta: A Way of Teaching*, p. 119.
86 CW III, p. 70ff & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy: Lectures on Raja Yoga*, p. 301ff.
87 CW III, p. 62.
88 Ibid., p. 63.
89 Ibid., p. 70 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 301.
90 Ibid., p. 72 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 304.
91 Ibid., pp. 79–80 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 312–314.
92 Smart, N. *Dimensions of the Sacred* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).
93 Otto, *Das Heilige Uber Das Irrationale in der Idee des Gottlichen un Sein Verhaltnis zum Rationalem* (1917). Translated as *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).
94 CW III, p. 79 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 312.
95 Ibid. & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 313.
96 When Vivekananda outlines his definition of the divine love of the devotee in his lecture of 10th February 1896, we again see a stepped view of progression towards what Vivekananda believed to be true divine knowledge. Ibid., p. 86ff & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 320ff.
97 *The Triangle of Love* – CW III, pp. 86–90 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 322–327.
98 Ibid., pp. 93–96 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 329–334.
99 Here, Vivekananda leans heavily on themes that appear in devotional texts such as the *Bhagavata Purana*, and also upon the writings of *Bhakta* philosophers such as Ramanuja, which appears at first to be at odds with his *Advaitic* agenda. However, whilst not explicitly stated in the lecture currently under discussion, in an earlier lecture in the series (16th December 1895, New York), Vivekananda was clear to state that: "It is quite natural for one to say that Shankara's meaning is the best, but I wish to add that one should not neglect Ramanuja's interpretation [of the Upanishads] either." (CW IV, p. 7). It is probable that Vivekananda had in mind, whilst making this comment, the importance of *Puranic* texts as aids for the development of what Vivekananda saw as fallible, emotional individual *Bhaktas*, in their spiritual progression from *Gauni Bhakti* to *Para Bhakti*. For further comment, see Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 76.

100 CW III, p. 94. Strangely, the Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy* text leaves out *Sakhya* section of this lecture entirely.
101 Ibid., pp. 95–96 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 331.
102 Ibid., p. 96 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 334.
103 Ibid., p. 97 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 334–335.
104 CW II, pp. 40–41.
105 Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Vol. 2, pp. 103–104.
106 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 110, 113.
107 See for example, CW I, p. 4 & 79.
108 CW IV, p. 121.
109 CW II, p. 39 & Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 101.
110 CW III, p. 357.
111 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1st edn. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1912–1914) in four volumes, volume three, pp. 194–196. Cited in Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in India: A Corrective Biography* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999) p. 241.
112 This view is furthered in a lecture titled *The Naturalness of Bhakti-Yoga and Its Central Secret*, which argues that the majority of people will benefit more immediately from *bhakti*, rather than *jnana*, because human nature is more inclined to devotion than knowledge at the baser levels of spiritual maturity. See CW III, p. 77ff and Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 310ff.
113 CW II, p. 38 & Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 98.
114 CW IV, p. 249.
115 Ibid., p. 93.
116 Ibid., p. 41.
117 Bhagavad Gita 3:35.
118 See particularly, his address at the final session of the parliament, CW I, pp. 23–24.
119 This is particularly expressed in lectures of 20th December 1895 and 10th January 1896. See CW I, pp. 63–71 & pp. 94–118.
120 Ibid., p. 64. It is interesting that Vivekananda validates what he understands to be universal truths by referring to specifically Indian thought systems.
121 Ibid., pp. 65–66.
122 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 96.
123 CW I, p. 26 cited in Rambachan, ibid.
124 CW I, p. 183 (author's added italics).
125 CW III, pp. 45–46 and p. 50. See also Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 269.
126 CW III, p. 48 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 273.
127 Rambachan also explores Vivekananda's preference for personal experience or knowledge, noting his insistence that exegesis of the *Upanishads* should be discounted as this was '*not final knowledge*.' See, Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 82. For Vivekananda, this knowledge needs to be passed on through an 'enlightened' *guru*, to have true meaning in the life of the *Bhakta*.
128 CW III, pp. 48–51 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, pp. 272–276.
129 CW III, p. 50 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 275.
130 Vivekananda frequently criticised the 'professional' status of Christian missionaries, who accepted payment for their services. Examples abound – see, for instance, Vivekananda's statements in his speech *Religion Not The Crying Need of India* on 20th September 1893, CW I, p. 20.
131 CW III, p. 51 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 276. It is noteworthy that Vivekananda quotes on more than one occasion the following line from the

Bhagavad Gita "*Whenever virtue subsides and wickedness prevails, I manifest Myself*." (Chapter 4, Verse 7) In his view, *avatar*s, holy persons and *gurus* were all manifestations of God's essential nature – that is love. See CW III, p. 56 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 282 & CW III, p. 32 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 252.

132 This stance is exampled by Vivekananda's time at Thousand Island Park (CW VII, p. 100) and Harvard University (CW V, p. 299).

133 CW IV, p. 31 & Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 47.

134 CW IV, p. 40 & Vivekananda, *Addresses on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Vol. 2, p. 102.

135 CW III, p. 42 & Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 264.

136 Robert C. Fuller, quoted by Hanegraff, W. J. 'Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism' in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 2 pp. 99–129, cited in De Michelis, E. *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 172.

137 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 175.

138 Titled 'Steps of Hindu Philosophic Thought' in CW.

139 CW I, p. 393.

140 The specific belief in 'God' as a personal, intervening deity. As if to highlight the 'low' level of theistic beliefs, Vivekananda noted on 4th January 1896 that: "the man who thinks that he is receiving response to his prayers does not know that the fulfilment comes from his own nature, that he has succeeded by the mental attitude of prayer in waking up a bit of this infinite power which is coiled up within himself." (See, CW I, p. 165, cited in De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 175).

141 The phrase 'lunar sphere' is used in this context by Vivekananda to mean the realm where the *Jiva* is located after death for those who have done good works, understood within a dualistic thought-system.

142 CW I, p. 398.

143 Ibid., p. 400.

144 Ibid., p. 403.

145 Vivekananda, Swami *Vedanta Philosophy: Jnana Yoga Part II* (New York: The Vedanta Society, 1907) p. 21ff.

146 CW II, pp. 432–441.

147 CW II, p. 433.

148 Ibid. Although these are not common translations of these terms, they are the ones used by Vivekananda, according to the *Complete Works*.

149 See, for example, CW IV, p. 187, CW V, p. 186 & CW VI, p. 98.

150 CW I, pp. 149–150.

151 By pseudo-scientific, I mean religious claims to answer scientific questions using language or methodology borrowed from the physical sciences, but interpreted in a non-scientific religious worldview.

152 CW I, p. 150.

153 Based upon the work of Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815).

154 De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 163.

155 Ibid., pp. 163–168.

156 CW I, p. 155. Vivekananda's borrowing of contemporary Western sources also continues with regard to the relationship of Vivekananda's *Raja Yoga* and the writings of Blavatsky on behalf of the Theosophical society. De Michelis has noted that as early as 1880, Blavatsky was formulating a hierarchical distinction between lower *hatha yoga* and higher *raja yoga*, within a wider framework which "amalgamates *rajayoga*, Patanjali's yoga, Vedantic *jnanayoga* and 'self-mesmerisation' by stating, effectively, that they are all the same." (De Michelis, *A History of Modern Yoga*, p. 178).

157 CW I, p. 151.

158 Ibid., p. 160.

159 Respectively, the basic understanding of nerve centres of the body, the thousand-petalled lotus of the brain, and the lotus of the navel. See CW I, p. 161.
160 CW V, p. 277.
161 Ibid.
162 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 101.
163 CW I, p. 130 cited in ibid., p. 100.
164 CW I, p. 151.
165 See, for example, CW I, p. 128 or Vivekananda, *Vedanta Philosophy*, p. 5.
166 Killingley, D. 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India' in Amigoni & Wallace (eds.) *Charles Darwin's The Origin of Species: New Interdisciplinary Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) p. 175. Specifically, in Bengal, Science was an embedded part of the curriculum by the 1840s – indeed, scholarship examinations for the Hindu, Hooghly, Dacca and Krishnagur Colleges all required passes in Maths and Science. See, Larwood, H.J.C. 'Science in India before 1850' in *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Nov., 1958) p. 46.
167 Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 176.
168 Ibid., p. 177.
169 Ibid., p. 178.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid., p. 179.
172 Max Muller, F. *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (the Hibbert Lectures, 1878) (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1880) p. 362, cited in ibid., p. 185. For a detailed treatment of this subject, see Schrempp, G. 'The Re-Education of Friedrich Max Muller: Intellectual Appropriation and Epistemological Antinomy in Mid-Victorian Evolutionary Thought' in *Man, New Series*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Mar., 1983) especially pages.
173 Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 186.
174 Singleton, M. 'Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century' in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Aug. 2007) p. 130.
175 CW VIII, p. 25.
176 It should be noted that aspects of Hindu mythological cosmology also ran counter to Darwin's claims of evolutionary progression – the Hindu concept of the *Yugas*, or Ages, run on a degenerating course, progressively distancing humanity from the source of spirituality causing *adharma*, or disorder in a "decline from an original perfection." See Killingley, D. '*Yoga-Sutra* IV, 2–3 and Vivekananda's Interpretation of Evolution' in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, Vol. 18 (1990) pp. 151–179, 153.
177 Singleton, 'Yoga, Eugenics, and Spiritual Darwinism in the Early Twentieth Century,' p. 133.
178 Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 192.
179 CW V II, p. 152 cited in ibid., p. 193.
180 Ibid. It is interesting to note that Vivekananda often equated this 'spiritual perfection' with the *Tat Tvam Asi* ethic popularised by Schopenhauer and introduced to Vivekananda by Paul Deussen in 1896. *Tat Tvam Asi* ('Thou art that') is based upon *Advaitic* monism and is the *mahavakhya* ('great saying') of the *Chandogya Upanisad*, and it was used by Schopenhauer as a foundational basis for ethics. In turn, Vivekananda was to claim this as a 'Hindu' concept, despite the fact that there was no ethical basis to the phrase before Schopenhauer. For a discussion of this topic see Halbfass, W. *Philology and Confrontation: Paul*

Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedanta (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) pp. 273–298, especially 291–298.

181 Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 193.

182 This thought is grounded in the Hindu concept of *sat-karya-vada* ('the doctrine of the existent effect'), which means that "any effect exists already in its cause, though in a latent form." Translation and quotation from Killingley, '*Yoga-Sutra* IV, 2–3 and Vivekananda's Interpretation of Evolution,' p. 152.

183 CW III, p. 406 cited in Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 194.

184 This is a reference to *avidya*, the ignorance, caused by *maya* which stops individuals from realising their unity with *Brahman* in the *Advaita* tradition.

185 CW III, p. 407, cited in Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 195.

186 See, in particular, Killingley, '*Yoga-Sutra* IV, 2–3 and Vivekananda's Interpretation of Evolution,' pp. 160, 164–166.

187 Raina, D. & Habib, S. I. 'The Moral Legitimation of Modern Science: Bhadralok Reflections on Theories of Evolution' in *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Feb., 1996) p. 16.

188 For a survey of this term, see in particular: Halliday, R. J. 'Social Darwinism: A Definition' in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jun., 1971) and Claeys, G. 'The "Survival of the Fittest" and the Origins of Social Darwinism' in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Apr., 2000).

189 Killingley, 'Hinduism, Darwinism and Evolution in Late Nineteenth-Century India,' p. 191.

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191 Stocking, G. W. Jr. *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987) p. 157.

192 Ibid., p. 159.

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194 Tylor, E. B. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom Vols. 1 & II* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1889 [1871].

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198 Ibid., p. 133.

199 Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 2, p. 539.

200 Duke, J. O. 'The Rise of Biblical Criticism: A Review' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Autumn, 1986) p. 562.

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203 Hill, H. 'Religion and the University: The Controversy Over *Essays and Reviews* at Oxford' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, March 2005, Vol. 73, No. 1, p. 184.

204 Altholz, 'A Tale of Two Controversies,' p. 50.

205 Baden Powell was a mathematician and clergyman who taught Geometry at Oxford.

206 Williams was Professor of Theology and Vice-Principle of St David's, College, Lampeter, now the University of Wales: Trinity St David.

207 Hill, 'Religion and the University,' pp. 186–187. The latter section of this quotation is taken from Benjamin Jowett's essay *On the Interpretation of Scripture*. See *Essays and Reviews*, p. 330ff.
208 Tonini, S. 'Swami Vivekananda's Christ' in Dasgupta, R. K. (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago: A Commemorative Volume* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, 1994) pp. 614–615.
209 Huff, P. A. 'Vivekananda's Contribution to Christology' in Sengupta, S. & Paranjape, M. (eds.) *The Cyclonic Swami: Vivekananda in the West* (New Delhi: Samvad India Foundation, 2005) p. 91.
210 Tonini, 'Swami Vivekananda's Christ,' p. 615.
211 CW IV, p. 146 cited in ibid.
212 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 80.
213 CW III, pp. 72–73, quoted in ibid.
214 CW V, p. 317, quoted in ibid. Italics in original.
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216 Ibid., p. 82.
217 CW I, p. 72.
218 Ibid., p. 108.
219 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 68.
220 Ibid., p. 70.
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222 CW I, p. 83 & CW V, p. 240.
223 See, for example, CW I, pp. 57–58 & 73–74.
224 Ibid., p. 58.
225 Ibid., p. 98.
226 Whicher & Carpenter (eds.) *Yoga*, p. 109.
227 Ibid.
228 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, pp. 102–103.
229 CW V, p. 392, cited in Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 103.
230 CW I, pp. 183–184.
231 Rambachan, *The Limits of Scripture*, p. 102.
232 Elkman has noted that: "It was one of Swami Vivekananda's keen desires to write a philosophical work showing the reconciliation (*samanvaya*) of the different schools of *Vedanta* based on the doctrines of *Advaita*. He mentioned this several times in letters from the West to India and requested that the *bhasyas* of Sankara, Ramanuja, and Madhva be sent to him. Unfortunately, his desire to accomplish this task was never fulfilled." Elkman, S. 'Religious Plurality and Swami Vivekananda' in *Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of the Sciences and the Humanities*, Vol. 59 (1997) p. 511.

5 Critiquing Christianity, Buddhism and Islam

> All the various practices and trainings, Bibles and Gods, are but the rudiments of religion, the kindergartens of religion.[1]

The previous chapter outlined Vivekananda's understanding of, and approach to, the formulation of a Hindu religious worldview. It concluded that Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism was, primarily, (1) hierarchical and (2) inclusivistic and universal. It is logical, therefore, that any *Advaita*-based philosophy such as Vivekananda's must make strong truth claims in relation to non-Hindu faith systems and philosophies. This is clearly the case with Vivekananda, and indeed, much of his legacy[2] and lasting appeal[3] is linked to his approach to non-Hindu worldviews.

This chapter will explore Vivekananda's application of his Hindu framework to Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, and is arranged in four sections: (1) Jesus, the Buddha and Mohammed, (2) divergence between the prophet's message and its interpretation by followers, (3) hierarchisation and the denigration of *Gauni Bhakti*, and (4) The underlying unity of these traditions.

Founders

Vivekananda's major single writing on Jesus is *Christ the Messenger*.[4] A lecture delivered in Los Angeles in 1900, it is a succinct summary of Vivekananda's attitude towards, and interpretation of, the person of Jesus, which "reveals the esteemed place of Jesus in his worldview" and "reveals an operative Christology that evolves along with his entire philosophical vision."[5] The text, which is full of praise for the Jesus of history, covers three important areas of Vivekananda's thinking regarding the person of Jesus – (1) that he must be seen within his own social and historical background; (2) that Jesus should be seen more for his message than for his person; and (3) that Jesus was one of a line of *avatara* connected with other prior and subsequent incarnations. We shall now look at what Vivekananda says about each of these three areas in turn.

Vivekananda argues strongly against the Westernisation of the historical character of Jesus of Nazareth, and all the "attempts to paint him with blue eyes and yellow hair,"[6] preferring instead to place him firmly within an Oriental framework. He cites Jesus' parables as mentioning village surroundings and practices that are commonplace across Asia[7] and argues that Jesus was focused upon religion, not politics, a standpoint Vivekananda clearly associates with the 'spiritual' East, rather than the 'material' West. Vivekananda also relates Jesus back to his origins in the Jewish tradition – indeed, Vivekananda calls Jesus the 'Incarnation of the Jews,'[8] but at this point we see one of the complications of Vivekananda's treatment of Jesus, and indeed of his treatment of incarnations in general. In *Christ the Messenger*, Vivekananda clearly praises the Jewish people for their endurance in the face of persecution in the early centuries BCE, especially for their collective 'concentrated energy'[9] but he then, quite deliberately, states that the incarnation of Jesus of Nazareth could be seen as the culmination of the Jewish race's energetic spiritual expression. This clearly has implications for the validity of Jewish identity and independence as a Faith, in relation to the embryonic Christian religion of first-century Palestine, and is somewhat dismissive of mainstream Jewish denials of Jesus' status as Messiah.[10] This attitude is even more explicitly stated in another work – *Buddhism, The Fulfilment of Hinduism*[11] which was delivered seven years earlier than *Christ the Messenger*, on the platform of the Chicago Parliament. In this talk, Vivekananda quite clearly states, "in the case of Jesus . . . the Jew[s] did not understand the fulfilment of the Old Testament."[12] It is interesting to comment, at this point, about Vivekananda's treatment of Judaism, which was noteworthy, although brief.

Vivekananda's engagement with Judaism is limited, to say the least. Whilst he does mentioned Judaism as a venerable, respected and 'old' religion, often bracketing it with Hinduism and Zoroastrianism,[13] this is consistently accompanied by a caveat – for example, that Judaism's basis is purely mythological, rather than spiritual[14] or that Judaism failed to establish itself as a dominant spiritual force once Christianity had arisen.[15] Vivekananda is also dismissive of Jewish criticisms of 'idol worship.' In *My Plan of Campaign*, a lecture addressed to the local population of Madras in 1897, Vivekananda argues that Jewish rejection of idolatry by non-Israelite tribes is hypocritical:

> If God is represented in any beautiful form or any symbolic form, said the Jew, it is awfully bad; it is sin. But if He is represented in the form of a chest, with two angels sitting on each side, and a cloud hanging over it, it is the holy of holies. If God comes down in the form of a dove, it is holy. But if He comes in the form of a cow, it is a heathen superstition; condemn it![16]

Vivekananda also links Judaism to conceptions of a vengeful of punishing deity. In a London lecture of 16th November 1895, titled *The Religion*

of Love, Vivekananda links the origins of blasphemy[17] to Jewish practice and states: "the ideas that God is judge and punisher are not in themselves bad, but they are low and vulgar."[18] This is particularly fascinating for our current study, as Vivekananda is here clearly situating Jewish conceptions of deity within his hierarchical framework of religion – indeed, in a later lecture given in London on 20th October 1896, titled *Maya and the Conception of God*, Vivekananda not only locates Jewish views of Jehovah as 'cruel and ruthless,' 'incongruous' and 'disgusting'[19] but locates these views within his emerging framework of religious hierarchalism and evolution and suggesting a form of socio-religious development by stating:

> These ideas, in the setting of past times, were harmonious and not more hideous than our present ideas. It is only when we try to take them out of their settings and apply to our own present circumstances that the hideousness becomes obvious. For the old surroundings are dead and gone. Just as the ancient Jew has developed into the keen, modern, sharp Jew, and the ancient Aryan into the intellectual Hindu, similarly Jehovah has grown, and Devas have grown.[20]

For Vivekananda, this 'development' of Judaism is invariably linked with Christianity – as the above understanding of Jesus suggests – in fact, engagement with Judaism for Vivekananda is often simply a method for introducing his understanding of Christian belief, practice or history. In an 1899 contribution to the Bengali language publication *Udbodhan*, Vivekananda provides a 'history of the Jewish race'[21] which is no more than a potted history acting purely as a precursor to a discussion on Jesus and early Christianity.[22] This is another example, as with Vivekananda's above-noted comment on Jesus being 'the incarnation of the Jews,' of Vivekananda valuing Judaism as the precursor to Christianity, in which Judaism finds its fulfilment, and this clearly impacts with Vivekananda's engagement with Judaism as an independent faith on its own terms.

Returning to the figure of Jesus, therefore, we can see that Vivekananda's imposition of his own viewpoint over and above documented Jewish reactions to claims about Jesus demonstrates here that he is, in his own way, painting Jesus' eyes and hair, perhaps not blue and yellow, but certainly in colours from his own palette. This re-colouring of the 'Jesus persona' by Vivekananda is part of what Killingley has described as "a distinctive Indian view [of Jesus] formed in the course of the nineteenth century"[23] where Vivekananda is standing on the shoulders of giants such as Keshub Chunder Sen.[24]

In *Christ the Messenger*, Vivekananda interprets the sayings of Jesus from 'the standpoint of the Orient,'[25] often conflicting with traditional Christian dogma. He claims that this is necessary as there has been too much emphasis on the person of Jesus by Christians; "And thus the whole teaching of the Master is degenerated, and all the struggle and fight is for the personality of the Man."[26] This approach is exemplified on several

occasions, but perhaps the most striking is when Vivekananda mentions the famous saying from John 14:6 that 'I and my father are one.'[27] A traditional Christian reading suggests that Jesus is wholly man and wholly divine, as one with the Father in a Trinitarian framework.[28] Yet here, it is not clear at all that Vivekananda is agreeing with this traditional interpretation. In an earlier paragraph of the text, Vivekananda argues that Jesus had "no other thought except one, that he was a spirit. He was a disembodied, unfettered, unbound spirit. . . . And . . . he . . . had found that every[one] . . . was the embodiment of the same undying spirit as himself."[29] Through this example, it can be seen that Vivekananda was attempting to re-interpret the message – and person – of Jesus from within a Vedantic framework.[30] Rather than a discourse on the Father-Son relationship in the context of a realised form of Eschatology,[31] Vivekananda's use of these sayings reminds the reader more of the *Advaita* teachings of the *Chandogya Upanisad Mahavakya*[32] – *Tat Tvam Asi*.[33]

The third area to be examined in this section is Vivekananda's placing of Jesus within a line of *avatara*. Vivekananda clearly identifies Jesus as being *one* of the 'great children of light'[34] – an interpretation which is opposed to exclusivist Christian claims for Jesus' unique incarnation, with which many of the listeners in Los Angeles would have been familiar.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, Vivekananda saw *avatara* as a necessary means of communication with the divine – a middle step in the tri-partite *dvaita, Vishishtadvaita* and *Advaita* hierarchy of human religious development: "At first the undeveloped intellect of the uneducated man sees God as far away, up in the heaven. . . . As man advanced spiritually, he began to feel that God was omnipresent. . . . And a few individuals who had developed enough and were pure enough, went further still, and at last found God."[35] In this understanding, the *avatar* aids the believer to realise that God is not removed and in heaven, but is amongst us. Indeed, "The Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen until He is reflected by these giant lamps of the earth – the Prophets, the man-Gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God."[36]

Vivekananda further explicates his understanding of Jesus' *avatar* role by analysing the text of the Lord's Prayer, with its concept of a 'Father in Heaven' which, for Vivekananda, was symptomatic of a *Gauni Bhakti* approach to spirituality. Indeed, to address this issue, Vivekananda suggests that "to a higher circle, to those who had advanced a little more, he [Jesus] gave a more elevated teaching: 'I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.'"[37] This incorporation of Jesus into a non-dual Vedantic worldview has been noted by Martin, who argues that this allowed Vivekananda to concentrate on the spiritual nature of Christ (and in this example also the Buddha), rather than on his humanity: "'Jesus had our nature; he became Christ. So can we and so must we. Christ and Buddha were the names of a state to be attained; Jesus and Gautama were the persons to attain it.' It is a spiritual error to separate ourselves from the

avatars, as without recognition by our own inner divinity their missions would be worthless."[38]

Whilst Vivekananda's interpretation of Jesus' teachings is no more or less valid than traditional Western thoughts, it is clear that he is placing Jesus into his hierarchical framework of religion – indeed, how could he not, when Christianity is a religion founded on the premise of incarnation, which Vivekananda links to his own understanding of *avatar*, as a step on the path to a non-dual understanding of reality?[39]

It is clear from much of Vivekananda's writings that he holds the historical person of Gautama Siddhartha in high esteem. This is, of course, not without its complications – Killingley notes that "the place of Buddhism in Vivekananda's discourse changed considerably in the course of his career"[40] – but, for Vivekananda, the Buddha, the 'greatest man ever born,'[41] sits in the pantheon of 'spiritual giants.'[42]

For Vivekananda, the Buddha clearly sits in the great line of prophets who have enlightened humankind, but he [the Buddha] claims neither to be an *avatar* or messenger – a category within which Vivekananda often places each of these great men. This is explicitly stated in *Karma-Yoga*:

> The prophets of the world, with this single exception, may be divided into two sets, one set holding that they are incarnations of God come down to earth, and the other holding that they are only messengers from God. . . . But Buddha is the only prophet who said, 'I do not care to know your various theories about God. What is the use of discussing all the subtle doctrines about the soul? Do good and be good. And this will take you to freedom and to whatever truth there is.'[43]

Complications are apparent throughout Vivekananda's view of the Buddha, when, on the one hand, he describes him as being, quite literally, God[44] and also states categorically that he is the same spiritual being as became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of the Christians,[45] whilst on the other hand, giving credence to the Buddha's own apparent view that "he died always declaring that he was but man."[46]

This malleable approach to the 'person' of the Buddha in Vivekananda's writings highlights two important facets of Vivekananda's approach to the key figures of the world's religions. First, Vivekananda was always at pains to explain these figures within a context of their social and historical background and second, he sought to locate them within a great religious-historical plan, in which India, and specifically *Vedanta*, was a central pivot. We shall now explore these two points in brief detail with specific reference to the Buddha.

For Vivekananda, it was essential to view the religious issues surrounding the Buddha's lifetime to fully understand the man and his actions, and principally this meant understanding the power of the priest-castes. In *Buddha's Message*,[47] delivered in San Francisco in 1900, Vivekananda outlines the 'struggle' of the Indian poor who were denied access to religious knowledge

by the Brahmin priests and the upper castes within Indian society. Not for the only time in his works, Vivekananda compares this to the Jewish struggle against the Pharisees at the time of Jesus of Nazareth's birth, treating both Jesus and the Buddha as reactionary reformers acting on behalf of the common people.

The Buddha's reaction to the existing religious practices of his time led to several key areas of thinking, about which Vivekananda comments. Vivekananda's praise for the Buddha's teaching derives from his view that "in Buddha, we had the great, universal heart and infinite patience, making religion practical and bringing it to everyone's door"[48] – the Buddha's mission was to liberate followers from the trappings of superstitious belief based on tradition and existing practice, to allow them to grow spiritually. This manifested in such teachings as non-reliance on holy texts, personal responsibility for attaining salvation, and placing women on an equal spiritual and social footing as men – all a direct response to what the Buddha perceived to be 'wrong' about the Vedic *Brahmanism* in India at the time. For Vivekananda, these actions made the Buddha a reformer, not the founder of a new religion – "Buddha was a great Vedantist (for Buddhism was really only an offshoot of Vedanta)";[49] and indeed Vivekananda even describes the Buddha as 'the greatest Hindu ever born.'[50]

Time and again throughout his writings, Vivekananda places the Buddha within a Vedantic framework. Of course, the historical Buddha was a product of a 'Hindu' system of thought, but in the same way that the Buddha is often listed as the sixth incarnation of *Vishnu* in modern *Vaishnava* lists of *avatars*, so Vivekananda is claiming the Buddha for his own interpretation of the Vedantic tradition. This encompassing can also be seen when Vivekananda praises the Buddha's practical approach to religion, claiming that this is simply putting *karma yoga* into practice.[51]

It is apparent, therefore, that Vivekananda places the Buddha within a Hindu milieu, a theme that will be developed in the latter sections of this chapter. There is a real danger that Vivekananda, through his desire to incorporate the Buddha into a Vedantic worldview, oversimplifies, or simply ignores, the complexity of the relationship between very early forms of Buddhism and the prevailing Brahminical Hindu religion of India of the time. As Gethin notes, "we can know very little of the historical Buddha with any degree of certainty,"[52] and, interestingly, when the earliest contemporaneous texts of the Hindu Brahminical tradition are examined, they offer no explicit mention of the Buddha at all.[53] Indeed, Williams explicitly rejects any notion of the Buddha as simply a Hindu reformer (which is, of course, at the heart of Vivekananda's views of the man), when he notes:

> We still find it commonly said that the Buddha was a 'Hindu reformer.' This is misleading. The Buddha rejected the final religious authority directly, indirectly, or ideologically, of the social class of Brahmins and their primordial scriptures, the Vedas, so important to Hinduism

> throughout history. And much of what we nowadays call 'Hinduism,' such as the centrality of the Gods Siva, or Visnu, the ideas of Samkara's Advaita Vedanta, the themes of the Bhagavad Gita, Tantric practices, and so on developed after the time of the Buddha.[54]

Clearly, therefore, despite Vivekananda's historical naivety, and clear preference for a Vedantic interpretation of the Buddha, his views are of interest precisely *because* they represent this hierarchical and inclusivistic view of a faith system and a religious leader solely in relation to *Vedanta*, and not on their own terms. Vivekananda also criticises the Buddha for certain views. On several occasions, Vivekananda purports to 'like the man, but not the teachings,'[55] seemingly in opposition to some of the praise indicated above. This may, perhaps, be explained by Vivekananda's view that the Buddha's 'teaching was bold even for India.'[56] In taking this stance, Vivekananda concentrated on ascribing Hindu attributes to the Buddha, rather than engaging with challenging issues of the Buddha's teachings, such as the concept of *anatta*, which presented problems in Vivekananda's *Advaitic* worldview.[57] Indeed, in such instances, Vivekananda describes the Buddha as having 'introduced sectarianism' into India,[58] which reflects disapproval of sect-based practices, which according to Vivekananda's hierarchical framework, were limited to lower levels of spiritual understanding.

With regard to Islam, Vivekananda clearly sees Mohammed, the 'great Arabian prophet,'[59] as sitting in the line of divinely inspired personalities which includes Jesus and the Buddha. Mohammed represents an example to which we should all aspire, with whom we should realise that we can be "the soul of Buddha, of Jesus, of Mohammed"[60] and whom Vivekananda believed "[brought] down the light of knowledge from above to the mortal world."[61] It is interesting to note, however, that Vivekananda often refers to Mohammed as a secondary level of these inspired men; for example, Vivekananda claims that Mohammed "stumbled upon [his] superconscious state without understanding it,"[62] as he (Mohammed) claimed that the angel Gabriel spoke to him, meaning that Mohammed (or his spiritual insight) was not the source of the message itself. In fact, Vivekananda goes as far as to say that Mohammed was "not a trained Yogi, and did not know the reason of what he was doing."[63] It is, of course, appropriate to see these comments in the light of Vivekananda's social inheritance regarding mainstream nineteenth-century Hindu views of Islam. Raychaudhuri notes that:

> as Indian nationalism entered an irredentist phase in the later decades of the 19th century, the negative perception of Indo-Islamic history and the role of the Muslims in Indian life acquired a passionate intensity. Around the same time the emotive features of increasingly militant nationalism came to be informed by an assertion of the Hindu identity.[64]

Against such a backdrop of anti-Muslim historiography, it is perhaps understandable that Vivekananda would at times relegate Mohammed to a lesser position than other religious leaders.[65]

As with Jesus and the Buddha, Vivekananda places Mohammed in a social and historical context, defending his historicity[66] and placing him firmly within a historical, as well as faith-based framework. To this end, Vivekananda saw Mohammed as a religious reformer, much in the tradition of the Buddha. Noting the widespread polytheism of the Arabian Peninsula, Vivekananda comments that "Mohammed's heart was sick at the sin, idolatry and mock worship, superstitions and human sacrifices."[67] Vivekananda thus praises Mohammed's wish to get rid of the corrupt priestly element of society, in much the same way that he praises the Buddha and Jesus before him; "The Prophet Mohammed himself was dead against the priestly class in any shape and tried his best for the total destruction of this power by formulating rules and injunctions to that effect."[68]

Vivekananda also reiterated Mohammed's role as a reformer by highlighting his criticism of Christianity during his lifetime, where Mohammed "found that Christianity was straying out from the Semitic fold and his teachings were to show that Christianity ought to be a Semitic religion, that it should hold to one God. The idea that 'I and my Father are one' disgusted and terrified him."[69]

Clearly, Vivekananda's understanding of the Gospel passage quoted above is *Advaitic*, but what is particularly notable is that in so doing, Vivekananda is being explicitly critical of Mohammed's approach, as he believed that "the conception of the Trinity was a great advance over the dualistic idea of Jehovah, who was for ever separate from man. The theory of incarnation is the first link in the chain of ideas leading to recognition of the oneness of God and man."[70] The meaning of this is clear – in Vivekananda's view, Mohammed was further separating humans from God by denying incarnation. Indeed, he comments; "Monistic is the highest stage, monotheistic is a lower stage"[71] again aligning other faiths within his hierarchical framework.

In contrast to this, one aspect of Mohammed's life and teachings that Vivekananda is highly appreciative of is Mohammed's role as the "Messenger of equality . . . the Prophet of equality, of the brotherhood of man, the brotherhood of all Mussulmans."[72] Vivekananda consistently praised Mohammed's promotion of "a perfect equality and brotherhood. [With] no question of race, caste, creed, colour, or sex."[73] However, this praise comes with a necessary caveat – Vivekananda clearly disapproved of the limiting of this brotherhood to 'signed-up' members of the Muslim faith. Whilst praising of Mohammed's social reform, which meant that all Muslims were seen as equals, Vivekananda could never accept Muslim monopolistic claims for Truth. In a lecture, simply titled *Mohammed*, delivered in March 1900 near San Francisco, Vivekananda summed up his thoughts on this dilemma thus:

> The first message was equality. . . . There is one religion – love. No more question of race, colour, [or] anything else. Join it! That practical quality carried the day. . . . The great message was perfectly simple. Believe in one God, the creator of heaven and earth. All was created out of nothing by Him. Ask no questions.[74]

Clearly, Vivekananda believed that monopolistic claims for truth negated the universal message of this statement.

Followers

It is clear throughout Vivekananda's writings that he makes a definite distinction between the teachings of the great prophets and the practice and doctrines of their followers. This stance is evidenced in Vivekananda's writings on Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, where he critiques (1) the disregard of key Prophetic teachings by followers and (2) the missionary aspects of these traditions.

In a lecture titled *Soul, God and Religion*, given in Hartford, Connecticut, on 8th March 1895, Vivekananda unequivocally states "the most profound and noble ideas of Christianity were never understood in Europe, because the ideas and images used by the writers of the Bible were foreign to it"[75] and that "Christ's teachings are now very little understood in this country.[76] If you will excuse me, I will say that they have never been very well understood."[77] Central to this viewpoint was Vivekananda's belief that "the religion of Christ is the religion of renunciation but the West has made it a religion of luxury."[78] This latter sentiment was voiced by Vivekananda in a public lecture in Detroit, on 21st February 1894, titled *Hindus and Christians*, during which he heavily criticised what he believed to be the deficiencies of the Christian interpretations of Jesus' teachings.

For Sil, this stance was necessitated to "rescue Hinduism from the quagmire of Oriental esoterism to which some Christian missionaries had relegated it and to proclaim vocally its anteriority and superiority vis-à-vis all other religions of the world."[79] Crucially, Sil contends that this was done by placing a distinct ethical-distance between the Prophet and the followers, indeed, he comments: "His [Vivekananda's] strategy was first to establish his credibility and goodwill by praising Jesus and yet admonishing the Christians for not following Christ's precepts."[80] As we have seen previously, Vivekananda's treatment of the character of Jesus, the teachings of the Nazarene Prophet are viewed through an *Advaitic* lens. Christological conceptions of unity with the Father,[81] future and realised eschatological understandings of the Kingdom of Heaven[82] and Jesus' claims to have existed before Abraham[83] are all viewed through an *Advaitic* worldview. It is clear, therefore that Vivekananda's interpretation of Jesus within an *Advaitic* hierarchical framework necessitates the view that 'traditional' Christian interpretations of Jesus' message are flawed; indeed, he summarised: "the religion they have

had, Christianity, although good and glorious in many respects, has been imperfectly understood, and is, as understood hitherto, found to be insufficient."[84] Even more simply, Vivekananda stated that "Look where we may, a true Christian nowhere do we see."[85] It is, of course, precisely such claims that Vivekananda makes about the conduct of Christians, which we will analyse in the following sections of this chapter.

In a manner consistent with his view of Jesus and Christians, Vivekananda also clearly differentiates between the Buddha and Buddhists. In a lecture titled *True Buddhism*, given in Brooklyn, New York, on 4th February 1895, he categorically stated: "What Buddha taught, the Hindoo believes, but what the Buddhists teach, we do not accept."[86]

According to Vivekananda, early Buddhists worshipped the Buddha as a God, which was contrary to the Buddha's wishes; "The very Buddha who declared against the existence of a Personal God had not died fifty years before his disciples manufactured a Personal God out of him."[87] It is this link with a personal God that is important here – for Vivekananda himself admitted to seeing the Buddha as God,[88] but he believed that the Buddhists had no choice but to turn the Buddha into a personal God, as this is a necessary condition of a low stage of religious understanding. Here, then, even a criticism of followers (in this case Buddhist) is tempered within Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of religion which suggests that these 'faults' may be overcome. Clearly, the inclusive hierarchy of Vivekananda's framework is at play here, as Vivekananda situates the faults of Buddhistic understanding of the Buddha within a *Gauni Bhakti* section of his framework, highlighting the original ideals of the founder within a higher, *Vedantic*, position. Indeed, Vivekananda stated that: "The aims of the Buddhistic and the Vedic religions are the same, but the means adopted by the Buddhistic are not right."[89]

Vivekananda's critique of Muslims is centred upon Mohammed's express condemnation of the worship of prophets or messengers. In this regard, Vivekananda argues for a substitution theory of worship, noting that: "The Mohammedans from the beginning stood against any such worship. They would have nothing to do with worshipping the Prophets or the Messengers, or paying homage to them; but practically, instead of one Prophet, thousands upon thousands of saints are being worshipped."[90]

Vivekananda describes the departure of Muslims from Mohammed's original message of brotherhood as 'accretions,'[91] and diminishes the importance of doctrinal or philosophical developments of the faith: "What Mohammedanism comes to preach to the world is this practical brotherhood of all belonging to their faith. That is the essential part of the Mohammedan religion; and all the other ideas about heaven and life etc. are not Mohammedanism."[92] Clearly focusing on the notion of Mohammed as a social reformer, Vivekananda is using a reductionist argument to analyse what he believes to be the core values of Mohammed's message – namely, the denigration

of iconography and the promotion of a unity of humankind. Clearly, this perceived divergence between Prophet and followers sits well within Vivekananda's hierarchical inclusivism.

One of Vivekananda's main criticisms of Christianity concerns its historical growth, from Europe and the Middle-ages through to the British Empire's actions in the East, which Vivekananda attributes (with deliberate emotiveness) to aggressive exploitation, arguing that "Christianity wins its prosperity by cutting the throats of its fellowmen."[93] Vivekananda links this prosperity with political and secular advancement in the name of religion, but it is precisely this politicisation of Jesus' teachings that Vivekananda argues against: "Old questions arise: Christianity must be the only true religion of the world, because Christian nations are prosperous! But that assertion contradicts itself, because the prosperity of the Christian nation depends on the misfortune on non-Christian nations."[94]

This Christian reliance on political power to convert and grow is seen by Vivekananda as a sign of weakness. He quite clearly believes that Christianity is less spiritual than the religion of the Vedas, and is damning of the Christian approach to religion, and the qualities of Christian societies, throughout his works; "intellectuality is not all that there is for a man or woman. There should be also spirituality. But that side is entirely absent from Christian countries. They live in India."[95] Indeed, Vivekananda believed that the entire emphasis of Western, Christian culture was misguided; "no amount of force, or government, or legislative cruelty will change the conditions of a race, but it is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better."[96]

Vivekananda is clearly at odds, throughout his works, with the Christian concept of missionary activity to bring about conversion. On the platform at Chicago, he passionately argues: "You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen – why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation? It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion,"[97] and this attitude continues throughout almost all of his approach to missionaries. Vivekananda believed that practical support and help from adherents of any religion to the needy of another religion was the only role of a missionary; indeed, he praises such work on several occasions.[98] Vivekananda's distaste for conversion derives from his conviction that people should mature and grow within their own religion, rather than attempt to embrace another tradition:

> Do I wish that the Christian would become a Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid. . . . 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.[99]

Vivekananda is highly critical of missionary attitudes towards, and statements about, Hindus and missionary practices in relation to the Indian populace:

> I protest against certain of their methods of raising money in America. What is meant by those pictures in the school-books for children where the Hindu mother is painted as throwing her children to the crocodiles in the Ganga? The mother is black, but the baby is painted white, to arouse more sympathy, and get more money. . . . I have heard one . . . gentleman preach in Memphis that in every village of India there is a pond full of the bones of little babies.[100]

Comments like this exemplify Vivekananda's crucial role as apologist for Hindu tradition, in the face of untruths from Western missionaries. Vivekananda often compares and contrasts the conduct of missionaries with the conduct of Indian holy men and women, and indeed even with the conduct of Jesus himself who, as Vivekananda points out on numerous occasions, the missionaries should be emulating at all times; "The Hindus would welcome the Christ of the Christians gladly, because his life was holy and beautiful; but they cannot and will not receive the narrow utterances of the ignorant, hypocritical, or self-deceiving men."[101]

This comparison with Jesus, and Vivekananda's views on how missionaries should conduct themselves, is repeated throughout Vivekananda's writings. Vivekananda openly accuses Christian missionaries of bribing Hindus in desperate circumstances to become Christians; "the young missionaries will hang about the fag end of a famine and give a starving native 5 shillings, and there you have him, a ready-made Christian,"[102] thus using money as a converting tool. He also contrasts the 'professional' Christian missionaries with the holy men of India, who "would lose caste and be spat upon by the people"[103] if they were to preach for money as the Christians did.

Vivekananda also, on occasion, comments positively on the outcomes of the Christian missionaries' work in sometimes. Vivekananda praises the work that Christian missionaries in India had undertaken in the field of education. Educational reform, in Vivekananda's perspective, represents the social role of the missionary, rather than an overtly or explicitly religious role, for which Vivekananda can find little praise; "The colleges founded by the missionaries are all right, so far as the education is concerned. But with religion it is different."[104]

Though Vivekananda was guarded in his praise of Christian missionaries, he was more appreciative of the Buddhist faith, which he often praised for its expansionist policies, with specific reference to three areas: first, that Buddhism sought to genuinely affect a wider area than India; second, that they sought to break boundaries of caste, class and society; and, third, that they tried to achieve this through peaceful means. We shall now briefly look at Vivekananda's comments on each of these areas.

Vivekananda is quite definite in his opinion that "Buddhism was the first missionary religion of the world"[105] – indeed, in 1896 he stated to a *Times* reporter in London that "India was once a great missionary power. Hundreds of years before England was converted to Christianity, Buddha sent out missionaries to convert the world of Asia to his doctrine."[106] Clearly, these are positive comments on Buddhism and its missionary activities, but it is important to note them in context, and with due regard to Vivekananda's thinking. Whilst talking to the *Times* reporter, Vivekananda was engaged in a dialogue regarding his work in America and England following the 1893 Parliament. What comes across very clearly in this exchange is Vivekananda's praise of American openness to new ideas, and his belief that England needed to learn from this. There is also a clear disapproval of English culture, with its 'many prejudices'[107] when examining the possibility of Indian influence on Western society. What we may well be finding here is an example of Vivekananda's belief of the spiritual superiority of the East over the 'old' West – indeed, the praise here for Buddhist missionary activity is couched in general terms, for it is the very fact that the missionaries came from India that is of importance here. In this exchange, Vivekananda is using Buddhist missionary activity to support his view of the central importance of India's role in 're-spiritualising' the world. The fact that the Indians in question were Buddhist is almost incidental to Vivekananda's exchange with the English reporter.

One area in which Vivekananda is, however, consistently praising of Buddhism's expansion is with regard to their conversion of minds and souls rather than bodies. Time and again, Vivekananda criticises Christian and Muslim missionary activity for putting communities to the sword, but he is praising of the Buddhist method of peaceful expansion. Indeed, he believes it to have been the most successful method of growth in any case; "the three missionary religions are the Buddhist, Mohammedan, and Christian. . . . Buddhists never killed, but converted three-quarters of the world at one time by pure gentleness"[108] and it may be an appreciation of this less confrontational approach that led Vivekananda to believe that Buddhism had influenced other religions. As mentioned in the previous section, Vivekananda saw strong parallels between Christianity and Buddhism, even going so far as to describe the "Buddha's religion [as] the foreshadowing of that of Christ,"[109] specifically mentioning seclusion from the world, the taking of a certain number of apostles, and the core ethics of Jesus and the Buddha's teachings as evidence of a link. Vivekananda indicated that Buddhism may have had a formative influence on Christianity: "some are bold enough to say that Christianity is the direct offspring of Buddhism just as the earliest heresy in the Christian religion – the Monecian [Manichaean] heresy – is now universally regarded as the teaching of a sect of Buddhists."[110] Although this is clearly an oversimplification of this heresy (for it is not possible to examine Mani without exploring other, non-Buddhistic influences), it is another interesting example of the link Vivekananda sought to establish between spiritual superiority and Eastern provenance.[111]

In stark contrast to his views on Buddhism, it is clear from his writings that Vivekananda places Islam in the same category as Christianity with regard to conversion and expansion – namely, that they were both willing to put opponents to the sword in the name of God, and for the furthering of their religion. Vivekananda saw Christianity, Buddhism and Islam as the 'spreading religions,'[112] indeed he went so far as to state that "the struggle will be between the Buddhists and Christians and Mohammedans to conquer the world,"[113] but he is careful to disassociate Buddhism from the violent tendencies portrayed throughout the histories of the other two faiths.

Vivekananda is particularly damning of Muslims, who he variously describes as 'wild'[114] and 'barbarous.'[115] In his text, *The Great Teachers of The World*, Vivekananda criticises the exclusivism that sits alongside the need to convert, stating "when each man stands and says 'My Prophet is the only true Prophet,' he is not correct – he knows not the alpha of religion"[116] and he accuses Muslims in no uncertain terms of being the worst example of such a viewpoint:

> Now some Mohammedans are the crudest in this respect. . . . Their watchword is: "There is one God, and Mohammed is His Prophet." Everything beyond that not only is bad, but must be destroyed forthwith. . . . Everything that does not belong to this worship must be immediately broken. . . . From the Pacific to the Atlantic, for five hundred years blood ran all over the world. That is Mohammedanism![117]

In addition to such bold statements, Vivekananda consistently preaches that the aggressive expansion of Islam was counterproductive to true religion, and indeed Islam's own growth: "The Mohammedans used the greatest violence. [Yet] they number the least of the three great missionary religions. The Mohammedans have had their day."[118] Clearly, this stance demonstrates Vivekananda's view of the undesirability, and indeed the lack of efficacy, of conversion from one tradition to another – a stance that Vivekananda could make his central rallying cry in his *Address at the Final Session* of the Chicago Parliament:

> if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him, that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."[119]

Much of this distaste for violent expansion was, of course, linked with Vivekananda's perception of India's fate at the hands of the Muslims, whom he describes as having "brought murder and slaughter in their train,"[120] and Vivekananda often links Muslim expansion with political growth, as well as religious conversion:

> it was at this time [the Dark Ages of Europe] that another barbarous race rose out of obscurity in Asia – the Arabs. With extraordinary rapidity, that Arab tide began to spread over the different parts of the world. Powerful Persia had to kiss the ground before the Arabs and adopt the Mohammedan religion.[121]

Muslim rule in India was, for Vivekananda, a mixed bag. He spoke of how it was 'tremendously strong,'[122] and he saw both positive and negative elements in the administration. Vivekananda praised the 'destruction of exclusive privilege' which was a 'great blessing' of the 'Mohammedan Rule.'[123] He argued that "the Mohammedan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. . . . It was not the sword that did it all. It would be the height of madness to think it was all the work of sword and fire."[124] However, Vivekananda was more damning of the Muslim persecution of non-converts, which he describes as 'ignorant,'[125] going so far as to state that India had never seen religious persecution before the Muslim religion grew in India[126] – a heavy burden to place on one social group, and a claim ill borne out by historical evidence.

It may have been that Vivekananda laid this accusation at the door of Islam due to the fact that he saw a definite threat to an Indian, or Hindu, identity from the Muslim rulers. Vivekananda believed that foreign rule brought out the emergence of strong apologetic individuals and movements, such as Chaitanya[127] and the Brahmo Samaj, whose "energy was for the most part spent checking the rapid conquest of Islam among the masses"[128] and without whom "the Mohammedans and the Christians would have far outnumbered the Hindus of the present day India."[129]

In the case of Islam, Vivekananda also believed that the exclusivist dangers outlined in the above section were magnified by the actions of what he would describe as fanatical followers taking a seed of an idea from Mohammed, and 'homing in' on these negative aspects; "Whenever a prophet got into a superconscious state . . . he brought away from it not only some truths, but some fanaticism also, some superstition which injured the world as much as the greatness of the teaching helped."[130] It is interesting to note that Vivekananda does not seem to apply this logic to his own prophet, Ramakrishna.

Hierarchy and the denigration of *Gauni Bhakti*

It is apparent throughout Vivekananda's writings that the perceived spiritual distance separating Jesus, the Buddha and Mohammed from their followers, is attributed to those followers interpreting the messages of the Prophets through a *Gauni Bhakti* lens – a worldview which sits at the lower stages of Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of religion. In exactly the same way that Vivekananda is critical of *Gauni Bhakti* within his own Hindu tradition, so he is critical of Christians, Buddhists and Muslims who he believes to be

operating at this low stage of spiritual understanding. He levels much criticism against the sectarian, doctrinal or devotional aspects of the three religions on these grounds. In an effort to demonstrate the consistency of Vivekananda's denigration of the kind of religiosity that is linked to *Gauni Bhakti*, I shall now examine Vivekananda's treatment of three themes: (1) the use of texts, (2) the use of iconography and (3) doctrine and doctrinal divisions.

I have previously noted that Vivekananda diverged from the teachings of Sankara regarding the importance of *sruti*. Referencing Rambachan's scholarship on this issue,[131] it was noted that Vivekananda did not accept *sruti* as self-validating knowledge for *brahmajnana*. This relative undermining of textual sources of authority is evident also in Vivekananda's treatment of religions other than Hinduism.

Vivekananda's discussion of the Bible (often only the New Testament) contains two clear themes – the use to which the scripture may be put, and its position within his hierarchical framework of spirituality. Vivekananda speaks well of the New Testament on occasion,[132] yet is critical of the use to which it has been put. He argues that the stories within the New Testament have been edited and arranged so as to represent a fabricated, Western view of Jesus and is highly critical of the Protestant branch of Christianity in particular, for attributing such authority to this text. In a discussion held in Memphis on 21st January 1894, Vivekananda challenged a female questioner from his audience, who had raised the issue of idol worship in Hinduism:

> The subject of idols came up and the monk [Vivekananda] said that idols formed a part of his religion insomuch as the symbol is concerned.
>
> "What do you worship?" said the monk, "What is your idea of God?"
>
> "The spirit," said a lady quietly.
>
> "What is the spirit? Do you Protestants worship the words of the Bible or something beyond? We worship God through the idol."[133]

It is clear, here, that Vivekananda believed that *murtis* were used by Hindus as a means for spiritual focus, but that, for Protestants, the means, in this instance the scriptures, had become the end, or the focus of worship, reflecting lower-level religiosity, on a par with *Gauni Bhakti*, not *Para Bhakti*.

Vivekananda contended that Christian and Muslim scriptures do not have any internal or intrinsic moral authority:

> The Christian says you must do this and not do that because the Bible says so. That will not be binding on those who do not believe in the Bible. . . . Where is the standard by which you can compare [scriptures]? You will say, look at the Sermon on the Mount, and the Mohammedan will reply, look at the Ethics of the Koran. . . . Neither the New Testament nor the Koran can be the arbiter in a quarrel between them. . . . No amount of books can help us become purer.[134]

The logical conclusion is that no devotee of one faith may pass judgement on another by citing authority in their scripture. Indeed, Vivekananda explicitly stated: "if you believe in the Bible as the word of God, you have no right to judge at all. The moment you judge, you think you are higher than the Bible. [Then] what use is the Bible to you?"[135] This appears consistent with Vivekananda's stance regarding the importance of understanding the social background to texts *as actual documents*, and his view that human-made foci of religion, such as scripture, lack the authority and validity of higher philosophical truths. However, on several occasions, Vivekananda clearly states that the *Vedas* contain this authority that other scriptures lack:

> It is in the Vedas that we have to study our religion. With the exception of the Vedas every book must change. The authority of the Vedas is for all time to come; the authority of every one of our other books is for the time being.[136]

Here, again, there is evidence of Vivekananda's ranking of spiritual truths within a Hindu-centred hierarchy of human responses to *Brahman*. Even though a dependence on the sacred texts of Hinduism represents for Vivekananda a lower stage in the path towards *brahmajnana*, the Vedas are understood by Vivekananda to be the only scriptures that are true for all time and all contexts and he therefore privileges these texts over all historically specific ones.

With regard to Islam, Vivekananda often linked Islamic expansionist policies with followers' interpretation and use of the Koran, and he directly criticises their use of the text on several occasions, suggesting that Muslims are 'unquestioning.' Furthermore, he emphasises the importance of 'reason' in any faith, valorising the use of reason over and above the use of scripture. In his *Practical Vedanta*, he says:

> Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason, no one knows. . . . One religion may ordain something very hideous. For instance, the Mohammedan religion allows Mohammedans to kill all who are not of their religion. It is clearly stated in the Koran. . . . Now if we tell a Mohammedan that this is wrong, he will naturally ask, "How do you know that? . . . My book says it is [good]." Therefore referring to books will not do. . . . There must be some independent authority, and that cannot be a book, but something that is universal; and what is more universal than reason?[137]

Vivekananda further argues that approaches to the Koran were coloured by a pre-existing exclusivism, thus completing a 'vicious circle' of sectarian prejudice:

> Each man in writing about these ancient books and dates is first of all prejudiced by his earlier education, then by his religion, then by his

> nationality. If a Mohammedan writes about the Hindus, anything that does not glorify his own religion he very scrupulously pushes to one side.[138]

Vivekananda saw unquestioning reliance on the authority of texts as likely to lead to bigotry and violence:

> we at once see . . . narrow-mindedness . . . the little, finite unit [i.e. sect] always laying claim to the infinite. . . . Think of the arrogance of it! . . . In this line the Mohammedans were the best off; every step forward was made with the sword – the Koran in the one hand and the sword in the other.[139]

Speaking as if he were a Muslim in dialogue with a Christian, Vivekananda states:

> Surely what is written in my book is right and what your book says . . . is wrong. . . . Allah declared in my book that certain things should be done, and that certain things should not be done, and that is all the test of right and wrong.[140]

In his discussion of image-based devotion, Vivekananda focuses mainly on the Muslim and Buddhist traditions. With respect to Islam, Vivekananda argued that any simplistic understanding of Muslims rejecting image worship is a misunderstanding, stating that Muslims venerated "the grave[s] of their saints and martyrs almost in place of images."[141] This viewpoint is furthered in two of Vivekananda's other works, both on aspects of devotion and worship, and linked with Vivekananda's interpretation of Islamic views of other faiths. In *Bhakti or Devotion* Vivekananda argues that Islamic denouncement of image worship within other faiths is hypocritical: "The Mohammedan, who thinks that every ritual, every form, image, or ceremony, used by a non-Mohammedan is sinful, does not think so when he comes to his own shrine, the Caaba."[142] Indeed, in his text *Formal Worship*, Vivekananda provides more evidence for his argument:

> It is a curious phenomenon that there never was a religion started in this world with more antagonism . . . [to the worship of forms] than Mohammedanism . . . The Mohammedans can have neither painting, nor sculpture, nor music . . . That would lead to formalism. . . . And yet it was not two centuries after the Prophet's death before saint worship [developed]. Here is the toe of the saint! There is the skin of a saint! So it goes. Formal worship is one of the stages we have to pass through.[143]

The last sentence in this quotation is of particular interest to the current argument. In the previous chapter on Vivekananda's development of a

hierarchical framework of religion, it was noted that, whilst Vivekananda viewed *Gauni Bhakti* based Hinduism as undesirable, and occupying a low level in his framework of human spirituality, he nevertheless saw it as a necessary first step on the threefold path towards higher spiritual knowledge.[144] Here, then, is a clear example of Vivekananda applying his framework to a religious situation outside of Hinduism, with Vivekananda arguing that Islam is itself going through a necessary stage of development as a faith. Indeed, in a letter to Alasinga, in May 1895, Vivekananda outlined his 'discovery' that Islam could be positioned within his framework thusly: "All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is, in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita. . . . This is the essential of religion. . . . The first stage, i.e. Dvaita, . . . as applied to the Semitic groups, [is] Mohammedanism."[145] It follows that Vivekananda should understand Islamic worship of saints and Mohammed as useful 'tools' for Muslims (even though such an argument would be blasphemous for many Muslims) as he viewed such worship and action as a stepping stone towards higher spiritual truths. In a lecture delivered at the Shakespeare Club in Pasadena, California, on 2nd February 1900, Vivekananda clarified his view as follows: "If an image helps, images are welcome. If worshipping a great man helps you, worship him. If worshipping Mohammed helps you, go on. Only be sincere; and if you are sincere, says Vedantism, you are sure to be brought to the goal."[146]

Specific to Buddhism, Vivekananda criticises what he understands to be the 'iconoclastic'[147] aspects of the faith, particularly in relation to the Brahminical religion which the Buddha himself rejected – indeed, he states that Buddhists[148] over-reacted in their rejection of *Brahminical* ceremony, to the extent that their own newly formed practice "became full of superstitions and ceremonials, a hundred times cruder than those it was intended to suppress."[149] Interestingly, Vivekananda often differentiates between sects of Buddhism, with Ceylonese[150] followers receiving the most criticism with regard to their religious rites,[151] but this may again be attributed to their apparent distance from Vivekananda's interpretation of *Vedanta*; indeed, the Japanese Buddhists receive praise, in direct contrast to the Ceylonese, for their "positive and theistic Buddhism . . . [which is] . . . the same as Vedanta."[152]

This separation of Ceylonese from Japanese Buddhism is a trend in Vivekananda's approach to doctrine and doctrinal divisions within Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. With regard to Christianity, Vivekananda clearly valorises the Catholic branch over the Protestant branch. Indeed, he praises the Catholic Church in connection with an assumed shared heritage with India – "The Catholic religion also takes all its forms from us [the Hindu religion] – the confessional, the belief in saints and so on"[153] – and highlights Protestant reliance on Holy Texts as symbols,[154] which Vivekananda sees only as a low-level stepping stone to higher religious truths. Of interest here is the positive linking of Catholicism with Hinduism, which Vivekananda does explicitly on several occasions,[155] in opposition to a negative comparison of the Protestant traditions with Islam.[156] This is particularly noteworthy as the religious practices

listed above with regard to Catholicism actually represent forms of what Vivekananda would usually describe as 'low' levels of spirituality – 'confessional and belief in saints' and yet he compares this favourably with Protestantism simply because he is linking the practice to an Indian provenance.

Regarding the actual doctrinal positions that lie at the heart of sectarianism and schism within the traditions in question, Vivekananda is most vocal, perhaps unsurprisingly, about Christian issues.

The Christian concept of Jesus of Nazareth's salvific death on the cross is firmly refuted by Vivekananda, indeed, he also refutes the physical reality of the crucifixion.[157] For Vivekananda, the importance of Jesus as an *avatar* is grounded in his words and deeds, not the 'other-worldly' claims of his followers. Vivekananda stated that this was a key difference between Christian and Hindu concepts of salvation:

> The Christian believes that Jesus Christ died to save him. With you it is belief in a doctrine, and this belief constitutes your salvation. With us, doctrine has nothing whatever to do with salvation. Each one may believe in whatever doctrine he likes or in no doctrine. With us realization is religion, not doctrine.[158]

But to what end is salvation sought? Vivekananda is swift to denounce the Christian concept of sin. He stressed that he was "the teacher of virtue, not of sin. I glory in being the preacher of light, and not of darkness."[159] He also firmly distanced Indian traditions from this Western concept:

> The Hindus do not recognise 'sin,' as it is understood by the Western mind. . . . 'Trinitarianism' is an advance on 'Unitarianism' (which is dualism, God and man for ever separate). The first step upwards is when we recognise ourselves as the children of God; the last step is when we realise ourselves as the One, the Atman.[160]

On the issue of the Kingdom of Heaven, the Christian focus of salvation, Vivekananda relies heavily on a realised eschatological viewpoint. He stated that a longing for a far-off Heaven as a reward for earthly deeds was a view that brought neither salvation nor the realisation of heaven any closer:

> According to the dualists, there is beyond this universe a place full of happiness and good only. . . . There will be eternal happiness, and they will be in the presence of God for all time and enjoy Him for ever. . . . Those who do good works in this world and help others, but with an eye to reward, hoping to reach heaven . . . that is not salvation; salvation never will come through the hope of reward.[161]

For Vivekananda, the Kingdom of God was within us, and it is this very realisation that brings about *brahmajnana*, and subsequent *moksha*.[162]

Concerning Buddhist conceptions of salvation, Vivekananda spoke of the Buddha's view that "one soul was to its successor like the wave of the ocean that grew and dies away, leaving naught to the succeeding wave but its force."[163] Clearly at odds to Vedantic understanding of the transmigration of the soul, it is interesting that this is explicitly rejected by Vivekananda, as this is, of course, a necessary step if Vivekananda is to be consistent when claiming that the Buddha and Christ are the same persona.[164]

Vivekananda also criticises the Buddhist view of reality (and, therefore, that from which salvation is sought) when examining *Maya*. Indeed, he stated; "The great point of contrast between Buddhism and Hinduism lies in the fact that Buddhism said, 'Realise all this as illusion,' while Hinduism said, 'Realise that within the illusion is the Real.'"[165] Again, we here find explicit hierarchy in Vivekananda's writings which valorise Vedantic understandings of reality.

Unity in diversity

Despite the explicit criticisms of Christian, Buddhist and Muslim doctrine and practice throughout his works, Vivekananda also clearly links each of these traditions to a wider understanding of the human religious condition, within the shape and nature of his hierarchical and inclusivistic framework of religion. In this section, I will outline three examples of this: (1) religion as social reform, (2) religion as renunciation and (3) claims for *Advaitic* influences on other religions.

When one considers Vivekananda's focus upon realisation as a way to *brahmajnana* and the centrality of *karma yoga* in his legacy in the form of the Ramakrishna Movement,[166] it is perhaps no surprise that Vivekananda stresses the importance of direct social action in human religious traditions. Indeed, he focuses on this as a theme that unites religious leaders and movements, particularly with regard to Buddhism and Islam.

Vivekananda clearly saw Buddhism as a great reforming tradition – indeed, he went as far as stating that "Buddhism . . . broke the chains of the masses. All castes and creeds alike became equal in a minute,"[167] which Vivekananda attributes to the usurping of social power of the *Brahmin* by the *Kshatriya* classes.[168] This reform of Hindu caste society is often praised by Vivekananda, especially when seen in response to the failing *Brahminical* priest-system which had "lost something – that reforming zeal, that wonderful sympathy and charity for everybody, that wonderful leaven which Buddhism had brought to the masses and which rendered Indian society so great."[169]

This reforming zeal of which Vivekananda spoke played a major part in how Buddhism would become, in Vivekananda's words, "the first historical outburst of a world religion."[170] Indeed, Vivekananda also believed that the missionary activity of early Buddhists could be attributed to the social work of the Buddha and the reforming characteristics that shaped the early adherents to this new faith movement. He often praised the fact that Buddhism sought

to "break wide open the gates of that very religion which was confined in the Upanishads to a particular caste."[171] This reflects Vivekananda's own distaste for the caste system, as a problematic social institution, rather than a valued religious concept.[172] This attempt at restructuring of social systems by the new faith movement could be seen to be grounded in the Buddha's rejection of the physical and material aspects of society; however, in Vivekananda's view this reform, while it had positive consequences for social equality between castes, had (inadvertently) a negative effect in relation to gender relations:

> He [the Buddha] also introduced for the first time the community life of religious houses, and thereby necessarily made women inferior to men, since the great abbesses could take no important step without the advice of certain abbots. It ensured its immediate object, the solidarity of the faith, you see, only its far-reaching effects are to be deplored.[173]

It is thus clear from a reading of Vivekananda's thoughts on the Buddha that one of the main areas for praise was the Buddha's approach to universal salvation. The Buddha's attempts at religious freedom through social reform opened the doors of salvation to all, including the lower castes as "one of his great messages was the equality of man,"[174] a message that Vivekananda described as 'bold even for India.'[175] This newfound spiritual democracy was fuelled by the Buddha's belief that individuals are responsible for their own salvation – they were not to rely on divine grace or priestly mediation. In real terms, this re-enfranchised the 'common person,' freeing them from specific doctrines, or religious-processes of salvation; a philosophical repositioning which clearly fits into Vivekananda's hierarchical framework. Vivekananda stated:

> the life of Buddha shows that even a man who does not believe in God, has no metaphysics, belongs to no sect, and . . . is a confessed materialist, even he can attain to the highest. . . . [the Buddha] reached the same state of perfection to which others come by Bhakti – love of God – Yoga, or Jnana. Perfection does not come from belief or faith. . . . Perfection comes through the disinterested performance of action.[176]

Vivekananda also praised the social reform inherent in the Islamic ideal of *Umma*, or community,[177] specifically focusing on the poor. In a personal letter dated November 1894, Vivekananda wrote with regard to the specific situation in his home area in India:

> Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say, they were converted by the sword. It was to gain their liberty from the . . . zemindars and from the . . . priest, and as a consequence you find in Bengal there are more Mohammedans than Hindus amongst the cultivators, because there were so many zemindars there.[178]

Vivekananda praised the Koran particularly for its social dimension – or perhaps to be more precise, that which Vivekananda interpreted as its social dimension, especially when compared to Christianity. In his large work *The East and the West*, Vivekananda argues that Islam, with due reference to the Koran, was more civilised and open-minded than Christianity:

> what support has Christianity ever lent to the spread of civilisation. . . ? In the New Testament there is no covert or overt praise of any arts and sciences. But there is scarcely any science or branch of art that is not sanctioned and held up for encouragement, directly or indirectly, in the Koran, or in the many passages of the Hadis,[179] the traditional sayings of Mohammed.[180]

The context of this comment is particularly interesting, appearing in a section of *The East and the West* that specifically compares and contrasts Western understandings of Christianity with an Arabian understanding of Islam. In so doing, Vivekananda is able to locate Christianity within a political and 'expansionist' setting, which he devalues in relation to the Arabic Islamic tradition. Vivekananda states: "wherever Islam has gone, there it has preserved the aboriginal inhabitants – there those races still exist, their languages and their nationality abide even to the present day. Where can Christianity show such an achievement?"[181]

In a private letter to Mohammed Sarfaraz Husain of Naini Tal, written in June 1898, Vivekananda proposes a perfect philosophy based upon *Vedanta* and Islam. Whilst firmly placing Advaitism on a higher platform than other philosophies – "Advaitism in the last word of religion and thought"[182] – Vivekananda stated that "practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone."[183] Indeed, he saw a union of faiths as a distinct possibility:

> We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. . . . For our own motherland [i.e. India] a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam – Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope. I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious, invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body.[184]

Vivekananda understood that "the idea of renunciation . . . is in all religions as a means to reach God"[185] – indeed, in *My Master*, he stated unequivocally:

> "Neither through wealth, nor through progeny, but through renunciation alone, is immortality reached," say the Vedas. "Sell all that thou

> hast and give to the poor, and follow me," says Christ. So all great saints and Prophets have expressed it, and have carried it out in their lives. How can great spirituality come without renunciation? Renunciation is the background of all religious thought.[186]

For Vivekananda, it was clear that the 'line of great Prophets' included the greatest practitioners of renunciation, such as Jesus and the Buddha.[187] Vivekananda is quite clear in his approval of Jesus of Nazareth's commandment to renounce this world and to 'render unto Caesar' materialistic concerns.[188] It is also clear that he, again, distances Jesus' followers from the ideal example given by Christ. In a personal letter to Mrs G. W. Hale, Vivekananda impels her to

> Be a true Christian, Mother – like Christ, renounce everything and let the heart and soul and body belong to Him and Him alone. All this nonsense which people have built around Christ's name is not His teaching. He taught to renounce.[189]

As we have established, Vivekananda perceives a spiritual divergence between the Prophets and their followers, and this is particularly the case with Christians and renunciation. Throughout his writings, Vivekananda criticises contemporary Western Christianity by highlighting their ignorance of Jesus' example and their insistence on focusing upon Christology, rather than Jesus' moral teachings.[190] For Vivekananda, this is an abject failure of Christianity, as renunciation can be understood as an area of common ground between traditions: "This is the great lesson of the Messenger [i.e. Jesus], . . . which is the basis of all religions, is renunciation. . . . This is the one ideal he preaches, and this has been the ideal preached by all the great Prophets of the world: renunciation."[191]

As suggested by the quotation above, Vivekananda also drew on renunciation as a common source of spirituality within Buddhism, and in particular in the case of the historical Buddha, of whom he thought: "never was a great man of such renunciation born in this world."[192]

Interestingly, in an interview given to *Prabuddha Bharata*[193] in September 1898, Vivekananda linked the Buddha's act of renunciation to national strength and a voice for the Indian people:

> "Our method," said the Swami, "is very easily described. It simply consists in reasserting the national life. Buddha preached *renunciation*.[194] India heard, and yet in six centuries she reached her greatest height. The secret lies there. The national ideals of India are RENUNCIATION and SERVICE.[195] Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself. The banner of the spiritual cannot be raised too high in this country. In it alone is salvation."[196]

The link to an Indian sense of identity and pride at this point in Vivekananda's interview picks up on the hierarchical nature of Vivekananda's framework of religion. For, whilst using renunciation as a defining bond between traditions, it is important to note that Vivekananda consistently returns to Indian ideals of renunciation as examples par excellence. Indeed, in a lecture delivered in London on 27th October 1896, titled *God in Everything*, Vivekananda clearly states "the ideal of renunciation nowhere attains such a height as in the teachings of the Vedanta."[197]

Regarding the practitioners of Buddhism, rather than the founder himself, Vivekananda is at times praising of renunciation, which he linked directly to the ideal of social reform, and the striving for personal salvation that he believed the Buddha to have taught: "Buddhist priests are renouncers of the world, living in monasteries as homeless ascetics. . . . The state of being a Buddha is superior to the heavenly positions of many a Brahma or an Indra . . . and to this Buddhahood, every man has the privilege to attain; it is open to all even in this life."[198] Whilst, at other times, he describes this as a weakness of Buddhism, when compared to Hinduism: "The Buddhist command could only be carried out through monasticism; the Hindu might be fulfilled through any state of life."[199]

Of course, for Vivekananda, the highest example of all with regard to renunciation was Ramakrishna and, in the dénouement of his classic text *My Master*, he made it abundantly clear that he believed Ramakrishna's renunciation to be a selfless act which demonstrated the underlying unity of all religious traditions:

> This is the message of Shri Ramakrishna to the modern world: "Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples; they count for little." The time has come for renunciation, for realisation; and then you will see the harmony in all the religions of the world. . . . To proclaim and make clear the fundamental unity underlying all religions was the mission of my Master.[200]

Finally, then, we return to a Hindu-centric understanding of renunciation, exemplified most perfectly by Ramakrishna. In *Universal Religion: Its Realisation*, delivered in Pasadena, California in January 1900, Vivekananda argued that "Renunciation and spirituality are the two great ideas of India, and it is because India clings to these ideas that all her mistakes count for so little."[201] It is apparent, therefore, that Vivekananda's understanding of an underlying unity to religious practice and tradition is still itself subject to the inherent hierarchy of his framework of religion, and its privileging of Hindu, and specifically *Advaitic*, traditions.

For Vivekananda, the assertion that there is an underlying unity to the diversity of human religious traditions formed a key component in his hierarchical framework of religion. In many examples throughout his writings,

Vivekananda even gives specific historical examples of his belief that traditions that are now understood to be separate entities have, in fact, shared a common heritage.

Buddhism, for instance, understood as 'off-shoot'[202] of *Vedanta*, receives praise from Vivekananda when he believes Buddhists work in the spirit of the Vedas,[203] and as well as criticism, when he sees fit, for being the 'errant child' of Vedic religion: "Buddhism is a great religion in some respects, but to confuse Buddhism with Vedanta is without meaning."[204] Vivekananda also links Buddhism with other faiths, including the Gnostic and Catholic[205] branches of Christianity, stating that "the [Gnostics] and other sects of early Christians were more or less Buddhistic in their tendencies."[206] By so doing, of course, Vivekananda is promoting the spiritual value and heritage of Buddhism, however this praise must be viewed within the context of Vivekananda's view of Buddhism as being contained within the higher Vedantic truths. When Vivekananda praises the Buddha, his teachings, and what he sees as the positive elements of the movement founded in his name, he consistently forges a direct link between positive aspects of Buddhism and the pre-existing Vedic religious milieu to which the historical Buddha was reacting. In an address to the Ethical Association in Brooklyn, February 1895, Vivekananda argued that "every one of Buddha's teachings is founded in the Vedantas,"[207] and five years earlier he had written to Akhandananda in Ghazipur, stating that "the religion of Buddha has reared itself on the Upanishads."[208] Clearly, here, in perfect alignment with his hierarchical and inclusivistic framework of religion, *Vedanta* is seen as the unifying stream that runs through the great traditions of the world.

Vivekananda also makes this argument when making a brief comment on Sufism. Here, Vivekananda sees an esoteric knowledge and message, missing from Mohammed's teachings, and he links this with *Advaitic* influences ensuring that: "Sufis identif[ied] man with God, and through them this idea came into Europe."[209] Here we see Vivekananda's belief in the importance of Indian influence upon world religious ideas, in this instance effectively commenting that Islam required this Hindu influence on its teachings in order to become palatable in Europe. Indeed, Vivekananda goes as far as to state that "Educated Mohammedans are Sufis, scarcely distinguished from Hindus."[210]

Vivekananda also notes the historical influence of India upon what he understands to be Islam's more positive aspects during a question and answer session at Boston's Twentieth Century Club. When asked if *Vedanta* has influenced Islam, Vivekananda responded:

> This Vedantic spirit of religious liberality has very much affected Mohammedanism. Mohammedanism in India is a quite different thing from that in any other country. It is only when Mohammedans come from other countries and preach to their co-religionists in India about living with men who are not of their faith that a Mohammedan mob is roused and fights.[211]

This is noteworthy for, although Vivekananda clearly disliked the Muslim exclusivist approach to other religions, he differentiates between Indian Muslims, for whom Vivekananda claims a peaceful and harmonious co-existence with all other faiths due to the influence of *Vedanta*, and Muslims from non-Indian countries. In effect, Vivekananda is praising the Indian Muslims for their very presence in Mother Bharata, and their passing acquaintance with his own tradition. Again, an inclusivistic hierarchy is at work in Vivekananda's treatment of religious traditions.

This chapter has sought to investigate how Vivekananda applied his hierarchical and inclusivistic framework of Hinduism to non-Hindu traditions. By examining Vivekananda's treatment of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, several inferences can be made. First, Vivekananda showed a clear reverence for the founders of these traditions, linking them to the great line of Prophets, which, in his view, included Ramakrishna. Vivekananda's view of the founders purposefully locates them within a Hindu framework; aspects of the founders' personalities, teachings or actions which Vivekananda deemed positive were consistently linked to Hindu or *Advaitic* language or concepts – indeed, what is valorised by Vivekananda above all else is self-realisation (in the *Advaitic* sense), which he sees most notably in Jesus and the Buddha. This positive view of the founders is balanced by Vivekananda's generally negative view of the followers of these traditions, who, in his view, represented the lower states of human religiosity, rather than the higher ideals exemplified by the founders. Second, there is a clear and consistent devaluing of 'low levels' of spirituality comparable to Hindu concepts of *Gauni Bhakti*, demonstrating that Vivekananda is consistent in his hierarchical formulation privileging *Advaita*, not only with regard to his own Hindu tradition, but also with regard to non-Hindu traditions. In particular, Vivekananda posits a clear link between missionary work and political expansionism, which he further links to sectarianism and a low level of religious awareness. This is also consistent with Vivekananda's distaste for religious conversion on a personal, spiritual, level as well as on a political and social level. Third, Vivekananda was keen to note the positive parallels between these traditions, as understood within his framework of religion, citing social reform and renunciation as examples of 'good' practice; it is, however, important to note that underpinning this positive view is the attribution of an *Advaitic* impetus to these diverse traditions in order to justify such valorisation.

Vivekananda's three-stage hierarchical view of human religiosity necessitated his engagement with other traditions, in three ways: (1) in his critique of missionary activity; (2) in his advocacy of a universal threefold path towards a non-dual understanding of reality; and (3) in his advocacy of *Advaita* as the final destination in all human religious endeavour. The next chapter explores how Vivekananda put his theoretical framework into practice, by analysing his performance in a vibrant oratory arena – the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893.

Notes

1 CW VIII, p. 140.
2 It is clear from the hagiographical works of the Ramakrishna Math publishing houses that Vivekananda's universalism is a key element of his life and message for his followers. Examples abound – for explicit hagiography, see *Swami Vivekananda: The Man and His Message by His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002 [1918]) pp. 87–96 & 161–169, and for an example of implicit hagiography, see Aleaz, K. P. *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1993) p. 212ff.
3 The enduring appeal of Vivekananda is demonstrated by the sheer volume of works that appeared around the time of the centenary celebrations of the Chicago Parliament in 1993. See in particular, DasGupta, R. K. (Gen. ed.) *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago: A Commemorative Volume* (Belur: Ramakrishna Math and Mission, 1994).
4 CW IV, pp. 138–153.
5 Both quotations from Huff, P.A. 'Vivekananda's Contribution to Christology' in Sengupta, S. & Paranjape, M. (eds.) *The Cyclonic Swami: Vivekananda in the West* (New Delhi: Samvad India Foundation, 2005) p. 91.
6 Ibid., p. 142.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 140.
9 Ibid., p. 141.
10 Textual examples of this position abound. See in particular, Barker, G. A. & Gregg, S. E. *Jesus Beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 18–23.
11 CW I, pp. 21–23.
12 Ibid., p. 21.
13 CW VII, p. 43 & CW I, p. 6.
14 CW VII, p. 49.
15 CW I, p. 6.
16 CW III, p. 218.
17 That is, uttering the name of God in vain, interpreted as a sinful act – Vivekananda is very deliberate to state that "in India there is no idea of blasphemy . . . to utter the name of God can bring nothing but good." CW VIII, p. 222.
18 Ibid.
19 CW II, p. 106.
20 Ibid., pp. 106–107.
21 CW VII, p. 369.
22 Ibid., p. 370.
23 Killingley, D. 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 142.
24 See Chapter 2. Also, see Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, pp. 165–168.
25 CW IV, p. 142.
26 Ibid., p. 151. In this statement, Vivekananda is arguing against Christian concentration on the nature of Jesus, whereas Vivekananda's framework of religion requires the adherent to concentrate on following the teachings of traditions so as to ascend the ladder of spiritual knowledge. By concentrating on concepts of Jesus' incarnation, divinity or humanity, Christians are, for Vivekananda, limiting themselves to the lower echelons of his framework.
27 Ibid., p. 146.
28 An interesting diversion from this tradition, however still from a Christian devotee, is the example of Swami Abhishiktananda (born Henri Le Saux, 1910–1973) a Benedictine who moved to India to live as a sanyassin. Referring to the same biblical passage as quoted above by Vivekananda, Abhishiktananda

argued that "the conclusion is inescapable: the experience of Jesus includes the *Advaitic* experience." See Du Boulay, S. *Swami Abhishiktananda: Essential Writings* (New York: Orbis Books & Mary Knoll, 2006) p. 157.

29 CW IV, pp. 145–146.

30 It appears clear that this form of interpretation became a part of Vivekananda's legacy to his followers. C. F. Andrews, famously a Christian friend to M. K. Gandhi, wrote in 1939, upon reviewing Swami Aseshananda's article *The Hindu View of Christ*, "It is strange indeed, to a Christian, to find the saying of Krishna in the Gita ['Relinquishing all other duties, take refuge in me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not'] given a place of equality with the great word of the Gospel ['Come unto me, all ye that are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest']. But to the Hindu of modern times, especially those in the Ramakrishna Mission, such harmonizing has almost become common-place." Andrews, C. F. 'The Hindu View of Christ' in *International Review of Mission*, Vol. 28 (1939) p. 261.

31 Realised Eschatology is a phrase popularised by C. H. Dodd, who has written extensively upon the theology and eschatology of St John's Gospel. Realised Eschatology argues that the Christian conception of the Kingdom of Heaven is already upon humanity, rather than being something that will come in the future. For a classic treatment of this subject, see Dodd, C. H. *The Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 [1953]).

32 Literally, 'great word' or 'great saying.'

33 It should be noted that this is a consistent theme in the treatment of Jesus by Hindu luminaries. As Flood has stated, "they all read Jesus through a lens of their own, particular understanding of Hinduism . . . ignor[ing] metaphysical differences." See Flood, G. 'Jesus in Hinduism: Closing Reflection' in Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, p. 204. Further examples include Sri Aurobindho's interpretation of Jesus' death on the cross within an *Advaitic* framework in his poem in *A Legend & A Symbol*. See Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, pp. 194–195.

34 CW IV, p. 147.

35 Ibid., pp. 147–148.

36 Ibid., p. 139.

37 Ibid., p. 148.

38 CW VIII, p. 191 cited in Martin, S. 'Hindu Perspectives on Jesus: The Ramakrishna Mission and Self-Realization Fellowship' in *Dialogue & Alliance*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Fall/Winter, 1998) p. 98.

39 A further note regarding Vivekananda's view of the crucifixion may be of interest. Fittingly for an adherent of *Advaita*, Vivekananda argued that the crucifixion did not really happen, and was simply a mirage to the eyes of those present: "Christ was God incarnate; they could not kill him. That which was crucified was only a semblance, a mirage." (CW I, p. 328). Whilst this position is obviously influenced by traditional teachings on *maya* and *Advaita*, it is interesting to note that it is very similar to the Docetic Heresy within Christianity which argues for a non-corporeal revelation of the person of Christ (see, for example, the letter of Ignatius *To the Trallians* cited in Stevenson, J. (ed.) *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to* AD *337* (London: SPCK, 1987 [1957])), and notable Islamic traditions (see in particular Koran Surah 4, Verses 157–158, quoted in Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, pp. 93–94).

40 Killingley, 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East,' p. 144.

41 CW I, p. 117. Interestingly, the hagiographies pick up this viewpoint. In her memoirs of Vivekananda, Nivedita recalls Vivekananda's response to a person who mistook him for a Buddhist, rather than a Hindu: "'A Buddhist! . . . I am the servant of the servants of the servants of Buddha!' as if even the title of a believer would seem, to his veneration, too exalted to claim." Tellingly, Nivedita ends this anecdotal recollection with the following: "Another factor, at least as

powerful, was the spectacle of the constant tallying of his own Master's life, lived before his eyes [i.e. when Vivekananda spoke of Buddha] . . . In Buddha, he saw Ramakrishna Paramahamsa: in Ramakrishna, he saw Buddha." See Nivedita, Sister *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1983 [1910]) pp. 215–216.

42 CW I, p. 317.
43 Ibid., p. 117.
44 CW VI, p. 227.
45 CW VIII, p. 180.
46 CW III, p. 527.
47 CW VIII, pp. 92–105.
48 CW II, p. 140.
49 CW VII, p. 59. Long gives a further example of this stance, when he quotes a lecture Vivekananda gave at the Brooklyn Standard Union in February 1895: "Every one of the Buddha's teachings is founded in the *Vedanta*s." Vivekananda also notes that Hinduism is "the mother religion from which it [Buddhism] came" – as such, it should come as no surprise to learn that the title of the lecture was *True Buddhism*. CW II, pp. 507–509, cited in Long, J. D. 'Claiming the Buddha for Hinduism' in Sengupta & Paranjape (eds.) *The Cyclonic Swami: Vivekananda in the West*, p. 117.
50 CW VIII, p. 184.
51 CW I, pp. 116–117.
52 Gethin, R. *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 9.
53 Ibid.
54 Williams, P. (with Tribe, A.) *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 8.
55 For example, CW VIII, p. 103 & CW III, p. 527.
56 CW VIII, p. 98.
57 "*Anatta*: Literally 'no-self,' this term refers to the denial of a fixed, permanent, unchanging self or soul." Laumakis, S. J. *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 45. This concept directly opposes *Advaitic* understandings of the eternal nature of the *atman*, and thus also the relationship between *atman* and *Brahman*.
58 CW VI, p. 120.
59 CW I, p. 481.
60 Ibid., p. 341.
61 CW IV, p. 430.
62 CW I, p. 184.
63 Ibid.
64 Raychaudhuri, T. 'Muslims and Islam in Swamiji's Vision of India: A Note' in Dasgupta, *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago*, p. 323.
65 Claims to chauvinism must be avoided, however – Raychaudhuri is careful to note that "In Vivekananda's perception the Indo-Islamic past is central to . . . the future India of his dreams." Ibid., p. 328.
66 CW III, p. 524.
67 CW I, p. 481.
68 CW IV, p. 446.
69 CW VII, p. 100.
70 Ibid. The use of the word 'Jehovah' complicates this discussion, but it is clear that Vivekananda is relating this to Islam and, specifically, Mohammed. In this example, Vivekananda is addressing the Abrahamic religions chronologically, with the Jewish concept of Jehovah predating the Christian 'Father' or the Muslim 'Allah' – in so doing, Vivekananda is making even clearer his argument that

Mohammed has actually taken a backwards step from the Christian incarnational stance by insisting on the separation of God and humanity.
71 Ibid.
72 CW IV, p. 133.
73 Ibid.
74 CW I, p. 483.
75 Ibid., p. 321. For contemporary newspaper coverage, see MLB III, pp. 50–53.
76 That is, America.
77 CW I, p. 323.
78 CW VIII, p. 213 cited in Aleaz, K. P. *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1993) p. 138. NB, Aleaz is here paraphrasing Vivekananda, the relevant text reads as follows: "Let me tell you brethren, if you want to live, if you really want your nation to live, go back to Christ. You are not Christians. No, as a nation you are not. Go back to Christ. Go back to him who had nowhere to lay his head. . . . Yours is religion preached in the name of luxury. What an irony of fate! Reverse this if you want to live . . . you cannot serve God and Mammon at the same time."
79 Sil, N. P. *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1997) p. 60.
80 Ibid.
81 CW IV, p. 146.
82 CW I, p. 324.
83 Ibid., p. 321.
84 CW III, p. 182.
85 CW VIII, p. 160 cited in Rambachan, A. 'Interpreting Another Tradition: Vivekananda on Christ and Christianity' in *Anima*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Spring, 1994) p. 127.
86 CW II, p. 507.
87 CW III, p. 251.
88 CW VI, p. 227.
89 CW V, p. 455.
90 CW IV, p. 121.
91 CW II, p. 372.
92 Ibid., pp. 371–372. It is interesting to note that this quotation is taken from a speech given in Pasadena, California in January 1900, titled *The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion*. In this text, Vivekananda also deliberately places his comments on the Muslim ideal of unity in the social context of the division apparent within the United States at the time, when he states that he had: "never yet seen a church where the white man and the negro can kneel side by side to pray" (p. 371).
93 CW IX, p. 528.
94 CW II, p. 95.
95 CW IX, p. 456.
96 CW III, p. 182.
97 CW I, p. 20.
98 e.g. CW VIII, p. 215.
99 CW I, p. 24.
100 CW IV, pp. 344–345.
101 CW VIII, p. 217.
102 CW IX, p. 453.
103 CW I, p. 20.
104 CW VIII, p. 216.
105 CW II, p. 497.
106 CW V, p. 191.

107 Ibid., p. 189.
108 CW VII, p. 43.
109 CW II, p. 511.
110 Ibid.
111 As noted in the previous section on Buddha, this links with Killingley's assertion that Vivekananda was fitting into a nineteenth-century trend of linking early Christianity with Buddhism, often linked to the scholarship of Arthur Lillie, author of *The Influence of Buddhism on Primitive Christianity* (London, 1893). See Killingley, 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East,' p. 144.
112 CW IV, p. 375.
113 Ibid.
114 CW V, p. 528.
115 Ibid., p. 508.
116 CW IV, p. 125.
117 Ibid., p. 126.
118 CW VIII, p. 217.
119 CW I, p. 24.
120 CW V, p. 190.
121 Ibid., p. 508.
122 Ibid., p. 459.
123 CW III, p. 294.
124 Ibid.
125 CW IV, p. 52.
126 CW I, p. 348.
127 A Bengali Vaishnava saint born in the fifteenth century.
128 CW VI, p. 165.
129 CW IV, p. 463.
130 CW I, p. 184.
131 Rambachan, A. *The Limits of Scripture: Vivekananda's Reinterpretation of the Vedas* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).
132 E.g. CW I, p. 444.
133 MLB I, p. 265. The original text is from the *Appeal-Avalanche* newspaper.
134 CW II, pp. 334–336.
135 CW I, p. 453.
136 CW V, p. 215.
137 CW II, p. 335.
138 CW IX, p. 251.
139 CW II, pp. 369–370.
140 CW I, p. 368.
141 CW III, p. 61.
142 CW II, p. 39.
143 CW VI, p. 60.
144 That is, from *Dvaita*, through *Vishishtadvaita* to *Advaita*.
145 CW V, pp. 81–82.
146 CW III, p. 537.
147 CW IV, p. 326.
148 Note, not Buddha himself, but his followers – the theme of spiritual separation between Prophet and followers remains constant here.
149 CW IV, p. 326.
150 The archaic name for Sri Lanka is retained here to be consistent with Vivekananda's use of the phrase.
151 CW VII, p. 506.
152 CW V, p. 210.
153 CW VII, p. 287.

154 For example, CW II, p. 39.
155 For example, CW IV, p. 164.
156 CW VI, p. 63.
157 CW I, p. 328.
158 CW IX, p. 279.
159 CW III, p. 240. This viewpoint is also apparent when Vivekananda states that "it is blasphemy to think that if Jesus had never been born, humanity would not have been saved." Vivekananda, *Inspired Talks* (Mylapore: Ramakrishna Math, 1969) cited in Bharat, S. *Christ across the Ganges: Hindu Responses to Jesus* (Winchester & Washington: O Books, 2007) p. 54.
160 CW VIII, pp. 15–16.
161 CW II, p. 243.
162 Examples abound – see in particular CW IV, p. 246, CW IV, p. 146 & CW VIII, p. 108.
163 CW IX, p. 457.
164 In class notes compiled under the heading *Are Christ and Buddha Identical?* Vivekananda states that "it is my particular fancy that the same Buddha became Christ. Buddha prophesied, 'I will come again in five hundred years,' and Christ came here in five hundred years." See, CW VIII, p. 180.
165 Ibid., p. 273.
166 The term is here used, as suggested by Beckerlegge, to include both the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. See Beckerlegge, G. *The Ramaskrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 2.
167 CW I, p. 455.
168 CW VI, p. 104. A cautionary note: As noted in the above section, Vivekananda is keen to place the Buddha within a Hindu reforming role. This position has been challenged and, as Pande notes: "the anti-ritualistic tendency within the Vedic fold is itself due to the impact of an asceticism which antedates the *Vedas*. . . . The fashionable view of regarding Buddhism as a Protestant Vedicism and its birth as a Reformation appears to us to be based on a misreading of later Vedic history caused by the fascination of a historical analogy and the ignorance or neglect of pre-Vedic civilisation." See Pande, G. C. *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983) p. 317. Killingley further notes that "In an age when Protestant reformation, seen as a return to the source of the true religion and a rejection of spiritual and social corruption, had been widely accepted in India as a model for reform, the Western idea of Buddhism as the Protestantism of Asia had a special appeal for Hindus." See Killingley, 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East,' p. 144.
169 CW I, p. 23.
170 CW III, p. 511.
171 CW VI, p. 225.
172 CW I, p. 22.
173 CW V, p. 230.
174 CW VIII, p. 98.
175 Ibid.
176 CW IV, pp. 136–137.
177 As noted previously, Vivekananda was highly critical of Islamic exclusivism regarding those outside the *Umma*, but the focus here is on the *ideal* of the concept of brotherhood, not what Vivekananda sees as the limited and misguided application of this ideal by Mohammed's followers.
178 CW VIII, p. 330.
179 Vivekananda here uses an archaic form of the more usual transliteration 'Hadith.'
180 CW V, p. 532.

181 Ibid., pp. 532–533.
182 CW VI, p. 415.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid., p. 416.
185 CW I, p. 98.
186 CW IV, p. 183.
187 Mohammed is conspicuous by his absence in this section, and it is certainly the case that Vivekananda, despite making claims that all major Prophets have taught renunciation, does not include Mohammed as an example. This exclusion makes more sense when Vivekananda's view of the spiritual state of Islam is taken into account. Consistently, Vivekananda believed Islam to be 'stuck' at the Dualist stage of spiritual development, below even the qualified-non-dualist stage of, for example, Christianity with its incarnational theology. When it is further noted that Vivekananda often associated true renunciation with higher stages of spirituality (which is why, of course, he criticises Christians for not following Christ's example), it is consistent that Mohammed should not feature in Vivekananda's teachings on this subject.
188 Matthew 22:21.
189 CW IX, p. 121.
190 E.g. CW IV, pp. 150–151.
191 CW IV, pp. 149–150.
192 CW VI, p. 507.
193 Literally, 'Awakened India.' An Indian "monthly magazine conducted in English [and] devoted to the spread of the doctrine of Hindu Religion and Philosophy" first published in July 1896. Swami Vivekananda was a regular contributor, including a contribution in the first issue titled *Buddha, the Ideal Karma Yogin*. See Basu, S. P. (ed.) *Swami Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian News (1893–1902)*, Vol. 2 (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2007) p. 530.
194 Italics in original.
195 Capitals in original.
196 CW V, p. 228.
197 CW II, p. 146.
198 CW IV, p. 443.
199 CW VIII, p. 273.
200 CW IV, p. 187.
201 CW II, p. 372.
202 CW VII, p. 59.
203 CW I, p. 21.
204 Ibid., p. 349.
205 CW VII, p. 430.
206 CW III, p. 512.
207 CW II, p. 509.
208 CW VI, p. 227.
209 CW VII, p. 40.
210 CW V, p. 190.
211 Ibid., p. 311.

6 The World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 1893[1]

All seemed imbued with a Christian spirit.[2]

The two previous chapters of this work have focused upon Vivekananda's creation of a hierarchical inclusivistic framework of religious philosophy. Chapter 4 concentrated upon Vivekananda's understanding of Hinduism, and Chapter 5 outlined how this pattern of hierarchical inclusivism can also be seen throughout Vivekananda's writings on Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. This chapter aims to investigate how Vivekananda used his framework as an approach to non-Hindu traditions in a practical situation. The subject chosen for this exercise is the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893. The rationale for this is simple – the Chicago Parliament represents Vivekananda's high-profile[3] public entry into the arena of nineteenth-century comparative religious debate and discourse.

This chapter is split into four main sections. First, as this chapter specifically addresses Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions in a Western environment, I will provide a brief overview of how Vivekananda understood the terms 'East' and 'West' and how this impacted on his representations of Hinduism in America and Europe. Second, the social and religious context of the Parliament will be examined. Third, I will analyse Vivekananda's role at the Parliament, and the content of his speeches. Finally, I will set Vivekananda's performance in context by examining the contributions of (a) other Indian delegates and (b) other delegates arguing for religious unity.

The 'East' and 'West' in Vivekananda's discourse

It is apparent from Vivekananda's construction of a hierarchical framework of religion that he privileged an *Advaitic* worldview over dualistic and qualified-non-dualistic worldviews. It is also apparent, from both his representation of Ramakrishna's persona and his treatment of Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, that Vivekananda differentiated between Eastern and Western conceptions of religion – indeed, Vivekananda specifically sought

to claim for the East facets of religion which he valued most highly, in his attempt to challenge Western social, religious and political dominance. As Raychaudhuri notes, "[Vivekananda's] perceptions of Europe and America were deeply coloured by his faith in what has been reduced to a clumsy cliché – India's spiritual superiority."[4]

There is no doubt that a superficial or cursory reading of Vivekananda's writings would lead to a simplistic view of East/West dualism – indeed, examples include his valorisation of *Advaita* as the religious system most compatible with nineteenth-century scientific advances, over and above Western religious traditions and also when he introduces an ethical hierarchy wherein he equates the East with spirituality and the West with materialism: "Just as your people are brave to jump at the mouth of a cannon, or into the midst of the battlefield, so our people are brave to think and act out their philosophy."[5] However, as I have argued throughout this work, Vivekananda's treatment of the human religious condition, whilst hierarchical with regard to *Advaita*, is not a simple comparison between East and West – it is clear, for example, that Vivekananda denigrates dualistic practices to the lower echelons of his framework wherever they are to be found, even in non-Western (Hindu or Islamic) contexts. Keeping this caveat in mind, I will now provide some examples of Vivekananda's treatment of the concepts of 'East' and 'West,' and outline how this affected his projection of Hinduism when in dialogue with 'Western' traditions.

It is apparent that Vivekananda's systematic censorship of Ramakrishna, outlined in Chapter 3, serves as a specific example of the cultural translation that Vivekananda was undertaking during his projection of Hinduism to Western audiences. This projection was very much in keeping with Vivekananda's wider agenda – the creation of a strong Hindu identity against the backdrop of colonialism and the patronising and critical Christian views of Hinduism that had culminated in animosity on the platform at Chicago.

Vivekananda's treatment of Hinduism was, on the surface, unashamedly universalistic – Vivekananda turned Ramakrishna's practical, or experiential form of pluralism into a systematic framework for interacting with non-Hindu traditions. His purpose for this was clear – the projection of a Neo-Vedantic form of Hinduism to the Christian West had to be undertaken with confidence, rather than with deference, so as to underpin the universal or hierarchical claims that Vivekananda made for Hinduism. Indeed, throughout his lectures, Vivekananda often asserts the primacy or superiority of Indian, Hindu or specifically *Advaitic* philosophies, including in his first address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago 1893, when he threw a diplomatic gauntlet down to the Christian missionaries present by stating: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth."[6]

The focus upon religious universalism can also be seen in Vivekananda's first lecture tour to America, from 1893–1896 for, although the public talks covered subjects as diverse as famine, women's rights, practical *yoga* and detailed teachings of *Advaitic* philosophy, over one quarter of all his talks focused on the universality of faith and the harmony of religions.[7] Crucially, however, this veneer of universality, still promoted today by representatives of the Ramakrishna Movement[8] does not tell the whole story. As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 of this work, a closer reading of Vivekananda's works show a clear and systematic construction of an inclusivistic, hierarchical framework within which Vivekananda views anything that reverts to a sectarian, creedal or dogmatic position as the lowest common denominator of human spirituality. Vivekananda's representations of Hinduism reflected this hierarchical structure, and this hierarchy was also applied introspectively to Hindu systems of practice and philosophy – resulting in the deprecation of *Gauni Bhakti*, and in what Devdas has described as a ladder-theory of religions[9] in which we see hierarchical management of paths of knowledge, practical spirituality and meditation. The self-reflective nature of Vivekananda's application of this hierarchy to his own Hindu tradition was rooted in Vivekananda's desire to rescue Hinduism from its associations with 'idolatry' and 'superstition.' This act of cultural revisionism was a path well trodden by Hindu reformers of the nineteenth century, starting with Rammohun Roy in the 1820s who argued against *murti*[10]-centred belief and worship within Hinduism.[11] Of course, the aims of both Vivekananda and Roy before him were to elevate Hinduism in the popular Western imagination above the damning stereotypes generated by the Christian missionaries of the period.[12]

Killingley, acknowledging that Vivekananda "adapted his message to his American audiences in the course of his visits,"[13] highlights Vivekananda's polarisation of the spiritual 'East' and the materialistic 'West,' and notes the legacy he inherited from Roy and Sen.[14] King has also noted that the conception of the spiritual East having something to teach the West was a theme taken up by eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German romantics, and later also by American Transcendentalists.[15] Since "Vivekananda's Western audiences had in most cases little or no knowledge of India,"[16] he had to formulate his teachings within a framework of culture and language understandable in the West:

> His message to the West, though it was Indian in that it spoke of Vedanta, yoga, the guru, the avatar and other ancient Indian concepts, was also Western in that it drew on ideas learnt from the West, and in part learnt in the West. It follows an agenda set by Western dissatisfaction with Christianity, and with materialism and capitalism.[17]

The starting point for Vivekananda in this transformation of Hinduism into a viable alternative to Christianity in the West was his cyclonic performance at the World's Parliament of Religions.

Although the significance of the legacy of the 1893 Parliament is undoubted, both in the inter-faith and Christian ecumenical movements,[18] it is important to remember that the gathering was part of a much larger event which dwarfed the Parliament in terms of prestige and media coverage. The World's Columbian Exposition, alternatively known as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, was the greatest of the nineteenth-century World's Fairs that had started with London's Great Exhibition in 1851. Planned originally to coincide with the 400th anniversary of Columbus's voyage to America, and arriving just a little late, the Chicago Fair welcomed 28 million visitors[19] in a three month period to a truly astounding site – 51 nations and 39 colonies were represented in a 600-acre[20] area of downtown Chicago, six miles south of the centre, that was transformed in a matter of 24 months into a fully functioning city. Within this space 14 Great Buildings were erected at a cost of $8 million, with some wings stretching to a third of a mile long, along with over 200 other white stone and marble buildings with a combined floor space of over 1.3 million square feet, or 31.5 acres.[21] Specific exhibitions were organised in: Horticulture, Liberal Arts, Government, Electricity, Mines, Transportation, Agriculture, Machinery, Administration, Forestry, Anthropology, Women, Children and Music.[22] Foreign and diplomatic relations were bolstered by the building of entire enclaves designed to foster an understanding of different cultures, examples including: Algerian, Tunisian, Swiss, Chinese, Dutch East India, French, German, Hungarian, Irish, Japanese, Moorish and Egyptian areas.[23] Lest visitors should become bored, there was also a casino, a pier and the world's third largest Ferris wheel. The total cost of the enterprise came to somewhere between a staggering $28–35 million, equivalent today of a total between $560–700 million[24] and Vivekananda himself wrote that "one must take at least ten days to go through it."[25] It truly was the greatest show on earth.

Crucially, against the backdrop of so much tourist-orientated showmanship, a series of auxiliary congresses was organised by Charles C. Bonney, a Chicago lawyer and layperson in the Swedenborgian church, with major academic conferences held on subjects as diverse as "Women's Progress, Public Press, Medicine and Surgery, Temperance, Moral and Social Reform, Commerce and Finance, Music, Literature, Education, Engineering, Art, Government, Science and Philosophy, Social and Economic Science, Labor [*sic*], Religion, Sunday Rest, Public Health and Agriculture."[26] Of a total of 5,978[27] public speeches throughout the 1893 Fair, the Parliament of Religions, chaired by John Henry Barrows, a Presbyterian, accounted for a mere 190,[28] or less than 3.2% of the total. The Parliament was also held in two main auditoria within the very centre of Chicago, isolated from the main Fair by some six miles' distance. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that the official US government review publication on the Fair, printed in 1901, did not even mention the Congress of Religions.[29]

The size of the Parliament, however, seemed in inverse proportion to the influence it had on senior members of the Chicago organising committee, with Charles Bonney stating that "the Department of Religion was 'the

Table 6.1 Parliament participants by religious or denominationial categories

Affiliation	*No. of Authors*	*No. of Papers*
Buddhism	10	14
Catholicism	18	21
Confucianism	2	2
Hinduism	8	10
Islam	2	3
Jainism	1	1
Judaism	11	11
Orthodox	8	10
Protestantism	114	122[34]
Shintoism	2	2
Taoism	1	1
Zoroastrianism	2	2

culminating achievement' of all the congresses and the Parliament its 'crowning event.'"[30] The panels of speakers on offer also captivated the public, as over 150,000 people were in attendance during the course of the 17-day symposium – the largest figure for any of the exposition's 20 congresses.[31]

The international make-up of the Parliament almost certainly played a large part in the popularity of the congress – participants came from across North America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Oceania and diverse parts of Asia. In a helpful, although not entirely accurate,[32] summary of papers, Seager divides participants into religious or (for the Christian contributors) denominational categories, arriving at Table 6.1 above.[33]

Perhaps the most telling statistic to be drawn from this list is the ratio of Christian to 'non-Christian' speakers. Out of a total of 199 papers,[35] 153 were given by representatives of the various Christian denominations – a mere 46, or 23% of the total, were delivered on behalf of other faiths, challenging the very validity of a 'World's Parliament of Religions.' There are, of course, several reasons for this. First, the agenda and vision of the organising committee must be acknowledged, the make-up of which makes for interesting reading. With the exception of one Jewish Reform Rabbi, the committee otherwise consisted of a Swedenborgian Christian, a Quaker, a German Methodist, two Lutherans (German and Swedish denominations), a Reformed Episcopal, a Unitarian, a Universalist Christian, a Methodist, a Second Baptist, a Congregationalist, a Protestant Episcopal, a Catholic, a First Presbyterian and an Independent Christian (Chicago Central Church).[36] Hardly representative of a diversity of worldviews, this make-up of the committee appears to support the view of the "unabashed missionary aim of the parliament's Christian promoters,"[37] with Ziolkowski noting that

> Barrows made clear, [that] he and the parliament's other chief promoters never conceived of the event as an opportunity to evolve 'a cosmic

> or universal faith'; on the contrary, they believed that the ingredients for such a faith are inherent in Christian faith.[38]

Second, the lack of Islamic contribution has skewed the statistics somewhat. A total of three papers, including two given by a Western convert,[39] was woefully unrepresentative of the diverse and influential Islamic traditions of the late nineteenth century. The major reason for this, as reported in Barrow's history of the Parliament in his official proceedings, was the refusal of the Sultan of Turkey to enter into dialogue or to patronise attendees – indeed, the Sultan strongly dissuaded the Greek and Armenian Churches within the Turkish Empire, as well as his Islamic subjects, from attending.[40] The Sultan was not, however, alone in his refusal to participate in the Parliament; the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote to the organising committee stating that:

> I am afraid that I cannot write the letter which, in yours of March 20, you wish me to write, expressing a sense of the importance of the proposed Conference, without its appearing to be an approval of the scheme. The difficulties which I myself feel are not questions of distance and convenience, but rest on the fact that the Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a Parliament of Religions without assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their position and claims.[41]

Third, in a problem alluded to by the Archbishop in his above letter, the organisers faced the simple, yet enormous, problem of cost and logistics for overseas delegates. Whilst seemingly obvious, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that travel from India, China, Korea or other nations far removed from America was simply too costly or time-consuming for many delegates, and that it was far easier for those speakers to attend who represented the majority Christian religion of the host country.

Given Christianity's predominance within the academic proceedings of the Parliament, it is no surprise that the pageantry and collective worship at the gathering was also unmistakeably Christian in character or origin.

Of course, it is possible to argue that, at the end of the nineteenth century, and in a predominantly Christian nation such as America, 23% was a significant contribution from 'non-Christian' religions, but this is tempered somewhat by the formulation of the event by the administrators and the atmosphere that ensued, which was positively saturated with Christianity and, at best, diminished the impact of a diverse identity for the gathering as a true Parliament of Religions and, at worst, provided merely an opportunity for Christian triumphalism to peer through a Christo-centric lens at the 'other' and 'lesser' gathered traditions of the world. Indeed, Seager has noted that "inequities intrinsic to the Columbian world-picture reflected . . . deeply ingrained western assumptions about the relative worth of West and East . . . [based upon] . . . naiveté, ethnocentrism, racism, and flawed theological premises. "[42]

A clear demonstration of the importance placed upon Christianity in the proceedings was in the opening session on the morning of 11th September 1893, where Rev. Wendte's[43] eyewitness account recalls Vivekananda, Nagarkar, Dharmapala, Mozoomdar[44] and Chakravarti, amongst other senior foreign delegates, standing on either side of "Cardinal Gibbons, the highest prelate of his Church in the United States, who, as was fitting in this Columbian year, was to open the meeting with prayer."[45] The allusion to American history, and the use of prayer as a welcome reception on behalf of the hosts to the assembled guests is only to be expected. However, it is interesting that the Christian basis for prayer continued throughout the assembly, and no attempts were made to offer non-Christian worship in the general assembly halls.[46] Indeed, the Final Session was officially ended with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer by Rabbi Hirsch,[47] and a prayer of benediction delivered by Bishop Keane.[48] Barrows also notes that the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah was sung as a part of the celebrations, leading to the following observation:

> The effect produced by the Hallelujah Chorus on this occasion is utterly beyond the power of words to describe. To the Christians who were present, and all seemed imbued with a Christian spirit, it appeared as if the Kingdom of God was descending visibly before their eyes and many thought of the Redeemer's promise – "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." . . . When the last note of the Hallelujah Chorus had been sung, . . . [it] struck a chord of prophecy and of Christian hopefulness which would long vibrate in the minds of men.[49]

A clearer example of a Christian-centred approach to the Parliament[50] would be hard to find, although perhaps the very final words spoken by Barrows in the closing moments of the Parliament might serve this purpose:

> I desire that the last words which I speak to this Parliament shall be the name of Him to whom I owe life and truth and hope and all things, who reconciles all contradictions, pacifies all antagonisms, and who from the throne of His heavenly kingdom directs the serene and unwearied omnipotence of redeeming love – Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world.[51]

Into this Christian-centred gathering entered a young Hindu monk, who would base much of the content of his speeches on direct criticism of, or challenge to, the very Christians who were his hosts. It is no wonder that he caused ripples to appear on the surface of the Parliament's façade of unity.

Vivekananda's approach to Chicago

Vivekananda's journey to the Parliament, in both geographical and cultural terms, represented a marathon pilgrimage. Having spent the previous two

years journeying through India under various pseudonyms, Vivekananda underwent a profound change that realigned his religious mission from experiential and spiritual, as it had been under Ramakrishna, to practical and societal, as it would be for the remainder of his career. Romain Rolland, quoting Goethe, has described this period in Vivekananda's life as "Wanderjahre . . . Lehrjahre"[52] ("years of travel . . . years of apprenticeship"), which is a succinct summary of the young ascetic's foray into the India beyond Calcutta.

Sponsored biographies note that Vivekananda's time wandering across India, whilst indicative of his desire for spiritual questioning and discourse with fellow seekers, also demonstrated Vivekananda's charitable and social concerns. The following words, attributed to Vivekananda, are based upon a recollection of Ramaswami Shastri, a college student in whose father's house Vivekananda had stayed in late 1892:

> [One day] he said to me and my father: "Practical patriotism means not a mere sentiment or even emotion of love of the motherland but a passion to serve our fellow-countrymen. I have gone all over India on foot and have seen with my own eyes the ignorance, misery and squalor of our people. My whole soul is afire and I am burning with a fierce desire to change such evil conditions."[53]

This growing sense of social awareness, and the apparent links between service to humanity and spiritual growth, which would culminate in the codified formation of *karma yoga*, lies at the root of Vivekananda's motivation for visiting the West. Indeed, in *My Plan of Campaign*,[54] Vivekananda explicitly stated: "I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions . . . I travelled twelve years all over India finding no way to work for my countrymen and that is why I went to America."[55] The hagiographies link this realisation to a religious experience, rather than a gradual awakening, as described by Burke:

> At the southernmost tip of India, Cape Comorin . . . he had a profound and revealing spiritual experience. . . . He saw, as it were, the whole of India – her past, present, and future. . . . He saw that it was not religion that was the cause of India's downfall but, on the contrary, the fact that her true religion, the very life and breath of her individuality, was scarcely found, and he knew her only hope was a renascence of the lost spiritual culture of the ancient rishis. His mind encompassing both the roots and the ramifications of India's problem, and his heart suffering for his country's downtrodden, poverty-stricken masses, he 'hit,' as he later wrote, 'upon a plan.'[56]

Vivekananda's 'plan' was to seek help in the West and, with the generous patronage of his friend[57] the Maharaja of Khetri, Vivekananda embarked for Vancouver from Bombay on 31st May 1893.

Despite this not being his primary reason for visiting the West, Vivekananda was aware of the plans for a Parliament of Religions as early as the first part 1892.[58] However, it was only in April 1893 that Vivekananda decided to journey, and even then attendance at the Parliament was secondary to what was primarily a fund-raising charitable mission.[59] Vivekananda could not make the Parliament a priority for two simple reasons – he was uninvited and he lacked the required credentials. This was the case when, a full six weeks before the start of the Parliament, Vivekananda arrived in Chicago at around midnight on 30th/31st July 1893 – the end of a long journey through Ceylon, Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Canada.

Sponsored biographies state that, after a short period of orientation following an initial bewilderment at the hectic nature of Chicago's cityscape, Vivekananda chanced upon an "old lady,"[60] thought to be Kate Sanborn,[61] on a train. She in turn introduced Vivekananda to Professor John Henry Wright of Harvard University. Burke notes that Prof. Wright persuaded Vivekananda to attend the Parliament,[62] and even provided a letter of recommendation describing Vivekananda as "one who is more learned than all our learned professors put together."[63] Whilst it is certainly true that Vivekananda knew Prof. Wright, and even stayed with his family as a house-guest,[64] Chattopadhyaya has noted that Wright was a Professor of Greek, and may have lacked the specialised knowledge of Hinduism or Indian philosophy necessary to judge the value of Vivekananda's own knowledge and potential contribution to the Parliament.[65] It seems likely, therefore, that it was Wright's standing as a Professor of Greek, rather than as someone with the specialist knowledge of Hinduism, that gave him influence in the Parliament of Religions. Furthermore, the chronology of events culminating in Vivekananda's acceptance as a delegate is muddied to say the least.[66] Chattopadhyaya claims that Vivekananda "knew that he was accepted as a delegate"[67] on 8th September, when Prof. Wright bought him a train ticket for Chicago and helped him on his way, but Sil states that it was "Mozoomdar [as a member of the selection committee] who accepted Vivekananda's late application without a letter of invitation and allowed him to participate in the Parliament by classifying the Swami as a representative of the Hindu monastic order."[68] Further still, the *Life* claims that he was only accepted after meeting Mrs George W. Hale, who took pity upon a lost and hungry Vivekananda and, having given him hospitality in her home, took him to the "officers of the Parliament, [where he] gave his credentials, and was gladly accepted as a delegate."[69] It seems probable that Vivekananda met Mrs Hale either on the 9th or 10th September,[70] and that he was taken to see Barrows on the 10th.[71] It therefore seems likely that the combined effect of Prof. Wright's reference letter, coupled with Mozoomdar's subject-specific patronage, enabled Vivekananda to squeeze in as a very fortunate last minute addition to the Parliament's proceedings.

Vivekananda's speeches at the Parliament remain a source of pride for the Ramakrishna Movement, evidenced by their position as the very first entries

in the nine-volume *Complete Works*. They are, however, far from consistently being Vivekananda's best writing – aside from the paper on *Hinduism*, they are impromptu responses, rather than pre-prepared presentations.[72] And yet they retain a power and impressiveness to this day, perhaps specifically because of the reactive nature of their content, which demands close attention. Specifically, the words of address tell us much regarding Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions, and particularly with Western Christianity. It is therefore somewhat surprising that recent scholarship has tended to overlook the content and specifics of Vivekananda's speeches. Indeed, the two major non-hagiographical biographies of Vivekananda published in recent years, the previously cited works by Sil[73] and Sen,[74] whilst covering aspects of Vivekananda's rise to prominence as a result of Chicago, offer no meaningful analysis of his speeches.

This section, in its own limited way, aims to address this issue, and will detail each of Vivekananda's contributions to the Parliament, analysing the importance and impact of each occasion, whilst specifically linking aspects of Vivekananda's rhetoric to the key theme of his emerging approach to non-Hindu traditions. With regard to sources, Barrows contains the most complete contemporary record, although Vivekananda's talk *Buddhism* is missing from this compilation. In light of such omissions, Burke (MLB) has endeavoured to complete the record by accessing contemporary newspaper items, and the *Complete Works* contributes the available resources by offering the widest summary for the general reader. References below are to Barrows, cross-referenced to the *Complete Works* where possible, and supplemented by Burke where necessary. Section titles are taken from the headings given to the speeches in the *Complete Works*.

Response to welcome[75]

Vivekananda's words of address during the Opening Session have become famous on account of the response that his opening greeting, 'Sisters and Brothers of America' received.[76] Barrows comments that "there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes"[77] in response to this opening, and local newspapers also attest to the impact of these very first words.[78] There are, of course, multiple layers to the meaning and impact of these very few words: first, they attest to the confidence of Vivekananda, a crucial theme that we will revisit throughout this scrutiny of his oration at the Parliament; second, they immediately relate Hindus and Americans (the latter synonymous for Vivekananda with Christians) as equals, rather than as inferior-superior within a colonial context; and, third, they respond directly to the make-up of the audience. As Chaudhari has noted,[79] the majority of attendees at sessions were often women, and it is quite feasible that Vivekananda purposefully used the term 'Sisters' to acknowledge this – indeed, throughout the course of Vivekananda's work in the West, his closest friends and disciples were almost invariably middle-class women of means.

The content of Vivekananda's first speech is nothing short of brilliant as a statement of his ideology of hierarchical inclusivism, formulated as a direct response to the expected Christian-focused agenda of the Parliament.[80] The last words of Vivekananda's opening paragraph are particularly important in this respect: "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religions, and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects."[81] The Hindu-centric meaning of these words to the assembled Christian audience, including those sitting beside him on the platform, is devastatingly clear: we are older than you, we are superior to you, we are more numerous than you, and we contain a more diverse representation of humanity than you.[82] Such was Vivekananda's breathtaking introductory address at the Parliament, in the form of combative discourse, which Barker likens to watching "a myriad of gauntlets [being] thrown down at the doors of the Church."[83]

Vivekananda goes on to expound on what he perceives as Hinduism's tolerance,[84] citing historical accounts of religious refugees being cared for in India. He opposes Hinduism's morally superior 'tolerance' to Christianity's morally inferior 'intolerance.' However, what is particularly interesting is that Vivekananda ends his very short speech with reference to the pluralism of the *Bhagavad Gita*, not to demonstrate a universal ideal of religious harmony, but to specifically vindicate the ontological truth of a Hindu teaching:

> The present Convention, which is one of the most august assemblies ever held, is in itself a vindication, a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita. 'Whosoever comes to me, through whatsoever form I reach him, they are all struggling through paths that in the end always lead to me.'[85]

In short, the Parliament of Religions is the modern vindication of an ancient Hindu teaching.

Why we disagree[86]

Vivekananda next spoke at the Parliament on the fifth day of the proceedings, although it was an unscheduled contribution at the very end of the afternoon session. Unchronicled in the official proceedings of the fifth day, and included by Barrows only as a brief aside in the listings of the Parliament, *Why We Disagree* is an eloquent, if a little simplistic, allegory reflecting upon religious sectarianism and narrow-mindedness. Telling the story of a frog who lives in a well, and for whom the well is the world in its entirety, Vivekananda rebuked the exclusivist Christian speakers who had spoken that afternoon. Chaudhuri provides a better context to the speech than does Barrows when he quotes Rev. J. T. Sunderland's eyewitness

account, which specifically related Vivekananda's comments to the speeches that went before:

> A simple little story was related by one of the speakers that was very telling as a rebuke to bigotry, and as a plea for breadth and brotherhood. The narrator was a learned Hindu. . . . We had been listening to a particularly narrow paper by a Catholic theologian, claiming for his Church the possession of the one only divine religion of the world.[87]

It is likely that the Catholic speaker in question was Monsignor C. D'Harlez, a Professor at the University of Louvain in Belgium, whose paper had been read aloud by Rev. D. J. Riordan.[88] Interestingly, D'Harlez was far from the most exclusivistic of Christian Theologians; however, Vivekananda clearly wanted to wrest control of the session and free it from sectarian dominance – it is interesting that this apparently unplanned interjection[89] continues the anti-sectarian theme that Vivekananda had mentioned in his *Response to Welcome*, when he stated that: "Sectarianism, bigotry and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have possessed long this beautiful earth. . . . I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor [*sic*] of this Convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism."[90]

Hinduism[91]

Vivekananda's major contribution to the academic section of the Parliament[92] was his paper on Hinduism, delivered on 19th September, the ninth day of the proceedings.[93] In the interim period since his last contribution, Vivekananda had been attending numerous evening receptions sponsored by his hosts[94] and Parliament organisers. These receptions included one specifically for foreign delegates and also one held at the Women's Building, where Vivekananda is reported to have spoken about the social condition of women in India.[95] The main aim of these gatherings was social and educational, and it seems that Vivekananda must have been a popular figure who was increasingly influential in the circles of the Parliament – indeed, such was his growing profile that numerous Chicago newspapers printed caricature and sketch drawings of Vivekananda throughout the Parliament.[96] The response to Vivekananda was not, however, always positive. Burke notes that, in response to Vivekananda's criticism of Christian doctrine and sectarianism, there was a backlash by missionaries, who described Vivekananda as "a teacher of deadly error. Woe! Woe! To those who follow a blind guide to their own destruction."[97] Vivekananda's criticisms of Christianity, according to Burke,[98] prompted several Christian speakers, who were also speaking on the 19th, to specifically criticise Hinduism. Burke gives no further details as to the identity of these speakers, and the official proceedings do not reprint any such criticisms,[99] making this difficult to verify. The presence of this story in the literature surrounding Vivekananda at the Parliament does, however, at least attest to the less

than congenial relations between some conservative Christians and the Asian delegates.

Vivekananda's response to this situation is articulated in *Hinduism* where he covers the following themes: (1) the primacy of Hinduism, (2) science as a vindication of Hinduism, (3) a hierarchical view of religion and (4) explicit and implicit criticism of Christianity. I shall now discuss these key themes in turn.

The opening words in *Hinduism* establish both the chronological and the ontological primacy of Hinduism. Labelling Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism as the three extant pre-historic religions, Vivekananda is quick to show the failings of Zoroastrianism and Judaism, in comparison to the strengths of Hinduism:

> They have all had tremendous shocks and all of them prove by their survival their strength; but while Judaism failed to absorb Christianity, and was driven out of its place of birth by its all-conquering daughter, and a handful of Parsees are all that remains to tell the tale of this grand old religion, sect after sect have arisen in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundation, but like the water of the sea-shore in a tremendous earthquake . . . [they] return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous.[100]

Crucially, Vivekananda understands this 'all-absorbing flood' in an inclusivistic framework, to which I will turn shortly. What is of interest at this point is Vivekananda's immediate statement of intent for the purpose of his lecture – this is not an example of deferential oration, but a confident assertion of Hinduism's right to take its place at the high table of 'world religions.' By asserting the primacy of Hinduism, Vivekananda was challenging colonial conceptions of the 'heathen' or 'primitive' stereotypes propagated by some Christian missionaries. This would, of course, become a recurrent theme in his teachings in the West.

A second key theme in *Hinduism* is Vivekananda's reference to science to validate Hindu teachings. As we have seen previously (in connection with the New York series of lectures in 1895–1896) this is a key aspect of his teaching of *raja yoga*; however, the seeds of this style of argument can be seen in his performance at the Parliament. Specifically, with respect to *Vedantic* (and by this Vivekananda invariably means *Advaitic*) teachings, Vivekananda uses science as a tool to legitimise Hindu teachings. Particularly interesting with respect to Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions, is the link he posits between religion and science in their search for unity. Vivekananda states that "science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal."[101] Interestingly, Vivekananda claims that religion has already reached the conclusion of this search: "the science of religion became perfect when it discovered Him who is the one life in a universe of death; Him who is the constant basis of an ever-changing world; One who is

the only soul of which all souls are but delusive manifestations."[102] It should not need pointing out that this description of religion is only understandable within an *Advaitic* framework, and that it is *Advaita* to which Vivekananda is really referring when he uses the term religion.

The third key theme of *Hinduism* is centred upon Vivekananda's use of a hierarchical scheme – the application of such ranking in relation to his fourfold *yoga* typology I have already discussed in Chapter 4. Here, however, is a superb example of the seeds of this framework for approaching non-Hindu traditions in a practical sense at the Parliament. Throughout *Hinduism*, Vivekananda is careful to demonstrate a ranking, or hierarchy of faiths, making a distinction between 'low' and 'high' forms or levels of spiritual engagement. Throughout the text Vivekananda gives examples of 'low-level' spirituality *pertaining to different faiths*. Crucially for the current work, this ensures that Vivekananda's ranking, or hierarchy is not between religions, but *within* religions. This means that Vivekananda is critical of low-level spirituality wherever it is found, and that higher-level spirituality is not to be found in only one tradition, but that it is to be found within a mode or type of religious consciousness, rather than in sectarian or doctrinal teachings. Of course, the problematic situation here is that Vivekananda's own *Advaitic* framework, which he sees as the highest religious ideal, can also be argued to be a form of sectarianism in itself.

In his speech on *Hinduism*, Vivekananda states that "idolatry in India does not mean a horror. It is not the mother of harlots. On the other hand, it is the attempt of undeveloped minds to grasp high spiritual truths."[103] The understanding of ranking modes of religious consciousness is made even more explicit when he stated:

> To the Hindu man is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth. . . . To him all the religions from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism mean so many attempts of the human soul to grasp . . . the Infinite, determined by the conditions of its birth and association. . . . To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal.[104]

The comments in this passage need to be understood within the context of the Parliament, and the discourse and debate that took place between Vivekananda and some of the Christian representatives present in Chicago. It is, of course, in direct reaction to Christian claims for the error and sin of the 'heathen' Hindu that Vivekananda is arguing his case for a Hindu understanding of humanity's religious path.

Vivekananda's criticism of Christianity in *Hinduism* is both implicit and explicit. His argument that "man is not travelling from error to truth" is a clear criticism of Christian teachings on sin, and Vivekananda is quick to

point out that Hinduism has no such concept, and that Hindus demonstrate superiority by not labelling individuals as sinners:

> Allow me to call you, brethren . . . heirs of immortal bliss – yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, ye are divinities on earth. Sinners? It is a sin to call man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.[105]

By declaring this position of Hinduism upon the Chicago platform, Vivekananda effectively assumed a position of Hindu moral superiority over the Christian missionaries who were present. In short, it was a damning attack on the conduct and doctrine of exclusivist Christians, sheathed in a veneer of politeness.

Even more explicitly, Vivekananda attacks 'low-level' spirituality within Christian practice:

> Superstition is the enemy of man, bigotry worse. Why does a Christian go to church, why is the cross holy, why is the face turned toward the sky in prayer? Why are there so many images in the Catholic Church, why are there so many images in the minds of Protestants, when they pray?[106]

Of course, the purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate inherent faults within Christian criticisms of Hinduism. Vivekananda is formulating a Hindu sense of identity in direct relation to Christianity, and his method, even though it leads to a very different end result, is not dissimilar to the method used by the very missionaries whom Vivekananda criticised during the proceedings of the Parliament. Indeed, here we can see an example of Vivekananda placing Christianity at a low-level within his hierarchy of religious truths in relation to higher-level Hindu practice.

The Christian criticism of Hinduism is addressed head-on by Vivekananda when he declares: "Throughout the whole order of Sanscrit philosophy, I challenge anybody to find any such expression as that the Hindu only would be saved and not others."[107] Again, this is a clear assertion of Hindu moral superiority, and Vivekananda's determination to critique Christian claims of uniqueness or privilege is made further evident by his statement "if there is to be ever a universal religion, it must be one which would hold no location in place or time."[108] This is a clear criticism of Christianity's reliance on its historicity, in asserting its authority. What this also addresses is the important distinction that Vivekananda often makes between the *ideal* of a universal religion, and a universal religion per se. The latter is necessarily linked to a sectarian and context-specific understanding of religious identity, whereas the former offers the opportunity for spiritual development independent of any given faith tradition.

One final comment regarding the content of the speech is in order. Vivekananda ended his speech with a triumphant congratulation of his host

country – presumably in an attempt to distinguish between the stereotype of Christian Exclusivism and his own hope for a new openness in the wider American populace. It is interesting to note, however, the wholly insensitive manner in which Vivekananda does this:

> It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion . . . Hail Columbia, motherland of liberty! It has been given to thee, who never dipped her hand in her neighbour's blood, who never found out that the shortest way of becoming rich was by robbing one's neighbours, it has been given to thee to march at the vanguard of civilisation with the flag of harmony.[109]

Such comments, coming only three years after the Massacre of Wounded Knee, seem at best naive and at worst ignorant of America's own history and treatment of religious and ethnic minorities. Whilst this ignorance was by no means Vivekananda's alone,[110] it is a telling example of how Vivekananda used idealised projections of nationhood and identity in his own approach to non-Hindu traditions and societies.

The response to this speech was predictably mixed. Eyewitness accounts report Vivekananda being swamped by female admirers as a result of his powerful performance,[111] and the philosopher William Ernest Hocking recalled that, after Vivekananda made his declaration that to call a man a sinner was itself a sin, he could "feel the silence of the crowd – almost as if shocked . . . through the silence I felt something like a gasp running through the hall as the audience waited for the affirmation which would follow this blow."[112]

Hinduism, therefore, is a powerful example of Vivekananda's use of the Chicago Parliament to force the agenda of Hindu self-assertion, often specifically in relation to Christianity. The speech does not explain in any detail Hindu concepts such as *atman, Brahman, karma* or *moksha*. It does not offer an explanation of *Advaita* as one of several schools of Hindu philosophy. Despite being presented in the section of the Parliament intended to outline the central beliefs and philosophies of each tradition, Vivekananda singularly, and purposefully, fails to do this. Instead, Vivekananda uses the opportunity of his highest profile session at the Parliament not for information delivery, but for a speech shaped entirely by his hierarchical understanding of the human religious condition.

Religion not the crying need of India[113]

The tenth day of the Parliament, the 20th of September, again saw the proceedings split into three sessions, with the evening session limited to two very short papers. At the end of this session, reports Barrows, Vivekananda gave a brief speech. What follows in Barrows's official proceedings, and also in the *Complete Works* is a wholly inadequate account of a little over a

quarter of what Vivekananda is thought to have said, and neither publication offers any context at all to Vivekananda's comments.

More detailed coverage of this speech is available in Burke, through the research of Swami Yogeshananda, who discovered a story printed in the *Chicago Inter Ocean* on 21st September. Crucially, this report gives a greater degree of context for Vivekananda's words of address, which were specifically referring to the last paper of the evening session, a lecture titled *Religion in Peking* by Prof. Isaac T. Headland of Peking University.[114] In his paper, Headland criticises the Chinese for building temples of better quality than their own homes and for burning money as part of ancestor worship – suggesting instead, that the funds should be better spent on building churches and accepting Christianity. It is not difficult to imagine Vivekananda's reaction to these comments, and he was given free rein to reply by the chair of the session, Rev. Dr Alfred Williams Momerie.

The report in the *Chicago Inter Ocean* states that Vivekananda opened his response by arguing that "the missionaries would do better to work in appeasing hunger than in endeavouring to persuade the Chinese to renounce their faith of centuries and embrace Christianity."[115] Vivekananda is then reported to have paused, and turned to Bishop Keane beside him on the platform, only resuming his address once "Bishop Keane had told him that Americans would not be offended at honest criticism."[116]

What followed from Vivekananda was an impassioned rallying cry for missionaries to be socially, rather than religiously engaged, with Vivekananda choosing Indian, rather than Chinese examples, presumably from his own life experience. During the course of the speech, missionaries are criticised for offering aid only in return for conversion,[117] of failing to help native peoples build temples, even though Hindus had helped build Christian churches,[118] and most crucially of all, of being guilty of theological blindness to the social ills of India:

> Brethren of America, the crying evil [need] of the East is not religion. We have more than religion enough; what they want is bread, but they are given a stone. (Applause). It is an insult to a suffering man dying of hunger to preach to him metaphysics. . . . Send missionaries to them to teach them how better to earn a better piece of bread and not to teach them metaphysical nonsense. (Great applause).[119]

Clearly Vivekananda had a receptive audience, as evidenced by the newspaper editor's notes in the above quotation. These words of address, unscheduled and, if the contemporary accounts are to be believed, actually prompted by the audience[120] indicates Vivekananda's growing confidence at the Parliament. The other Indian delegates, including Mazoomdar, Nagarkar and Gandhi were all notable for their deferential approach to the Parliament, with Mazoomdar even being described as 'heartily Christian.'[121] Clearly, Vivekananda did not fit this mould at all, and this short address of words

proves invaluable in understanding Vivekananda's use of the Parliament as an active platform for the promotion of his hierarchical approach to non-Hindu traditions, rather than as a disengaged arena of dry papers and contrasting archaic theological accounts.

Buddhism, the fulfilment of Hinduism[122]

Vivekananda's words of address regarding Buddhism were also delivered as a conclusion to a session in which he did not formally speak. Burke quotes the *Chicago Inter Ocean* of 27th September 1893, which suggests that the Buddhist speaker Dharmapala, rather than the chair of the session, Dr Alfred Momerie, was the person to invite Vivekananda to speak. The speech itself was superficially understood by the assembled press to be supportive of Buddhism, with Vivekananda being described as having "nothing but kind words for Buddhism."[123] Whilst Vivekananda is indeed praising of the Buddha in his speech, it is essential to note that he is far from praising of Buddhism. In a key theme of his speech, Vivekananda separates the figure of the Buddha from Buddhists, in a deliberate act of hierarchisation. For Vivekananda, Buddhism erred when it departed from the original teachings of the Buddha because "he was not understood properly by his disciples."[124] The implication is that there is an alternative, correct, understanding of the Buddha, and for Vivekananda this is the 'Hindu' understanding.[125] Vivekananda unabashedly states: "As the Jew did not understand the fulfilment of the Old Testament [in Christ],[126] so the Buddhist did not understand the fulfilment of the truths of the Hindu religion. Again I repeat, Shakya Muni came not to destroy, but he was the fulfilment, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus."[127] The Buddha, for Vivekananda, was Hindu, and represented the fulfilment and validation of Hindu teachings.

Vivekananda ends his speech with an oft-quoted phrase concerning Hindu-Buddhist union, which was picked up by the contemporary press:

> Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism . . . the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist. . . . Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmins with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanising power of the Great Master [Buddha].[128]

Whilst these sentiments were described by the Chicago press as "a plea for tolerance, and the recognition of essential truth, wherever it may be found"[129] a more accurate reading must surely take into account Vivekananda's insistence upon an *Advaitic* hierarchy of religious understanding, wherein Buddhism is only truly valued when it can be incorporated within a Hindu framework. During this speech, Vivekananda famously states that

"in religion there is no caste; caste is simply a social institution"[130] and in so doing he was separating out the theological/philosophical and social/practical elements of religion.[131] Crucially, this aids the current understanding of Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions because it again separates sectarianism, social customs and rituals, and accepted cultural norms, from 'true' spirituality or religious understanding. Again, this foreshadows much of Vivekananda's New York lecture series by placing *Advaitic* understanding above social or sectarian manifestations of human religiosity.

Address at the Final Session[132]

Vivekananda's Address at the Final Session[133] was delivered as part of a series of speeches by major figures at the Parliament. Asian traditions were well represented and Vivekananda was accompanied by Mazoomdar, Yu, Hirai, Gandhi, Shibata and Dharmapala, who spoke immediately before Vivekananda. In total, 22 speakers addressed the session, of which 13 represented Christianity. Interestingly, the Asian delegates were grouped together at the beginning,[134] and the session built to a crescendo of speeches on Christianity, carefully stage-managed by speech, prayer and music, inspiring what Barrows has described as a 'Pentecostal'[135] atmosphere.

Vivekananda, the penultimate of the Asian speakers, used this opportunity to specifically address this Christian pomp and ceremony, which had saturated much of the proceedings of the Parliament. His tone in the *Address* is nothing short of defiant, and it is reported in Barrows that: "Swami Vivekananda was always heard with interest by the Parliament, but very little approval was shown to some of the sentiments expressed in his closing address."[136]

The key sentiment of Vivekananda's address was a rejection of sectarianism and domination by any one religion. It is clear that Vivekananda was explicitly meaning Christianity in this context, and that his words of address were specifically aimed at the Christo-centric ambitions of numerous delegates and members of the organising committee. Indeed, he addressed them directly in the opening section of his speech: "My thanks to the shower of liberal sentiments that has overflowed this platform . . . [However] a few jarring notes were heard from time to time in this harmony. My special thanks to them, for they have, by their striking contrast, made the general harmony the sweeter."[137]

Crucial to Vivekananda's rejection of sectarianism was his firm belief that conversion was unnecessary and undesirable, outlined in his following words:

> Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity . . . but if anyone here hopes that this unity would come by the triumph of any one of these religions and the destruction of others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian

> would become a Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.[138]

There are, of course, two reasons for Vivekananda's distaste for conversion, which are not unrelated: first, his interest in the assertion of a Hindu identity against the backdrop of Christian Colonial dominance and, second, his hierarchical approach to both Hinduism and non-Hindu traditions, which deemed sectarianism (and its conversion impulse) a low level of spirituality. This is summed up by Vivekananda when he states: "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 others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its own law of growth."[139] Put simply, higher religious knowledge is not linked to sectarianism, or with one particular religious system, but is available through all faith systems. Therefore, Vivekananda's spiritual hierarchy formulates a structure *within* rather than *between* religions which seeks to deconstruct colonial or exclusivistic claims for any sectarian doctrine or dogma.

Hindu voices at the Parliament

Vivekananda was not, of course, the only representative of Hinduism or India at the Parliament – indeed, upon a close examination of Barrows's record of the official proceedings, it is apparent that Vivekananda must be seen within the wider context of Hindu voices present in Chicago. Throughout the Parliament, Jainism, Buddhism and Theosophy[140] were all presented as a part of the process of engagement with Indian religions, but there were also other delegates who were specific and authoritative representatives of Hinduism, to whom I will now turn.

Manilal N. D'Vivedi's paper *Hinduism* was read on the second day of the Parliament.[141] Whilst the majority of the lengthy speech[142] is a straightforward outline and defence of key Hindu concepts, including the importance of the Vedas, and a defence of Hindu practice and devotion, it is interesting to note that he prefaces his talk with a deconstruction of the 'Western' understanding of 'religion.' Central in his criticism here is the type of scholar and priest who was "brought up in the atmosphere of so-called 'Oriental Research' in the West."[143] D'Vivedi argues that this group of writers and commentators had an "inclination towards . . . the religion in which [they are] . . . brought up"[144] which effectively undermines the legitimacy of their pronouncements upon Hinduism, and other 'Eastern' traditions.[145] That D'Vivedi's speech should contain criticisms of Western (mis)understandings of Eastern traditions, and that it should also defend Hindu practices such as idol worship[146] is perhaps to be expected; however, the last section of D'Vivedi's paper is interesting for its reflective view of Hinduism. Section VI of the speech addresses the condition of Hinduism 'as it stands at present'[147] and specifically mentions three movements – the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya

Samaj and the Theosophical Society. D'Vivedi dismisses the Brahmo Samaj as 'un-Hindu' due to its theology and renouncement of "the institution of Varnas, and the established law of marriage."[148] The Arya Samaj fares a little better in D'Vivedi's eyes, but his tone is cursory at best and critical at worst when he states that "This Samaj claims to have found out the true religion of the Aryas, and it is of course within the pale of Hinduism, though the merit of their claim yet remains to be seen."[149] The Theosophists are treated in a reasonably positive light by D'Vivedi, who notes that the movement has "set earnest students to study their ancient books with better lights and fresher spirits than before,"[150] although he is quick to point out that the Theosophical Society 'does not profess anything new.'[151] In treating the three movements thus, D'Vivedi is linking Hinduism to a pre-reform era, and valorising a Hindu identity predating the very movements which were to play no small part in shaping Hinduism, and wider views of 'Indian religion' well into the twentieth century. A position further removed from that of Vivekananda, who was a member of the Brahmo Samaj and was himself an important link in the chain of Hindu reformation, could hardly be found.

D'Vivedi ends his speech with what Seager has described as a "characteristically Hindu model of religious unity"[152] when he argues that the common basis of religion is "1. Belief in the existence of an ultra-material principle in nature and in the unity of All. [and] 2. Belief in re-incarnation and salvation by action."[153] D'Vivedi understood these statements within an *Advaita* framework – a framework before which

> other philosophical systems paled 'before the blaze of unity and love lighted at the altar of the Vedas by this sublime philosophy, the shelter of minds like Plato, Pythagoras, Bruno, Spinoza, Hegel, and Schopenauer in the West and Krs'na, Vyasa, S'ankara, and others in the East.'[154]

Vivekananda would no doubt have approved of this sentiment.

A second representative of Hinduism at the Parliament was B. B. Nagarkar, a resident of Bombay and a member of the Brahmo Samaj. Delivering three speeches at the Parliament, including a very brief response to the welcome just a few minutes after Vivekananda's own response, Nagarkar used his two main speeches first to address English rule in India and, second, to provide an overview of the merits of the Brahmo movement. Nagarkar's style of dress and conduct during the Parliament can be seen to be somewhat different to Vivekananda's. Part of Vivekananda's appeal was his striking physical presence upon the Chicago stage, noted by several first-hand observers.[155] Nagarkar was somewhat different, in that his style of dress was conservative and largely Western, and it is interesting to note that this seems reflective of his approach to non-Hindu traditions at the Parliament.[156] Whereas Vivekananda projected an image of the exotic, Nagarkar was intent upon projecting a neutral image, beyond sect or creed, which would aid the homogenising focus of his Brahmo-informed understanding of pro-syncretic

Pluralism – indeed, he was described thus by a contemporary newspaper: "[he was] a polished scholar and gentleman, whose hair is tinged with silver. He has a strongly intellectual face, and but for his complexion, might be taken for Marshall Field."[157] There are also clear indications of Nagarkar's wish for universalism within his actual speeches: in his second speech, given on the fifteenth day of the Parliament and titled *Spiritual Ideas of the Brahmo-Somaj*, he stated

> The truth that lies at the root of them all [i.e. religions] is unchanged and unchanging. But it requires an impartial and dispassionate consideration to understand and appreciate this truth. . . . This truth cannot be observed unless we are prepared to forget the accident of our nationality.[158]

Nagarkar differs from Vivekananda in his treatment of colonial rule in India as, during his speech on the seventh day of the Parliament, titled *The Work of Social Reform in India*, Nagarkar is clear in seeing English rule as a predominantly positive aspect of Indian culture, even going so far as to claim that in the "rise of the English from petty shopkeepers to imperial rulers . . . 'there was the hand of God.'"[159] It is important to note that Nagarkar saw the awakening of India as a result of the revival of Indian learning and the re-emergence of a forgotten past, thus positioning the 'recovery' of the country firmly in Indian hands, but that crucially for Nagarkar, the English involvement acted as the catalyst to this reformation.

A second representative of the Brahmo Samaj was the influential and, for Vivekananda at least, crucially important P. C. Mozoomdar. As noted previously, it was Mozoomdar who effectively arranged Vivekananda's participation at the Parliament – no small contribution to Vivekananda's legacy.

Mozoomdar's presence at the Parliament was significant. He was the only Indian delegate to have visited America prior to the Parliament when, according to Rev. Wendte of Oakland, California, he had "delighted large audiences with his eloquence."[160] Accordingly, many Western delegates knew Mozoomdar both personally and through his 1883 publication *Oriental Christ*, which was a summary of Keshub Chunder Sen's views on Jesus.[161] Consequently, he was greeted with favourable responses throughout his speeches, and there are several instances of Barrows noting the audience's applause, and indeed even loud cheering, in the official proceedings.[162]

Mozoomdar's main speech during the Parliament was titled *The World's Religious Debt to Asia*,[163] and was presented on the twelfth day. Seager has described the content as "a reversal of current by sending the impulse toward unity built upon western signs and sent heading East by western delegates, back to the West but built on signs from the East."[164] Put simply, Mozoomdar was using his familiarity with Western audiences and the contemporary religious debate in America to repackage Christian universalism within an Eastern framework, to project Indian religious authority to the

West. To achieve this aim, Mozoomdar employed the tactic, used also by Sen before him, arguing for Asian origins to many elements of religion that were normally comprehended as Western – often specifically linking events and characters in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament with Asian origins or equivalents.[165] Interestingly, there is cross-over in Mozoomdar and Vivekananda's approaches to the Parliament, demonstrated by the final section of Mozoomdar's speech, which concentrates upon the power-balance of East and West, and which Seager has described as "Majumdar [flinging] down a gauntlet before the imperial pretenses of the West."[166] The tone of Mozoomdar's text, however, suggests a less than confrontational declaration. Whilst the body of Mozoomdar's speech extolled the virtues of understanding Eastern origins of key 'universal' religious concepts – worship, renunciation and self-surrender – the concluding remarks, presumably intended to lay down the challenge that Seager suggests, lack somewhat in strength and purpose. Indeed, Mozoomdar is almost deferential or self-abasing at stages and concludes with the following, less than inspiring words:

> In the East we are the subject race, we are talked of with contumely. The Asian is looked upon as the incarnation of every meanness and untruth. Perhaps we partly deserve it. Perhaps in being allowed to associate with you free and noble children of the West we shall learn what we have failed to learn hitherto. Yet in the midst of the sadness, the loneliness, the prostration of the present, it is some consolation to think that we still retain some of our spirituality, and to reflect upon the prophecy of Ezekiel, "Behold, the glory of the Lord cometh from the way of the East."[167]

As this quotation clearly demonstrates, the reasons for Mozoomdar's popularity, noted above, may not simply have rested upon his familiarity with his audience for, throughout his speeches, and in particular during his response in the final session, Mozoomdar's engagement with the West bordered on sycophancy toward the aims of the Parliament, the established Christian denominations, and the organisers themselves:

> the time is coming when the more liberal of the Catholic and Protestant branches of Christ's Church will advance and meet upon a common platform. . . . Come then, my friends, ye broad-hearted of all churches, advance and shake hands with each other and promote that spiritual fellowship, that kingdom of Heaven which Christ predicted. . . . I conclude with acknowledging the singular cordiality and appreciation extended to us Orientals. Where everyone has done so well we did not deserve special honor, but undeserved as the honor may be, it shows the greatness of your leaders, and especially your Chairman, Dr. Barrows.[168]

This use of Christian-based language, and an almost deferential politeness to the hosts, stands in stark contrast to Vivekananda's self-confident,

Indian-based response to Christendom, which we have already noted was combative in its language and focus, and which drew negative comments both from the audience and from Barrows himself in his editing of the proceedings. Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions thus stands apart from that of other representatives of Hinduism at the Parliament. It is also interesting to note a comment made by Mozoomdar at the very beginning of his final response, in which he stated that a principal lesson learned from the Parliament was that:

> the charge of materialism, laid against the age in general and against America in particular, is refuted forever. Could these myriads [of delegates and audience] have spent their time, their energy, neglected their business, their pleasures, to be present with us if their spirit had not risen above their material needs or carnal desires? The spirit dominates still over matter and over mankind.[169]

For, whilst Mozoomdar thought the claim had been 'refuted forever,' for Vivekananda the distinction between the 'spiritual' East and the 'material' West was to remain a strict tenet of his teachings throughout his influential New York lecture series in the years after the Parliament.

Finally, in this brief comparative section of Hindu delegates at the Parliament, we will turn to S. Parthasarthy Aiyangar, a Vaishnava from Madras. Whilst not a major contributor to the Parliament, and with his contribution read in absentia[170] during the Scientific Section of the Parliament, Aiyangar is important to the current discussion because his words presented a far more traditional, and explicitly Ramanuja-informed theistic form of Hinduism, than did those of the other delegates. Much of Aiyangar's speech, which would have lasted no more than a little over five minutes, is concerned with outlining the five worshipful manifestations of the Lord, including *avatars*, and an understanding of the consort, and a stress upon the importance of a guru-figure. He also goes on to outline "the five ways of attaining salvation – good works, knowledge, love, faith, and the grace bestowed by the guru,"[171] clearly stating that "[faith] is the true method of salvation, for which all other means should be abandoned."[172] Aiyangar's most interesting comment, however, is his follow-up to this statement on faith, when he states: "Vedanta, in teaching other ways of salvation, is simply prescribing God hidden under these other ways."[173]

Aiyanagar is here, therefore, using his own model of inclusivism which encompasses *Vedanta* within a *Visishtadvaita Bhakti* framework. Of course, Vivekananda and other Vedantins would no doubt argue with Aiyangar's understanding of deity within the *Advaita* system of thought, principally upon a negation of theistic understandings of *Brahman saguna* in favour of a view of *Brahman nirguna*, but nevertheless in a lecture aimed at explaining a Hindu system of thought to delegates from the West, we again find a tendency to encompass different systems of thought within an inclusivistic approach to non-Hindu traditions.

Calls for unity at the Parliament

The Parliament, despite being largely Christian in character as outlined above, included many lectures which called for religious unity – a cooperation beyond mere tolerance or respect for the 'other,' and which necessitated the transcendence of doctrine or orthopraxy in given traditions. Throughout these talks there are echoes (and indeed, foreshadows) of Vivekananda's concepts of acceptance and universal religion, although there are, of course, important differences also. This section briefly examines several of the individuals making this call, so as to position Vivekananda's papers within the framework of universalism that was present in sections of the Parliament.

Rev. George Candlin was an English Methodist missionary working in China who spoke several times during the Parliament and who focused especially upon missionary approaches to non-Christian religions and the need for religious unity. Despite Seager describing Candlin as a 'liberal,'[174] it is quite clear that this description is only accurate if one is to recognise that theological Exclusivism was the ideological norm for nineteenth-century Christian missionaries and that Candlin, in marking some degree of departure from this stance, was tending towards 'liberalism.' Indeed, during his speech in the Final Session, the universal aspirations of Candlin are genuine and motivational, but are explicitly aimed at the projection of a Christian worldview:

> The Parliament has more than justified my most sanguine expectations. As a missionary I anticipate that it will make a new era of missionary enterprise and missionary hope. . . . The conventional idea of religion which obtains among Christians the world over is, that Christianity is true, all other religions false . . . or else with a little more moderation that Christianity is revelation from heaven while other religions are manufactures of men. You know better, and with clear light and strong assurance you can testify that there may be friendship instead of antagonism between religion and religion.[175]

To fully understand this rallying call, however, we need to return to Candlin's major speech, titled *Religious Unity*,[176] given on the fifteenth day, which clearly laid the boundaries for his specific form of inclusivism. One of the longest speeches at the Parliament, *Religious Unity* is Candlin's outlining of how differing faith systems may be evaluated within a universal understanding of human religiosity. Crucially, it is formulated through a missionary lens that seeks, no matter how well meaning, to assert the primacy of the Christian faith. This, of course, is to be expected and, superficially, is no different to Vivekananda's assertion of the primacy of *Advaita*. There is, however, a crucial difference between the two speakers. Candlin's universalism is rooted in a desire to see a united Christianity, rather than the ideal of a universal religion, and in so doing, he betrays the difference between

his form of explicit hierarchical inclusivism, in which conversion is central, and Vivekananda's implicit hierarchical inclusivism, which desires that no conversion need take place for the ideal of a universal religion to become reality. This is clear from Candlin's words:

> Christian union is but a part of the wider question of religious union. . . . Religion has been spoken of as the 'great divider,' it is, in fact, the great, the only adequate and permanent uniting power. . . . Religion wherever we find it makes its appeal to the human conscience, addresses itself to the faculty of worship and makes a stand, effective or ineffective, against evil. . . . China without Confucius, would have been immeasurably worse than China with Confucius. . . . [However] Christianity, in the conception of her Divine Founder, and according to her best traditions in every century, is a religion for the whole world. To bring all mankind into fellowship with Christ is her chief mission.[177]

In his speech, which includes a clear ranking of faiths within this Christian-centric framework,[178] Candlin therefore ranks individual faiths, rather than religious elements within faiths, whereas Vivekananda consistently ranks elements of human religiosity within traditions, rather than simply between traditions. Candlin is proposing a system of hierarchical inclusivism which denigrates entire faith systems and traditions, rather than the disparate practices therein.

Emil Hirsch is another contributor to an understanding of universal religion at the Parliament and an interesting example for two principal reasons – first that he was a member of the local organising committee for the Parliament in Chicago and, second, that he was a Jewish Rabbi. Indeed, Hirsch stands as the only non-Christian on Charles Bonney's organising committee, as outlined above. It is interesting to note that Hirsch, the Professor of Rabbinic Literature at Chicago University, was so lauded at the Parliament that it was he, and not a Christian minister, who led the huge audience at the Final Session in the Lord's Prayer in the closing moments of the entire assembly.[179]

Hirsch's most relevant speech during the Parliament was given on the last day, and was titled *Elements of Universal Religion*.[180] In his speech, Hirsch argued that:

> Judaism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity had all transcended their original geographical boundaries to become universal religions, but that one day they all would be eclipsed by one yet greater, which was the destiny of the race. All creeds would then become outdated; character, conduct, and conscience would be 'the keynote of the Gospel in the Church of Humanity Universal.'[181]

Interestingly, Hirsch does not mention Hinduism, other than an oblique reference to baptism in the Ganges, and yet his form of universalism is closer to Vivekananda's than that of Candlin. Seeing beyond the boundaries of creed and sect, Hirsch is advocating universalism based upon a new religious tradition. To this end, his argument is rather similar to the teachings of Nagarkar and Mozoomdar, in that an attempt is made to go beyond sectarianism, although the result is simply another sect, denomination or creed. Admirably, Hirsch attempts to avoid this problem when expounding the authoritative content of the new faith: "Will this faith have its bible? It will. It retains the old bibles of mankind . . . [however] . . . religion is not a question of literature, but of life. God's revelation is continuous, not contained in tablets of stone or sacred parchment."[182] The limitation of this stance, of course, is Hirsch's philosophical understanding of God, which is clearly theistic and *bhakti*-driven; indeed in another section of his speech he makes it very clear that "there [will] be prayer in the universal religion . . . man will worship."[183] This therefore differs from Vivekananda's model in a strikingly important way, for Hirsch is proposing, or more correctly predicting, a form of universal religion beyond creed or sect, but that is firmly entrenched in worship. Clearly, this would be seen as counterproductive by Vivekananda, whose framework of religious hierarchy called for each to grow within their own traditions, and to ultimately jettison lower levels of spirituality within that tradition, including simplistic worship. Again, the importance of understanding Vivekananda's universalism as the search for the *ideal of a universal religion*, rather than the creation of a universal religion per se, is of critical importance.

The third and final speaker to be examined in this section is Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Unitarian from Cambridge, Massachusetts. Speaking on the eighth day of the Parliament, Higginson argued for a form of non-sectarian theism in his lecture *The Sympathy of Religions*.[184] Seeing organised religion, in the form of the existing faith traditions, as a way of avoiding descent into superstition, Higginson is equally clear of the importance of spirituality, arguing that even superstition is better than no religion at all: "The penalties of a total alienation from the religious life of the world are perhaps severer than even those of superstition."[185] Higginson also firmly believed that lessons could be learned from all traditions: "in . . . man's creative imagination . . . the humblest individual thinker may retain the essence of religion, and may moreover, have not only one of these vast faiths, but all of them by his side."[186]

Higginson is clear that it is necessary to move beyond the boundaries of sect and creed, not because religions are equally correct, but precisely because they are equally incorrect:

> Among all these vast structures of spiritual organization there is a sympathy. It lies not in what they know, for they are alike, in a scientific sense, in knowing nothing. Their point of sympathy lies in what they

> have sublimely created through longing imagination. In all these faiths are the same alloy of human superstition; the same fables of miracle and prophecy. . . . In point of knowledge, all are helpless; in point of credulity, all puerile; in point of aspiration, all sublime. All seek God, if haply they might find him.[187]

In this eloquent deconstruction, Higginson is proposing a human-centred, rather than revelatory, understanding of sect and creed, foreshadowing the Christian theological Pluralists of the twentieth century.[188] In doing so, we see an important overlap with Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions, as the emphasis is on the development of the individual, and not the creed in question:

> We shall find him, if we find him at all, individually; by opening each for himself the barrier between the created and the Creator. . . . All the vast mechanism of any scheme of salvation or religious hierarchy becomes powerless and insignificant beside the hope in a single human soul.[189]

However, there are of course divergences between Higginson and Vivekananda, and the most basic of these is Higginson's understanding of universal theism and a single, non-sectarian tradition, as the basis for universality. Higginson notes that "for most of us in America, the door out of superstition and sin may be called Christianity . . . [but it] is the accident of a birthplace . . . other nations find other outlets; they must pass through their own doors, not through ours."[190] Superficially this sounds similar to Vivekananda's argument that each should "grow according to his own law of growth,"[191] however the crucial difference is that Higginson is necessarily thinking of theism when he argues for the merits of each faith system. Therefore, for Higginson, it is the theistic elements of differing religions, albeit loaded with human fallibility, that is the underlying sympathy between religions, and the basis for his universalist thought. For Vivekananda, theism is simply the beginning, not the end-point, of religious hierarchy and true spiritual understanding, and must be transcended within one's own tradition to continue on the path to *moksha*.

Much has been made of Vivekananda's performance at the Parliament by the Ramakrishna Movement's hagiographies and it is certainly the case that Chicago was the springboard for much of Vivekananda's work in the West. The immediacy of this impact is a matter of debate, particularly the veracity of Vivekananda's own claims to be 'a celebrity.'[192] Chattopadhyaya has contributed to this debate when he questions the impact that Vivekananda had upon the Chicago press by noting that *The Chicago Daily Tribune* front page[193] did not carry any mention of Vivekananda in the 12th of September edition which followed his *Response to Welcome*, a speech that has taken on a Shakespearean poignancy within the hagiographies.[194] Chattopadhyaya's criticism, however, is rather unfair. It seems unlikely that the newspaper would

run a story on an unknown Indian delegate on its front page, when there were other higher profile Indian delegates such as Mozoomdar,[195] and also Christian delegates such as Keane, Ryan and Fallows who were not mentioned on the front page either. In fact, no delegates were mentioned by name on the front page, and Vivekananda had two entire paragraphs dedicated to him on the second-page report,[196] which seems generous for a hitherto unknown delegate after his very first speech. Indeed, as Chaudhuri has noted,[197] the lack of contemporary news stories may well be down to the simple fact that Vivekananda often spoke at the end of the evening sessions, and was too late to be reported in newspapers that had tight press deadlines for their daily editions. It is certainly the case, however, that many eyewitness accounts, reported in Barrows as well as the hagiographies, attest to the popularity and impact of Vivekananda on a personal and social level at the Parliament.

The impact of Vivekananda, and the importance of his performance at Chicago to the current work, may be summarised thus. First, Vivekananda used the Parliament as an opportunity for the promotion of Hinduism to the West, claiming chronological, moral and philosophical primacy for his specific conception of Hinduism. Specifically, Vivekananda saw his particular form of *Advaitic* Hinduism as the 'mother of all religions.' In so doing, Vivekananda was swimming against the tide of Christianity that saturated the Parliament. This ensured that Vivekananda used the Parliament to engage in a strong defence of Hinduism to counter Christian attacks. Vivekananda often achieved this by critiquing Christianity on Christian grounds (for example, scripture, doctrine and practice) thus ensuring that Christianity was subject to the same critiques as Hinduism. Vivekananda applied this criticism in a hierarchical approach, which ranked spirituality and religious practice within, rather than between, faith systems, culminating in his ill-received words in his *Address at the Final Session* criticising the desire for conversion between faiths. Second, many of Vivekananda's themes at Chicago are consistent with those in his subsequent writings and lectures, including criticism of missionary work, promotion of social reform, the use of science to validate *Advaita*, and his distaste for conversion. The most important consistent theme is that of inclusivism, to support his hierarchical view, which is particularly evident in his speech regarding Buddhism. Vivekananda ended his involvement at the Parliament with a rallying cry against sectarianism, a clear link to his devaluation of 'low-level' spirituality, which would be the central focus of his subsequent formulation of a hierarchical and inclusive framework of religion. Finally, it must be understood that Vivekananda did not seek to represent Hinduism in its entirety – Nagarkar and Mozoomdar of the Brahmo Samaj, and Aiyangar, representing Theistic Dualism, clearly advocated radically differing views of Hinduism at the Parliament. In the same way, neither did Vivekananda understand 'unity' of religions in the same way as Candlin, Hirsch or Higginson. In this respect, it is important to note that Vivekananda represented only a very specific *Advaitic* understanding of both 'Hinduism' and 'religious unity.'

Notes

1 Note: this chapter uses some of Vivekananda's quotations, to which reference has already been made in previous chapters, thus causing repetition of source-use. This is deliberate. Whilst previous chapters have sought to establish the existence, shape and nature of Vivekananda's framework of religious understanding in relation to Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, this chapter provides a systematic appraisal of the *practical* application of this theoretical framework in a real-life discursive situation.
2 Barrows, J. H. *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893, Vol. I & II*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893) p. 173.
3 The impact of Vivekananda upon the press and assembled audience of Chicago is much contested, clouded as it is by hagiographical representations of his on-stage performances. This debate will be explored in the relevant section of this chapter, but it should be attested that, whatever the provenance of claims to immediate celebrity status, the enduring myth of Vivekananda's performance at Chicago demonstrates the continuing importance of this short period in his Western work.
4 Raychaudhuri, T. *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 220.
5 CW III, p. 18.
6 CW I, p. 3.
7 Jackson, C. T. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) p. 32.
8 See, for example, Aleaz, K. P. 'Swami Vivekananda: Inclusivist or Pluralist' in Dasgupta, *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago*, pp. 230–247.
9 Beckerlegge, G. *The Ramakrishna Mission: The Making of a Modern Hindu Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 43.
10 Often dismissed as 'idol worship' by Christian missionaries of the age, the Hindu veneration of the *murti* is based on the belief that divinity may dwell in a sculpture, statue or other physical entity (sometimes as aniconic natural images such as trees). Vivekananda's understanding of *murti* acknowledges that the object in question is not divinity itself, but a means for human communion with the divine. See, for example, CW I, p. 16.
11 See in particular, *A Defence of Hindu Theism in Reply to the Attack of an Advocate for Idolatry at Madras* in Ghose, J. C. (ed.) *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Srikanta Roy, 1901) pp. 123–142 and *A Second Defence of the Monotheistical System of the Veds: In Reply to an Apology for the Present State of Hindoo Worship* in Ghose, J. C. (ed.) *The English Works of Raja Rammohum Roy*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Srikanta Roy, 1901) pp. 147–180.
12 It is clear that Vivekananda clashed often with Missionaries whom he accused of spreading lies and falsehoods regarding Hindu custom and practice. In his 1894 Detroit lecture *Christianity in India*, Vivekananda described Christian Missionaries as "ignorant, hypocritical . . . self-deceiving men." See CW VIII, p. 217.
13 Killingley, D. 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 139.
14 Ibid.
15 King, U. *Indian Spirituality and Western Materialism: An Image and Its Function in the Reinterpretation of Modern Hinduism* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1985) p. 5, cited in Killingley, 'Vivekananda's Western Message from the East,' p. 141.
16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., p. 156.
18 Braybrooke, M. *Pilgramage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) pp. 7–8.
19 Bolotin, N. & Laing, C. *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Urban and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002 [1992]) p. vii. This figure is truly astounding when one considers that the population of Chicago in 1893 was only in the region of 1.3 million people. See www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/collections/maps/chi1890/ (accessed 01/10/18).
20 Figures are contradictory – Bolotin and Laing give the figure as 600, but the 1893 publication *A Week at the Fair* gives the figure at 1,037 acres. See Ziolkowski, E. J. (ed.) *A Museum of Faiths: Histories and Legacies of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993) p. 7.
21 Bolotin & Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, p. 20. Again, the *A Week at the Fair* figure differs, giving 5 million square feet as the figure.
22 Ibid., chapter III.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., p. 20 and Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 7.
25 Letter to Alasinga, 20th August 1893, CW V, p. 11.
26 Charles Carroll Bonney, *World's Congress Addresses* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1900) p. ii quoted in Burg, D. F. *Chicago's White City of 1893* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1976) p. 235.
27 Bolotin & Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition*, p. 20.
28 King, U. 'Rediscovering Women's Voices at the World's Parliament of Religions' in Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 329.
29 Note: the terms Parliament and Congress were used, seemingly interchangeably, in early texts concerning the Religion panel. See, *World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, Illinois, 1893: Report on the Committee on Awards* (Government Printing Press, 1901) quoted in Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, pp. 234–235.
30 Bonney, *Report of the President (Appendix A)*, p. 326, quoted in Seager, R. H. *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995) p. xx.
31 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1558, quoted in Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 8.
32 Ziolkowski notes that Seager arbitrarily lists only those who give 'major' speeches, and also points out an omission from the list. See Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 9.
33 Seager, R. (ed.) *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1994 [1993]) pp. 477–492. The summary comes from Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 9.
34 These 'Protestantism' figures include one speaker missed by Seager – the Unitarian Eliza R. Sutherland who spoke on the fifth day of the Parliament, her speech titled *Serious Study of All Religions*. See Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 622–638.
35 This number contradicts the previous number, taken from King's notes, used above. The inconsistency has been retained to demonstrate the difficulty for modern scholars of firmly establishing the exact numbers of papers, and their relative rank as full papers or simple words of address. It has been noted by Seager that: "The fact that the papers of the two most important organizers, Barrows and Charles Carroll Bonney, were either lost or destroyed in the early part of this [twentieth] century, complicates difficulties with the basic texts." See Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 177. These 'complicated difficulties' are further evidenced by Sen stating, without any referencing or noting, that 'over a thousand papers' were given – a number that simply does not relate to any extant historical record. See Sen, A. P. *Swami Vivekananda* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 32.

36 Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 6–7.
37 Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 10.
38 Ibid., pp. 9–10. It is interesting to remember that Seager, whilst discussing the centrality of Christianity to the organiser's agenda, notes that the outcomes of this agenda were variously perceived: "The Parliament was seen by some as a sign of the coming fulfilment of missionaries' hopes to evangelize the world, while others saw it as a disaster for missionaries. It was said to prove the superiority of Christianity, but it was also said to prove the superiority of the religions of the East. For some, the Parliament pointed to the coming unity of Christendom, while for others it was a revelation of the forces dividing it. It was alternatively praised as a vision of Christian millennium and damned as the death knell for pure evangelicalism as the dominant force in America's religious mainstream." See, Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, pp. xvii–xviii.
39 Mohammed Webb, nee Alexander Russell. See Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 989–996 & 1046–1052. It is perhaps telling that one of these papers was singled out for criticism by Barrows in the chronicle section of the official proceedings: "The reading of [The Spirit of Islam] was an exceptional event in the proceedings of the Parliament, for the fact that it was attended with strong and even violent and impatient expressions of disapproval on the part of the hearers. At the outset of the paper . . . these demonstrations, in the form of hisses and cries of 'Shame!' were so emphatic that the speaker seemed deterred from pursuing the line of discourse on which he had entered." Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 127.
40 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 20.
41 Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 20–22.
42 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 44.
43 Wendte was a clergyman from Oakland, California, but no further biographical details are given by Barrows.
44 Protap Chunder Mozoomdar – alternately transliterated as Protap Chunder Majumdar in, for example, Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*. The form of Mozoomdar will be used here, consistent with Barrows. Mozoomdar was a member of the Brahmo Samaj who had previously toured America and had published summaries of the work of Keshub Chunder Sen.
45 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 62.
46 The official closing ceremony of the Parliament was also preceded by two 'devotional meetings' – both Christian in focus. See Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 155.
47 See below for further engagement with Hirsch's role at the Parliament.
48 Whilst Shibata, a Shinto priest from Japan, had an address read aloud by Barrows in the Final Session which ended in a prayer, it was oratorical, rather than communal, and did not form part of any public acknowledgement of worship. See Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 168.
49 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 173.
50 Some Christian observers believed the Parliament was not Christian *enough* in its focus. In a damning piece of writing, the A. T. Pierson, the editor of *The Missionary Review of the World*, wrote: "The crowning mistake of this Parliament of Religions was the fatal blunder of at least implying that salvation is not in Christ alone. And in so far, the Parliament was and still is the foe of Christian missions, and has already done measureless harm." See, Pierson, A. T. 'The Parliament of Religions: A Review' in *The Missionary Review of the World*, Vol. 17 – Old Series – December – Vol. 7 – New Series (1894) p. 889.
51 Ibid., p. 184. It is interesting to note Barrows's career after the end of the Parliament. Touring Asia in 1896, Barrows forcibly argued that Christianity was "destined to become the universal religion of the entire world . . . Christianity was the 'universal religion,' the Bible the 'universal book' and Jesus Christ the 'universal man and saviour.'" See Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 15. Indeed, in his review of the Parliament, published as Section V of his official

proceedings, Barrows stated unambiguously that "The Parliament has shown that Christianity is still the great quickener of humanity, and thus it is now educating those who do not accept its doctrines, that there is no teacher to be compared with Christ, and no Saviour excepting Christ . . . The non-Christian world may give us valuable criticism and confirm scriptural truths and make excellent suggestions as to Christian improvement, but it has nothing to add to the Christian creed. It is with the belief, expressed by many a Christian missionary, that the Parliament marks a new era of Christian triumph that the editor closes these volumes." Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 1581–1582, quoted in Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, p. 15.

52 Rolland, R. *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, trans. E. F. Malcolm-Smith (Calcutta: *Advaita* Ashrama, 1997 [1931]) p. 21.
53 *Life* I, p. 338.
54 A speech delivered in Madras, February 1897 – see CW III, pp. 207–227.
55 Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 31.
56 MLB I, p. 13.
57 It is apparent that the Maharaja thought highly of Vivekananda as, in 1891, Vivekananda had "blessed [him] . . . so that a son might be born to him" and in May 1893, Vivekananda delayed his departure to the West so as to be present at the birth celebrations of the Maharaja's subsequent child, suggesting that the closeness was mutual. See Williams, G. *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda: A Study of Religious Change* (Chico: New Horizons Press, 1974) p. 59.
58 Williams, *The Quest for Meaning of Svami Vivekananda*, p. 56.
59 MLB I, pp. 14–15.
60 MLB I, p. 19.
61 Cousin to Franklin Benjamin Sanborn, a Transcendentalist and founder of the Concord Summer School of Philosophy. See *Life* I, p. 403.
62 It appears that Vivekananda's determination to attend the Parliament wavered considerably at times – in a letter sent from Japan, en route to Vancouver, he stated that if he had been able to access more of his patron's money by bank transfer, then "I would have given up my plan on visiting the States." Datta, M. & Chattopadhyay, B. (Eds.). *Srimat Vivekananda Swamijir JivanerGhatanavali*, Vol. 3 (Calcutta: Manomohan Libraray, 1925) p. 3, cited in Sil, N. P. *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1997) p. 151. Note that this letter does not appear in any of the CW, *Life* or MLB.
63 MLB I, p. 20.
64 MLB I, p. 35.
65 Chattopadhyaya, R. *Swami Vivekananda in the West* (New Delhi: KP Bagchi & Company, 1994) p. 30. Sil also concurs with this fact, stating that "an expert in Classics . . . Wright was unlikely to have fathomed the Swami's erudition in the Hindu scriptures and philosophy." See Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*, p. 31.
66 Interestingly, Vivekananda claims to have first asked the Theosophists for sponsorship, but was rejected by them, as he would not become a signed-up member of the Society. This seemed to prey somewhat on Vivekananda's mind throughout the Parliament, and he later recalled that: "I saw some Theosophists in the Parliament of Religions, and I wanted to talk to them. I remember the looks of scorn which were on their faces, as much as to say, 'What business has the worm to be here in the midst of the gods?'" See CW III, p. 209.
67 Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, p. 4.
68 Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*, p. 188. Vivekananda had known Mozoomdar through his membership of the Brahmo Samaj in the early 1880s – see also p. 49.

69 *Life* Vol. 1, p. 412.
70 MLB I, p. 60.
71 *Chicago Record*, 11th September 1893, cited in MLB I, p. 60.
72 It is quite possible that even large parts of *Hinduism* were spoken by Vivekananda as unplanned rebuttals of the criticisms that had been aimed at him by Christian missionaries during the Parliament, although large parts of the text are clearly more formulaic than many of the off-the-cuff words of address.
73 Sil, *Swami Vivekananda: A Reassessment*.
74 Sen, *Swami Vivekananda*.
75 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 102 & CW I, p. 3.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., p. 101.
78 *Chicago Herald*, 12th September 1893, cited in Chaudhuri, A. *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago: New Findings* (Calcutta: New Bharat Press, 2000) p. 89.
79 Ibid., p. 92.
80 Whilst only accepted as a delegate at the very last minute, it would be naive to think that Vivekananda was unaware of the agenda of the central organising committee, having spent a number of weeks around Chicago prior to the opening, and also having personally met members such as Barrows in the days leading up to the 11th September. It is also notable that Vivekananda spoke twentieth in this first session, and 13 of the 19 speakers prior to Vivekananda were representatives of Christianity, or Christian nations. It is therefore perfectly feasible that Vivekananda chose his words in response to that which had gone before on the platform – indeed, in a letter to the members of the Alambazar monastery written in the summer of 1894, Vivekananda makes clear his method of public speaking: "I don't prepare . . . beforehand . . . I deliver off-hand, whatever comes to my lips." See CW III, p. 293, cited in De Michelis, E. *A History of Modern Yoga: Patanjali and Western Esotericism* (London: Continuum, 2004) p. 150.
81 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 102 & CW I, p. 3.
82 Chowdhury-Sengupta has noted that: "Thus Vivekananda established three essential features of Hinduism at the very beginning: its ancient origins, its vast following and its universal toleration." See Chowdhury-Sengupta, I. 'Reconstructing Hinduism on a World Platform: The World's First Parliament of Religions, Chicago 1893' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 26.
83 Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, p. 2.
84 Vivekananda actually argues that Hindus "believe not only in universal toleration, but [that they] accept all religions to be true." Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 102 & CW I, p. 3.
85 The scripture reference is to Bhagavad Gita Chapter 4 Verse 11 – Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 102 & CW I, p. 4.
86 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 118 & CW I, p. 4.
87 Sunderland, J. T. *The World's Parliament of Religions*, The Unitarian, October, 1893, Vol. 8, No. 10 (Boston: Geo H. Ellis, 1893) pp. 446–447. Cited in Chaudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago*, p. 90.
88 This was common practice at the Parliament, and many papers were read aloud with their original authors in absentia. See, Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 605–621.
89 It is noted in Barrows that Vivekananda was invited to say a few words, rather than Vivekananda necessarily seeking the opportunity.
90 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 102 & CW I, p. 4.
91 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 968 & CW I, p. 6.
92 The Parliament was split into two main parts – in the first ten days, each of the major religions were addressed in papers that outlined their key doctrines, of

which Vivekananda's *Hinduism* was a part, in the second half, the final seven days, the Parliament included papers that examined the practical influence of religions on society, and also the relations between religions.

93 Vivekananda is listed, seemingly erroneously, by Barrows to have given his talk on the 22nd September, although the date of the 19th is supported by contemporary newspaper reports. See Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 153.

94 For the majority of the Parliament Vivekananda stayed with John B. Lyons, a volunteer who acted as a host as part of a Chicago-wide church initiative to house the disparate delegates. In later years, it emerged that Lyons had specifically requested that their delegate be 'broad-minded' as he "was much interested in philosophy but heartily disliked bigots." See MLB I, p. 151.

95 MLB I, p. 97.

96 MLB I, chapter 2.

97 MLB I, p. 110. The original source is an article titled 'Swami Vivekananda, an Unsafe Religious Guide' which was published later as a part of *Swami Vivekananda and His Guru with Letters from Prominent Americans on the Alleged Progress of Vedantism in the United States* (London & Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1897). MLB incorrectly cites the reference as p. xxxiii, although the source is actually found on p. lxx.

98 MLB I, p. 110.

99 There is one comment regarding 'oriental despotisms' in the speech of Thomas Dwight, a scholar from Harvard University, however this is not directly aimed at Hinduism. See Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 956.

100 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 968 & CW I, p. 6.

101 CW I, p. 14 (here quoted) & Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 974.

102 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 975 & CW I, pp. 14–15.

103 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 976 & CW I, pp. 17–18.

104 Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 976–977 & CW I, pp. 17–18.

105 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 971 & CW I, p. 11.

106 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 975 & CW I, pp. 15–16.

107 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 977 & CW I, p. 18.

108 Ibid., p. 19.

109 Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 977–978 & CW I, pp. 19–20.

110 Treatment of Native American religion and culture at the Worlds' Fair was shameful. Ziolkowski has noted how there was a Native American section in the 'foreign' villages section, as if it were somehow intrinsically removed from American culture, and the Parliament contained precisely no papers or representatives of indigenous American religions at all. See Ziolkowski, *A Museum of Faiths*, p. 7.

111 *Indian Mirror*, 30th November 1893, cited in MLB I, p. 116.

112 Hocking, W. E. 'Recollections of Swami Vivekananda' in *Vedanta and the West* (Sept.–Oct., 1963) p. 59, cited in MLB I, p. 118. It appears that, rather predictably, the response from Christian missionaries was less in-awe. The *Chicago Tribune* of 20th September ran with the sub-headline "Hindoo Monk Creates a Stir Among the Clergymen" (Chaudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago*, insert between pp. 112 & 113) in its first page report on the Parliament.

113 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 128 & CW I, p. 20 & MLB I, p. 123.

114 Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 1019–1023.

115 MLB I, p. 124. Note: Headland's speech had referenced many examples of poverty in China, seemingly dispassionately. See Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1019.

116 MLB I, p. 124.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid., p. 125.

120 Ibid., p. 123.
121 *The Outlook*, 23rd December 1893 (Christian Union Publications), cited in Chaudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago*, p. 101.
122 CW I, p. 21 & MLB I, p. 131. This speech does not appear in Barrows.
123 *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 27th September 1893, quoted in MLB I, p. 131.
124 CW I, p. 21.
125 Aleaz states that, in this speech, Vivekananda "presented Buddhism as the fulfilment of Hinduism." This is misleading, and a hagiographical interpretation of events. Vivekananda does no such thing, as he only praises his own narrow view of Buddhism, criticising the aspects he does not agree with. See Aleaz, K. P. *Harmony of Religions: The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Punthi-Pustak, 1993) p. 54.
126 The Jewish reaction to such a statement is not, unfortunately, recorded in any extant document. As evidenced in the figures previously given, Judaism was sparsely represented at the Parliament with only 11 delegates, and it is not clear whether any were present during this session.
127 CW I, p. 21.
128 Ibid., p. 23.
129 *Chicago Inter Ocean*, 27th September 1893, quoted in MLB I, p. 131.
130 CW I, p. 22.
131 Caution should be noted. Whilst Vivekananda was praising of religious reformers who removed barriers for social unity, Bayly has noted that Vivekananda "echoed contemporary Western ethnological themes in his remarks about the natural differences of ability and character that separated persons of unlike varna" for example stating variously that it is natural for society to form itself into groups (CW III, pp. 245–246) that caste has become a racially separating element in India (CW VIII, p. 54), and even arguing at times that the benefits of caste outweigh its disadvantages (CW VIII, p. 242). It should be made clear, therefore, that in this speech at the Parliament, Vivekananda was referring to *jati* rather than *varna*. See Bayly, S. *The New Cambridge History of India IV.3: Caste, Society and Politics in India From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001 [1999]) p. 165.
132 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 170 & CW I, p. 23.
133 Seemingly, there were actually two 'Final Sessions' at the Parliament, due to the enormous numbers of people who wished to join the audience. Barrows reports that: "For more than an hour before the time announced the eager crowds swept up against the doors of the Art Palace. The throng extended from the doorways to Michigan avenue and thence for half a block in either direction. It is said that ticket speculators were at work, and that three and four dollars were demanded and paid for cards which admitted only to the Hall of Washington where the overflow meeting was held and the entire program was repeated." Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 158. It is not clear how much difference there was between speeches at each session, and from where Barrows took his quotations to form the official proceedings.
134 Momerie did in fact speak first, however, his was an introductory oration.
135 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 158.
136 Ibid., p. 171. Sisir Kumar Das also notes this reception to Vivekananda's words when he cites Barrows: "When at the closing meeting one speaker ventured to suggest that no religion should henceforth seek to make converts of the others, that strange remark received applause from only one person." Das, S. K. 'A Defence of Plurality: Vivekananda's Anxiety For Christianity' in Dasgupta, *Swami Vivekananda: A Hundred Years since Chicago*, pp. 188–189.
137 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 170 & CW I, pp. 23–24.

138 Ibid., p. 24.
139 Ibid.
140 Whilst, strictly speaking, Theosophy was founded in New York, by the time of the Parliament the international headquarters were in India, and Prof. C. N. Chakravarti, who spoke prior to Vivekananda in the opening session, was a native of Allahabad.
141 Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 316–332. D'Vivedi was in absentia, and the paper was read aloud by Virchand Gandhi.
142 The speech is approximately 50% longer than Vivekananda's later speech of the same title.
143 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 317.
144 Ibid.
145 The same could, of course, be said of *any* commentator writing on a religion other than their own.
146 "No Indian idolator, as such, believes the piece of stone, metal, or wood before his eyes as his god, in any sense of the word." Ibid., p. 327.
147 Ibid., p. 330.
148 Ibid., p. 331.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 106.
153 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 332.
154 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 107, quoting Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 317–318 & 325.
155 See, for example, the testimony of Harriet Monroe, cited in MLB, Vol. 1, pp. 85–86.
156 Vivekananda "considered dark-skinned Indians in western attire to be a revolting sight," emphasising the difference in approach between Vivekananda and Nagarkar. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda in Bengali*, Vol. 7, p. 217. Cited in Raychaudhuri, *Europe Reconsidered*, p. 321.
157 *Daily Inter Ocean*, 18th September 1893, quoted in Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 113.
158 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1226. It should be noted that Nagarkar here uses the word 'nationality' to encompass both political and religious boundaries.
159 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 113, quoting Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 768. It should be noted that this does not mean that this development was necessarily positive.
160 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 64.
161 Mozoomdar, P. C. *The Oriental Christ* (Boston: Geo H. Ellis, 1883). The most interesting sources for Sen's original views may be found in: *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, Vol. 1 (London, Paris, New York, & Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1901) pp. 33–34 and *Keshub Chunder Sen's Lectures in India*, Vol. 2 (London, Paris, New York, & Melbourne: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1904) pp. 25–27, 32 & 55–56. For a brief commentary on these texts, see Barker & Gregg, *Jesus beyond Christianity*, pp. 165–167.
162 Examples include Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 86 & 114.
163 Ibid., pp. 1083–1092.
164 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 114.
165 See, for example, Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1084.
166 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 116.
167 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1092.
168 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 163. Note – the first section of text is a quotation used by Mozoomdar, which is taken from an 1883 lecture by Sen titled *Asia's Message to Europe*.

169 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 162.
170 Chattopadhyaya, *World's Parliament of Religions, 1893*, p. 17.
171 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 103.
172 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1377.
173 Ibid., p. 1377.
174 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 97.
175 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 169.
176 Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 1179–1191.
177 Ibid., pp. 1185–1188.
178 For example "China is better than Africa because she has better religion." Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1187.
179 Ibid., p. 186.
180 Barrows, Vol. 2, pp. 1304–1308.
181 Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions*, p. 57.
182 Barrows, Vol. 2, p. 1307.
183 Ibid., p. 1307.
184 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 780.
185 Ibid., pp. 781–782.
186 Ibid., pp. 780–781.
187 Ibid., p. 781.
188 For example, John Hick and Paul Knitter.
189 Barrows, Vol. 1, p. 782.
190 Barrows, Vol. 1, pp. 782–784.
191 CW I, p. 24.
192 Letter to Alasinga, 2nd November 1893, CW V, p. 21.
193 Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, pp. 236–238.
194 Jackson notes: "Ramakrishna movement accounts go so far as to claim that the swami completely dominated the proceedings, overshadowing the large Christian representation a the sessions. The facts suggest a more modest impact." Jackson, *Vedanta for the West*, pp. 26–27.
195 At the outset of the Parliament, and indeed prior to the event, Mozoomdar can be seen to have had a higher profile than Vivekananda for several reasons: (1) he was a representative of the Brahmo Samaj (indeed, he was a direct disciple of Keshub) and therefore had the backing of an organisation, (2) he had previously visited America in 1874 (3) these links had ensured that American Unitarians had invited him to help organise aspects of the Parliament. Regarding Mozoomdar's impact on the West prior to 1893, Kopf has noted that "No Brahmo up to his time, and certainly no Bengali before Vivekananda, spoke so often to so many different kinds of people and with such effectiveness as did Majumdar." See Kopf, D. *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) p. 19.
196 Chattopadhyaya, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, p. 239.
197 Chaudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago*, p. 90.

7 Locating Vivekananda

The central research aim of this work was to evaluate Swami Vivekananda's interaction with non-Hindu religious traditions and to explore how this affected his formulation of Hinduism. This research question has been investigated by surveying Vivekananda's social and religious influences, his relationship with Ramakrishna, his formulation of an exportable form of Hinduism, his critique of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, and his performance at the Chicago Parliament of 1893.

This work has argued that Vivekananda should be understood in the context of the legacy of religious leaders in nineteenth-century India – particularly Roy, Sen, Ramakrishna and Blavatsky. Rammohun Roy, with the creation of the Brahmo Samaj, promoted a pro-syncretic approach to non-Hindu traditions which sought to homogenise religions, effectively giving rise to one universal form of religion, transcending the traditional religious boundaries between 'Hinduism' 'Christianity' and 'Islam.' Keshub Chunder Sen developed interaction with Christianity in particular and, whilst not rejecting Roy's pro-syncretic stance, reclaimed religious concepts for the East, in particular the concept of the Asiatic Christ,[1] which Vivekananda would use in his own speeches in the West.[2] Ramakrishna adhered to a superficial form of practical pluralism, wherein he observed non-Hindu religious rites and customs, but consistently returned to a Hindu-conception of divine reality when comparing and contrasting his experiences. Outside of the Hindu tradition, Blavatsky created a *yoga*-based form of spirituality which was exportable to the West. Influences from all of these thinkers may be found in Vivekananda's formulation of Hinduism and his interaction with non-Hindu traditions.

Vivekananda formulated an exportable version of Hinduism based upon his re-interpretation of the Ramakrishna persona and on his fourfold hierarchical *yoga*-based *Advaitic* Hinduism. Vivekananda's Hinduism was, then, a Hinduism for the world – not just for India. Writing to Alasinga in March 1896, regarding the newly established *Brahmavadin*[3] journal, he noted: "you must always remember that you are addressing the whole world, not India alone, and that the same world is entirely ignorant of what you have got to tell them."[4] The Western-facing, exportable *yoga*-based Hinduism which

Vivekananda formulated in the light of India's colonial experience and late nineteenth-century American religious trends was coupled with the complete re-interpretation of the Ramakrishna persona to ensure that Hinduism found a foothold in the religious consciousness of America and Europe. Such outward-looking ventures were facilitated by Vivekananda's universalistic framework within which he placed Hinduism. As if to emphasise the point, he noted in a further letter to Alasinga: "Truth alone is my God; the entire world is my country."[5]

Vivekananda's reformulation of Hinduism was hierarchical, inclusivistic and universalistic. All three of these points are central to an understanding of Vivekananda's view of Hinduism, and its relation to non-Hindu traditions. In his fourfold codification of Hinduism, Vivekananda consistently approached human spirituality as a stepped, hierarchical, approach to truth, within an *Advaitic* framework, from dualism, through qualified non-dualism to non-dualism. Within each of the *yogas*, and particularly *bhakti yoga*, Vivekananda clearly differentiates between lower and higher stages of spiritual consciousness and is specifically critical of *Gauni Bhakti*, as the lowest stage of this process. The inclusivistic nature of Vivekananda's framework, however, allows for this 'low' stage of spiritual adherence by acknowledging the value of *Gauni Bhakti* as a preparatory, and indeed necessary, step towards higher spiritual truths. Crucially, for this current investigation, Vivekananda saw this stage of human religious development as universal.

Vivekananda's reformulation of Hinduism provided the impetus for engagement and interaction with non-Hindu traditions. It is clear that Vivekananda understood his framework of religion to be universal, rather than merely limited to Hinduism – indeed, the non-dual understanding of *Brahman* in *Advaitic* philosophy negates any non-universal understanding of reality. The logical result of such a stance was the necessity of interaction with non-Hindu traditions. When Vivekananda criticises image worship in Hinduism, he criticises also the Catholic veneration of saints. He is equally critical of human reliance on holy texts, whether the text in question is a Purana, the Bible or the Koran. Equally, he commends 'higher level' religiosity in all traditions valorising, for instance, renunciatory impulses and commitment to social service across traditions.

During public oratory situations, Vivekananda used a combative style of interaction with non-Hindu traditions, shaping his projection of Hinduism in response to the colonial context in which it found itself. For Vivekananda, the promotion of a Hindu religious worldview was central to the re-empowerment of India as a nation and as a people. During his performances at the Chicago Parliament, Vivekananda used his speeches as opportunities to offer critiques of Christianity in particular, and the perceived 'opponents' of Hinduism in general. In his speeches he asserted Hinduism's chronological, ethical, social and ontological primacy over other faiths.

Cush and Robinson have previously noted: "Vivekananda was clearly a hierarchical inclusivist, accepting other traditions within and without

Hinduism as lower stages of development towards the full and final truth that is *Advaita Vedanta*."[6] The evidence put forward in this work regarding Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions supports this view, and furthers our understanding of Vivekananda by examining his understanding of the 'lower stages' within Hinduism as well as non-Hindu traditions, where Vivekananda clearly sees room for spiritual growth in what he would understand as 'simplistic' forms of Hinduism. This has important implications for critiquing views of Vivekananda as a 'Hindu Chauvinist.'

Further, Paul Hacker has noted a theme of *Inklusivismus* as a "pervasive, specifically Indian way of dealing with foreign relations and worldviews."[7] He notes that what may at first seem to be Indian tolerance was 'almost always inclusivism.'[8] Clearly, Vivekananda must be seen as a part of this context. Hacker relates *Inklusivismus* to a form of hierarchical relativism, which he attributes to Roy,[9] Vivekananda and, in the period after Vivekananda's life, Gandhi and Radhakrishnan.[10] Indeed, when Hacker understands Hindu inclusivism in direct opposition to Christian forms of interaction with other religious traditions, where the 'otherness' of these traditions is emphasised, this work has demonstrated, through a close reading and interpretation of the primary sources, that Vivekananda provides the perfect practical example of this through his combative performances at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.

Of particular interest to a discussion on Vivekananda's approach to non-Hindu traditions is Hacker's observation that Hinduism identifies "the highest principles of different religious and philosophical traditions with the absolute of Vedantic monism" and also that "foreign traditions [are understood as] preliminary stages" within this hierarchy.[11] The previous discussion on Vivekananda's views on Buddhism, and his castigation of Islam for its dualistic worldview, support Hacker's point. Hacker further notes that "it seems that this method was employed especially by such religious groups as felt themselves inferior to their environment."[12] Here, then, thought must turn to Vivekananda's combative style of oration at the Chicago Parliament and his ongoing debate with the Christian Missionaries. It is clear that Vivekananda was promoting his *Advaitic* ideal as an antidote to the humiliation suffered by Indians in the colonial context.

In his formulation of a fourfold *yoga*-based understanding of Hinduism, and in his wider lectures and writings, Vivekananda valorised *Advaita* above all else. Indeed, as Halbfass has noted, "it is to the Vedanta that not only Hinduism but all religions ultimately, though unconsciously, tend. Thus the Vedanta is the unifying element in the multiplicity of the religious views and practices of Hinduism and of all religions."[13] Crucially, however, Vivekananda was consistent in his criticism of aspects of religious practice which he understood to be 'low levels' of spiritual awareness both within Hinduism and also within non-Hindu traditions. This suggests that Vivekananda's hierarchical framework of religion is no simplistic 'ranking of faiths' but is a complex, and sometimes contradictory, ranking *within* faiths, which valorises

Advaita as the philosophy *par excellence* and Hinduism as the 'mother of all religions' precisely because he believed Hinduism facilitated growth within all levels of spirituality, low and high, rather than limiting individuals to the lower levels of spiritual consciousness, a criticism of which he makes of other religious traditions. Indeed, this critical aspect of Vivekananda's hierarchical framework meant that when he was quick to damn Muslim commitment to the Koran, so he criticised the 'undeveloped minds' of Hindus who used *murti* as spiritual foci. He was not, in this sense, a 'Hindu' chauvinist at all; he was, however, steadfast in his view that *Advaita* represented ultimate religiosity in its truest form. This work has therefore demonstrated that a close reading of Vivekananda's comments upon non-Hindu traditions, *in relation to his framework of Hinduism* challenges the notion that Vivekananda's teachings could be understood to underpin right-wing Hindutva ideologies, as suggested by van der Veer.

Vivekananda's framework of religion specifically aimed to supersede sectarianism, which Vivekananda argued was a low form of spirituality linked with *Gauni Bhakti*. From an *Advaitic* viewpoint, concerns such as nationalism or party politics are merely products of the *avidya* caused by *maya* and thus belong to the transient world of the senses, not the ultimate reality of *Brahman*. If *Advaita* is beyond sectarianism, Vivekananda's mission could not be said to support right-wing politics of any sort, and those that appropriate him for such a cause are guilty of a *mis*appropriation. Vivekananda, in his last address at Chicago, makes this point forcefully:

> if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and not Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension."[14]

Therefore, whilst some recent commentators may read into Vivekananda's polemic the seeds of what has since developed into an assertive form of Hindu nationalism, the primary evidence does not support this. Of course, a superficial reading of Vivekananda will provide a plethora of quotable sound-bites arguing for the primacy of Hinduism and for the superiority of Indian spirituality over non-Indian cultures;[15] these statements, however, need to be understood in the light of Vivekananda's valorisation of a universalised *Advaita*, and his devaluing of what he would consider sectarian, particularistic, and therefore inferior, forms of 'Hinduism.'

Vivekananda's formulation of the human religious condition can only be understood when viewed through an *Advaitic* lens, necessarily refuting claims of 'Hindu' chauvinism. The evidence strongly suggests instead a position of '*Advaitic* primacy.' Vivekananda understood this *Advaitic* worldview to be equally relevant to non-Hindu religious traditions such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. Indeed, as Halbfass notes, "[Vivekananda] adopts Western

motifs of self-criticism . . . and transforms them into aspects of Hindu self-assertion"[16] enabling him to systematise his approach to non-Hindu religious traditions. Of course, Vivekananda's stance creates a powerful and irresolvable tension. Whilst on the one hand, Vivekananda spoke forcefully against sectarianism, on the other hand his entire view of the human religious condition can only be understood through a culturally and religiously specific *Advaitic* worldview.

I have previously noted Sharma's view that approaches to religion in India since the colonial period have been centred upon a Western, predominantly Christian, hermeneutic which gave rise to a series of reactions from Hindu religious, social and political leaders. It is clear, therefore, that Vivekananda provides a vibrant response to this hermeneutic. Indeed, in his reformulation of Hinduism, constructed through his inheritance from Roy, Sen, Ramakrishna and others, Vivekananda provides us with an *Advaitic* hermeneutic through which the British Colonial conception of religion may be challenged. Indeed, as Halbfass has noted: "Vivekananda tends . . . to . . . assert himself as a Hindu and to derive his teachings and practical programs from sources of Hinduism"[17] more explicitly than his hugely influential forefathers, Roy and Sen. This assertion of Hinduism, understood as a clear valorisation of *Advaita*, enabled Vivekananda to engage with non-Hindu traditions on Hindu terms of engagement.

At his core, Vivekananda was concerned with the universal human religious condition – perfected, in his understanding, within an *Advaitic* worldview. He represents an outward looking, expansionist form of Indian spirituality that attempted to transcend sectarianism, and yet at the same time clung to an *Advaitic* doctrinal understanding of ultimate reality. For Vivekananda, as this work demonstrates, the spiritual truths he offered were not confined to Hinduism, but could only be truly understood when applied to a wider range of religious traditions.

Notes

1 Barker, G. A. & Gregg, S. E. *Jesus Beyond Christianity: The Classic Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 166–168.
2 CW IV, pp. 138–153.
3 A journal founded by Alasinga, which was to run from 1895 to Alasinga's death in 1909. The publication was succeeded by the *Vedanta Kesari* in 1914, which is to this day the primary English language journal of the Ramakrishna Movement.
4 CW VII, p. 491.
5 Letter to Alasinga, Collected Bengali Works of Vivekananda, Vol. VII, p. 193. Cited in Raychaudhuri, T. 'Swami Vivekananda's Construction of Hinduism' in Radice, *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernisation of Hinduism*, p. 3.
6 Cush, D. & Robinson, C. 'The Contemporary Construction of Hindu Identity: Hindu Universalism and Hindu Nationalism' in *DISKUS*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Autumn, 1994) accessed online at http://jbasr.com/basr/diskus/diskus1-6/CUSH_ROB.TXT
7 Halbfass, W. *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (New York: SUNY Press, 1988) p. 403.
8 Hacker, P. *Kl. Schr., VIII* cited in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 403.

9 Hacker does not accept that Roy endorsed liberal views of Hinduism, as proposed by Jones and other early Indologists, but it is apparent from Roy's pro-syncretic understanding of pluralism that he was effectively promoting a Brahmo conception of religion over sectarian conceptions.
10 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 408.
11 Ibid., p. 404.
12 Hacker, *Kl. Schr*. 599f. Cited in Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 405.
13 Halbfass, *Philology and Confrontation*, p. 245.
14 CW I, p. 24.
15 Beckerlegge has noted: "The importance and representative nature of passages, let alone slogans or phrases, selected by those who have claimed Vivekananda as an authority for their own positions must be judged within his works as a whole." Beckerlegge, G. 'Swami Vivekananda and the *Sangh Parivar*: Convergent or Divergent Views on Population, Religion and National Identity?' in *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2006) p. 125.
16 Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 229.
17 Ibid., p. 228.

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Note

1 All hyperlinks active as of 01/10/18.

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