

Modernity in Hindu Monasticism: Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Movement

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts first to define "modernity" within a Hindu context, using *Religion in Modern India* (Robert D. Baird, ed.) and *Modern Religious Movements in India* (J.N. Farquhar) as points of departure. Many of the Hindu thinkers studied by both the Baird and the Farquhar texts were either monastic or ascetic leaders, and of the four Hindu modern movements described in the Baird edition, three were monastic centered movements. Thus, "modern" in the Hindu context is closely interrelated with a monastic or an ascetic way of life and with monastic movements as institutions of socio-religious change. Indeed, Aghananda Bharati, in his insightful article entitled, "The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns" (1970), identifies Swami Vivekananda, who is a key figure in the Baird and Farquhar texts, as an ideal model of a scientific, modern man, who, nevertheless is a monastic. Bharati concludes that "Modern Hindus derive their knowledge of Hinduism from Vivekananda, directly or indirectly."

The remainder of the paper provides an analysis of Swami Vivekananda's definition of modernity, which he first formulated in 1893 at the World's Parliament of Religions. The paper concludes with notes on the monastic institution, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, that Vivekananda founded in order to carry out his vision of Hindu modernity.

Introduction. The problem of defining modern/modernity within the Hindu context

Religion in Modern India (1989), edited by Robert D. Baird, now in its third edition, introduces the reader to those Hindu religious leaders and thinkers who are considered by most Hindu studies scholars as the Fathers of Modern Hindu India. This list includes: Rammohun Roy, Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Three were monastics, and Gandhi lived a life guided by the monastic vows of chastity and poverty. It could be argued that

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the other three, Roy, Tagore and Radhakrishnan often functioned as charismatic gurus; this was certainly true of Rammohun Roy's successor in the Brāhmo Samāj, Keshub Chunder Sen. Of the four Hindu "modern" movements studied in the Baird edition, three, the Ārya Samāj, the Ramakrishna Math and Mission and the Divine Life Society, are monastic centered movements that attract large numbers of well educated, upper class, lay persons. It would appear, then, that "modern" in Hindu India is curiously interrelated with a monastic or an ascetic way of life and with monastic movements, both of which hardly seem to connote "modern" by Western definitions.

One problem with the Baird edition, which is truly excellent in other respects, is that, since it is multi-authored, no clear definition of what is meant by "modern" in terms of the Hindu context is made. No theoretical understructure is established,¹ and indeed, Baird notes in his preface that "modern" refers to "the modern period (1800 on)" (Baird: vi). Anyone who has taken the Howrah Bridge to the Calcutta train station and who, from there, has travelled by rail along to East Coast to Madras City knows that India is only now entering "the modern period", at least, by Western standards of what is meant by "modern".

The Baird text, however, seeks to supplement, and, in fact, go beyond the classic work of J.N. Farquhar, entitled, *Modern Religious Movements in India* (1915), which Baird notes, "for years... has served as a basic introduction to religion in modern India..." (Baird: v). Since the title of Farquhar's book indicates that he was focusing upon modern religious movements rather than, as Baird, upon the modern period, he was able to make distinctions between modern and traditional religious movements that are helpful for my analysis. He defines "modern" as "those fresh religious movements which have appeared in India since the effective introduction of Western influence" (Farquhar: 1). The two factors that brought about what Farquhar titles as "The Awakening of India" were: 1) the presence of the British Government, following, of course, the British military dominance of India and 2) the advent of the Protestant Missions, which, at first, were not welcomed by the British Government. The two "working together" sought a reform of Indian society and a conversion to Christian principles, norms and values if not to Christianity.

Farquhar labelled as "modern" those movements, such as the Brāhmo Samāj, founded in 1828 by Rammohun Roy, that favored "vigorous reform", that denounced caste injustices, and that rejected Hindu idolatry and other such "debased" Hindu practices and customs as *satī*. Another type of "modern" religious movement is exemplified by the Ramakrishna Movement (after 1870) that sought "a full defence of the old religions", while, at the same time, adopting certain reformist concerns, such as the denunciation of caste. This later type Farquhar identified as part of a "counter-reformation", an essentially reactionary position compromised by reformist values. Although his study sought to describe "modern" movements

Farquhar did provide interesting accounts of “the old religions”, such as the Śāktas, that appeared to be unchanged by Western influence and that maintained traditional values, norms, beliefs and practices.

Farquhar’s classification, then, provides us with a continuum of socio-cultural change that ranges from reformist movements, such as the Brāhmo Samāj, that are correlated with modernity at one end and the old religions, such as the left-hand Śāktas that are correlated with tradition at the other end. In the middle he placed movements such as the Ramakrishna Movement that sought to “defend the ancient faith”, while promoting certain reforms of the Hindu social structure.

Although recent scholarship might reject or qualify Farquhar’s equation of the introduction of Westernization with the beginning of modernity in India, we, in the West, continue to define what we mean by modernity in Western terms and concepts that do not take into account the complexity of Indian patterns and forms of social, cultural, and religious development. Susan Seymour presents this problem and argues for a solution that stresses the adaptiveness of Indian institutions:

By emphasizing certain directions in which nonwestern societies are assumed to move and qualities or values they are assumed to acquire, such theories focus attention upon structural differences and implied incompatibilities between the old and the new rather than upon processes of adaption, and thus they produce an analytic gap between “tradition” and “modernity.” Tradition and modernity then become static and opposed categories: i.e., to become “modern” requires discarding old institutions and ways of life.

Some recent views, emerging from observations and analyses of sociocultural change in complex societies, have pointed to the continuities between the old and the new, thus diminishing the presumed antithesis between more traditional and more modern ways of doing things. . .

Such recognition has led the Rudolphs to propose a dialectical view of change (Seymour: 266).

If we accept this analysis of a “dialectical view of change,” in which traditional and modern elements interact with each other, we see that traditional institutions such as Hindu monasticism and asceticism, which many Western observers have labelled “other-worldly”, “escapist”, or “world-negating” institutions, have provided structures that have been instrumental in the process of change. Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, the monastic heads, the *gurus* (religious teachers) or the *sādhus* (holy persons) of Hindu tradition, have often become the principal agents of social, cultural, and religious change in India (Miller: summer 1976). Of course, this fact had been pointed out earlier by G.S. Ghurye in his excellent study, *Indian Sādhus* (1953) and by Aghananda Bharati in his essay, “The Hindu Renaissance and its Apologetic Patterns” (1970).

Although Bharati does not state it explicitly, he is well aware of the interaction between traditional and modern values in the thought of Hindus such as Swami Dayananda, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, former President of India S. Radhakrishnan, and Professor V. Raghavan, to name several of those whom he holds to be representative of the process of change from traditional to modern ways of thinking and acting. But, of those individuals who have adopted modern elements into their thought without renouncing basic or traditional religious values, the Hindu monastics or the *sādhus* are the most influential group: “When the *sādhus* are viewed as a total category, they certainly represent the most powerful bloc of agents of the Hindu Renaissance” (Bharati 1970: 278). Their very presence commands both respect and loyalty.

Yet, Bharati quickly notes that the Hindu attitude to the *sādhus*, as a composite of many diverse elements, is one of ambivalence:

The modern Hindu disavows the “old-fashioned”, non-English speaking, peregrinating or ashram-bound *sādhu* who does not contribute to modern life. Yet, all “modernities” overtly or covertly admire and venerate the “scientific”, “modern” man who wears monastic robes: Swami Vivekananda is an undisputed culture-hero not simply of all modern Bengali Hindus. . . Modern Hindus derive their knowledge of Hinduism from Vivekananda, directly or indirectly. (Bharati 1970: 278)

Bharati’s identification of Swami Vivekananda as the ideal of a scientific, modern man, who, nevertheless, is a monastic, supports the point with which I began this paper: Hindus identify modernity with certain monastics or ascetics, such as Dayananda, Gandhi and Aurobindo, but most importantly with Vivekananda, all of whom they hold to be Fathers of Modern (Hindu) India. Vivekananda first gave expression to his concept of modernity at the World’s Parliament of Religions, which met in Chicago, Illinois for sixteen days as part of the 1893 World’s Fair. Here, he addressed an international audience of four thousand people.

Swami Vivekananda: Defining Hindu Modernity

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who left India in 1893, to participate in the World’s Parliament of Religions was relatively unknown in India and was not immediately accepted by his fellow Indians, (in particular, P.C. Mozoomdar of the Brāhmo Samāj) as an authorized representation of Hinduism to the Parliament. Nevertheless, on that opening day, September 11, 1893, Swami Vivekananda was one of fifty-nine speakers, representing all of the major religious traditions, who spoke to an international audience of clergy and religious specialists in the gigantic Hall of Columbus at the Chicago Art Institute. The Rev. Dr. John Henry Barrows, who headed the General Committee and who edited and published the

presentations in two volumes, quotes an otherwise unidentified Rev. Wendte's description of the members of the Indian delegation seated on the platform:

Conspicuous among these followers of Brahma and Buddha and Mohammed was the eloquent monk Vivekananda of Bombay, clad in gorgeous red apparel, his bronzed face surmounted with a huge turban of yellow. Beside him, attired in orange and white, sat B.B. Nagarkar of the Brahmo-Samaj, or association of Hindu Theists, and Dharmapala, the learned Buddhist scholar from Ceylon, whose slight, little person was swathed in pure white, while his black hair fell in curls upon his shoulders. In dark, almost ascetic garb, there sat among his fellow Orientals, Protap Chunder Mozoomdar. Mr. Mozoomdar, the leader of the Brahmo Samaj or Hindu Theists in India, visited this country some years since, and delighted large audiences with his eloquence and perfect command of the English tongue. (Barrows: 63-64)

Swami Vivekananda, whose major address was on the ninth day of the Parliament, had been preceded by most of the Indian delegation, yet his paper, simply entitled "Hinduism" is the paper most remembered and most honored by India. Vivekananda chose a new direction for dialogue than the one that had been argued before by his Indian colleagues, one that challenged Christians in particular. After acknowledging what was, by then, the most recurrent theme heard from the Indian delegation, "India as the Mother of Religions", Vivekananda presented a critique of Hindu tradition from the standpoint of his understanding of science. Acknowledging that "the Hindus have received their religion through their revelation, the Vedas", Vivekananda argued further that "by the Vedas no books are meant" over against, by implication, Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions for whom revelation in a book (or books) had become the basis of sacred authority. By the Vedas, then, Vivekananda continued, are meant "the accumulated treasure of spiritual law discovered by different persons in different times" (Barrows: 969). That is to say, that the "spiritual law" discovered by "different persons" provides, therefore, "scientific verification" just as a laboratory experiment verifies a certain hypothesis whether the experiment be done in Chicago, Moscow or Calcutta, in 1893 or 1993.

This species of argument reflects his guru Sri Ramakrishna's (1836-1886) position that all religions are equally true, that all religions have in common a mystical core of Oneness or interrelatedness of all existing things which can be "experienced" and therefore, verified by mystics in quite different cultures, places and times. Sri Ramakrishna is said to have realized a rich variety of mystical experiences, Hindu, Christian and Islamic, that he claimed were the same from the standpoint of the experience itself. Although Ramakrishna's position has been challenged by scholars of Hindu tradition, such as, R.C. Zaehner, others, such as Agha Khan and W.T. Stace support Ramakrishna's interpretation that

mystical experience has a universal core of unitary consciousness or Oneness (see Bharati 1976; Stace; Zaehner).

Vivekananda was not unique in holding this position; it is well known that Swami Dayananda Sarasvati (1824-1883), the founder of the Ārya Samāj, believed that the Vedas contain “truths of science as well as truths of religion” (Sharma: 301; also, Farquhar: 113). Later, other Hindus, such as Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), held similar views. Vivekananda’s speech to the Parliament, however, must have been the first time that many in his audience heard this claim, which he repeated fourteen times throughout his presentation.

Vivekananda’s method was quite simple and direct. He first made a statement that characterized Neo-Hindu (Neo-Vedāntic) thought, then, he cited a parallel or similar statement drawn from his knowledge of science.² This, then, permitted Vivekananda to argue for the “scientific” verification of Hindu mystical experience, while at the same time, down-playing other religious understandings, particularly those of Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. What follows, is the first such argument that Vivekananda made to the Parliament:

The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science has proven to us that the sum total of the cosmic energy is the same throughout all. Then if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in potential form in God. But then God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make him mutable, and everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. Therefore God would die. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation. . . God is power, an ever active providence, under whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos — made to run for a time and again destroyed. . . And this agrees with science. (Barrows: 969)

I am not concerned here whether or not a well informed scientist would accept as “science” or as “scientific theory” what Vivekananda claimed to be science. My concern is that Vivekananda made the claim and in so doing put Jews, Christians and Muslims on the defensive, especially since they had recently undergone attacks by scientists and social scientists from the West. Certainly, Vivekananda’s claim helped strengthen the Hindu position in the dialogue that must have followed.

In his next argument Vivekananda attempted to substantiate the Hindu belief in rebirth of souls by juxtaposing it with what he held to be a scientific understanding:

We cannot deny that bodies inherit certain tendencies from heredity. . . the cause of those peculiar tendencies in that soul have been caused by past actions. . . And this is in perfect accord with science, for science wants to explain everything by habit, and habit is got through repetitions. So these repetitions are also necessary to explain the natural habits of a new-born soul — and they were not got in this present life; therefore they must have come down from past lives. (Barrows: 970)

This is, at best, a weak argument, as Vivekananda presupposes that souls exist, which, of course, would have been rejected by many scientists of his time who were offering physiological and psychological explanations to account for “habits” and such things. Again, I am not interested here in the truth of Vivekananda’s claim; rather, I am only interested in the method by which Vivekananda went about entering into dialogue with non-Hindus. Back of Vivekananda’s words lie the complex Hindu-Buddhist theories of action (*karma*) and rebirth (*samsara*), which have been summarized and debated in two recent volumes (see Neufeldt; O’Flaherty).

Vivekananda finalized his argument for the belief in rebirth by indirectly referring to the “experiences” of meditators and others, who like his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, “witnessed” their previous rebirths:

Verification is perfect proof of a theory and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We (Hindus) have discovered precepts 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. (Barrows: 970)

Several pages further Vivekananda concluded his analysis of the Hindu concepts of God and of the soul with these words:

So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is ‘I have seen the soul; I have seen God! . . .’ The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing; not in believing, but in being and becoming. (Barrows: 974)

One still hears today from Hindus and others the echo of Vivekananda’s words that “Yoga is the scientific technique for verifying all religious experiences”, or some statement similar to that. Bharati has pointed out that the claim as “scientific” and the use of “scientific language” are key elements in understanding “a communication pattern peculiar to the Indian Renaissance” (Bharati 1970: 273). Further, as I noted above, by implication, “scientific” is equated with “modern”, and therefore, all modern Hindus “overtly or covertly admire and venerate the ‘scientific’, ‘modern’ man who wears monastic robes” of whom the foremost spokesman was Swami Vivekananda.

In the final argument that Vivekananda made to the Parliament he returned to the point with which he began his speech: Neo-Vedāntic thought not only is the ultimate philosophy, it is supported by scientific reasoning:

Science is nothing but the finding of unity, and as any science can reach the perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal. . . The science of religion would become perfect when it discovered Him who is the one life

in a universe of death. . . Thus was it, through multiplicity and duality, the ultimate unity was reached, and religion can go no further, and this is the goal of all, again and again, science after science. (Barrows: 974-975)

Vivekananda argued not only for the superiority of the Neo-Vedāntic philosophy of Oneness as the ultimate in modern religious thought and action, but he held to the claim that Neo-Vedāntic tradition was grounded in modern scientific understandings as well. In this sense Neo-Vedāntic tradition surpassed Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions that were, for Vivekananda at least, encased in archaic, dogmatic belief systems that were counter to the findings of modern science.

Whether or not Vivekananda was admired as a modern, scientific Hindu at the Parliament is problematic. If one were to read the glowing accounts recorded in Vivekananda's official hagiography, the impression given is that:

Vivekananda. . . was beyond question the most popular and influential man in the Parliament. . . Hundreds of enlightened and liberal — minded persons, Emersonians, Transcendentalists, Neo-Christians, Theosophists, Universalists, Congregationalists, either hearing him personally while in attendance at the Parliament, or reading the glowing accounts about him, felt that the Swami was, indeed, another Oriental Master come to them with a new message. (Disciples: 312-313)

Of course, the authors intended by the words "another Oriental Master" to equate Vivekananda with the Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed and perhaps, even Zoroaster. Vivekananda's disciples hold that their Master brought to the Parliament a new message for a new time, an universal religion for modernity.

In his last appearance before the Parliament Vivekananda restated the position of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, that he did not intend that "the Christian would become a Hindu. God forbid. (nor) The Hindu or Buddhist would become a Christian. God forbid" (Barrows: 170). Rather, he stressed "the common ground of religious unity", which the Parliament now understood meant a mystical core, a Oneness of religious traditions, characteristic of that already achieved in the philosophical thought of Neo-Vedānta. This position was taken-up later by a host of Hindu monastics, gurus and philosophers, most notably by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, whom Bharati acknowledges as: "the foremost interpreter of that segment of Indian thought which has seeped through to the Renaissance" (Bharati 1970: 281). But, whatever might be said of Swami Vivekananda's speeches to the Parliament, he was the first to set the tone, to establish the direction and to provide the rhetoric that the dialogue of modernist Hindus with non-Hindus would take over the next one hundred years. And he did so as a monastic, as one who, after his return to India in early 1897 was to change the orientation of traditional, world negating Hindu monasticism.³ First, however, let me summarize the key points that Vivekananda made in constructing his definition of Hindu modernity.

1. India is the Mother of Religions; all of the major religious traditions of the world have found a home in Mother India.
2. Ideally, Hindu tradition promotes the harmony of all religions. In fact, all religions are equally true in essence; hence, religion is One, at least, in its inner mystical core.
3. In the rationalistic thought of the Neo-Vedānta the concept of the One, the All, found its highest expression. Despite apparent polytheism, Hindus are not idolaters. Images are symbols of the all-pervading One.
4. Not only is Neo-Vedāntic philosophy rationalistic, but it is also scientific. The Vedantic truth of Oneness has been scientifically verified by sages and mystics, who, through the practice of Yogic techniques, have “experienced” the One.
5. This essential truth of Oneness is not just a philosophical/mystical concept. It is the basis for socio-cultural reform in a new India that seeks to overcome caste distinctions, caste injustices and other related evils.
6. Therefore, spiritualistic Mother India, with Neo-Vedāntic systems of thought and action guiding her, has much to teach the materialistic West. In fact, Neo-Vedanta is the ultimate philosophy for the modern world as it is supported by modern scientific understandings.

After the close of the Parliament, Vivekananda entered into vigorous debate with liberal Christians and advocated a dialogue that centered upon the points of Neo-Vedāntic thought and action that I have outlined above. He remained in the West, travelling and speaking throughout the United States and Europe until December 30, 1896, when he sailed from Naples to Ceylon and thereafter, to India. India recognized him as a national hero, a defender of a New Hinduism. He returned to India to create an elite vanguard of monastics who would provide the leadership for bringing about a New-India and the realization of Neo-Vedantic modernity. Many years later Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan recalled the inspiration that the speeches and the writings of Vivekananda had had on him as a young intellectual. Certainly, Vivekananda’s dynamic impact upon the intellectual and the religious life of India began in the period of his return from the West.

Modernity Within Hindu Monasticism

Vivekananda’s disciple-biographers ecstatically have recorded their guru’s return to India in January, 1897:

The Home-coming of Swami Vivekananda may be regarded as a great event in the history of modern India, for a united India rose to do him honour. Looming as he did upon the national horizon as the Arch-Apostle of the Hinduism of his age, and regarded as the Prophet of a re-interpreted Hinduism — an “Aggressive Hinduism”,

new in statement, and new in courageous consciousness — Swami Vivekananda was the man of the hour and the Harbinger of a new era. . . his coming was awaited eagerly by millions of his fellow-countrymen (Disciples: 452).

Even Farquhar, who is critical of Vivekananda in other respects, wrote:

He (Vivekananda) was everywhere acclaimed by vast audiences of Hindus as the Saviour of the ancient faith. . . He exercised a fine influence on young India in one direction. He summoned his fellow-countrymen to stand on their own feet, to trust themselves and to play the man; and his words were not without fruits (Farquhar: 202; 204-205).

And indeed, Vivekananda moved quickly to put his words of Hindu modernity into practical results in a program that Williams and others have titled “Practical Vedānta” (Williams: 85-104). On May 1, 1897, Vivekananda assembled his fellow monks, nuns and lay disciples and founded an association known as the Ramakrishna Mission, which sought to use the talents and the energies of his monastic and lay followers to achieve a new awakening in India and to undertake religious, educational and philanthropic projects directed at social “uplift” rather than radical social reform. He was critical of the social reform program promoted by the Brāhmo Samāj denouncing it as elitist and therefore, misdirected. Rather, social reform, Vivekananda argued, can be successful only if the masses of the poor and the down-trodden are educated by Western scientific and rational standards supplemented by spiritual training in Neo-Vedānta and are given a higher standard of living since, indeed, the less privileged are, in reality, ONE with the more privileged.

The record achieved by Swami Vivekananda and his disciples in the two-year period 1897-1899 is nothing less than phenomenal. I shall list here briefly the major projects undertaken by the Ramakrishna Mission, which are described in Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission* (Gambhirananda: 119-132).

1. Monastic Organizations (Mathas and Ashramas)
 - Belur Matha (Headquarters) near Calcutta, founded January, 1899.
 - Advaita Ashrama in Himalayas, near Almora founded May, 1899.
2. Missionary Branch Institutions
 - Colombo, Ceylon, February, 1898.
 - Boston, August, 1898.
 - New York, August, 1898.
3. Publications
 - Prabuddha Bharata* (Awakened India), a series of philosophical writings, August, 1898.”Udbodhan” Monthly Journal, January, 1899.

4. Education

Orphanage and School at Sargachhi, Bengal, December 1897.

Sister Nivedita School for Women, Calcutta, November, 1898.

5. Famine Relief and Medical Aid

Mahula, Bengal, May, 1897.

Deoghar, Bihar, October, 1897.

Calcutta, April, 1898.

Calcutta, March, 1899.

On June 20, 1899, Swami Vivekananda sailed from India, with Sister Nivedita and other disciples, for the West, from which he returned to India in December, 1900. Illness plagued Vivekananda for the next year and a half, and he died suddenly in July 4, 1902, after, however, vividly demonstrating to the world the worth of Practical Vedānta.

The new direction toward selfless service to others, especially toward the poor, that Vivekananda had given to the monasticism of the Ramakrishna Movement was continued and strengthened by his successors. The remarkable achievements of the Ramakrishna Movement are detailed elsewhere. Gambhirananda provides an excellent insider's view of the history Ramakrishna Matha and Mission through 1957. In a chapter in the Baird edition, George Williams presents a scholarly overview of the Ramakrishna Movement from its beginnings until the 1980's (Williams, 1981). One point that Williams makes is of interest here; he uses the Weberian category "inner-worldly ascetics" to describe the monastics of the Ramakrishna Movement.⁴ More recently, Wade Dazey in a essay on the Dasanāmi Samnyāsins (monastic/ascetic disciples of Śaṅkara) notes that of "the Committed Organizations" that have answered "the call for modernization", the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission is the foremost. Dazey writes:

Certainly the most famous of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, through his dynamic lectures and published works, popularized the ideal of selfless social service in India, and gave it an inspirational base within the traditional teachings of Advaita Vedānta (Dazey: 312).

Since Vivekananda's death the religious, the educational and the philanthropic activities of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission have aided hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, of Indians, establishing a model for modernity within Hindu monasticism. And, as I noted at the beginning of this essay, Swami Vivekananda is ranked by Hindu studies scholars as one of the Fathers of Modern Hindu India, alongside of Gandhi and Radhakrishnan. In fact, in Weberian terminology Vivekananda becomes the model of an exemplary prophet, whose life becomes the ideal for modern Hindu action and behavior.⁵

I turn now to the field study of Hindu monasticism that I conducted in 1963-64 and that was later co-authored and published with Dorothy C. Wertz (see,

Miller and Wertz). Of the twenty-two monastic establishments in Bhubaneswar, Orissa, the contrast between tradition and modern becomes most striking if I were to compare the Gopala Tirtha Matha, which was founded about 1000 C.E., with the Bhubaneswar branch of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission, which was established in 1919.

The Gopala Tirtha Matha, which has been historically associated with the Lingaraja-Mahaprabhu Temple, was founded by Dasanāmi Samnyāsin (Śāṅkara) monastics of the Tirtha suborder (see Dazey). Because of the influence of the Vaiṣṇava cult of Jaganatha (Kṛṣṇa) at Puri, Orissa, the name of the monastery was derived from an epithet of Kṛṣṇa (Gopala = cowherd). The massive, medieval-built structure that houses the Gopala Tirtha Matha visibly dominates the smaller stone buildings that crowd the main street that borders the Lingaraja-Mahaprabhu Temple. The traditional functions of the Gopala Tirtha Matha were 1) to participate in and to support the annual festivals and daily services of the temple 2) to administer land endowments given by medieval kings and wealthy landlords for the maintenance of temple festivals and ritual services. In 1964 the annual income of the Gopala Tirtha Matha was Rs. 35,384, by far the largest income of any monastic establishment in Bhubaneswar. Since 1940, however, the Gopala Tirtha Matha and its endowments have been managed by the Orissa Hindu Endowments Commission. In 1964 the Head Monastic, who was the only monastic in residence, had little to do; he had no disciples of status in the Old Town. In fact, marketplace gossip claimed that the Endowments Commissioner and the Head Monastic had been involved in illegal land sales. In 1964 all that remained of its medieval glory was a building sadly in need of repair, as was also the institution that it housed.

By contrast the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission, founded in 1919 by Swami Brahmananda the immediate successor of Swami Vivekananda, occupied a large tract of land at the border of the Old Town and the New Capital; although not intentional, its location is symbolic of the synthesis of the old with the new. Within the compound was a three-story, British colonial style building that housed five monastics and several servants and that had a Bengali-type temple at one end. Adjacent to the main building were four smaller structures: a guest house, a library, a school and a medical clinic, each a physical representation of the functions and activities of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission.

In 1964, the Mission administrated a primary and middle grammar school for the poor and the low caste, was constructing a high school and ran an out-patient clinic that, again, serviced the poor and the low caste. The library held 2,230 books on a variety of subjects, traditional and modern. Religious services and annual festivals were open to the general public, regardless of class, caste or religion. Yet the Matha and Mission's income of Rs. 5000 was meager by comparison to that of the Gopala Tirtha Matha, and although the monastery received support from lay disciples and patrons, funds from the State Government, in part, supported the Mission

School, which taught the State curriculum supplemented by religious instruction in Neo-Vedantic thought and practice. The Head monastic had four younger monastic assistants who were assigned to administer the Mission's educational, medical and philanthropic activities. The Head Monastic once said to me: "You Westerners come to India to learn meditation. We, monastics, have little time for that; our concerns are to follow our Master's lead of selfless service to humanity." In 1963, the Ramakrishna Matha celebrated the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Birthday in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the All India Congress Party at Bhubaneswar. Prime Minister Nehru and many other political elites attended the religious celebrations in honor of Swami Vivekananda, as did many disciples and patrons from the Bhubaneswar area. The Organizing Committee for this major event was chaired by Biju Patnaik, a highly respected Orisa politician who, some years later, was elected Chief Minister for the State of Orissa (see, also Miller, 1980).

Conclusion: The Hindu Synthesis Of The Old And The New

If I were to use the same comparative scheme that I used in analyzing Farquhar's modern to traditional types, the monastic establishments of Bhubaneswar could be placed on a continuum that would put the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission at the end designated as "modern" and the Gopala Tirtha Matha at the other end designated as "traditional". Most of the other monastic establishments at Bhubaneswar would be grouped near the Gopala Tirtha Matha, but a few others might be placed nearer the Ramakrishna Matha (see, for example, Miller-Wertz: 29-41). "Vivekananda's lead" is still not representative of the majority of monastic establishments in Bhubaneswar. Most follow traditional models, but, as Dazey noted, "the call for modernization" is being heard.

Farquhar was misled by his commitment to Christianity in identifying Hindu reform, hence, Hindu modernity, with the adaptation of Christian values, norms and attitudes, exemplified by the leaders of the Brāhmo Samāj, who, he thought, would bring about a New India, even a Hindu-Christianity. Farquhar recalls a fellow missionary's conversation with P.C. Mozoomdar, who represented the Brāhmo Samāj at the World's Parliament of Religions, in 1893:

Mr. Mozoomdar assured him that his own faith, and Keshab's also, was precisely the same (i.e. Christian), and said that the reason why he and Keshab did not give public expression to these beliefs was that they held they would be more likely to bring their fellow-countrymen to full faith in Christ by a gradual process than by a sudden declaration of all they believed. (Farquhar: 67).

After returning to India, Mozoomdar publicly acclaimed Jesus Christ to be no mere prophet among prophets, but the universal man and the universal prophet whose life and teachings would transform the world. Brāhmo Samāj

followers, under Mozoomdar's leadership, began to observe Christian festivals, and Mozoomdar's public lectures often focused upon the meaning and the message of Jesus Christ (Kopf: 23). In time, as one historian has noted, the reform position begun by Rammohun Roy and carried forth by Keshub Chunder Sen and P.C. Mozoomdar was all but forgotten by "99.9 percent of the vast Hindu Samaj", who rejected a Christianized form of Hinduism (Pankratz: 276).

Farquhar failed to understand an essential characteristic of Hinduism, in all of its many forms. Hindu tradition, or more accurately Hindu traditions, throughout the ages have adopted to and have absorbed religious forms of thought and action that have appeared on the historical scene as "new". Perhaps, the best way to make this point is to read the *Bhagavad Gītā*, which is a classic synthesis of diverse thought and action systems. All of the Vedāntic schools of thought have made commentaries upon the *Bhagavad Gītā* arguing for their particular interpretation of the text. The *Gītā* is only one example of the Hindu ability to synthesize diverse elements. One could argue, as well, that much of Buddhist monasticism was taken into Hindu monasticism, thus, undercutting the attraction of Buddhist monasticism, which in time, died out in India. Of course, many other factors would have to be taken into consideration, but Hindu tradition credits Sankara (788-820 C.E.) as the one who defeated the Buddhists (and others) in argument, who revived Hinduism, who founded an order of ascetics/monastics (Dasanāmi Samnyāsins) who established monasteries at four (perhaps, five) centers in India, causing, eventually, the demise of Buddhist monasticism in the land of its birth.

Swami Vivekananda was heralded by many of his followers as a Second Śāṅkara, who through the synthesis of the old and the new created a New Hinduism, which was not just a "full defense of the Old Religions", as claimed by Farquhar. Vivekananda's presentation of Neo-Vedantic thought and action at the World's Parliament of Religions was an attempt, like the *Bhagavad Gītā* and like Śāṅkara before him, at a creative synthesis of the old and the new, in which, traditional and modern elements were in dynamic interaction. His return to India and his attempt to institutionalize his Neo-Vedantic thought brought about a new direction in Hindu monasticism. The Ramakrishna Matha and Mission became the vanguard of modernity within Hindu monasticism that sought reform compromised by revival, that demanded of its monastics a life of selfless service to others as well as spiritual enrichment of one's religious convictions and practices. Sadly, Vivekananda died too young to bring about the Awakening that he had envisioned. Vivekananda's work has been carried on by many others, not only his immediate disciples, but those, like Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), whose long life as a modernist monastic did see the fruit ripen that Swami Vivekananda had planted (see Miller, 1981).

NOTES

- 1 Baird is aware of this problem as he notes: "since this is a composite work, it lacks the overarching interpretative framework that is found in Farquhar's work." (Baird: vi).
- 2 Vivekananda's "Neo-Vedānta" is a unique synthesis of Advaita Vedānta and Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta, with other Upaniṣadic (Vedāntic) elements as well (see Williams, 1974). Yet, Vivekananda, often thought of himself as a strict follower of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta.
- 3 Joseph W. Elder uses Weberian categories in his excellent, but brief discussion of Hindu monasticism (see Elder). G.S. Ghurye's *Indian Sādhus*, although somewhat outdated, provides a readable historical-sociological survey of Hindu Asceticism and Monasticism (see Ghurye).
- 4 Max Weber uses the category "inner-worldly ascetics" to refer mainly to those of Calvinist groups, in particular those of the Puritan communities that were found in North America. In my opinion, Vivekananda and his followers would be better characterized by being placed in the category "inner-worldly mystics". Both "inner-worldly" categories "require. . . participation within the world (or more precisely: within the institutions of the world but in opposition to them)" (see Weber: 166-183).
- 5 I would characterize Vivekananda as an "exemplary prophet" who, as Weber notes, "by his personal example, demonstrates to others the way to religious salvation, as in the case of the Buddha." (Weber: 55). The exemplary prophet acts as a "vessel" who is "full" of an indwelling sacredness or divinity which is the essence of Vivekananda's understanding of the ONE. The categories, "inner-worldly mystic" and "exemplary prophet", indeed, do describe Swami Vivekananda in terms of his world view and religious orientation.

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