

# *Sarathi*

SOCIO – CULTURAL TRUST

**2012**



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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It's intriguing that the word *durgā* is related to *durga*, which means a stronghold, a fort, an inaccessible place. Goddess *Durgā* is also known as *Tripurā*, the earliest reference to which is found in the *Brahmanas*, where there's a mention of *tripur*, which means a stronghold with triple fortification, a fort protected by three concentric walls. Such forts were never found anywhere in India, but were discovered recently at a place called *Dashly*, near *Balkh* in northern Afghanistan. *Dashly* is a part of the *Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex*, which is even older than the *Rig Veda*. A seal discovered from one of its archaeological sites depicts a female figure sitting on a lion, which resembles to a great extent the image of *Durgā* we are used to see. It's likely that Goddess *Durgā* may have originated from an ancient Mother Goddess of Central Asia known as the protector of the *tripur*.



This makes *Durgā* one of the oldest Gods of Hindu pantheon. Equally old may be *Shiva*, which may have descended from the *Indus Valley Civilization*, as old as, and even contemporaneous to the *Bactria Margiana Archaeological Complex*. Little do we realize that when we celebrate *Durgā Puja* we're actually following a tradition which may be four thousand years old.

In Bengali there's a saying, *Bāro Māse Tero Pārbon*, meaning thirteen festivals in twelve months. That's true not only for Bengal, but for our entire country, which is a civilization so much rooted in her age old traditions and cultures. The festivals in India are part of her ancient traditions that have been kept alive for thousands of years. Our festivals have survived through wars, ravages, wrath of nature, rise and fall of mighty empires, new dawns and long darks nights. Several civilizations have sunk into oblivion in these many thousands of years, but our festivals have somehow survived, retaining the tenants of the Indian culture and civilization, but changing continuously with the times, inculcating new ideas and thoughts, assimilating newer traditions and evolving more and more into all inclusive celebrations that transcend the barriers of languages and religions. The Durgā Pujo, the worship of Maa Durgā, the Goddess of Shakti, as we see today, is more of a Durgā Festival than a religious affair. It may not be too much relevant now what originally would have been mentioned in Mārkaṇḍeya Purāna about the significance of Durgā. That Durgā stands for Shakti and that she was created with the power of all Gods to kill a demon, the symbol of evil, may be well known to all. But today, the Durgā Festival stands for much more than a myth. It might not have mattered much had there been some other myth in some other Purāna. For the millions of people who celebrate the Durgā Puja across the world, it's an identity, no matter what the scripture says. Durgā Puja, or for that matter, any other festival, is all what India stands for – a common platform for diverse peoples to come together and celebrate.

Indian festivals are very much like what Rabindranath calls "***Bhārater Mahā Mānaver Sāgar Teer***", the sea shore of the Maha Manav of Bharat. In his poem Bharat Tirtha he says, "*He mor chitta, punya tirthe jāgo re dheere, ei Bhārater Mahā Mānaver sāgar teere*", Oh my mind, awake at this place of sacred pilgrimage, the sea shore of the Mahā Mānav of Bharat. Here with outstretched hands, we bow down to the Human God. With bountiful prosody and supreme felicity we adore Thee. Rabindranath thinks of India as the sea shore where the Great Humans, the great souls of India, have assembled together from various places of the world – there are the Aryans, there are the Mongols, there are the Chinese, there are the Sakas, Huns and Pathans. That's the pluralistic idea of India that Tagore has always professed and that's what in reality India is. Our identity is not of any particular religion or tradition. It's of a collage of all the cultures and traditions that have merged into one. And nothing else showcases this identity more than our festivals that bring together everyone, irrespective of their backgrounds, their languages, their religions – all these ten years, our pandals have been erected by Dennis; people have cherished Nizam and Lazeez's biriyani as much as they did Bengali mishti; we've been enthralled as much by the melodious voice of Kavita Krishnamurthy, as

by the sarod played by Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's grandson; we've danced as much to the tunes of Bengali folk songs, as to the recent Hindi songs.

There's an economic angle to the festivities too. Not many festivals in India result in so much of private spending. But unfortunately there's no authentic estimate of the spending around Durga Puja. A very pessimistic estimate would arrive at a figure of \$250million just for Calcutta. An optimistic estimate can very well reach close to \$1billion for greater Calcutta, not including the monies spent in the frantic shopping spree before the pujo.

Now let's see how this \$1billion is being spent and where the money is actually flowing. The first name that comes to our mind is Kumortuli – the traditional Bengali name for the place where the idols are made by highly skilled people who have been doing this job for generations. Without creating the idols all these people would have had absolutely no other job, because the only thing that they know is to create these highly artistic idols. This form of folk art is one of the few surviving old arts in India. Even if the number of people involved in this occupation is not something big compared to the 1.2 billion people of India, still it's not very insignificant also. More over from the cultural point of view it's very important to preserve the heritage of any form of art. A good portion of this \$1billion goes to these sculptors.

Next comes the thousands of laborers who get employment for close to 100 days just for putting up the pandals. Employment for 100 days for something constructive is something that even the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme fails to provide in many cases. Undoubtedly the pandals created during Durgā Puja are folk art, technology and creativity at their zenith.

The millions of people who throng the various Puja venues are catered to by few thousands of small time vendors who sell snacks, handicrafts etc. Never ever do they get so many customers. They wait for this period of the year for the most brisk business.

Dhak, a form of drum (dhol), very specific to Bengal, is an inseparable part of the festivities in Bengal. You can't imagine a Durgā Puja without the sounds of the dhaak beat. The people who play these instruments are surely as declining as the Royal Bengal Tigers. Lack of proper opportunity is killing these people who have been playing dhak for centuries. If it's not for the Durgā Puja, they would have been a Dodo by now.

Finally, Durgā Puja is also a cultural festival. Almost all the Pujas have back-to-back cultural programs for all the four or five days. These give opportunity to many artistes from various fields of performing arts. Even

the highest paid singers in Calcutta await these few days of Durgā Puja for a good remuneration. There are many artistes who may hope to get some work only during Durgā Puja. Their numbers may not be huge, but still Durgā Puja plays a critical role in patronizing art – something that has been in a phase of decline since the death of royalties in India.

Durgā Puja, or for that matter of fact, any other major festival in India, is much more than a tradition or culture. It's an occasion to come together, walk together, sing together, feel for others, help others and an endeavor to make the world a better place for all. It's like the last hymn of Rig Veda:

***saṃ ghachadhvaṃ saṃ vadadhvaṃ saṃ vo manāṃsi jānatām |***

***devā bhāghaṃ yathā pūrve saṃjānānā upāsate || 10.191.2***

Assemble, speak together: let your minds be all of one accord,

As ancient Gods unanimous sit down to their appointed share.

***samāno mantraḥ samitiḥ samānī samānaṃ manaḥ saha cittameṣām |***

***samānaṃ mantramabhi maṅtraye vaḥ samānena vohaviṣā juhomi || 10.191.3***

The place is common, common the assembly, common the mind, so be their thought united.

A common purpose do I lay before you, and worship with your general oblation.

***samānī va ākūtiḥ samānā hṛdayāni vaḥ |***

***samānamastu vomano yathā vaḥ susahāsati || 10.191.4***

One and the same be your resolve, and be your minds of one accord.

United be the thoughts of all that all may happily agree.

It's our privilege that this year, the tenth year of Sarathi, also happens to be Swami Vivekananda's 150<sup>th</sup> birth year. We dedicate the entire edition of our souvenir to the Super Human, who, perhaps for the first time in the modern times, made the Indians feel proud of their culture and heritage.

Centuries of Western dominance in all aspects of life had broken down the backbone of a nation like never before. The swābhimān, self-respect, of the whole country was at all-time low. One of the oldest civilizations of the world was relegated, for the first time, to a vanquished nation, a nation that had lost all its glory and value. Indians had forgotten to look up with pride. That was when a young and confident Indian called out, "Arise, Awake." That was the clarion call to a nation that had fallen into a deep slumber.

It's our privilege to dedicate this special edition of our souvenir to this young Indian, Swami Vivekananda, who is perhaps one of the very few personalities who stand for the very concept of India, the very idea of Hinduism, the very essence of the Indian way of life. Today Indian culture is a 'cool' thing in the west. Yoga and Vedanta are popular Indian exports to the world. Today neither the Indians are ashamed of their heritage, nor does anyone look down upon us, despite the abysmal statistics in various aspects of our growth and development. We owe a lot to Swami Vivekananda for all this.

For this special edition of our souvenir, we're pleased to present three chapters and a collection of rare photographs. The first chapter is a very contemporary article published recently in The Wall Street Journal. It talks about the impact Vivekananda made in the western world immediately after his famous speech at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1893 and later. The second chapter is about the World Parliament of Religions, which talks about the intent and the proceedings of the conference where Vivekananda emerged as the messiah, prophet and the avatar of the oldest religion and civilization of the world which had been subjugated for years by western aggression in every aspect of life and society. It's interesting to see that the main intent of this conference was perhaps to indirectly reestablish the supremacy of Christianity. The third chapter is a compilation of Vivekananda's epoch creating speeches at the conference. It was through these speeches that Vivekananda made Hinduism and Vedanta a household name in the West.

**~ Sudipto Das**

Cover Photo: Durga slaying Mahishashura, in a 7<sup>th</sup> Century Pallava creation at Mahabalipuram





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# **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE PIED PIPER OF THE GLOBAL YOGA MOVEMENT**

By A. L. BARDACH

*[Published in The Wall Street Journal, March 30, 2012]*

By the late 1960s, the most famous writer in America had become a recluse, having forsaken his dazzling career. Nevertheless, J.D. Salinger often came to Manhattan, staying at his parents' sprawling apartment on Park Avenue and 91st Street. While he no longer visited with his editors at "The New Yorker," he was keen to spend time with his spiritual teacher, Swami Nikhilananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, located, then as now, in a townhouse just three blocks away, at 17 East 94th Street.

Though the iconic author of "The Catcher in the Rye" and "Franny and Zooey" published his last story in 1965, he did not stop writing. From the early 1950s onward, he maintained a lively correspondence with several Vedanta monks and fellow devotees.

After all, the central, guiding light of Salinger's spiritual quest was the teachings of Vivekananda, the Calcutta-born monk who popularized Vedanta and yoga in the West at the end of the 19th century.

These days yoga is offered up in classes and studios that have become as ubiquitous as Starbucks. Vivekananda would have been puzzled, if not somewhat alarmed. "As soon as I think of myself as a little body," he warned, "I want to preserve it, protect it, to keep it nice, at the expense of other bodies. Then you and I become separate." For Vivekananda, who established the first ever Vedanta Center, in Manhattan in 1896, yoga meant just one thing: "the realization of God."

After an initial dalliance in the late 1940s with Zen—a spiritual path without a God—Salinger discovered Vedanta, which he found infinitely more consoling. "Unlike Zen," Salinger's biographer, Kenneth Slawenski, points out, "Vedanta offered a path to a personal relationship with God...[and] a promise that he could obtain a cure for his depression....and find God, and through God, peace."

Finding peace would, however, be a lifelong battle. In 1975, Salinger wrote to another monk at the New York City center about his own daily struggle, citing a text of the eighth-century Indian mystic Shankara as a cautionary tale: "In the forest-tract of sense pleasures there prowls a huge tiger called the mind. Let good

people who have a longing for Liberation never go there." Salinger wrote, "I suspect that nothing is truer than that," confessing despondently, "and yet I allow myself to be mauled by that old tiger almost every wakeful minute of my life."

It was his daily mauling by the "huge tiger" and his dreaded depressions that led Salinger to abandon his literary ambitions in favor of spiritual ones. Salinger—who appears to have had a nervous breakdown of sorts upon his return from the gruesome front lines of World War II—subscribed to Vivekananda's view of the mind as a drunken monkey who is stung by a scorpion and then consumed by a demon. At the same time, Vivekananda promised hope and solace—writing that the "same mind, when subdued and controlled, becomes a most trusted friend and helper, guaranteeing peace and happiness." It was precisely the consolation that Salinger so desperately sought. And by 1965 he was ready to renounce his once gritty pursuit of literary celebrity.

Although all but forgotten by America's 20 million would-be yoginis, clad in their finest Lululemon, Vivekananda was the Bengali monk who introduced the word "yoga" into the national conversation. In 1893, outfitted in a red, flowing turban and yellow robes belted by a scarlet sash, he had delivered a show-stopping speech in Chicago. The event was the tony Parliament of Religions, which had been convened as a spiritual complement to the World's Fair, showcasing the industrial and technological achievements of the age.

On its opening day, September 11, Vivekananda, who appeared to be meditating onstage, was summoned to speak and did so without notes. "Sisters and Brothers of America," he began, in a sonorous voice tinged with "a delightful slight Irish brogue," according to one listener, attributable to his Trinity College-educated professor in India. "It fills my heart with joy unspeakable..."

Then something unprecedented happened, presaging the phenomenon decades later that greeted the Beatles (one of whom, George Harrison, would become a lifelong Vivekananda devotee). The previously sedate crowd of 4,000-plus attendees rose to their feet and wildly cheered the visiting monk, who, having never before addressed a large gathering, was as shocked as his audience. "I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world," he responded, flushed with emotion. "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."



Annie Besant, a British Theosophist and a conference delegate, described Vivekananda's impact, writing that he was "a striking figure, clad in yellow and orange, shining like the sun of India in the midst of the heavy atmosphere of Chicago...a lion head, piercing eyes, mobile lips, movements swift and abrupt." The Parliament, she said, was "enraptured; the huge multitude hung upon his words." When he was done, the convocation rose again and cheered him even more thunderously. Another delegate described "scores of women walking over the benches to get near to him," prompting one wag to crack wise that if the 30-year-old Vivekananda "can resist that onslaught, [he is] indeed a god."

"No doubt the vast majority of those present hardly knew why they had been so powerfully moved," Christopher Isherwood wrote a half century later, surmising that a "strange kind of subconscious telepathy" had infected the hall, beginning with Vivekananda's first words, which have resonated, for some, long after. Asked about the origins of "My Sweet Lord," George Harrison replied that "the song really came from Swami Vivekananda, who said, 'If there is a God, we must see him. And if there is a soul, we must perceive it.' "

The teachings of Vedanta are rooted in the Vedas, ancient scriptures going back several thousand years that also inform Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism. The Vedic texts of the Upanishads enshrine a core belief that God is within and without—that the divine is everywhere. The Bhagavad Gita (Song of God) is another sacred text or gospel, whereas Hinduism is actually a coinage popularized by Vivekananda to describe a faith of diverse and myriad beliefs.

Vivekananda's genius was to simplify Vedantic thought to a few accessible teachings that Westerners found irresistible. God was not the capricious tyrant in the heavens avowed by Bible-thumpers, but rather a power that resided in the human heart. "Each soul is potentially divine," he promised. "The goal is to manifest that divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal." And to close the deal for the fence-sitters, he punched up Vedanta's embrace of other faiths and their prophets. Christ and Buddha were incarnations of the divine, he said, no less than Krishna and his own teacher, Ramakrishna.

"He is the most brilliant wise man," Leo Tolstoy waxed. "It is doubtful another man has ever risen above this selfless, spiritual meditation."

Although Vivekananda was a Western-educated intellectual of encyclopedic erudition, "the descendant of 50 generations of lawyers," as he would say, Ramakrishna was for all intents and purposes illiterate. Born Gadadhar Chattopadhyay, Ramakrishna had not an iota of interest in schooling beyond the study of

scripture and prayer. Fortunately, that amply met the job requirements of his post as a priest at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple. According to numerous firsthand, contemporaneous accounts, Ramakrishna—who is revered as a saint in much of India and as an avatar by many—spent a good deal of his short life in samadhi, or an ecstatic state. On a daily basis, sitting or standing, he was often observed slipping into a transported state that he described as "God consciousness," existing with neither food nor sleep. He died in 1886 at age 50.

Though Ramakrishna spoke in a village idiom, invoking homespun local parables, word about the "Bengali saint" spread through the chattering classes of India in the 1870s like a monsoon. Many who flocked to him—and declared him a divine incarnation—were educated as lawyers, doctors and engineers and were often the graduates of British-run Christian schools. His closest and most influential disciple, however, was Vivekananda (born Narendranath Datta in 1863 to an affluent family), whom he charged with carrying the message of Vedanta to the world.

Certainly, a smattering of Eastern thought had already traveled to the West before Vivekananda's arrival in the U.S. In the 1820s, Ralph Waldo Emerson had snared a copy of the Bhagavad Gita and found himself enchanted. "I owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad Gita," Emerson wrote in his journal in 1831. The Gita would inform his Transcendentalist essays, in which he wrote of the "Over-Soul," that part of the individual that is one with the universe—invoking the Vedantic precepts of the Atman and Brahman. (In a tidy historical twist, one of Emerson's relatives, Ellen Waldo, became a devotee of Vivekananda, and faithfully transcribed the dictated text of his first book, "Raja Yoga," in 1895.)

Emerson's student and fellow Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, would study Indian thought even more avidly and crafted his own practice—living as a secular monk, as it were, by Walden Pond. In 1875, Walt Whitman was given a copy of the Gita as a Christmas gift, and it is heard unmistakably in "Leaves of Grass" in lines such as "I pass death with the dying and birth with the new-wash'd babe, and am not contained between my hat and my boots." Though the two never met, Vivekananda hailed Whitman as "the Sannyasin of America."

The Academy, however, was a bit slower to embrace Eastern thought and literature. It wasn't until after an electrifying lecture by Vivekananda at Harvard's Graduate Philosophical Club on March 25, 1896, that Eastern Philosophy departments became a staple at Ivy League colleges.

Fascinated by the erudite and polyglot monk—who could pass an entire day sitting motionless in silent meditation—the esteemed philosopher William James roped in many of his colleagues, students and friends to attend Vivekananda's Harvard lecture. They were not disappointed. "The theory of evolution, and prana [energy] and akasa [space] is exactly what your modern science has," their exotic visitor blithely informed them. Nor were they unamused. When asked, "Swami, what do you think about food and breathing?" he replied, "I am for both." The evening ended with the turbaned monk, "dressed in rich dark red robes," receiving an offer to chair Harvard's new department. Columbia University promptly made its own bid for Vivekananda—who declined both, noting his vows of renunciation.

At a dinner party in his honor the following night, William James and Vivekananda scurried off to a corner by themselves, where they were observed nattering away until midnight. The next morning, James sent word inviting him to dinner at his own home that evening. And over the next week, James would dash into Boston to hear his other lectures.

"He has evidently swept Professor James off his feet," wrote a Harvard colleague. Indeed, the eminent scholar was deferential to a fault with his newfound Bengali friend, referring to him as Master. More important, in his seminal book "The Varieties of Religious Experience," James relied upon Vivekananda's "Raja Yoga," a treatise on the discipline of meditation practice from which he quoted extensively: "All the different steps in yoga are intended to bring us scientifically to the superconscious state, or samadhi."

Unbeknownst to him, Vivekananda had hit the piñata of influence: James was arguably the country's premier intellectual. And it hardly hurt that his brother was the master novelist Henry James.

Along with the James brothers, a half dozen socially prominent and wealthy women immeasurably facilitated the visiting monk—who not infrequently encountered some racism on his U.S. lecture tours. Sara Bull in Cambridge, Josephine MacLeod in New York City, and Margaret Noble in London would set up salons and avidly spread the word—and even followed him to India. With the vast contacts and shrewd networking of these women, his talks in Cambridge and Manhattan became standing-room-only affairs attended by the cognoscenti of the day, assorted seekers, and all manner of movers and shakers—from Gertrude Stein, one of James's students, to John D. Rockefeller. Blessed with "the power of personality," as Henry James would say, Vivekananda was the ideal missionary to pitch the message of Vedanta.

During his lifetime, Vivekananda had another enthusiast in Leo Tolstoy, the titan of Russian letters. "He is the most brilliant wise man," Tolstoy gushed after devouring "Raja Yoga" in 1896 in a single sitting and

reporting it to be "most remarkable... [and] I have received much instruction. The precept of what the true 'I' of a man is, is excellent...Yesterday, I read Vivekananda the whole day."

Not long before his death, Tolstoy was still waxing about Vivekananda. "It is doubtful in this age that another man has ever risen above this selfless, spiritual meditation."

Tolstoy and Vivekananda never met, but the opera diva Emma Calvé and the great tragedienne Sarah Bernhardt sought him out and became his lifelong friends.

Bernhardt, in fact, introduced him to the electromagnetic scientist Nikola Tesla, who was struck by Vivekananda's knowledge of physics. Both recognized they had been pondering the same thesis on energy—in different languages. Vivekananda was keenly interested in the science supporting meditation, and Tesla would cite the monk's contributions in his pioneering research of electricity. "Mr. Tesla was charmed to hear about the Vedantic prana and akasha and the kalpas [time]," Vivekananda wrote to a friend. "He thinks he can demonstrate mathematically that force and matter are reducible to potential energy. I am to go to see him next week to get this mathematical demonstration. In that case Vedantic cosmology will be placed on the surest of foundations." For the monk from Calcutta, there were no inconsistencies between science, evolution and religious belief. Faith, he wrote, must be based upon direct experience, not religious platitudes.

More presciently, he warned that India would remain a vanquished, impoverished land until it "elevated" the status of women. And while he admonished Westerners for their preoccupation with the material and the physical, he famously advised a sickly young devotee to toughen himself with athletics: "You will be nearer to heaven playing football than studying the Bhagavad Gita."

Vivekananda's influence bloomed well into the mid-20th century, infusing the work of Mahatma Gandhi, Carl Jung, George Santayana, Jane Addams, Joseph Campbell and Henry Miller, among assorted luminaries. And then he seemed to go into eclipse in the West. American baby boomers—more disposed to "doing" than "being"—have opted for "hot yoga" classes over meditation. At some point, perhaps in the 1980s, an ancient, profoundly antimaterialist teaching had morphed into a fitness cult with expensive accessories.

Moreover, a few American academics have recently taken to scrutinizing Vivekananda and Ramakrishna through a Freudian prism, offering up speculative theories of sexual repression. In turn their critics respond

that the two titans from Calcutta are incomprehensible via simplistic Freudian prisms. To understand the unconditional celibacy of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, they argue, requires fluency in 19th-century Bengali and a decidedly non-Western paradigm.

Supporting this view were Christopher Isherwood and his friend Aldous Huxley, who wrote the introduction to the 1942 English-language edition of "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna," a firsthand account (originally published in India in 1898) described by Huxley as "the most profound and subtle utterances about the nature of Ultimate Reality." Nikhilananda, Salinger's guru, did the translation, with assistance from Huxley, Joseph Campbell and Margaret Wilson, the daughter of the late president.

Huxley and Isherwood were introduced to Vedanta in the Hollywood Hills in the late 1930s by their countryman, the writer Gerald Heard. In a fitting counterpart to the New York Center, the Hollywood Vedanta society was likewise run by a scholarly and charismatic monk, Prabhavananda, who initiated the English trio of writers.

Like Nikhilananda, Prabhavananda was a magnet for the intelligentsia, and his lectures often attracted the likes of Igor Stravinsky, Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh and W. Somerset Maugham (and led to his writing "The Razor's Edge"). Inspired by Isherwood—who briefly lived at the center as a monk—Greta Garbo asked if she too might move in. Told that a monastery accepts only men, Garbo became testy. "That doesn't matter!" she thumped. "I'll put on trousers."

Henry Miller, who made headlines with his torrid and banned "Tropic of Cancer," visited with Prabhavananda at the Hollywood center, devoured a small library of Vedanta books and settled down in Big Sur in 1944. Throughout his memoir, "The Air Conditioned Nightmare," Miller invokes Vivekananda as the great sage of the modern age and the consummate messenger to rescue the West from spiritual bankruptcy.

Isherwood's commitment to Vedanta, like Salinger's, was unswerving and lifelong. Over the next 20 years, he co-translated with Prabhavananda the Bhagavad Gita, Patanjali's "Yoga Aphorisms" and Shankara's "Crest Jewel of Discrimination," and was the author of several books and tracts on Vivekananda and Ramakrishna.

Huxley, however, in his final years turned over his spiritual quest to his second wife, Laura, and pharmaceuticals—an unequivocal no-no among Vedantins. Believing he had found a shortcut to samadhi,

the great man had his wife inject him with LSD on his deathbed. "Aldous was the most brilliant man I ever met," sighed one monk, "but he lacked discrimination."

Of all the literary lions captivated by Vivekananda and Vedanta, J.D. Salinger perhaps made the fullest commitment and sacrifices. In 1952, Salinger exhorted his British publisher to pick up the English rights of the Gospel, calling it "the religious book of the century."

At the peak of his fame in 1961, Salinger delivered a warmly inscribed copy of "Franny and Zooey," which is saturated in Vedantic thought and references, to his guru Nikhilananda, who by then had formally initiated him as a devotee. Salinger confided to Nikhilananda that he intentionally left a trail of Vedantic clues throughout his work from "Franny and Zooey" onward, hoping to entice readers into deeper study.

The two men often met at the 94th Street center, where they would discuss the spiritual challenges of renunciation. Salinger would also embark on "personal retreats" at the Vedanta center in Thousand Island Park in the St. Lawrence River. There he would stay in the cottage where Vivekananda had lived and held retreats in the late 1890s.

In January 1963, at the New York celebration of Vivekananda's 100th birthday—presided over by the secretary-general of the United Nations, U Thant—Salinger sat front and center at the banquet table. A few weeks later, he published "Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction," two exquisitely wrought novellas in which the suicide of Seymour, arguably Salinger's alter ego, is the catalyzing event. "I have been reading a miscellany of Vedanta all day," begins one entry in Seymour's diary in "Raise High." In Seymour, the narrator declares, "I tend to regard myself as a fourth-class Karma Yogini, with perhaps a little Jnana Yoga thrown in to spice up the pot."

In Salinger's last published work, "Hapworth 16, 1924," in 1965 in "The New Yorker," Seymour bursts into a manic tribute to Vivekananda. "Raja-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga, two heartrending, handy, quite tiny volumes, are perfect for the pockets of any average, mobile boys our age, by Vivekananda of India."

And then America's beloved novelist stopped publishing. "Name and fame," eschewed by Ramakrishna, no longer was the ticket for the increasingly hermetic Salinger. His ferocious literary ambition was now supplanted by what appears to have been a diligent, albeit eccentric, spiritual quest for the next four decades—until his death in 2010.

While Salinger is depicted by many chroniclers and contemporaries as an ornery crank, four letters, approved by Salinger's estate for use by the New York Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, suggest a man of singular devotion and renunciation: "I read a bit from the Gita every morning before I get out of bed," he wrote to Nikhilananda's successor swami at the New York center in 1975.

Salinger also conducted a long correspondence with Marie Louise Burke, who compiled a six-volume history of Vivekananda's visits to the West. Burke was as serious a seeker as Salinger and as devoted as a nun: Indeed, she took the monastic name Sister Gargi. Nevertheless, the nervous, sometimes paranoid Salinger fretted that she might profit from their letters. Unfortunately, Burke proved her fidelity to her friend by burning them.

In between his two treks to the West, Vivekananda returned to India and founded the Ramakrishna Order as both a monastery and a service mission. Today it is among the largest philanthropic organizations in India—providing food, medical assistance and disaster relief to millions. His prescription for his countrymen, however, who had been demoralized by colonialism, was to borrow a page from the West, he said, and instill itself with the "can do" spirit of Americans. "Strength! Strength is my religion!" he exhorted. "Religion is not for the weak!"

India has scheduled a yearlong party to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Vivekananda's birth, beginning on January 12, 2013. There will be plenty of readings of his four texts on yoga as a spiritual discipline. Nine volumes chronicle his talks, writings and ruminations, from screeds against child marriage to Milton's "Paradise Lost" to his pet goats and ducks. But if there were a single takeaway line that boils down his teachings to one spiritual bullet point, it would be "You are not your body." This might be bad news for the yoga-mat crowd. The good news for beleaguered souls like Salinger was Vivekananda's corollary: "You are not your mind."

In a 1972 letter to the ailing Nikhilananda in the last year of his life, Salinger seemed to be saying as much.

"I sometimes wish that the East had deigned to concentrate some small part of its immeasurable genius to the petty art of science of keeping the body well and fit. Between extreme indifference to the body and the most extreme and zealous attention to it (Hatha Yoga), there seems to be no useful middle ground whatever."

Salinger went on to express his gratitude to the man who had guided him out of his "long dark night." "It may be that reading to a devoted group from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is all you do now, as you say, but I imagine the students who are lucky enough to hear you read from the Gospel would put the matter rather differently. Meaning that I've forgotten many worthy and important things in my life, but I have never forgotten the way you used to read from, and interpret, the Upanishads, up at Thousand Island Park."

By then, Salinger had not published in some time. Nor would he again. Nor did he seem to miss it.



# **WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS (1893)**

Edited by Derek Michaud, incorporating material by Joas Adiprasetya (2004)

*[Courtesy: Boston Collaborative Encyclopedia of Western Theology]*

## **1. Background**

The 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, held on the shore of Lake Michigan, Chicago, was the largest and most spectacular event among many other congresses in the World's Columbian Exposition. The Exposition itself was a large trade fair that was to celebrate the quadricentennial of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus. The organizing process of the Parliament began after Charles Carroll Bonney, a layman in the Swedenborgian church and the president of the World's Congress Auxiliary, appointed John Henry Barrows to administer the General Committee on the Congress of Religion, which eventually was called the World's Parliament of Religions. Under Barrows' leadership, the Parliament was expected to be "the most important, commanding, and influential, as surely it will be the most phenomenal fact of the Columbian Exposition" (in Ziolkowski 1993, 5). The committee consisted of sixteen persons from different religious backgrounds. Although most of them were from Christian mainline denominations, we could find distinguished names such as E.G. Hirsch (Jewish rabbi from New York), Jenkin Lloyd-Jones (Unitarian), and P.A. Feehan (Catholic bishop).

In June 1891, more than three thousand copies of the Preliminary Address was sent out to the world, informing the plan of the 1893 Parliament and inviting religious leaders from all over the world to attend to it. The responses were varied and well documented in Barrows' two-volume report books (1893a, 18-61). The enthusiastic responses came from those like Max Müller, a champion in the field of comparative studies of religion. Although he deeply regretted failing to attend the Parliament, he expressed his hope that the Parliament would increase interest in the studies of religions. He also said that the Parliament "stands unique, stands unprecedented in the whole history of the world" (in Seager 1993, 154). Some other positive responses demonstrated particular interests, for instance, to show the supremacy of one religion over others or to clarify misconceptions about their religious traditions (Braybrooke 1980, 2).

There were also those who disapproved. For instance, the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, the home church of John H. Barrows, passed a resolution against this convention. Yet, the fact that this resolution was passed hurriedly in the closing hours of the General Assembly in 1892 did not produce unified voice among the Presbyterians; indeed, their opinion was divided. Further opposition came from the Archbishop of Canterbury, saying in his letter that his disapproval rested 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” (in Barrows 1893, 20-2). Along with these two, the sultan of Turkey, the European Roman Catholic hierarchy, and many North American Evangelical leaders such as D.L. Moody also opposed this convention.

In spite of these varied responses, the 1893 Parliament had to be recognized as a great achievement within the modern civilization in general and the Western American culture in particular. As Marcus Braybrooke said, “it remains a remarkable pioneer event, and no subsequent inter-faith gathering has come near to it in size or complexity” (1980, 8). The glory of the Parliament was most obvious in the opening ceremony, on September 11, 1893. More than four thousand people had gathered in the Hall of Columbus, when at ten o'clock a dozen of representatives from different faiths marched into the hall hand in hand. At the same time, the Columbian Liberty bell in the Court of Honor tolled ten times, honoring the ten great world religions—Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The inaugural ceremony began with “an act of common worship to Almighty God,” in which Isaac Watts' paraphrase of the hundredth Psalm was sung (Barrows 1893a, 66):

Praise God, from whom all blessing flow;

Praise him, all creatures here below;

Praise him above, ye heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. (67)

Afterwards, Cardinal Gibbons led the crowd in the Lord's Prayer, which interestingly became the “universal prayer”—to use Barrows' words—that marked the beginning of each day during the seventeen days of the Parliament.

Statistically speaking, the Parliament was dominated by English-speaking Christian representatives, who delivered 152 of 194 papers. The opportunity for the leaders from other religious traditions was limited but significant; 12 speakers represented Buddhism, 11 Judaism, 8 Hinduism, 2 Islam, 2 Parsis religion, 2 Shintoism, 2 Confucianism, 1 Taoism, and 1 Jainism (Seager 1986, 87). ***Among them, Swami Vivekananda's three speeches undoubtedly drew most attention from the American public. Barrows recorded that when Vivekananda addressed the audience as "sisters and brothers of America," they went into rapture with "a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes"*** (Barrows 1893a, 101).

The whole program of the Parliament was designed to provide a wide range of topics presented by a great variety of speakers. Beside a large amount of papers focused on religion per se, several papers were categorized under the rubric of "scientific section" and "denominational congress."

More than seven thousand people attended the closing session on the seventeenth day. Several Christian hymns were sung before Bonney and Barrows delivered their concluding addresses. Along with them, some representatives also spoke to express their thanks and impressions. The "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah was then sung. About this Barrows commented,

To the Christians who were present, and all seemed imbued with a Christian spirit, [the chorus] 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." (Barrows 1893a, 172-3)

The Parliament was officially closed with the Lord's Prayer led by Emil G. Hirsch, a rabbi from Chicago.

## **2. Works (Selected List)**

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 (edited by J.H. Barrows in two volumes, 1893).

## **3. Themes**

### *An Analysis of Culture and Religion*

John P. Burris is correct when he maintains that in the Parliament "religion was perceived as the center of any given society and the most obvious aspect of culture through which the essence of a given people's

cultural orientation might be understood” (2001, 123-4). The importance of culture and ethnicity was replaced by “religion” as a new central category. Consequently, the decision of which religion could reasonably be included in or excluded from the group of “ten great world religions” had put aside the categories of culture and ethnicity. By using such a conception the Parliament excluded all Native Americans and included African Americans insofar as they were converted Christians (125).

The discovery of America by Columbus, which became the *raison d'etre* of the celebratory Exposition, ironically, had become the beginning of Spanish colonialism on the Indian lands. In this sense, the presence of various Native American groups in this Columbian Exposition and their underrepresentation in the World's Parliament of Religions had magnified this irony. In the Fair, they consented to be set up in “mock villages” or exhibited within the exhibition of American anthropologists without their own display as other social groups had. I agree with Burriss that this fact reveals the leitmotifs that dominated all aspects of the Fair, i.e., “the evolutionary hierarchy of cultures” (110) and “colonial illusions” (123-4). Richard Hughes Seager rightly concludes,

The Columbian celebration claimed to be the World's Columbian Exposition, not simply white America's, and it sought to represent the entire globe in a single, unified vision. People of other colors, creeds, and ethnic traditions were not excluded, but their inclusion was based on precarious grounds which, as in the case of American blacks, placed them in a position clearly subordinate to the progressive, allegedly universal vision of the Greco-Roman, Christian White City. (1986, 51; italics mine)

As far as the issue of religion was concerned, it seemed that the evolutionary motif was more dominant than that of the colonial motif, but the result was the same, namely, the confidence in the supremacy of one religion over others. Yet, the official statements seemed to be careful in avoiding this attitude. For example, the General Committee formulated ten objects of the Parliament that were possibly written in the 1891 Preliminary Address (Barrows 1893a, 18):

1. To bring together in conference, for the first time in history, the leading representatives of the great historic religions of the world.
2. To show to men, in the most impressive way, what and how many important truths the various religions hold and teach in common.

3. To promote and deepen the spirit of human brotherhood among religious men of diverse faiths, through friendly conference and mutual good understanding, while not seeking to foster the temper of indifferentism, and not striving to achieve any formal and outward unity.

4. To set forth, by those most competent to speak, what are deemed the important distinctive truths held and taught by each Religion, and by the various chief branches of Christendom.

5. To indicate the impregnable foundations of Theism, and the reasons for man's faith in Immortality, and thus to unite and strengthen the forces which are adverse to a materialistic philosophy of the universe.

6. To secure from leading scholars, representing the Brahman, Buddhist, Confucian, Parsee, Mohammedan, Jewish and other Faiths, and from representatives of the various Churches of Christendom, full and accurate statements of the spiritual and other effects of the Religions which they hold upon the Literature, Art, Commerce, Government, Domestic and Social life of the peoples among whom these Faiths have prevailed.

7. To inquire what light each Religion has afforded, or may afford, to the other religions of the world.

8. To set forth, for permanent record to be published to the world, an accurate and authoritative account of the present condition and outlook of Religion among the leading nations of the earth.

9. To discover, from competent men, what light Religion has to throw on the great problems of the present age, especially the important questions connected with Temperance, Labor, Education, Wealth and Poverty.

10. To bring the nations of the earth into a more friendly fellowship, in the hope of securing permanent international peace.

These officially stated objects seemed to avoid any attempt to prove the supremacy of one particular religion over others. The emphasis was placed more on searching for religious commonalities and building of "human brotherhood" [sic!], through which the world's religions could make the world a better place. Neither did the Parliament aim to establish a universal religion or "any formal and outward unity." Interestingly, the importance of the comparative study of religions in order to maintain "mutual good understanding" among religious traditions was also introduced here. The statements also recommended

the necessity for presenting religions as accurately as possible by those who were “competent” and “authoritative.”

However, these “objective” statements did not reflect the real diverse attitudes that we find in writings and speeches throughout the Parliament. Donald H. Bishop eloquently discusses three common attitudes towards other religions occurred in the 1893 Parliament: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (Bishop 1969; cf. Williams 1993). Due to the space limit, I only give brief comments on and examples of exclusivism and pluralism and discuss longer the inclusivist attitude that was commonly found in the Parliament. The exclusivist attitude took places either in the offensive or amicable type. William C. Wilkinson, for instance, proudly proclaimed in his presentation,

Men need to be saved from false religion; they are in no way of being saved by false religion. Such, at least, is the teaching of Christianity. The attitude, therefore, of Christianity towards religions other than itself is an attitude of universal, absolute, eternal, unappeasable hostility ... (in Barrows 1893b, 1249)

With regard to pluralism, its common version in the Parliament was the one that emphasized more the peaceful coexistence of religions. Any superiority claim of one religion over others was rejected because “the differences between religions are mainly in externals” (Bishop 1969, 72). The best example of this attitude could be found in Bonney's opening speech,

As the finite can never fully comprehend the infinite, nor perfectly express its own view of the divine, it necessarily follows that individual opinions of the divine nature and attributes will differ. But, properly understood, these varieties of view are not causes of discord and strife, but rather incentives to deeper interest and examination, Necessarily God reveals himself differently to a child than to a man; to a philosopher than to one who cannot read. Each must see God with the eyes of his own soul. Each must behold him through the colored glasses of his own nature. Each one must receive him according to his own capacity of reception. (Barrows 1893a, 68)

Regarding the inclusivist attitude, a careful investigation needs to be done. By inclusivism I mean a certain attitude toward other religions based on an underlying assumption that one's religion is superior, yet this assumption is expressed in openness toward other religions. In terms of the superior attitude, an inclusivist would agree with exclusivists, but they disagree in the way other religions are treated. While the value of other religious beliefs are undermined in exclusivism, they are respected by the inclusivists, exactly because those beliefs could be possibly included in or subordinated to the terms defined by the inclusivists

without sacrificing their own religious superiority. Once foreign religions have been subordinated to the superior religion, they become “more fascinating than threatening—as objects to be played with in a game where the rules [have] been stacked against them” (Burriss 2001, 127).

In the 1893 Parliament, interestingly, this attitude received its justification from the evolutionary interpretation of religious plurality. The invitation sent to the world's religious leaders said, “ we affectionately invite the representatives of all faiths to aid us in presenting to the world, at the Exposition of 1893, the religious harmonies and unities of humanity, and also in showing forth the moral and spiritual agencies which are at the root of human progress” (Barrows 1893a, 10; italics mine). Barrows, who in his opening address spoke about “a spiritual root to all human progress,” seemingly, drafted this statement (75).

According to Barrows, “human progress” would objectively reached its culmination through Christianity. As the apex of all religions, Christianity can influence other religions meaningfully, but not vice versa.

The Parliament has shown that Christianity is still the great quickener of humanity, that 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 suggestion as to Christian improvement, but it has nothing to add to the Christian creed” (1893b, 1581; italics mine).

This was the inclusivism par excellence. Other religions are appreciated with an open heart yet, at the same time, being subordinated to the finality of Christian answer. They could be included within the conversation with Christian faith insofar as there is nothing from them that is needed to fulfill Christian system. On the contrary, it is Christian message that could fulfill the lack within other religious systems.

For ones who adopted this position, such as Barrows, there is no tension between seeking universal religious truth and keeping the finality of Christian message, insofar as the affirmation of universal truth do not lead them to the building of a new universal religion, since it would judge Christianity as incomplete so that it should be replaced by the new one. Rather, by “universal truth” it means that the truth in other religions is considered the foreshadowing of the Gospel or the *preparatio evangelium*. Thus, what is important for Christians in their encounter with people from other faiths is to find the “points of contact” between Christianity and other religions. Then, we can surely find certain fundamental beliefs in Christianity that cannot be reconciled with other religious systems. Those fundamental beliefs would prove Christian

supremacy over other religions. This understanding was very common within Christian missionaries who attended the Parliament, especially those who worked in India (cf. Goodpasture 1993, 404-5).

This is exactly the background of the “silent” debate between Barrows and Vivekananda. An advocate of the Vedantic Hinduism, Swami Vivekananda believed that “every religion is only an evolving a God out of the material man; and the same God is the inspirer of all of them” (in Barrows 1893b, 977). Contradictions among religions for him were only apparent and came from the same truth “adapting itself to the different circumstances of different natures” (977). Vivekananda's ultimate goal was undoubtedly represented in his proposal of a “universal religion,” which would hold no location in place or time, which would be infinite like God it would preach, whose sun shines upon the followers of Krishna or Christ; saints or sinner alike; which would not be the Brahman or Buddhist, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity would embrace in its infinite arms and formulate a place for every human being, from the lowest groveling man who is scarcely removed in intellectuality from the brute, to the highest mind, towering almost above humanity, and who makes society stand in awe and doubt his human nature. (977)

To be sure, these statements captivated the attention of the American audience who had been influenced by the evolutionary way of thinking. As a different model of “human progress” that every religious people could dream of, it was more intriguing than that of the inclusivist model proposed by Barrows.

What Vivekananda meant by the “universal religion” was not that all religious traditions would be disappeared and replaced by a new and single religion. Rather, it would be an authentic togetherness of all religions, in which “each must assimilate the others and yet preserve its individuality and grow according to its law of growth” (in Barrows 1893a, 170). The necessity to “assimilate the others” was expressed by Vivekananda as the avoidance of the triumph of any one of the religions over others. He stated, “Do I wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid” (in Barrows 1893a, 170).

For Barrows and other inclusivists, Vivekananda's idea was certainly threatening the Christian supremacy. In his “Review and Summary” of the Parliament, Barrows seemed to attack Vivekananda directly,

The idea of evolving a cosmic or universal faith out of the Parliament was not present in the minds of its chief promoters. They believe that the elements of such a religion are already contained in the Christian



ideal and the Christian Scripture. They had no thought of attempting to formulate a universal creed. (Barrows 1893b, 1572)

Barrows then continued with a Christian version of the Darwinian “survival of the fittest.” He wrote, “The best religion must come to the front, and the best religion will ultimately survive, because it will contain all that is true in all the faiths” (1572).

#### **4. Relation to Other Thinkers**

##### *Significant Legacies of the Parliament*

Richard H. Seager, one of a few experts on the 1983 Parliament, illustrates the Parliament as a brief storm that was “quickly banished from our collective memory” (1993, 214). Seager is not entirely wrong if we remember that two decades thereafter the world’s optimism for global unity was wiped out with the emergence of the First World War. Nevertheless, we can still note several developments that have become the legacies of the Parliament, both blooming during the two decades after the Parliament and reemerging a century later.

First, it is important to highlight that the Parliament supplied—although not initiated—“a strong stimulus for the wide acceptance of the study of comparative religion” in America, especially in the academic life (Kitagawa 1987, 364). The presence of the religious others—“living forces of religions other than Christianity” in Braybrooke’s words (1980, 8)—with their fascinating beliefs and practices before the American Christian audience has raised the awareness of the value of religious plurality. Moreover, the flood of immigrants entering the USA during those times has made “religious plurality” and “multiculturalism” two characteristics of the twentieth century America. The study of comparative religion, which was tainted by the inclusivist view of Christian supremacy held by Barrows and others, has slowly been objectified within its academic environment and neutralized from any religious bias. However, Kitagawa points out that in the 1930s “the sudden decline of comparative religion was accelerated by the impact of neoorthodox theology, the depression and the impending war” (1987, 366). We should wait for its reemergence in the second half of the late twentieth century, with the 1993 Parliament as its apex.

Second, along with the emergence of the study of comparative religion, we should point out that the Parliament is usually considered the cradle of interfaith movement, although no specific organization emerged in this event. The formation process of some interfaith bodies ran slowly (though recently quite

rapidly) and seemed to be sporadic. The best historical exploration of the interfaith movement since the 1893 Parliament can be found in Braybrooke's works (1980 & 1992).

A third contribution of the Parliament was to the Christian ecumenical movement. According to Diana L. Eck, the Parliament itself "might be seen as one of the first events of ecumenical movement" (1993, xv). Eck is not wrong given the fact that 152 of 194 speakers were Christians (Protestant, Orthodox, and Catholic) and that the "Christian flavor" was very obvious through the hymns, prayers and rhetoric during the Parliament. Barrows sometimes also discussed the necessity of Christian unity by employing the image of three concentric circle with "Christian assembly embodying its center; the American religious assembly, including Jews, comprising the next circle; and the religions of the worlds making up the outer circle" (Ziolkowski 1993, 57-8).

Among those who spoke on the subject of Christian unity, Philips Schaff was considered most authoritative (in Barrows 1893b, 1192-1201). While being critical of the organic or corporate model of ecumenism "under one government," he argued for a federal or confederate union, in which the balance between unity and independence could be maintained. However, the relevance of the Parliament to the ecumenical movement has not been recognized fully until the 1910 Conference of World Mission in Edinburgh. Thereafter, the ecumenical movement has always been dealing with the issues of religious plurality in connection with Christian unity and mission.

Fourth, the Parliament has also influenced Christian missionaries who work abroad in the ways they approach and appreciate people from other religious traditions. They become more sensitive to local cultures and religions. Yet, what is fascinating is that the Parliament has opened the gate widely for the leaders from other religions to do their own missions to the West, especially to America. Among the missionaries from the East several important figures can be mentioned: Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, Swami Vivekananda, Anagarika Dharmapala, and Soyen Shaku. In conclusion, after the Parliament the religious situation in America has been changed forever. Seager describes it beautifully that after the Parliament, there were many new ways to be religious. One could be saved or self-realized or grow in God consciousness or be self-emptyed. And as America itself continued to pursue its messianic mission, it was a nation under a changed God ... other deities had been tucked up in the nation's sacred canopy ... America had gone into the Parliament claiming to be a cosmopolitan nation and had come out having to live up to the claim. There was no going back (1986, 277).

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# **ADDRESSES AT “THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS”**

## **RESPONSE TO WELCOME**

[At the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

### ***Sisters and Brothers of America,***

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. 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.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honour of bearing to different lands the idea of toleration. 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. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.”

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; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.”

Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth.

They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed

civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now. But their time is come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen, and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.

## **WHY WE DISAGREE**

[15<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

I will tell you a little story. You have heard the eloquent speaker who has just finished say, "Let us cease from abusing each other," and he was very sorry that there should be always so much variance.

But I think I should tell you a story which would illustrate the cause of this variance. A frog lived in a well. It had lived there for a long time. It was born there and brought up there, and yet was a little, small frog. Of course the evolutionists were not there then to tell us whether the frog lost its eyes or not, but, for our story's sake, we must take it for granted that it had its eyes, and that it every day cleansed the water of all the worms and bacilli that lived in it with an energy that would do credit to our modern bacteriologists. In this way it went on and became a little sleek and fat. Well, one day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well.

"Where are you from?"

"I am from the sea."

"The sea! How big is that? Is it as big as my well?" and he took a leap from one side of the well to the other.

"My friend," said the frog of the sea, "how do you compare the sea with your little well?"

Then the frog took another leap and asked, "Is your sea so big?"

"What nonsense you speak, to compare the sea with your well!"

"Well, then," said the frog of the well, "nothing can be bigger than my well; there can be nothing bigger than this; this fellow is a liar, so turn him out."

That has been the difficulty all the while.

I am a Hindu. I am sitting in my own little well and thinking that the whole world is my little well. The Christian sits in his little well and thinks the whole world is his well. The Mohammedan sits in his little well and thinks that is the whole world. I have to thank you of America for the great attempt you are making to break down the barriers of this little world of ours, and hope that, in the future, the Lord will help you to accomplish your purpose.

## **PAPER ON HINDUISM**

[Read at the Parliament on 19<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

Three religions now stand in the world which have come down to us from time prehistoric — Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. They have all received tremendous shocks and all of them prove by their survival their internal 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 is all that remains to tell the tale of their grand religion, sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith.

From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.

Where then, the question arises, where is the common centre to which all these widely diverging radii converge? Where is the common basis upon which all these seemingly hopeless contradictions rest? And this is the question I shall attempt to answer.

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws

discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings. I am glad to tell this audience that some of the very greatest of them were women. Here it may be said that these laws as laws may be without end, but they must have had a beginning. The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then, if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.

If I may be allowed to use a simile, creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, running parallel to each other. God is the ever active providence, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, made to run for a time and again destroyed. This is what the Brâhmin boy repeats every day: "The sun and the moon, the Lord created like the suns and moons of previous cycles." And this agrees with modern science.

Here I stand and if I shut my eyes, and try to conceive my existence, "I", "I", "I", what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? The Vedas declare, "No". I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here am I in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die. Some are born happy, enjoy perfect health, with beautiful body, mental vigour and all wants supplied. Others are born miserable, some are without hands or feet, others again are idiots and only drag on a wretched existence. Why, if they are all created, why does a just and merciful God create one happy and another unhappy, why is He so partial? Nor would it mend matters in the least to hold that those who are miserable in this life will be happy in a future one. Why should a man be miserable even here in the reign of a just and merciful God?



In the second place, the idea of a creator God does not explain the anomaly, but simply expresses the cruel fiat of an all-powerful being. There must have been causes, then, before his birth, to make a man miserable or happy and those were his past actions.

Are not all the tendencies of the mind and the body accounted for by inherited aptitude? Here are two parallel lines of existence — one of the mind, the other of matter. If matter and its transformations answer for all that we have, there is no necessity for supposing the existence of a soul. But it cannot be proved that thought has been evolved out of matter, and if a philosophical monism is inevitable, spiritual monism is certainly logical and no less desirable than a materialistic monism; but neither of these is necessary here.

We cannot deny that bodies acquire certain tendencies from heredity, but those tendencies only mean the physical configuration, through which a peculiar mind alone can act in a peculiar way. There are other tendencies peculiar to a soul caused by its past actions. And a soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency. This is in accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So repetitions are necessary to explain the natural habits of a new-born soul. And since they were not obtained in this present life, they must have come down from past lives.

There is another suggestion. Taking all these for granted, how is it that I do not remember anything of my past life? This can be easily explained. I am now speaking English. It is not my mother tongue, in fact no words of my mother tongue are now present in my consciousness; but let me try to bring them up, and they rush in. That shows that consciousness is only the surface of the mental ocean, and within its depths are stored up all our experiences. Try and struggle, they would come up and you would be conscious even of your past life.

This is direct and demonstrative evidence. Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered the secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up — try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life.

So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce — him the fire cannot burn — him the water cannot melt — him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is

free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.

Why should the free, perfect, and pure being be thus under the thralldom of matter, is the next question. How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it is imperfect? We have been told that the Hindus shirk the question and say that no such question can be there. Some thinkers want to answer it by positing one or more quasi-perfect beings, and use big scientific names to fill up the gap. But naming is not explaining. The question remains the same. How can the perfect become the quasi-perfect; how can the pure, the absolute, change even a microscopic particle of its nature? But the Hindu is sincere. He does not want to take shelter under sophistry. He is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is: "I do not know. I do not know how the perfect being, the soul, came to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter." But the fact is a fact for all that. It is a fact in everybody's consciousness that one thinks of oneself as the body. The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God is no explanation. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, "I do not know."

Well, then, the human soul is eternal and immortal, perfect and infinite, and death means only a change of centre from one body to another. The present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death. But here is another question: Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions — a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect; a little moth placed under the wheel of causation which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or the orphan's cry? The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of Nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape? — was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings: "Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again." "Children of immortal bliss" — what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name — 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 divinities on earth — sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a

standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.

Thus it is that the Vedas proclaim not a dreadful combination of unforgiving laws, not an endless prison of cause and effect, but that at the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One "by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth."

And what is His nature?

He is everywhere, the pure and formless One, the Almighty and the All-merciful. "Thou art our father, Thou art our mother, Thou art our beloved friend, Thou art the source of all strength; give us strength. Thou art He that beareth the burdens of the universe; help me bear the little burden of this life." Thus sang the Rishis of the Vedas. And how to worship Him? Through love. "He is to be worshipped as the one beloved, dearer than everything in this and the next life."

This is the doctrine of love declared in the Vedas, and let us see how it is fully developed and taught by Krishna, whom the Hindus believe to have been God incarnate on earth.

He taught that a man ought to live in this world like a lotus leaf, which grows in water but is never moistened by water; so a man ought to live in the world — his heart to God and his hands to work.

It is good to love God for hope of reward in this or the next world, but it is better to love God for love's sake, and the prayer goes: "Lord, I do not want wealth, nor children, nor learning. If it be Thy will, I shall go from birth to birth, but grant me this, that I may love Thee without the hope of reward — love unselfishly for love's sake." One of the disciples of Krishna, the then Emperor of India, was driven from his kingdom by his enemies and had to take shelter with his queen in a forest in the Himalayas, and there one day the queen asked him how it was that he, the most virtuous of men, should suffer so much misery. Yudhishtira answered, "Behold, my queen, the Himalayas, how grand and beautiful they are; I love them. They do not give me anything, but my nature is to love the grand, the beautiful, therefore I love them. Similarly, I love the Lord. He is the source of all beauty, of all sublimity. He is the only object to be loved; my nature is to love Him, and therefore I love. I do not pray for anything; I do not ask for anything. Let Him place me wherever He likes. I must love Him for love's sake. I cannot trade in love."

The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the word they use for it is therefore, Mukti — freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery.

And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of His mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases. He is no more the freak of a terrible law of causation. This is the very centre, the very vital conception of Hinduism. The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. If there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is an all-merciful universal Soul, he will go to Him direct. He must see Him, and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is: "I have seen the soul; I have seen God." And that is the only condition of perfection. The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising — not in believing, but in being and becoming.

Thus the whole object of their system is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God, and this reaching God, seeing God, becoming perfect even as the Father in Heaven is perfect, constitutes the religion of the Hindus.

And what becomes of a man when he attains perfection? He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God.

So far all the Hindus are agreed. This is the common religion of all the sects of India; but, then, perfection is absolute, and the absolute cannot be two or three. It cannot have any qualities. It cannot be an individual. And so when a soul becomes perfect and absolute, it must become one with Brahman, and it would only realise the Lord as the perfection, the reality, of its own nature and existence, the existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. We have often and often read this called the losing of individuality and becoming a stock or a stone.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound."

I tell you it is nothing of the kind. If it is happiness to enjoy the consciousness of this small body, it must be greater happiness to enjoy the consciousness of two bodies, the measure of happiness increasing with the consciousness of an increasing number of bodies, the aim, the ultimate of happiness being reached when it would become a universal consciousness.

Therefore, to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go. Then alone can death cease when I am alone with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself, then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion. Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita (unity) is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul.

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. Thus Chemistry could not progress farther when it would discover one element out of which all other could be made. Physics would stop when it would be able to fulfill its services in discovering one energy of which all others are but manifestations, and the science of religion become perfect when it would discover 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. Thus is it, through multiplicity and duality, that the ultimate unity is reached. Religion can go no farther. This is the goal of all science.

All science is bound to come to this conclusion in the long run. Manifestation, and not creation, is the word of science today, and the Hindu is only glad that what he has been cherishing in his bosom for ages is going to be taught in more forcible language, and with further light from the latest conclusions of science.

Descend we now from the aspirations of philosophy to the religion of the ignorant. At the very outset, I may tell you that there is no polytheism in India. In every temple, if one stands by and listens, one will find the worshippers applying all the attributes of God, including omnipresence, to the images. It is not polytheism, nor would the name henotheism explain the situation. "The rose called by any other name would smell as sweet." Names are not explanations.

I remember, as a boy, hearing a Christian missionary preach to a crowd in India. Among other sweet things he was telling them was that if he gave a blow to their idol with his stick, what could it do? One of his

hearers sharply answered, "If I abuse your God, what can He do?" "You would be punished," said the preacher, "when you die." "So my idol will punish you when you die," retorted the Hindu.

The tree is known by its fruits. When I have seen amongst them that are called idolaters, men, the like of whom in morality and spirituality and love I have never seen anywhere, I stop and ask myself, "Can sin beget holiness?"

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is 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? My brethren, we can no more think about anything without a mental image than we can live without breathing. By the law of association, the material image calls up the mental idea and vice versa. This is why the Hindu uses an external symbol when he worships. He will tell you, it helps to keep his mind fixed on the Being to whom he prays. He knows as well as you do that the image is not God, is not omnipresent. After all, how much does omnipresence mean to almost the whole world? It stands merely as a word, a symbol. Has God superficial area? If not, when we repeat that word "omnipresent", we think of the extended sky or of space, that is all.

As we find that somehow or other, by the laws of our mental constitution, we have to associate our ideas of infinity with the image of the blue sky, or of the sea, so we naturally connect our idea of holiness with the image of a church, a mosque, or a cross. The Hindus have associated the idea of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such other ideas with different images and forms. But with this difference that while some people devote their whole lives to their idol of a church and never rise higher, because with them religion means an intellectual assent to certain doctrines and doing good to their fellows, the whole religion of the Hindu is centred in realisation. Man is to become divine by realising the divine. Idols or temples or churches or books are only the supports, the helps, of his spiritual childhood: but on and on he must progress.

He must not stop anywhere. "External worship, material worship," say the scriptures, "is the lowest stage; struggling to rise high, mental prayer is the next stage, but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realised." Mark, the same earnest man who is kneeling before the idol tells you, "Him the Sun cannot express, nor the moon, nor the stars, the lightning cannot express Him, nor what we speak of as fire; through Him they shine." But he does not abuse any one's idol or call its worship sin. He recognises in it a

necessary stage of life. "The child is father of the man." Would it be right for an old man to say that childhood is a sin or youth a sin?

If a man can realise his divine nature with the help of an image, would it be right to call that a sin? Nor even when he has passed that stage, should he call it an error. 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 and realise the Infinite, each determined by the conditions of its birth and association, and each of these marks a stage of progress; and every soul is a young eagle soaring higher and higher, gathering more and more strength, till it reaches the Glorious Sun.

Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognised it. Every other religion lays down certain fixed dogmas, and tries to force society to adopt them. It places before society only one coat which must fit Jack and John and Henry, all alike. If it does not fit John or Henry, he must go without a coat to cover his body. The Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realised, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, and the images, crosses, and crescents are simply so many symbols — so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for every one, but those that do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism.

One thing I must tell you. 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. The Hindus have their faults, they sometimes have their exceptions; but mark this, they are always for punishing their own bodies, and never for cutting the throats of their neighbours. If the Hindu fanatic burns himself on the pyre, he never lights the fire of Inquisition. And even this cannot be laid at the door of his religion any more than the burning of witches can be laid at the door of Christianity.

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. Every religion is only evolving a God out of the material man, and the same God is the inspirer of all of them. Why, then, are there so many contradictions? They are only apparent, says the Hindu. The contradictions come from the same truth adapting itself to the varying circumstances of different natures.

It is the same light coming through glasses of different colours. And these little variations are necessary for purposes of adaptation. But in the heart of everything the same truth reigns. The Lord has declared to the

Hindu in His incarnation as Krishna, "I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls. Wherever thou seest extraordinary holiness and extraordinary power raising and purifying humanity, know thou that I am there." And what has been the result? I challenge the world to find, throughout the whole system of Sanskrit philosophy, any such expression as that the Hindu alone will be saved and not others. Says Vyasa, "We find perfect men even beyond the pale of our caste and creed." One thing more. How, then, can the Hindu, whose whole fabric of thought centres in God, believe in Buddhism which is agnostic, or in Jainism which is atheistic?

The Buddhists or the Jains do not depend upon God; but the whole force of their religion is directed to the great central truth in every religion, to evolve a God out of man. They have not seen the Father, but they have seen the Son. And he that hath seen the Son hath seen the Father also.

This, brethren, is a short sketch of the religious ideas of the Hindus. The Hindu may have failed to carry out all his plans, but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for, every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.

Offer such a religion, and all the nations will follow you. Asoka's council was a council of the Buddhist faith. Akbar's, though more to the purpose, was only a parlour-meeting. It was reserved for America to proclaim to all quarters of the globe that the Lord is in every religion.

May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea! The star arose in the East; it travelled steadily towards the West, sometimes dimmed and sometimes effulgent, till it made a circuit of the world; and now it is again rising on the very horizon of the East, the borders of the Sanpo,\* a thousandfold more effulgent than it ever was before.



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.

## **RELIGION NOT THE CRYING NEED OF INDIA**

[20<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

Christians must always be ready for good criticism, and I hardly think that you will mind if I make a little criticism. 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? In India, during the terrible famines, thousands died from hunger, yet you Christians did nothing. You erect churches all through India, but the crying evil in the East is not religion — they have religion enough — but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics. In India a priest that preached for money would lose caste and be spat upon by the people. I came here to seek aid for my impoverished people, and I fully realised how difficult it was to get help for heathens from Christians in a Christian land.

## **BUDDHISM, THE FULFILMENT OF HINDUISM**

[26<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

I am not a Buddhist, as you have heard, and yet I am. If China, or Japan, or Ceylon follow the teachings of the Great Master, India worships him as God incarnate on earth. You have just now heard that I am going to 49umanizin Buddhism, but by that I wish you to understand only this. Far be it from me to 49umanizin him whom I worship as God incarnate on earth. But our views about Buddha are that he was not understood properly by his disciples. The relation between Hinduism (by Hinduism, I mean the religion of the Vedas) and what is called Buddhism at the present day is nearly the same as between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, and Shâkya Muni was a Hindu. The Jews rejected Jesus Christ, nay, crucified him, and the Hindus have accepted Shâkya Muni as God and worship him. But the real difference

that we Hindus want to show between modern Buddhism and what we should understand as the teachings of Lord Buddha lies principally in this: Shâkya Muni came to preach nothing new. He also, like Jesus, came to humanize and not to destroy. Only, in the case of Jesus, it was the old people, the Jews, who did not understand him, while in the case of Buddha, it was his own followers who did not humanize the import of his teachings. As the Jew did not understand the humanizing of the Old Testament, so the Buddhist did not understand the humanizing of the truths of the Hindu religion. Again, I repeat, Shâkya Muni came not to destroy, but he was the humanizing, the logical conclusion, the logical development of the religion of the Hindus.

The religion of the Hindus is divided into two parts: the ceremonial and the spiritual. The spiritual portion is specially studied by the monks.

In that there is no caste. A man from the highest caste and a man from the lowest may become a monk in India, and the two castes become equal. In religion there is no caste; caste is simply a social institution. Shâkya Muni himself was a monk, and it was his glory that he had the large-heartedness to bring out the truths from the hidden Vedas and through them broadcast all over the world. He was the first being in the world who brought missionarising into practice — nay, he was the first to conceive the idea of humanizing.

The great glory of the Master lay in his wonderful sympathy for everybody, especially for the ignorant and the poor. Some of his disciples were Brahmins. When Buddha was teaching, Sanskrit was no more the spoken language in India. It was then only in the books of the learned. Some of Buddha's Brahmin disciples wanted to translate his teachings into Sanskrit, but he distinctly told them, "I am for the poor, for the people; let me speak in the tongue of the people." And so to this day the great bulk of his teachings are in the vernacular of that day in India.

Whatever may be the position of philosophy, whatever may be the position of metaphysics, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world, so long as there is such a thing as weakness in the human heart, so long as there is a cry going out of the heart of man in his very weakness, there shall be a faith in God.

On the philosophic side the disciples of the Great Master dashed themselves against the eternal rocks of the Vedas and could not crush them, and on the other side they took away from the nation that eternal God

to which every one, man or woman, clings so fondly. And the result was that Buddhism had to die a natural death in India. At the present day there is not one who calls oneself a Buddhist in India, the land of its birth.

But at the same time, Brahminism lost something — that reforming zeal, that wonderful sympathy and charity for everybody, that wonderful heaven which Buddhism had brought to the masses and which had rendered Indian society so great that a Greek historian who wrote about India of that time was led to say that no Hindu was known to tell an untruth and no Hindu woman was known to be unchaste.

Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism. Then 51umaniz what the separation has shown to us, that the Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist. This separation between the Buddhists and the Brahmins is the cause of the downfall of India. That is why India is populated by three hundred millions of beggars, and that is why India has been the slave of conquerors for the last thousand years. Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmins with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful 51umanizing power of the Great Master.

## **ADDRESS AT THE FINAL SESSION**

[27<sup>th</sup> September, 1893]

The World's Parliament of Religions has become an accomplished fact, and the merciful Father has helped those who laboured to bring it into existence, and crowned with success their most unselfish labour.

My thanks to those noble souls whose large hearts and love of truth first dreamed this wonderful dream and then realised it. My thanks to the shower of liberal sentiments that has overflowed this platform. My thanks to his enlightened audience for their uniform kindness to me and for their appreciation of every thought that tends to smooth the friction of religions. 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 general harmony the sweeter.

Much has been said of the common ground of religious unity. I am not going just now to venture my own theory. But if any one here hopes that this unity will come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others, to him I say, "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Do I wish that the Christian

would become Hindu? God forbid. Do I wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth; or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth, assimilates the air, the earth, and the water, converts them into plant substance, and grows into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. 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.

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, 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."

**PHOTOGRAPHS OF**  
**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**

[Courtesy: Vedanta Society of Northern California]

*Calcutta, 1886*

*One of the earliest photos of Swami Vivekananda*



*Trivandrum, December 1892*

*Photo taken by Prince Martanda Varma of Travancore*





*Belgaum, October 1892*



*Chicago, September 11, 1893*

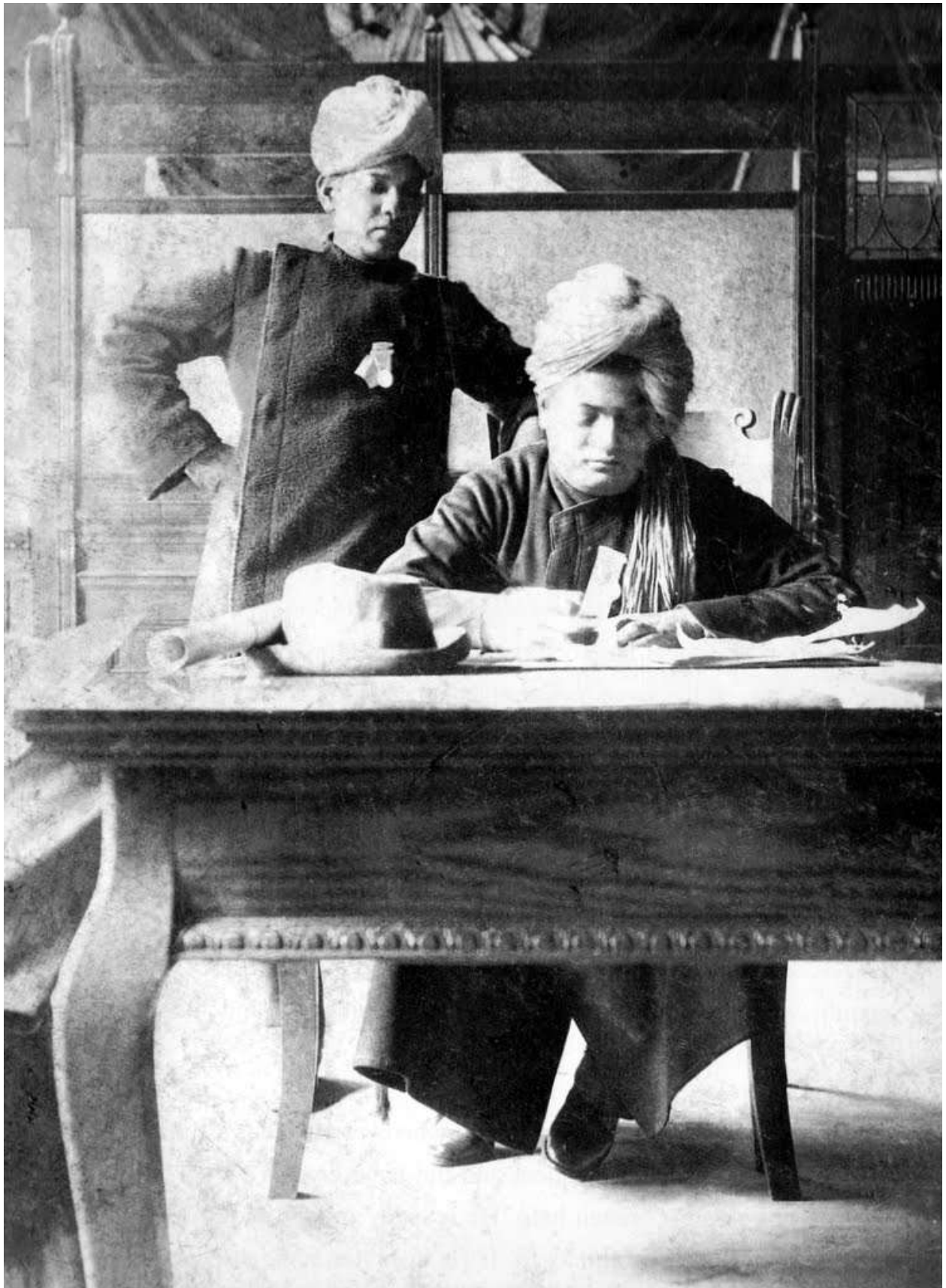
*Swami Vivekananda on the Platform of the Parliament of Religions*

*[From Left to Right: Virchand Gandhi, Hewivitarne Dharmapala,  
Swami Vivekananda, G. Bonet Maury]*



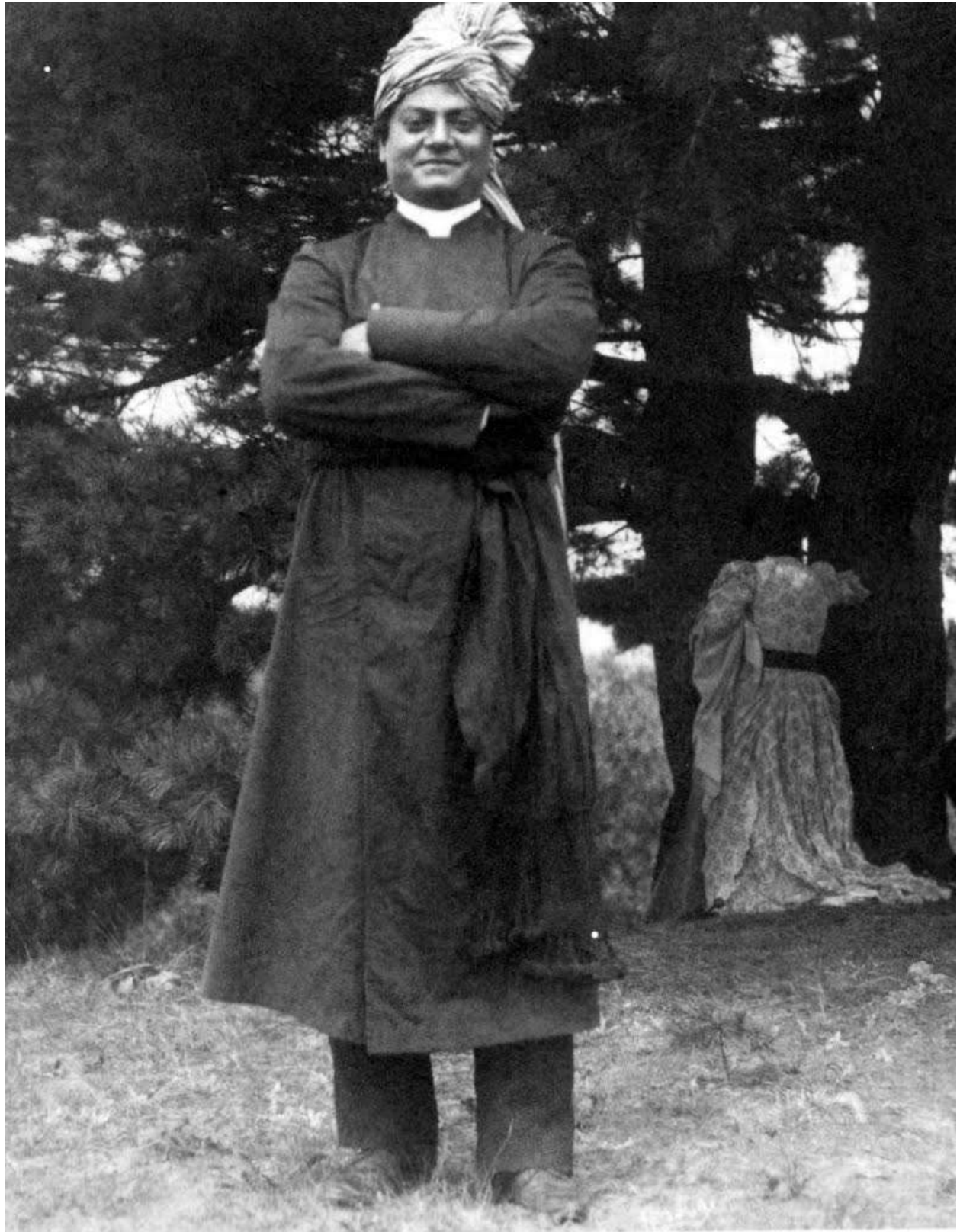
*Chicago, September 1893*

*Room No. 1, Art Palace*



*Green Acre, August 1894*





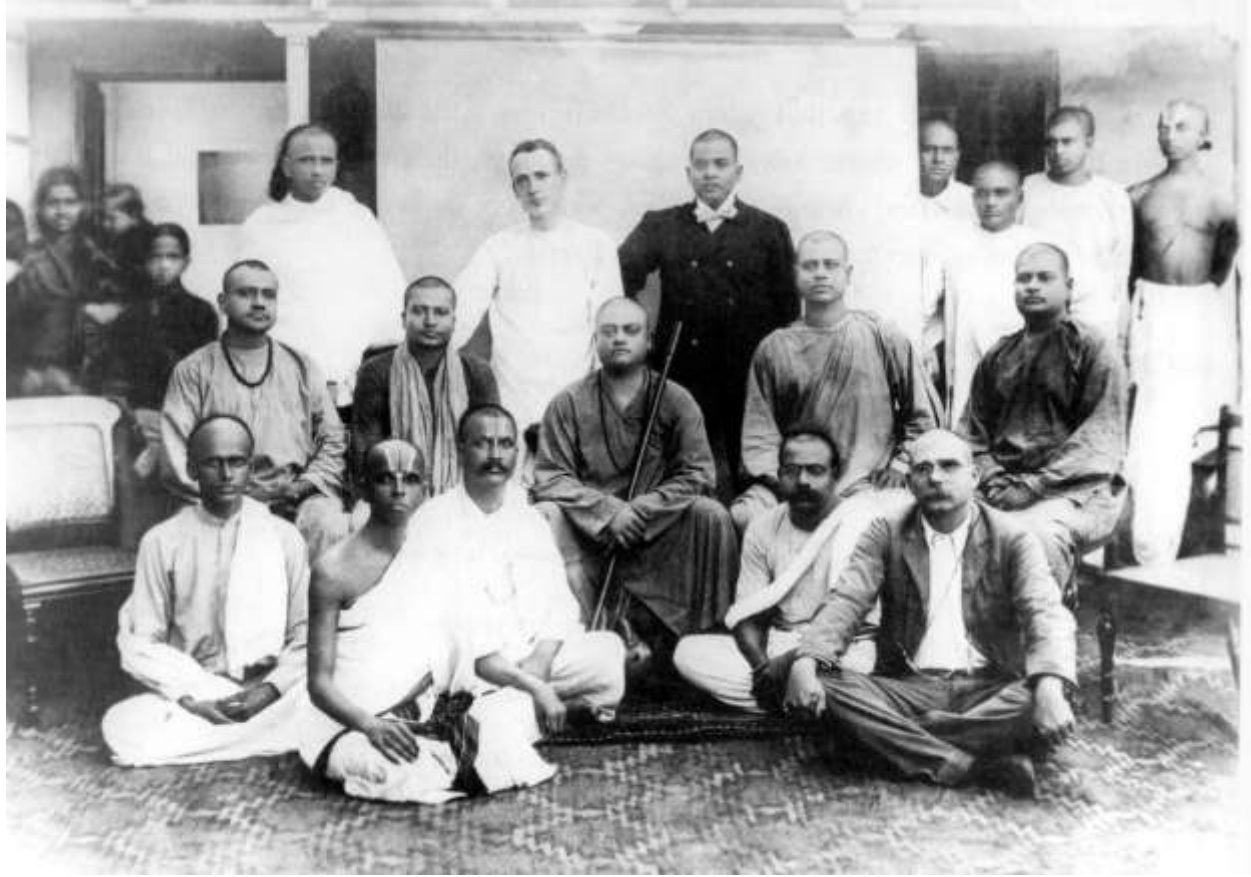
*London, December 1896*



*Colombo, January 1897*



*Madras, February 1897*



*Kashmir, September 20, 1898*

*[Left to Right: Josephine MacLeod,  
Mrs. Ole Bull, Swami Vivekananda and  
Sister Nivedita]*





*South Pasadena, California, January 1900*



*California, 1900*



*San Francisco, 1900*



*Shillong, 1901*

*Perhaps the last photo of Swami Vivekananda*





