NAME OF AUTHOR/NOM DE L'AUTEUR_ MARTIN SHIELDS

TITLE OF THESIS/TITRE DE LA THÈSE_ Across The Black Water: A Study of Two Hindu Sects in North America.

UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITÉ_ Simon Fraser University

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED/GRADÉ POUR LEQUEL CETTE THÈSE FUT PRÉSENTÉ_ M.A.

YEAR THIS DEGREE CONFERRED/ANNÉE D'OBTENTION DE CE GRADÉ_ 1979

NAME OF SUPERVISOR/NOM DU DIRECTEUR DE THÈSE_ DR. JOHN MCK. WHITWORTH

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

DATED/DATÉ_ April 24, 1979

SIGNED/SIGNÉ_ 

PERMANENT ADDRESS/RÉSIDENCE FIXÉ_ 131 West 15th Ave., Vancouver, BC. V5Y 1V8.
NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us a poor photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de mauvaise qualité.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE
ACROSS THE BLACK WATER: A SOCIOLOGICAL
STUDY OF TWO HINDU SECTS
IN NORTH AMERICA

by

Martin Shiels
B. Sc. University of Leicester 1972

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in the Department of
Sociology and Anthropology

© Martin Shiels 1978
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
March 1978

All rights reserved. This work may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without permission of the author.
Name: Martin Shiels
Degree: Master of Arts
Title of Thesis: Across The Black Water: A Study of Two Hindu Sects in North America

Examinin Committee:
Chairman: Dr. Peter Lomas

Dr. John Whitworth
Senior Supervisor

Prof. Robert Wylie

Dr. David Martin
External Examiner
Professor of Sociology
London School of Economics and Political Science

Date Approved: 16/11/1978
I hereby grant to Simon Fraser University the right to lend my thesis, project or extended essay (the title of which is shown below) to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by me or the Dean of Graduate Studies. It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis/Project/Extended Essay

ACROSS THE BLACK WATER: A STUDY OF TWO HINDU SECTS IN NORTH AMERICA

Author:

(signature)

MARTIN SHIELDS

(name)

April 24th 1979

(date)
ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exercise in the sociology of religion, or more specifically, in the sociology of religious sectarianism. It is an attempt to investigate the history, belief systems, social organization, and patterns of development of two religious sects, which originated in India, but are firmly established in North America. The analysis is based upon information acquired through a thorough investigation of the literature of these movements, extensive participant and non-participant observation of their West Coast American and Canadian centers, and interviews and correspondence with their senior officers and members.

One of these movements dates from the late nineteenth century, when a Hindu monk from Calcutta established a Vedanta Society in New York. Since then thirteen Ramakrishna Vedanta centers, each independently administered, and each with its Hindu Swami-in-charge, have established themselves in often small, but generally stable, North American communities. The second group is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, which was founded by an aging Bengali Swami in 1966, in New York's East Village, and after more than a decade of rapidly expanding membership, drawn principally from middle class American youth, is now probably entering a period of retrenchment.

The introduction presents a summary of the development of an analytic framework for the sociological study of sectarian
groups, and points out various methodological difficulties attendant upon such study. In the two main substantive chapters each sect is analysed separately, each analysis involving consideration of the origins and history of the group, its specific religious teachings and associated concept of mission, its formal organization—patterns of leadership and stratification, methods of social control, economic base, worship, social composition, and sexual and broader familial relationships—and the relationship of the particular sect with the external society.

In the concluding chapter comparisons between the two sects are drawn on the basis of the analytical framework outlined above; the applicability of the dominant typology of sectarian reactions to the sects analysed is assessed and some modifications are proposed; and the possible future development of the two sects is explored.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td></td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td></td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2</td>
<td>THE RAMAKRISHNA MATH AND MISSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Inspiration and the Founder</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Ramakrishna-Vedanta Movement in the Twentieth Century- An Overview</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Beliefs</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Structure and Organisation of the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ramakrishna-Vedanta Movement in</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemporary North America</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>THE HARE KRISHNAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The International Society for</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Krishna Consciousness</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Composition, Formal Organization, and Worship</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Control and Relations with the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Society</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
<td>CONCLUSIONS</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td></td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td></td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selected Bibliography</td>
<td>423</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sociological studies of sectarianism have generally been concerned with the analysis of sects which arise within the Christian, typically Protestant, tradition. On the whole the very conceptual framework developed for the analysis of sectarianism has been considered applicable only to cultural contexts where Christianity is, dominant, or, more rarely, to colonial or ex-colonial societies where Christianity, as the religious tradition imposed on the benighted natives by enlightened missionaries, is seen as the new orthodoxy. In this thesis, however, I am concerned to analyse two sectarian groups in North America which came into existence in India, squarely within the Hindu religious and cultural tradition, and which undertook to bring the blessings of true spirituality overseas to the benighted materialists of the industrialized West.

The first of these groups is the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, or the Vedanta Society, which, with the exception of a few isolated Swamis and Fakirs, was the first Hindu religious movement to proselytise systematically in the West. The origin of the Vedanta movement may conveniently be dated from the attendance of the Bengali Swami Vivekananda at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, 1893. In India this
mainly on work of a social welfare kind, including schools, colleges, hospitals, and large-scale famine and disaster relief. In the West, however, it has never been of more than modest size, and eschews welfare activities as inappropriate in a materialistically oriented (and materially successful) society. Although relatively small it is well established and stable, and shows no signs of decreasing virility.

The second group is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, otherwise known as ISKCON, or, less formally, as the Hare Krishnas. In contrast to the Vedanta Society the Hare Krishnas are a recent group, founded by an aged Bengali Vaisnavite, A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, in 1966. Their number has grown quickly and dramatically in the West, and they have attracted much notoriety, but have had relatively little success in India. While both are Hindu movements they represent different strands of the highly pluralistic Hindu religious tradition: the Vedanta Society base their religious philosophy ultimately on Advaitism (absolute monism), while the Hare Krishnas are Vaisnavite bhaktas (devotional dualists)—terms which will be clarified in the analytical chapters and the appendix. A glossary is provided for the convenience of readers who may not be familiar with the Hindu religious terminology.

If the term 'sect' were taken narrowly in its Christian theological (and traditionally perjorative) sense of schism from orthodoxy, it would, of course, have no value for the
analysis of these two movements. However, both in sociological and commonplace usage, it has been appropriately employed to refer to phenomena which transcend the cultural boundaries of Christendom. Nevertheless, a lingering association of sectarianism with specifically Christian religious and socio-religious concerns, calls for a brief description of the origins and development of the distinctively sociological concept of the sect, and some indication of its usefulness for the analysis of these groups, which arose in an alien tradition.

'The Sect' in Sociology

Nearly all developments of the sociological concept of the sect take as their starting point the work of Ernst Troeltsch. Based upon what he considered to be the three main kinds of Christian religious thought, Troeltsch distinguished three religious types: Church religion, sect religion, and mystical religion. The first two he related to dichotomous forms of he believed, did not lead to the establishment of organized groups, but at most, perhaps, to small, informal, and transient associations. This last type has not proved particularly fruitful in the sociological analysis of religious behavior, probably because of the obvious empirical difficulties. The dichotomous concepts of Church and sect, on the other hand,
referring at once to types of organizations and characteristic ways of thinking within the Christian tradition, are the basis of much work in the sociology of sectarianism even today. Both were declared by Troeltsch to be "a logical result of the Gospel" of the early Church, which had an inbuilt tendency to bifurcate into opposed organizational expressions, the Church being essentially conservative, the sect essentially radical.

The Church sought to be universal, to be coterminous with society, which meant identification with the State and the ruling classes, and general acceptance of the secular order, which it in fact legitimized and supported. The sect, on the other hand, was characteristically voluntarist and individualist, and, being either indifferent or hostile to external society, laid stress on "the simple but radical opposition of the Kingdom of God to all secular interests and institutions". While the Church, in ideal -typical terms, was hierarchical, and utilized division of labor in ritual and sacramental (and govermental) offices, the sect was egalitarian in its demand for total, voluntary commitment from all. The Church was institutionalized to the point of seeking to be identified with all social institutions; the sect sought total freedom from social institutions. Church membership was virtually automatic at birth, sect membership was by voluntary adherence and proof of merit. Unlike the Church, the sect was "connected with the lower classes, or at least with those elements in society which are opposed to the State and to
society; they (sects) work upwards from below, and not downwards from above".  

Seminal, though certainly not subtle, use was made of Troeltsch's typology by the theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, whose well-known study of American Protestantism, The Social Sources of Demoninationalism, represents the first attempt to translate the Church-sect dichotomy to an American context. Niebuhr recognized the inherently dynamic aspect of Troeltsch's two dichotomous types, and made it explicit in his denominational thesis, which concentrated on the American Protestant fundamentalist sects of the poor. He agreed with Troeltsch that, for mainly economic and psychological reasons, new sects are typically generated among the lower classes of society, and went on to argue that the pristine nature of the enthusiastic sectarian movement is quickly and inevitably lost. "By its very nature the sectarian type of organization is valid only for one generation." With the birth of children into the sect the energy and spiritual vigor of the founding generation is diluted; as wealth increases through thrift and diligence (after Wesley's argument) total separation from the socio-economic life of the wider society becomes increasingly difficult; an official clergy replaces lay leadership; doctrinal and ethical compromise creeps in, the sect shifts in a churchly direction--it becomes a denomination (which I take to be a sort of small-scale Church in Niebuhr's sense).
Interesting though it was, this study by Niebuhr, restricted empirically to fundamentalist Protestant sects of the poor, represented no advance over the ideas of Ernst Troeltsch, but remained tied to the gross categories of Church and sect—whence the unhelpful conclusion that all sects become Churches in one generation. This summary thesis was retained relatively intact by sociologists of religion through to the 1950's: Howard Becker's *Systematic Sociology* (1932), Elmer T. Clark's *The Small Sects in America* (1937), and Liston Pope's fascinating *Millhands and Preachers* (1942), *mutatis mutandis*, all accepted it. A notable contribution was Milton Yinger's *Religion in the Struggle for Power* (1946) in which the concept of the established sect was introduced, significantly modifying the bald Troeltschian dichotomy. An established sect, Yinger declared, is a group which has retained its basic sectarian character—its small scale, its separation from the wider society, its totalitarian dominance over the lives and loyalties of its members—for several generations, having developed a style of living and a *Weltanschauung* which does not inevitably transform it into a denomination.

It was not until the mid to late 1950's, however, that Niebuhr's thesis attracted sustained and constructive criticism. Peter L. Berger, in an article written in 1954, commented on the crudity and inadequacy of the Church-sect typology, and suggested a more elaborate typology of sectarian groups.
took to the lists in 1957, and Yinger once more in the same year, both highly critical of the oversimple Church-sect typology. However it was Bryan Wilson, in an important article published in 1959, who was able to produce an elaborated typology of sectarian development, the utility of which he demonstrated in a major empirical study in 1961; and it is Wilson's work which has, in the long run, proved most fruitful in generating further analysis and research in the field.

For the study of 'Hindu' sectarian movements in a 'Christian' context, any typology based upon the Troeltschean dichotomy would be useless. If sects are to be defined in relation to Church, if they are typified as heterodox in contradistinction to some churchly orthodoxy, then any movement growing out of the Hindu tradition, which is characterized by the absence of anything like a Church, cannot be made to fit. Moreover, the shackling of sect to Church limits the conceptualization of sectarianism in other ways. That sects are movements of protest has always been recognized, but it is not inevitable that the protest be against the Church, or religious orthodoxy--this is a specifically Christian assumption, deriving from the historical circumstances of sectarian development in those European countries where sociology originated, and received a markedly ethnocentric cast. Protestantism implies protest against the sacerdotal, thaumaturgical, ritual, and sacramental Catholic Church, and in the sociological tradition it is
associated with increasing rationality of organization and lifestyle. It is hardly surprising, then, that attempts to classify sectarian movements after the Troeltschian-Niebuhr pattern have concentrated on the criteria of ideology or doctrine, and style or degree of organization and institutionalization. While analysis of sects on these bases has provided valuable insights into the nature of religious behavior in a Christian context, and concomitantly into the realities of the wider social life out of which they grew, such criteria would be of no value for the study I wish to undertake here. What is more, in an increasingly secularized and pluralistic society such as North America, they can in any case be of only limited use. The credit for producing a conceptual framework for the analysis of sectarianism which avoids these pitfalls belongs to Bryan Wilson. It is ironic that he does not follow his own injunctions to their logical conclusion.

As already stated, the broad sociological consensus is that the sect is a religious movement characterised by voluntary membership retained by proof of merit, a tendency toward ideological totalitarianism, and a commitment to maintaining a degree of separation from the wider society and from other religious groups. On this basis Wilson developed a seven fold ideal-typification of sectarian groups on the basis of their "response to the world". Religious movements are made by men who seek salvation, however defined, in a world in which they
feel the need for supernatural aid. Obviously, sectarians reject, or judge inadequate, the secular means their culture offers for the achievement of their aims, else the religious response would be unnecessary. Now there are, Wilson argues, eight basic supernaturalist responses to the ultimate problem of salvation from the world's evil—while emphatically recognizing that evil may be defined in a wide variety of ways, which in turn will effect the nature of the response. The first is the orthodox, the conformist response.

"The dominant position is that of acceptance of the world, the facilities it offers, and the goals and values that a given culture enjoins upon men. This orthodox response (whether secular or religious) concerns us only as a base-line—and and thus Wilson dismisses it. I shall return to it. Briefly, the other seven responses are as follows:

1) The corruption of the world is but a manifestation of the corruption of men's hearts. It is useless to try to change the world directly; what is needed is a change of heart by everyone. The individual must personally experience conversion, the emotional transformation of the self into the condition of being "saved". Only this experience will do—ritual, reform, priests or prayers, are useless without it. When all men have had the "heart experience" of salvation we might hope for a better world—not before, and never without. This is the conversionist response. Examples are fundamentalist Baptists and
Pentecostalists.

2) God is planning a world revolution. The evil of the world is intractable, such that it is beyond the power of man to alter it. The world will therefore be destroyed, and all the sinners with it--save for the few, the true believers. These believers, it must be noted, do not intend to destroy the world themselves--that will be the work of divine power. But they may be called upon to aid the forces of light when the sign is given. Here it is not inner, emotional change, but transformation of the external, especially the social, world which is demanded. This is the revolutionist response. Well known examples are the Millerites of Nineteenth Century America, and the Jahovah's Witnesses.

3) A third response to the perception of the world as evil is to withdraw from it, to leave it to stew in its own corruption, and, literally, to go to the Devil. The world is so evil that to avoid sinful contamination the faithful must abandon it, and form a purified communion of the saved. This is the introversionist response, well represented by the Hutterites and some of the more isolationist or radical Mennonite groups.

4) The conversionist seeks salvation in a transformed self, the revolutionist awaits a transformed world, while the introversionist withdraws into a purified community. A fourth response is narrower than these three, and has a more specific conception of evil. The manipulationist response is to seek a
transformed set of techniques for coping with the world's evil. Immediate and permanent salvation is sought in the realm of everyday wellbeing, a salvation which is reached by learning the true principles underlying man and his world—a kind of gnosis. Nor is salvation merely spiritual or transcendental; indeed, success in acquiring a measure of the scarce goods of this world—health, wealth, longevity, and success here and now—at once demonstrates the efficacy of this knowledge and implies the salvation of the individual. Once the new conception of reality is learnt the world may be manipulated, good achieved, and evil, as it affects the individual believer, negated. The best known approximation to this type is probably Christian Science.

5) An even narrower, more particularistic view of salvation from evil, is held by thaumaturgical movements. It is immediate and specific ills of a physical and mental kind which are the object of thaumaturgical response. The belief here is that the supernatural is active in the world of men, and those who are aware of this can benefit thereby; the ills of life may be relieved, and a state of blissful release from pain and trouble be obtained. This salvation is a strictly personal one; healing, foresight, avoidance of calamity, balm for the grief of bereavement, and the concrete guarantee of a life after death, are typically what salvation means; and miracles, marvels, and oracles, are the instruments of its attainment. Spiritualism is highly thaumaturgical, as are the snake-handling groups of the
Southern United States.

6) A sixth response, the reformist, is based on the belief in the divinely inspired reform of social life. The world (i.e. the social world) must be amended in specific ways revealed to those whose hearts and minds are receptive to divine inspiration. Thus men, with the help of the divine, may set the world to rights, and evil may be defeated. Obviously this is close to secular reformism, differing only, but essentially, in the fact that the attainment of certain social reforms is felt to be desired by God, and possibly, to some extent, assisted by his power. This kind of group is rare, occurring only in advanced societies, and only in groups which have undergone long development. The Quakers are an example of this type.

7) The final response is also something of a rarity. This represents an attempt radically and totally to transform the world by constructing a society in conformity with divinely revealed plans—"God's blueprints" as they have been called.¹⁶ The basic principles of this reconstruction may be discovered in sacred scripture, or revealed directly through charismatic inspiration: in either case a perfect society, a panacea for the world's evil, is to be built. This must be carefully distinguished from the introversionist response, which sees the world as irredeemably evil and to be abandoned. Utopians may temporarily withdraw, but only to construct a model for the eventual reconstruction of the world according to God's plan.
The Shakers and the Oneida Community in the early stages of their development are good examples of this rare response.

This ideal-typology based on "response" is particularly valuable for the analysis of sectarian movements in its escape from the ethnocentric elements embedded in the analytical criteria of ideology and organization. It need not be assumed, for instance, that the typical features of specifically Christian sectarianism must be present—exclusivity, formal organizational structure and internal coherence. As Wilson rightly points out "response to the world, much more evidently than mission, may be manifested in many relatively unfocussed, unpurposive activities, and not only in activities, but also in life-style, association, and ideology".17 It avoids the proliferation of more or less perjorative terminology, and provides a coherent conceptual framework for the analysis of all supernaturalist responses by men to circumstances—a thoroughly sociological approach. What is more, Wilson recognizes explicitly that sects, as movements of protest, are not (and never were) necessarily protesting against the Church. The protest "may be against the State, against the secular institutions of society, or in opposition to or separation from particular institutions or groups within the society".18

Nevertheless, following the traditional descriptions of religious sectarianism, Wilson makes the rejection of religions orthodoxy a defining characteristic. Given the Christian concept
of religious orthodoxy this is logical, but here Wilson is attempting precisely to define sectarianism in a way which transcends cultural Christendom. He half recognizes his partial failure to do so (or better, perhaps, half fails to recognize his success) when he declares that in the Hindu religious tradition, which is diffuse and pluralistic, lacking a single identifiable orthodoxy, such as a Church for example, "sectarianism exists only in a much more limited sense than in Christendom". However, this is only true if the Christian concept of orthodoxy is retained, and ironically Wilson's own conceptual framework, based on response to the world, obviates the necessity for this retention.

Orthodoxy of a kind recognisable in the Christian cultural tradition is not universal, but concern with transcendence over evil and the search for salvation are, and it is these which call for a response to the world of a supernaturalist kind. Necessarily, when the response is of any given kind, some of the possibilities set forth in Wilson's typification are retained, others rejected. That both the ones retained and those rejected may be covered by a sacred canopy which has no orthodoxy in the Christian sense, is irrelevant. In the Christian tradition it is not culturally available facilities that are rejected, as Wilson maintains, but culturally orthodox ones. But this is a concept of orthodoxy which stems from the very Christian cultural tradition which Wilson is seeking to transcend. The defining
characteristic of sectarian response, I would suggest, is not so much rejection of cultural facilities for salvation, as selection from among the range of facilities conceivable in a given culture—which, of course, implies rejection of all those not selected.

This is not necessarily to say that the sectarian selects a response from a consciously perceived range of possible alternatives. In a Christian context it is perhaps more likely that he will view his alternatives rather in a way which, significantly, recalls the Church-sect dichotomy--acceptance of a corrupted orthodoxy, or its rejection and adherence to the "one true way". On the other hand, selection from among a number of what are self-consciously viewed as alternatives is most likely to occur in a cultural context such as India's, which quite lacks the Christian concept of orthodoxy. 20

Empirical Analysis of Religious Sects

In recent years the sociological study of sectarianism has gained considerably in popularity. This is partly because of the renewal of theoretical interest in the late 1950's outlined above, and partly because of the dramatic upsurge of sectarian activity in the West, associated with the so-called counter-cultural movement of the 1960's. There are in any case certain obvious attractions for the sociologist in the study of the religions sects. For a start it is usually a clearly defined
group with easily visible boundaries, often strictly maintained. A highly articulated ideology and value system, and a cosmology which is usually more self consciously explicit and less diffuse than that of the wider society, combine with an often totalitarian degree of control over the adherents to produce a group which frequently has something of the appearance of a sociological laboratory specimen. The processes of social life, it seems, should be observable here with unique clarity—especially, perhaps, if the group has introversionist or utopian characteristics. The mechanisms of social integration and control, the sources of tension and conflict, the pattern of social change and arrangements for its regulation, must surely be open to the inquiring sociologist.

What is more, it is not merely the laboratory microcosm which the sect offers as a subject for study: every microcosm has its macrocosmic implications. The very fact that sectarian groups arise as a response to perceived evil and a search for salvation, must also tell us something about the wider society from which they are concerned to separate themselves—more particularly about those intra-societal groups, socio-economic and other, from which the sectarians themselves primarily originated. The specific evils condemned may serve to pinpoint unsuspected areas of conflict or tension in society, or may show them in a new light.
Groups such as the two which are the subject of this thesis, being the offspring of an alien culture successfully established here, may be particularly illuminating in this respect. Potentially at least, the analysis of such movements can tell us much, not only about the relationships between religious minority groups and the wider society, but also about relationships between the two cultures with which they are associated, the equivalent socio-economic strata, age, and sex groupings from which adherents are drawn, and the different patterns of rejection and accommodation with the external society in each case. To exhaust those possibilities, of course, would require a much longer study than this can be. At any rate, it is obvious enough that there is much of immediate interest in sectarian groups to engage the attention of the social researcher.

Less striking at first sight, but somewhat daunting on closer acquaintance, are the difficulties involved. The first problem encountered is quite simply the ethnographic one of gaining access to information about sects. The obvious source is participation in the group's activities, and interviews with its members; however, this is often only possible if the sociologist conceals the true nature of his interest and presents himself in the guise of a potential convert. Some sectarian groups are prepared to accept the researcher qua sociologist, but more are not. The sociologist is perceived at best as a professional sceptic, at worst as a closed-minded cynic and an emissary of
demonic forces. He is the representative of secularism par excellence, a scoffer at the divine, one who would give the lie to Eternal Truth, who calls the Word of God "ideology", and takes the unreality of the supernatural as simply a given. If tolerated by the sectarians at all, it is usually on the charitable assumption that even sociologists have souls to save, and in this case the problem is to get the interviewees to talk of anything but salvation. The kinds of questions the researcher wants to ask might be considered irrelevant and meaningless, or even impertinent or sinful.

The alternative is the resort to subterfuge, to "concealed participation" as an intending convert, or even a convinced adherent. This, of course, raises a problem of ethics for the researcher which each must resolve according to his conscience; but even beyond that there are a number of practical difficulties. In the first place it is not an easy pose to maintain without a level of the spian skill, and a thicker skin than many researchers are likely to have. The genuine aspirant is a naive seeker for conversion, and generally has an air of breathless receptivity, an eagerness for the "truth", and a tendency to instant, nodding agreement with the teacher, that are particularly hard to counterfeit. They are also not necessarily productive of the kind of first-hand information which the sociologist is really seeking. Curiosity and watchfulness, rather than receptivity and a desire for involvement, are what
characterise the research worker, and this lends an air of the secular to his presence which invites suspicion. The difficulties need not be labored. Suffice it to say that as a rule this kind of research is of limited value, and can usually be successfully maintained only for relatively short periods.

Another fairly obvious place to turn for information is to rejected members and apostates, but these are not often the rich resource they might be. In the event they may have only the vaguest and most superficial knowledge of the sect, and their views may also be distorted by the bitterness of rejection and a desire to vindicate themselves. On the other hand ex-members of a sect may wish to rejoin the group, or have already joined some other group; in any case, they are not usually any more favorably disposed towards sociologists, or less hostile to "the world", than the group in question.

In many cases the easiest resources to tap are literary ones, and they can be very fruitful. A difficulty here is that the literary output of sectarian groups seldom has much circulation outside the membership, and may quickly disappear from the scene. Such ephemera are hard to trace, and may necessitate systematic searching through many piles of dusty magazines and obscure religious journals. On the other hand some sectarian movements consider the printing press to be God\'s instrument for the propagation of his word, and concentrate much of their resources on literary evangelism. In these cases,
horribile dictu, the sheer bulk of material to be read can be overwhelming, and in pursuit of but a few enlightening details, long journeys through tomes of recondite theology and inscrutable exegesis may be required. As in the case of the face to face approach, the information of interest to the sociologist is not necessarily what the sectarian is concerned to convey. The details of social life and practices in the group may be taken for granted or concealed, dates are treated cavalierly, and statistics of membership are routinely exaggerated.

Such are the drawbacks of relying on primary literary sources: what, then, of secondary sources? Accounts by contemporary journalists may contain material of interest, especially since it is not usually the doctrines but the social practices of a sect which are accounted "good copy". But all too often such descriptions are marred by inaccuracies and a tendency to sensationalize. Sometimes the rebuttal of these journalistic reports by the sects' official spokesman is a better source. In the case of older and larger sects, particularly, a certain amount of scholarly attention may have been attracted. Histories which cite sectarian movements as illustrative, or of marginal interest, usually contain overly gross characterizations; but occasionally historical, or even sociological reports on specific sects are available. Such sources are potentially of immense value, but are rare.
Those are some of the impediments to be overcome in the empirical analysis of sectarianism. Fortunately they do not all apply to the two movements I am concerned with: unhappily, many of them do.

Both the Vedanta Society and the Hare Krishnas are in existence today, so I am not forced to rely entirely on literary and historical sources. At the same time both these groups have placed considerable emphasis upon literary evangelism, so that there is a quantity of primary source material available for each. In the case of the Vedantists this is something of an embaras de richesses, since various centers, both in India and the West, have been publishing copiously for decades. Among their voluminous output are included some detailed biographies (or rather hagiographies) and official histories, which are fairly comprehensive as far as they go, and very useful. A much more recently established group, the Hare Krishnas nevertheless have generated a large body of literature, including the translation from Sanskrit to English, with additional commentary ("purports"), of some fifty volumes of Indian sacred scripture, by the founder Swami Bhaktivedanta. The imbalance in the length of the analytical chapters reflects the fact that the Ramakrishna movement has been established in the West since about 1894, ISKCON only since 1966.

The secondary literature on these movements includes some encouragingly careful and serious studies, as well as a number of
short popular accounts, and a few journalistic scurrilities. There are also accounts written by members or admitted sympathizers, with some valid claims to scholarship, which at any rate avoid the wilder excesses of blind enthusiasm. Particularly useful for the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement was the unpublished Ph.D. thesis of Carl Thomas Jackson, *The Swami in America: A History of the Ramakrishna Movement in America, 1893-1960.* Although lacking the precision of a sociological analysis, as Jackson himself admits, the work contains a wealth of useful historical data, and provides a comprehensive and well-organized bibliography. A recent, popular book by Harold W. French, *The Swan's Wide Waters, Ramakrishna and Western Culture* is interesting, and useful in providing gobbets of recent information from Vedanta centers around the continent. At the same time it is a somewhat superficial account, and has few pretensions to be otherwise. An earlier source is Wendell Thomas' *Hinduism Invades America,* published in 1930, which contains an assessment of the Vedanta movement in the later 1920's. Again, this is an interesting contribution, but one with minimal sociological content. Many other works consulted are listed in the analytical chapters, in footnotes, or in the bibliography. That there is no specifically sociological study of this movement in print is itself interesting, considering the age of the movement, and its accessibility.
Significantly, the case of the Hare Krishnas is somewhat different, since despite its youth it has already attracted more sociological attention than the Vedanta movement. Part of the reason for this, no doubt, is the colorful and bizarre public behavior of the Krishna devotees, with their shaved heads, orange robes and painted faces, and their practise of singing and dancing in the streets. Such strange and highly visible behaviors are bound to attract the attention of the socially curious, among whom, presumably, sociologists are to be numbered. However, it is unfortunate that this sociological tendency to concentrate on the outlandish and non-intellectual groups, leads to the neglect of less singular, but no less important religious groups such as small denominations, or long established sects, which remain to be systematically analysed.

Perhaps a second, and related, reason for the sociological attention attracted by the Hare Krishna movement is its association with the so-called "counter culture". Both historically, in its early growth and development among young city-dwellers in New York's lower East Side and San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury, and currently, in the estimation of the devotees themselves, most of whom describe themselves as "ex-hippies" or "ex-freaks", the Krishna movement is linked through its membership to the "counter culture"—however vaguely that may be (and usually is) conceived. And indeed, it is as a "counter cultural" phenomenon that the movement has generally been analysed.
ISKCON has been the subject of two fairly recent doctoral dissertations, both of which have provided trenchant information on the movement, and revealing comment on the social background of its members. One of these is Gregory Johnson's analysis of the Hare Krishnas in California, mainly the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, in the late 1960's and 1970's. Emphasizing the widespread drug use among members prior to joining ISKCON, he points out some similarities in the ecstatic experiences of Bhakti-yoga (the Hare Krishna devotional practices) with the experiences brought about by the use of certain hallucinogenic drugs. Moreover, the world-rejecting characteristics of "hippies", or countercultural members of the Haight-Ashbury youth community of the late 1960's, are considered by Johnson to be paralleled in the temple communities of the Krishna devotees, which are, at the same time, more successful in providing stable validation and collective security in this rejection of American mainstream culture. Johnson's study is especially useful with respect to the early period of ISKCON's development in San Francisco, but is too localized both geographically and chronologically to be of great continuing value.

A second doctoral research project, an anthropological case study of the Hare Krishna movement by Francine Daner, involved somewhat wider observation of temples in Boston, New York, London and Amsterdam. Utilizing chiefly Goffman's concept
of "total institution" combined with Erik Erikson's analysis of identity crises in young persons, Dr. Daner discusses the conversion of members from a rather loosely defined "counter cultural" situation which engenders a crisis of identity and related psychological problems, to the total-institutional setting of the Krishna Community in which these problems are solved. The ethnographic description of the ISKCON communities (especially Boston's) is lucid and telling, but made explicitly in an anthropological and psychological context the study lacks the wider perspective of the sociology of religion.

The same is only slightly less true of J. Stillson Judah's markedly sympathetic Hare Krishna and The Counter culture, an historical and social study of the movement, mainly in California, which contains a great deal of valuable material, not only on the organization itself, but also on the social backgrounds of its Californian members. Once again, however, the principal focus of concern is the process of the members' conversion from a never very clearly defined "counter cultural" situation, to a position of total commitment to the Krishna Consciousness movement, described in largely social psychological terms.

Little or no attempt is made in any of these studies to place the movement in a sociological perspective, to make comparisons with other sectarian groups, or to utilize the insights gained from the particular study to illuminate matters
of wider concern in the sociology of religion. In short, despite the quantity of useful sociological data they contain, they are primarily ethnographic and psychological accounts rather than sociological analyses.

Other than these few scholarly works by social scientists, the secondary literature on the Hare Krishna movement is confined to the efforts of journalists, or short sections in compendiums on Eastern mysticism, new religious cults, and the like.27

This dearth of secondary literature is the more surprising in view of the general accessibility of these two movements to observational research. The Vedanta Societies are particularly open to the researcher in that intellectual self-confidence is a marked characteristic of most Vedantists, and many members evince a strong interest in social science, especially anthropology. A scientific world view in the sense of objective rationality, (as long as it is not the "closed minded scepticism" of philosophical materialism) is believe to be exactly parallel to the Vedantist ideology, in that the more rigourously and accurately the scientific method is applied to perceived reality, the closer its findings will approximate what Vedantists already know to be the truth. Ultimately, science can have nothing to say on the subject of Supreme Spiritual Beings, and therefore can never pose a threat to the beliefs of the Vedantists at this level. Moreover, the more adept Swamis are ingenious at reconciling the findings of natural and social science with their interpretation
of revealed truth. Finally, it is thought that an interest in Vedanta is a sign of "good Karma", an indication of spiritual enlightenment, whether that interest be called sociological, philosophical, or whatever. The inevitable display by the researcher of familiarity with sacred scriptures and the teachings of the founders of the movement, are taken as confirmation of this view.

It is therefore not perceived as at all threatening or undesirable that sociological or other scholarly interest be taken in the movement: on the contrary, such attention is welcomed. No resort to disguised participation was thus necessary; all questions were treated seriously and answered with every appearance of frankness; the society libraries were made available for use even when closed to the public, and with the exception of material of a personal nature, most records and archives were accessible. Interviews, conversations and correspondence with Swamis and members at the major West Coast Centers, were supplemented by research carried out in the Vedanta Society libraries and records in San Francisco, Trabuco Canyon and Hollywood.

The case of the Hare Krishnas was different, but again, generally speaking, presented no great problems. The researcher qua researcher is looked upon by Krishna devotees as irrelevance embodied, a pursuer of maya; but this in no way bars one from participation in temple activities. Participant observation,
then, is not difficult, the real difficulty lies in persuading the members to talk of anything not immediately concerned with Krishna consciousness, since this is expressly forbidden and condemned as "frivolity" or "mental speculation".

Longstanding members with positions of responsibility and authority in the movement, could, on rare occasions, be brought to talk seriously and informatively about the formal structure of ISKCON, its economic resources and its relations with the press, the police and the wider society. They were prepared to humor one for a while, in order to retain one's attention for more earnest, and more lengthy, discourses on Krishna Consciousness. Grass-roots members were extremely reluctant to discuss mundane affairs, and moreover were often more ignorant of such matters as ISKCON economics and public relations than myself. Persistent questioning about things like accusations in the press of fraudulent begging, or the instability of Krishna marriages, was viewed with suspicion, considered hostile or "demonic", and ultimately met with prolonged chanting of the mahamantra. On the other hand, the daily routines of temple life, the nature and meaning of the ceremonies, the beliefs, hopes and expectations of the devotees, were subjects which any member would willingly discuss at length.

2. In a recent and valuable article, Colin Campbell, regretting the neglect of Troeltsch's category of mystical religion, attempts to elaborate it into an ideal-type construct of the 'cult' as a quasi-group, a "mystical collectivity". Interesting though Campbell's contribution is, its real worth will only become apparent when empirical data are available to provide some concrete basis for assessment. Neither of the religious movements considered here can be fitted to his ideal-type. Colin Campbell, "Clarifying the Cult", British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 28, No. 3, September 1977, pp. 375-388.

3. Troeltsch, op. cit., p. 342.

4. Ibid., p. 332.

5. Ibid., p. 332.


7. Ibid., p. 19.

8. Ibid., p. 20.


14. Wilson's first suggested typology (1959) was fourfold, but this was developed into a more sophisticated and more useful sevenfold typology in a subsequent article in Archives de Sociologie de Religion, Vol. 16, 1963, pp. 49-63. Its effectiveness has since been demonstrated in subsequent studies by Wilson: Religious Sects, a Sociological Study, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970; and more importantly, Magic and the Millenium, A Sociological Study of Religious Movements of Protest Among Tribal and Third World Peoples, Heinemann, London, 1973. Each of these works contain a description of the typology.

15. Wilson, Magic and the Millenium, p. 21.


17. Wilson, Magic and the Millenium, p. 20.

18. Ibid., p. 12.


20. The increasingly conscious selection of "the religion of your choice" from the ever-widening range proffered to the consumer of the supernatural, is perhaps a measure of the degree of secularization in the Western context, which traditionally has had a popular, viable orthodoxy.

21. These difficulties have been discussed at some length and with great feeling by Whitworth, op. cit., pp. ???, who covers most of the points brought out here.


27. An example of this genre is the *New Spiritual Community Guide*, Spiritual Community Publications, 1974.

28. Darwinian evolution, for example, is seen as scientific groping towards the truth of reincarnation, and the atomic theories of matter in modern physics are believed to be merely rediscoveries of the atomic theory embodied in the Vedantic scriptures. (Srimad Bhagavatam)
The Inspiration and the Founder

The acknowledged source of inspiration for the Ramakrishna Math (Monastery) and Mission was a semi-literate villager from Bengal, who became a famed mystic and teacher at the great Garden-Temple of Dakshineswar on the banks of the Ganga. Very much a holy man of the traditional Hindu kind, considered a madman by some, and an anachronism by others, Ramakrishna, as he was called, gathered about him a few committed disciples, and taught them the ancient techniques of God-realization according to the Vedic scriptures.

However, he was not an organizer, lacking the most rudimentary skills of administration, and frequently being incapable even of caring for himself. It was his disciples, most especially Vivekananda, who eventually transformed the loosely-knit group of devotees, monks and householders, into the large, rationally organized and socially active religious society the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is today. In India and the Far East the Ramakrishna Mission is engaged in medical, educational and disaster relief work on an enormous scale, running hospitals, clinics, schools, colleges, technical and trade institutions, and refugee centers, as well as temples and monasteries. In the West—North America and Western Europe—the society has numerous temples where Swamis of the Ramakrishna
Order disseminate the religious teachings of Ramakrishna and his successor Vivekananda, who introduced his teachings to the West.

It is the Swamis and their disciples in the West which are the subject of the analysis which follows. Vivekananda believed that conditions in the United States and Europe in the early years of this century made the pursuit of salvation through dedicated social welfare work inappropriate. Already the social and material side of life was over-emphasised. Western culture was sunk in materialism, and needed Indian spirituality to counteract its baneful influence. Accordingly, the Ramakrishna Vedanta temples in advanced, industrialized countries, are centers of "spiritual and cultural activities only". However, in order to understand the Western Vedanta societies, it is necessary to examine briefly the historical development of the movement as a whole in 19th Century India and fin de siècle America.

Ramakrishna was born on February 18, 1836 in the tiny Begali village of Kamarpukur, to poor but respectable and pious brahmin parents. According to official biographers his parents each, separately, had a vision before he was born, which predicted that he was to be a reincarnation, an avatar of Vishnu; and indeed his given name means "bearer of the sceptre" which is one of the titles of that deity.

Although his early years at the village school provided evidence of an unusual memory and intelligence, Ramakrishna
showed no interest in academic subjects. From a very early age he was subject to occasional, brief, trance-like episodes, which were taken by the villagers to be evidence of great spiritual talent: indeed, some of the women in the village considered Ramakrishna to be possessed by a goddess.

When Ramakrishna was seven years old his father died, and the burden of supporting the family fell on the shoulders of the eldest son, Ramakumar, who was eventually forced into debt, and went to Calcutta to open a Tol—a school of Sanskrit. Ramakumar was never very strong, so that when his Tol proved successful and the work mounted, he brought sixteen year old Ramakrishna to assist him. Ramakrishna undertook the duties of a priest at the Tol in Calcutta, and was happy to do so, but he refused to study anything other than sacred scripture. In reply to Ramakumar's demands that he undertake more practical studies he is reported as saying:

"Brother, what shall I do with a mere bread-winning education? I would rather acquire that wisdom which will illumine my heart, and getting which one is satisfied forever".

About this time an event occurred which was to solve many of the problems of Ramakumar and his family, and at the same time marked a major turning point in Ramakrishna's life. In 1847 a rich Calcutta widow, Rani Rasmani, a great supporter of religious and philanthropic causes, commissioned the building of a temple to Kali about three and a half miles from Calcutta. This
Garden-temple of Dakshineswar was designed to express the fundamental unity of Hindu religion.

After eight years of work the temple buildings were complete and ready for dedication, but one problem stood in the way. Rani Rasmani was a sudra, and it was considered by the orthodox to be improper and degrading for a brahmin to officiate as her priest and accept sacramental food in her temple. Ramakumar made the shrewed suggestion that if she were to make a gift of the temple to a brahmin and endow it with funds sufficient for its maintenance, it would then be quite in keeping with scriptural injunctions and no brahmin could object to acting as priest and eating the sacrificial food offered there. The Rani was overjoyed at this solution and promptly offered the post of resident priest to Ramakumar. Ramakrishna, however, seems at first to have considered this suggestion of his brother's a trifle too Pharisaical, but soon he was won over by the obvious sincerity of the good widow, and moved into the temple living quarters with Ramakumar. Even more important in winning him over was the living presence in the temple of the great Mother Kali, and the proximity of the sacred Ganga, (Ganges).

Ramakrishna began to practice Kali-worship with extraordinary fervor, and was subject to sudden and prolonged periods of unconsciousness brought on by meditation on the Temple Goddess. His nephew, Hriday, undertook to care for his uncle when he passed into trances, protecting him from the sun, bathing
him, and making him eat and drink. Thus protected and ministered to, at the age of twenty Ramakrishna became a priest in the temple of Kali.

This development pleased Ramakumar, who assumed that his brother could now succeed him as chief priest and thus secure the family's welfare for the future. Accordingly he instructed Ramakrishna in the elaborate procedures of Kali-worship, and recommended that he take initiation from a guru, indicating a Brahmin called Kenaram Bhattacharya as one suitably noted for his devotion and experience. At his initiation Ramakrishna received his mantra, and immediately plunged into meditation so deep and concentrated that his guru was astonished. It is about this time that he dropped his given name Gadadhar, and took the name of Ramakrishna, and when his brother died shortly afterwards, Ramakrishna was formally appointed chief priest.

Throwing himself into Kali-worship with an intensity which many judged to be insanity, Ramakrishna began to shun the company of those he felt to be worldly; his obligations as priest he fulfilled with passion, and then spent the hours of his leisure in meditation and prayer. He took to spending long nights in a thicket of thorn bushes in the temple grounds, meditating and praying quite naked, having removed his clothing as a symbol of freedom from earthly bonds. Hriday began to suspect that his uncle was losing his sanity. What Ramakrishna was attempting to achieve was a vision of Kali, and he practiced extremes of bhakti
(devotional exercises) and asceticism in pursuit of his goal.

At last he was successful, but since the vision he had did not lead to a continuous state of ecstatic absorption in the divine, he was not satisfied, but increased his efforts. His behavior became more bizarre than ever and while his admirers thought him God-intoxicated and called his trances samadhi, others considered him to be dangerously psychotic and indeed Ramakrishna himself did not understand the strange alterations in his consciousness and feared for his sanity. He was seen conversing with the image of Kali as if he could hear replies; he would weep and roll on the ground, banging his head and screaming like a child in a tantrum; he reported being surrounded by sparks of light, or enveloped in silver mist; and his visions of Kali as a living woman became more and more frequent so that he saw her everywhere, and would follow his vision up and down stairs and about the temple. The bouts of unconsciousness became more prolonged and had it not been for the constant attendance of Hriday, Ramakrishna would probably have died.

Rani Rasmani decided that his mental state was too dangerous and sought to cure him by ending his rigid celibacy. She employed prostitutes to seduce him, but he declared them to be manifestations of the Divine Mother, and fell into samadhi much to the consternation of these women. His mother considered marriage more appropriate, and he was taken back to Kamarpukur, and married to a six year old Brahmin girl called Sarada Devi; he
was twenty-three years old. Ramakrishna remained in Kamarpukur for a year, and recovered much of his strength and some mental stability, but on returning to Dakshineswar immediately reverted to his former practices.

In the next three decades Ramakrishna took a series of gurus, or spiritual mentors, and systematically pursued a variety of the traditional sadhanas or "journeys to realization", described in sacred lore and practised by great Sadhus—holy men and women. The first of these gurus was a sannyasini, a mendicant nun called Bhairavi Brahmani who was learned in Vaisnava and Tantrika literature.\(^9\) She was astonished to hear the story of his solitary Sadhana, and warned him that although he was not insane, he was in some danger of becoming so by engaging in such ascetic practices, and reaching such extraordinary states of spiritual realization, without the guidance of a realized and experienced spiritual master.

The Brahmin nun took Ramakrishna step by step through the stages of Vaisnavite Bhakti (devotions), showing him the relevant scriptural instructions for maintaining the path of realization with safety. With this guru he passed through all the phases of Bhakti-yoga, achieving God-realization in each of them; he practiced the disciplines laid down in the sixty-four principal books of the Tantras, centering on meditation on Kali, and quickly achieved the goal of each discipline—any one of which is usually a lifelong endeavor. Within a year Ramakrishna was
adept and learned in Vaisnavite bhakti and Tantrism and, moreover, had gained in the process a wide reputation, and was acknowledged as an avatar, or incarnation of Caitanya, the fifteenth Century Bengali saint worshipped by the Hare Krishnas.

As a result scholars, holy men and women, mendicants and seekers from all over India came to visit the temple at Dakshineswar. In talking with them Ramakrishna gained greatly in self-confidence and mental stability, and developed an individual and extraordinarily effective style of preaching and instruction, which was to win him many disciples and devoted followers.

Subsequently, in 1864, Ramakrishna came under the tutelage of a wandering ascetic monk called Totapuri, who determined to instruct the priest of Kali in the highest sadhana,—that of Advaita Vedanta. Perfection for the Advaitist is reached through the recognition of the Absolute as formless and impersonal, through total indifference to the innumerable gods and goddesses which are considered to be mere fantasies, useful for the spiritual advancement of lesser souls who need the ceremonies, rituals, prayers, and other forms and formulas which are still on the plane of Maya.

Under Totapiur's instruction he took sannyasa, vows of renunciation, and soon afterwards he reached his goal. He entered into nivikalpa-samadhi, the highest state of identification with the Absolute, remaining motionless in this state for three days, locked alone in a room by Totapuri to avoid
disturbances. After three days he was found in exactly the same posture as before, and the cataleptic symptoms of Nivikalpa Samadhi—no discernible heartbeat, respiration or perspiration—were all present. Ramakrishna reportedly achieved this rare state after only one day of instruction in Vedanta; it had taken Totapuri forty years.11

When Totapuri left, Ramakrishna decided to enter and remain in the state of absolute identity with Brahman, and going into samadhi he remained thus for six months, during which time he was kept alive by Hriday. At last a vision of kali told him to "Remain on the threshold of consciousness for the sake of humanity",12 and he came back to consciousness.

Ramakrishna's achievement of realization by such a variety of sadhanas convinced him that all the traditional ways of reaching God, of whatever religion or creed, were equally true and valuable. This is the fundamental tenet of the Vedanta Society which bears his name. Not satisfied with this conclusion, he set out to "prove" it by seeking realization, which he equated with personal ecstatic states, including visions and the visionless Nivikalpa Samadhi, through brief experiments with religious traditions outside Hinduism. First, under the tutelage of a Sufi devotee, Govinda Ray, he followed the Mohammedan path—albeit very briefly. He describes the experience as follows:
"Then I used to repeat the name of Allah, wear my cloth in the fashion of the Mohammedans and recite the Namaz regularly. All Hindu ideas being totally banished from the mind, not only did I not salute the Hindu Gods, but I had no inclination even to visit them. After three days I realized the goal of that form of devotion."13

He saw a person with a radiant countenance and a long beard, the Prophet of the Muslims, and soon entered a state of communion with the Personal and then the Impersonal God—absorbed at last in Brahman without attributes, the Impersonal One. It is this experience which Ramakrishna considered the goal of all religions, each of which was merely a means of reaching it. A similar brief excursion into Christianity led to the same result—a vision of Jesus and samadhi.14

Ramakrishna's long sadhanas had led him to a series of conclusions about himself and religion which form the basis of the religious philosophy of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The first of these has already been emphasized—that all religions are true, that all doctrinal systems are pathways to God. Secondly he had concluded that the three great systems of thought of the Hindu scriptural tradition—Dualism, (Dvaita), Qualified Monism (Vishishtadvaita), and Pure Monism (Advaita) were but three stages in the progress of the soul to God-realization. He had reached perfection in each system and held that they are not contradictory but complementary, being suitable for people of different outlooks.15 Thirdly,
Ramakrishna was convinced that his extraordinary spiritual achievements and realizations were not for himself, that he needed none of them, that mukti (liberation) had no meaning for him, that he was an Incarnation of God. All his spiritual struggles were for the benefit of mankind, and he realized that the Mother's wish was that through him She would found a new Order, comprising those who would uphold the universal doctrines illustrated in his life.16

In March 1875 Ramakrishna first met Keshab Chandra Sen—a meeting which was eventually to have a powerful influence on his conception of the Religious Order Which he was planning. Keshab was the leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a religious reform movement, powerfully influenced by Christianity. Ram Mohan Ray, the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, was perhaps most centrally concerned with political and social reform. Under his leadership the Samaj campaigned against sati, child marriage, caste, restriction of the freedom of the press, exclusion of Indians from higher posts in any sphere, the repression of women, and so on. By the time of Keshab's leadership the social reform aspect of the Brahmo Samaj was firmly established, and widely accepted by educated Indians—even those who were not particularly religious—as pointing to the future.17

Through Keshab Chandra Sen Ramakrishna was introduced to the leading religious intelligentsia of Bengal, and became aware of the importance in their thought of Western philosophy, and the
great use they made of books and journals in the propagation of their ideas. He also came into contact with a wide social sphere, eventually including teachers, headmasters, musicians, actors, dramatists and writers in his circle of intimate acquaintance. Ramakrishna understood the potential for the spread of his ideas in people of their social class and influence.

Ramakrishna was a countryman, a semi-literate villager, whose sadhanas had been an intensely personal experience—unusually so even for traditional Hindu. It was only through contact with those who expressed their religion in social terms that he was led to express his own convictions in these areas. His closest disciples in the later years of his life were men who were not only familiar with the social program of the modern Hindu Sects but in some cases had been actively associated with them—Vivekananda being the readiest example. At the same time one must not exaggerate this influence on Ramakrishna's thought: in conversation with the Brahmo Samajists it was usually he who supported a more traditional Hindu orientation against the (overly) westernized views of Keshab's followers. And always he emphasized that true spirituality is a matter of personal God-realization, to which all else is secondary.18

The fact remains, however, that the period of Ramakrishna's life during which his idea of founding a religious order of monks took root and came to fruition, was spent in a context of close
association with these people, a fact which had decisive consequences for the eventual nature of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. It is not that he wanted Brahmo Samajists to be his monks, on the contrary he thought them too worldly and too Westernized; but he chose his first core disciples from the same social sphere. Indeed, the first group of devotees to form "a sort of spiritual brotherhood" around Ramakrishna were all educated, middle-class men, active in professional and business circles in Bengal.19

However, they were also householders, married, with family responsibilities, and Ramakrishna wanted young, celibate disciples to form the basis of his order of sannyasis. During the early years of the 1880's a few such young men did become his followers, and under his guidance began more and more to adopt a style of life which was monastic. Although Ramakrishna was reluctant to take on formally the responsibilities of the guru and grant initiation, he did maintain an inner circle of young disciples who received more esoteric instruction than the rest. One of these was soon to receive the master's mantle and his authority, and to establish the Ramakrishna Order of Monks on a sound basis.

Ramakrishna's chief disciple, and eventual founder of the society which bears his name, was born in Simla, North Calcutta,
on January 12th, 1863. He was the son of a Viswanath Dutta, a successful solicitor and later a prominent attorney in the High Court at Calcutta, and so was brought up in comfortable, middle-class surroundings. His given names were Narendra Nath Dutta.

From his mother Narendra learned much of the great epics of Hindu religious myth, the Ramayana and Mahabharata. On the other hand, from his father, who undertook much of his formal education, he gained a knowledge of western philosophy and literature, and was imbued with a rationalistic scepticism which he claimed never to lose. Later he attended school in Calcutta, but continued to read widely outside the prescribed texts, being especially attracted by the writings of such western philosophers as John Stuart Mill, Hume, Descartes and Spencer, as well as the scientific treatises of Darwin.

At the same time he had been deeply affected by his mother's long and careful instruction in Hindu religious beliefs, and the loss of his childhood faith in the colorful pantheon of Indian gods and goddesses was severely disturbing. He felt himself to be both religious and sceptic, refusing to relinquish his rationalism, yet profoundly attracted to religion and the religious life. Throughout his adolescence this conflict in his thought and feelings caused Narendra great mental and emotional distress.
It is probably this which first drew him to the Brahmo Samaj, whose members sought to be "modern" and "scientific", as well as traditional and Hindu; it was a movement full of paradox and ambiguity, and in fact was split by serious schisms. Nevertheless, attracted by the high ideals and avowed modernism of the Samaj, as well as by the personality of its leader, Keshab Chandra Sen, Narendra, like many young college students of his day, became an active member. But the Brahmo Samaj did not offer the direct, personal experience of salvation, of God-realization, which is fundamental to the Hindu religious tradition, and it was partly this which Narendra was seeking.

In November 1880 Narendra was persuaded to go with a number of friends to Dakshineswar, to visit the famous seer at the Temple of Kali. He was asked to sing a devotional song, at which Ramakrishna promptly fell into an ecstatic mood. After the hymn Ramakrishna took Narendra aside and declared him to be a reincarnation of Narayana, an ancient sage, come to remove the misery of mankind, and said that he had been waiting many years for this meeting. Narendra decided that Ramakrishna was insane: "He must be raving mad, he should be put in a strait jacket." But to humor him he promised to return alone in the near future.

A month later the second meeting took place. On this occasion a touch from Ramakrishna's foot caused Narendra to swoon and almost lose consciousness, as "the walls, and everything in
the room whirled rapidly away and vanished into nought, and the whole universe together with my individuality were about to merge in an all-encompassing mysterious Void".22 By stroking his chest Ramakrishna brought him back to normal consciousness. Narendra considered a variety of explanations, such as hypnosis or mesmerism, but remained dissatisfied and profoundly disturbed.

The third meeting was similar. At a touch from the old monk Narendra fell unconscious, and woke later to be told that they had had a long conversation, in which he had told Ramakrishna that he was truly a great sage, a past master in meditation, who would give up the body through yoga on the day that he learned his true nature. Naturally the young student was greatly impressed, and although he did not yet accept Ramakrishna as an avatar he began to spend much of his time with him, and soon became a close disciple.

For the next four years Narendra continued his studies at the Scottish Churches College in Calcutta, and also his relationship with Ramakrishna. From the College he obtained a B.A. degree in law, from Ramakrishna he learned of Advaita Vedanta, and at last achieved nirvikalpa samadhi.

Meanwhile he had resisted all attempts by his father to make him marry, and had half-formed the intention to become a monk when his father's sudden death from heart-failure revealed that his family was deeply in debt. For a long time Narendra was torn between his family responsibilities and his desire for the
religious life. He succeeded in gaining temporary work as an attorney's clerk and translator, but could not earn enough to support his family. At length he decided that if Ramakrishna were to pray for it his family would be permanently freed from want, and he went with this request to Dakshineswar. With difficulty he extracted a promise from the master: "All right, they will never be in want of plain food and clothing". Narendra accepted this completely, and thus felt free to pursue the religious life of renunciation.

Ramakrishna was nearing the end of his life. He was constantly ailing, and had been treated by a number of doctors who were concerned about his psychological as well as his physical condition, and had difficulty reaching a diagnosis. Sarada Devi, his wife, had come to join him at Dakshineswar, and for some years was in constant attendance on him, though their relationship remained platonic and essentially spiritual. At last, what had been thought to be clergymen's throat was found to be cancer, and it was realized that Ramakrishna would not recover.

Meanwhile, he was surrounded by his closest disciples, by now mostly young, unmarried college students, who, living with their guru in an atmosphere of intimate spirituality, were, not surprisingly, fired with enthusiasm for the religious life. They spent their time in meditation, study, worship, singing and discussion; already they were living like a group of monks around
their spiritual master. Ramakrishna wished to bind them permanently to religious life, to make them truly monks, the core of the religious order which was to be his legacy. He sent them into the streets with begging bowls to get their food in the traditional monastic manner. When an older devotee made a gift of twelve ochre robes and rosaries of rudraksha beads Ramakrishna called his closest young disciples together, and after a ceremony he made them put on the robes and beads, and declared that from then on they might take food from anyone, irrespective of caste or creed. In other words they were sannyasis, and having renounced all earthly ties were no longer bound by caste or other distinctions.

According to the official accounts Ramakrishna was quite clear about passing on his authority to Narendra; two incidents are usually quoted as substantiation for this. The first is explicit and public. Ramakrishna told Narendra to look after the devotees: "I leave them in your care. See that they practice spiritual exercises and do not return home". The second is reported by Narendra. Ramakrishna made him sit close, and gazing into his eyes he fell into samadhi, at which Narendra felt a force like an electric shock pass through him before he too entered samadhi. When he regained consciousness Ramakrishna was weeping, and said:
"Today I have given you my all and have become a Pakir. Through this power you will do immense good to the world, and then only shall you go back". 28

Narendra's explanation is that Ramakrishna passed to him all his spiritual powers; they became as one soul.

Ramakrishna died on August 16th, 1886, and was cremated at the burning ghat by the Ganga at Cossipore. Immediately a rift became apparent among his followers. The older, householder devotees, were of the opinion that the young disciples should now return home to their families, and to college to continue their education. The young devotees, led by Narendra, considered themselves already sannyasis, without family or any other ties, and had vague ideas of living a renounced life together. Ramakrishna had instructed the householders that they should seek salvation within the world; by fulfilling their duties as grihasthas and practicing devotions they must reach as high a spiritual level as their karma would allow. He had said nothing to them of monasticism, and they remained unaware of the different instructions received by the younger, celibate devotees, considering the talk of forming a monastery to be the silly dreams of those too young truly to appreciate Ramakrishna and his message. Accordingly these older disciples continued working to spread the ideas of Ramakrishna, as they understood them, by public lectures, musical processions and the publication of books and magazines. 29 The young monks, lacking a place to
establish their community, scattered, some going on a pilgrimage to Vrindavan with Sarada Devi, others returning home.

However, following a vision of Ramakrishna, one of the devotees, Svrendra Nath Mitra, rented a tumbledown slum dwelling near the Ganga at Baranagore, and one by one the young sannyasis returned to live there. There were no formal monastic rules in this first monastery, but they lived a life of devotion and asceticism under the supervision of Narendra, who remained there for two years. As is the tradition with sannyasis, many of the young monks set off, singly or in pairs, on long pilgrimages, travelling mainly on foot and begging for sustenance, often being away for months at a time. But the shared memory of Ramakrishna, kept alive at Baranagore by daily worship of his ashes, and the strong feeling of community generated by their years of joint devotion to his ideals, prevented the group from disintegrating. This sense of community was reinforced by the early difficulties many of the monks had in convincing their families of the genuineness and permanence of their religious status. There were even violent attempts to remove some of them from the monastery. Such incidents provided a clear demonstration that bridges were burnt, and strengthened individual and collective resolve.

Although Narendra had now seen to the establishment of the new monastic group, he did not feel that he had yet fulfilled the sense of mission imparted to him by Ramakrishna. In February 1891 he set off alone on a great journey through India, at once a
pilgrimage to holy places and a search for a mission.  

The son of a wealthy lawyer in urban Calcutta could know little of the conditions of the masses in 19th Century rural India. For more than a year Narendra travelled, usually on foot, working gradually south. He spent time with scholars in the great temples, improving his Sanskrit and studying a variety of scriptural traditions, including Muslim, Jain, Christian and Buddhist texts. He stayed at the palaces of Maharaja and the great houses of Dewans, was entertained with learned discourse, fine food and dancing girls. But he also begged from sweepers, told stories by the well in small villages, lived for weeks on little more than a handful of rice a day, and, travelling on foot, saw at close quarters the results of famine, flood and disease. Ignorance and poverty were everywhere, and the manifold miseries of his countrymen deeply impressed the young monk. 

He considered the work of Christian missionaries, however well intentioned, to be destructive, especially in that they believed the eternal religion of Hinduism, the sanatana dharma, to be in some measure responsible for his country's pitiful state an error encouraged by "pseudo-reformists" like the Brahmo Samaj. Narendra believed that only true Hinduism could in fact save his country: but he remembered that Ramakrishna used to say "Religion is not for empty bellies", and began to understand what it meant.
In late December, 1892, Narendra reached the southern tip of India, Cape Comorin, and here he had a powerful experience which crystallized his sense of mission both spiritual and temporal. Meditating on a rock off the Cape coast, he decided that he must devote himself to an attempt to restore his country's greatness, even at the cost of his own nivikalpa samadhi. His mission was as much for the material salvation of his country as for his own and others' spiritual salvation.32 Ramakrishna's maxim "Religion is not for empty bellies" he interpreted to mean that some measure of material security is a necessary prerequisite for devotion to spiritual life. If one is starving, one thinks of food, not of God.

But the necessary means to bring about this transformation of India--advanced technology, modern science and education, finance, industry and large-scale organization--were a monopoly of the western powers. Already Narendra had toyed with the idea of travelling to the West, now his mind was almost made up. He discussed his thoughts with a number of people and at length reached a firm decision to go to Chicago and attend the Parliament of Religions at the World's Columbian Exposition as a representative of Hinduism. This would give him a platform from which to launch his appeal: he would offer the treasures of India's spirituality for the material benefits of western science, finance and industry, the power of samadhi for the power of organization, spiritual science for industrial science.
The Maharaja of Khetri, grateful in the belief that Narendra's prayers had led to the birth of his son and heir, provided a first-class ticket to Chicago, a spectacular scarlet robe and bright turbans, and a sum of money. It is probable that he also suggested the name of Vivekananda, which means "whose bliss is in discrimination". Narendra had developed the habit of using a large number of temporary names in his travels, partly as a symbol of detachment, but mainly to avoid being contacted by his brothers from Baranagore, for he wished to be alone to ponder his mission. The name Vivekananda was probably accepted as one more temporary alias, but it became too well known to change. For the rest of his life Narendra was to be known as Vivekananda to all but a few old friends.

Despite his firm decision to travel to Chicago, Vivekananda's preparations were sketchy and incomplete. He had money, but not an abundance of it; he intended to appear at the Parliament of Religions as a representative of Hinduism, but made no attempt to get credentials as such; furthermore he left Bombay on the steamship Peninsula on May 31, 1893, and arrived a full two months before the Parliament was due to meet. His plans were remarkably vague, but of course he could have had no more than the cloudiest notions of what to expect in the United States. For all his study of the sciences, his legal training and his talk of organization, he was yet a Hindu Swami, drawing his inspiration and his energy from an ancient tradition of myths,
folklore, and intricate theology, which were alien to the society and culture he was entering.

Yet he was also conscious of the inadequacy of the traditional role of the Hindu Swami to deal effectively with the problems confronting his country. Thus it is significant that his two years of travelling in India, of which his journey West was at once the outcome and the continuation, was accomplished without the help, or advice, or any consultation with the young monks of Baranagore; nor did he even consider taking one or more of them with him to America. Indeed, when he accidentally met two of them, and Hari Babu (Swami Turivananda), at the Abu Road Station, on his way to the Steamer, he told Hari "Haribhai, I cannot understand your so-called religion". He described the misery and poverty of the Indian masses which he had seen in his travel, and spoke of his conviction of the futility of preaching religion to the starving. "It is for this reason, to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India that I am now going to America."33

Travelling via China and Japan, Vivekananda arrived in Vancouver, B.C. towards the end of July 1893, and immediately entrained for Chicago. He was weeks too early for the Parliament of Religions, for which in any case he had no credentials, and he had insufficient money to feed and house him in the meanwhile.
Nevertheless he had no great difficulty in achieving his object. By a series of fortuitous circumstances (in which, of course, his followers see the manifest hand of Providence) he met, and became friendly with a number of influential Americans, and by the time the parliament opened in September he had already given about eleven public lectures on Indian religion, customs, economics and social conditions. A letter from Professor John Henry Wright, a Hellenist in Harvard University, secured him the credentials he needed to appear at the Parliament, and comfortable lodging with the other Oriental delegates. 34

On September 11, 1893, Vivekananda finally found himself, possibly a little to his own surprise, sitting on the delegates' platform listening to the series of opening addresses. His own speech, which he delayed until near the end, was a resounding success. He spoke of Hinduism as the religion of tolerance and universal acceptance. "We not only believe in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true." And he quoted the well-known prayer, repeated daily by millions of Hindus of all sects:

"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 as they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to thee."

He concluded his speech with the pious hope;
"that the bell that tolled this morning in honor 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."  

With this speech, helped, no doubt, by the striking appearance of his rich scarlet robes and orange turban, Vivekananda made a remarkably strong, favorable first impression. The press reports were adulatory and he was understandably elated. He referred to his opening address in a letter a month later: "The next day the papers announced that my speech was the hit of the day, and I became known to the whole of America." Allowing for a modicum of exaggeration, it is certainly true that a wide section of the reading public in America was introduced to the Hindu monk by the press coverage of the Parliament.

The Parliament of Religions continued for seventeen days, and was filled to capacity every day. One of the chief attractions was the group of Oriental delegates, with their gorgeous vestments set off by the sober garb of most Christian delegates. Many Eastern speakers, including Vivekananda, condemned the misconceptions held by Westerners generally, and Christian missionaries in particular, about the religion and culture of India and the Far East. There were a few acrimonious exchanges between delegates, especially on the subject of
Christian missionary practices, but on the whole the Eastern speakers were listened to with sympathy and a good deal of approval, at least on the part of the audiences.38

Following the Parliament Vivekananda returned to lecturing as a means of making money. He seems still to have intended to amass sufficient money to implement great social changes in India, though he can hardly have expected to acquire it by lecturing.39 After his success at the Parliament, and his social success among his newly made American friends, he was lionized by Chicago society; much in demand as a house guest and parlor speaker, he became familiar with the manners and lifestyle of the comfortable middle classes. He met various celebrities such as Emma Calvé, and perhaps even John D. Rockefeller, and became a minor celebrity himself. The life of a drawing-room guru must have had its attractions, and the rich have souls just like the poor—moreover, for an intellectual such as Vivekananda they are more accessible.

It was particularly, though not exclusively, with the ladies that he had great success. Some of them, such as the Hale sisters, daughters of a prominent Chicago family, became intimate friends, and it is interesting that the bulk of his Western correspondence was with women (with the notable exception of Professor Wright).40 There is no question of sexual relations involved, though accusations were rumored in India,41 but Vivekananda's youth, his style, his religious zeal and exotic
presence were captivating in the natural habitat of the fin de siècle American middle class women--the parlor. As a scholar, and perhaps a scientist, he was of interest to the men, but as a holy man, a saint, he fell within the women's province.

Public reaction to his lectures, however, was not all favorable. In March 1894 a series of lectures in Detroit, emphasizing the moral superiority of India, and severely critical of Christian missions, generated a stormy debate which continued in press and pulpit for more than a year.\textsuperscript{42} Vivekananda lectured on three main themes: firstly he discussed Indian social customs and institutions, secondly Indian religious philosophy (especially Vedanta), and thirdly he lectured on the need for an East-West synthesis based on what he perceived as the universal basis of all the world's religions. It was particularly the first of these which aroused the anger of his Christian opponents. Lectures on this theme took the form of an apologia for the religious and social customs of his country, a defense of the ideals of Hindu society against the Western/Christian onslaught. It is interesting that in India the reverse was true, and that there he tended to be severely critical of the "evils" of his society.\textsuperscript{43}

Vivekananda was not exceptional in this tendency to be critical at home where he was complimentary abroad. In India, as a Western educated son of a wealthy family, Vivekananda was a member of what has been termed the "new elite" of Indian
society. The new elite were at once pressing for reform and asserting the value and worth of Hinduism, a paradoxical mixture of reformism and revivalism, which is also typical of Vivekananda.

For many Americans, he found, Hinduism was synonymous with the worst horrors of bloody paganism, infanticide, widow-burning, rituals of sexual perversion and temple prostitution. Quite naturally he was drawn into a powerful defence of what he regarded as the true ideals of Hinduism, pointing out that even the most condemned practices had their good as well as bad aspects, and that many of the worst corruptions were outgrowths of foreign conquests, not Hinduism proper. Vivekananda's opponents, especially the missionaries, accused him of misrepresenting conditions in India, and he, in turn, accused them of the same. In enlisting support for missionary work in India, American missionaries were naturally inclined to emphasize the worst aspects of social life there, sometimes to the point of distortion. Vivekananda's contrary descriptions were, ironically, not best calculated to draw money from American pockets, and moreover, were in contrast to his dedicated attack on the evils of Indian society when he returned.

Whether his original intention of remaining in the U.S.A. after the Parliament was indeed solely to raise money and gain experience of organization for social reform in India, is impossible to determine. His letters are unclear and
contradictory on this point, and his biographers have reached no consensus.\textsuperscript{45} It is probable that Vivekananda himself was unsure. Certainly he tried to raise money, and spoke of using it for social reform—though he had little success in this. Equally certainly he worked intensely to establish organizations in America and in Britain, to propagate the Vedanta philosophy of spiritual life in which he believed with such passion. In this he was more successful. Indeed, as time went on, the Swami spoke more frequently of Indian religion, and less frequently of Indian social conditions.

In 1895 following a long, miserable and rather sordid dispute between Vivekananda and the Ramabai Society for women's education in India, concerning, as usual, the representation (or misrepresentation) of social conditions in India,\textsuperscript{46} Vivekananda finally turned away from concern with social matters while in the West. From this time he dropped his idea of gaining Western support for social reforms in India, and decided to devote himself to his spiritual ministry, consolidating his work by training disciples in smaller, more intimate circles, and through the foundation of the first Vedanta Society in New York City.

Vivekananda took mean and dingy lodgings in a disreputable part of the city known as the "tenderloin" district. He chose this address in part because the rent was low, but also to mark his independence from his wealthy, female, middle class, and all too assertive, devotees. He gave classes to all comers,
insisting that they be "free as air", and flatly refusing offers of financial aid to avoid being pressured by wealthy patrons. Thus he operated on a low budget, supporting himself by giving secular lectures for which he took a fee, and by completing an earlier undertaking to give a series of lectures at the Brooklyn Ethical Society.

Those who were impressed by his Brooklyn lectures were moved to seek out his classes in New York City, which during 1895 were packed to capacity. As usual he attracted a number of American young ladies of good family, among them the MacLeod sisters, Miss Laura Glenn (later Sister Devamata), Miss S.E. Waldo (later Sister Haridasi) and others who were to work for his Vedanta Society. Also attending the classes were Mrs. Emma Thursby, a well-known soprano of the day, and Mr. and Mrs. Walter Goodyear of the celebrated rubber tires. Vivekananda lectured on the four yogas—Raja, Karma, Bhakti and Jnana—and these lectures in time were published as small books, which are of considerable importance in the Vedanta Societies today.

Offered the use of a cottage at Thousand Island Park at the western end of Wellesley Island in the St. Lawrence river, Vivekananda decided to invite his closest disciples to spend a few weeks there with him. As he wrote on May 6th 1895:

"... I have a firm footing in New York, the very center of American life, and so my work will go on. I am taking several of my disciples to a Summer retreat to finish their training in Yoga, and Bhakti
and Jnana, and then they will be able to help carry the work on.

For seven weeks, in a situation as close to the traditional guru-disciple intimacy as he was to achieve in the West, Vivekananda prepared his core followers to teach the Vedanta philosophy.

Of those present two were initiated into sannyas, the final vows of renunciation, others into brahmachari, the celibate "student-monk" stage of preparation for sannyas. The two sannyasis were Leon Landsberg, a Russian Jew, and Madame Marie Louise, an eccentric French woman. Landsberg did not remain with the society for long, though why he broke with Vivekananda remains a mystery. Marie Louise took the name Swami Abhayananda, and for some months directed classes for Vivekananda in New York, but in December 1895 she opened a center of her own, and, although she maintained good relations with the Vedantists, she remained independent and gravitated towards New Thought.

The brahmachari initiates included Miss Christine Greenstidel, and Miss S.E. Waldo (a distant relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson), both of whom worked for the Vedanta movement for many years, both in the U.S.A. and in India. One important early member of the movement who was not present at the Thousand Island Park retreat was Miss Josephine MacLeod, later known as "Tantine". She was a constant follower and close friend of Vivekananda's, travelling in India and Europe to be with him.
Through her sister's marriage to a wealthy American businessman, Mrs. Francis Leggett, later first president of the New York Vedanta society, she was connected with the highest society of New York. The country home of the Leggetts' in the Catskills was one of Vivekananda's major bases during his American work. When she and her sister met Vivekananda at his New York City classes they were already devotees of Oriental philosophy, having read the Bhagavad-gita and attempted meditation. From the very first she was captivated by the Swami, following him to India in 1898, and across Europe in 1900. In later years she went to India many times, spending long periods at the Ramakrishna Mission headquarters at Belur. She is held to have persuaded Romain Rolland to write his Prophets of New India, and was certainly responsible for promoting and financing the publication of much of Vivekananda's work. In the 1930's she was instrumental in establishing a Ramakrishna Mission society in France, and her declining years were spent working for the Vedanta Society of Los Angeles, California.

Immediately after the retreat at Thousand Island Park, Vivekananda left America for Europe. From France Vivekananda went to England at the long standing invitation of two Theosophists: Miss Herrietta Muller, (a speaker at the Parliament of Religions) and Mr. E.T. Sturdy. He met with instant success, much to his delight, and had ideas of founding a large center in London. However, he was anxious to return to New York, where he
had left Landsberg (Swami Kripa\-nan\-da), Marie Louise (Swami Abha\-ya\-na\-nda) and Miss MacLeod, in charge of the fledgling society. Accordingly he wrote to India and asked that one of the monks, preferably Ramakrishnana\-nda, come out to London to take charge there while he was in New York. In fact it was Swami Shivananda who came, arriving in London shortly after Vivekananda had left for America.

In New York Vivekananda resumed the work of teaching, and consolidating his organization. A young Englishman called J.J. Goodwin took the job of recording all Swami's lectures in shorthand, and soon was sufficiently impressed with what he heard to dispense with salary and work for nothing. It was mainly Goodwin's work which made possible the publication of the books *Karma Yoga* and *Bhakti Yoga*, which are based on lectures given by Vivekananda in New York at this time, as also is *Jnana Yoga* which was published some years later.

In addition to these lectures and classes on the Yogas, and the private shepherding of his closest disciples, Vivekananda, as usual, accepted a number of public lecture engagements, which enabled him to reach a wider audience, especially of persons interested in New Thought. His last public lecture in New York was on February 24th, 1896. It was entitled "My Master", and was the most extensive reference to Ramakrishna that Vivekananda had made before a public audience.
An interesting comment on the social composition of these audiences was made by a reporter for the *New York Herald* in late January.

"Swami Vivekananda is a name to conjure with in certain circles of New York society today... when I visited one of the Swami's classes recently, I found present a well-dressed audience of intellectual appearance. [Sic] Doctors and lawyers, professional men and society ladies were among those in the room."48

By this time Vivekananda was obviously firmly committed to the establishment of a permanent organization in New York. His attitude to "organization" had always been somewhat uneasy—he seemed to feel that somehow it militated against the truly religious mystical experience which Vedanta sees as the aim of life. Between 1893 and 1896 he wrestled with the problem of reconciling an effective organizational structure with the spiritual aims of the movement, and his disciples duly recorded his vacillations.49 However, by mid-February 1896, Landsberg was able to report to India: "There has been organized in New York a 'Vedanta Society' for the study propagation of the Vedanta literature."50

The religious and the administrative functions were not formally separated in the New York Society, which was at once a body of believers and committee of directors, but informally within the Society the two functions were distinguished. From the very first the Ramakrishna Mission turned to India for the
supply of religious need—for religious philosophy and its teachers—and to the local, Western followers for the financing and administration. The form of organization was decentralized, "each one independent", and despite occasional attempts to change this, every local society is autonomous in its administrative and financial arrangements to this day. The Swami is head of the local center at the invitation of its members, and continues as long as he has their approval. Mr. Francis Leggett was made first president of the newly founded New York Society, as far as I know the only American to hold such a post to date. Ellen Waldo was authorized to assist him and to teach raja yoga classes.

This first Society was proto-typical of the Mission's work in the West—especially in North America. The Vedanta Society of New York combined religious and administrative functions, looked to the West for its organization and financial support, to the East for its teachings, and operated as a local and mainly autonomous unit. Already the teaching method combined the lecture and class style of Western colleges, with the individual instructions and meditations of the guru-chela relationships of the East. The first Western Sannyasins had been initiated, both male and female, and ashramas, or retreat centers, such as that at Thousand Island Park, had been experimented with, and would become a permanent feature of the Ramakrishna Mission in the West. Vivekananda's determination to play down the ritualistic
aspects of Hinduism, and to emphasize the universal Vedanta (the "Perennial Philosophy") and its compatibility with scientific nationality, set the tone of the society's attitude until very recent times. The movement in the West has maintained the closest ties with the Indian movement, which clearly will continue for the foreseeable future. In fact by early 1896, with the establishment of the New York center, Vivekananda had succeeded in laying the foundations for the Mission's future work in the West.

On April 15th 1896, having lectured and taught for a few weeks in Detroit (this time without controversy) Vivekananda left for England. By now he was in poor health, though he did not perhaps realize just how sick he was. He remained in England from April to December, determined to establish a second base for his work in the West. A heavy schedule of lectures and classes was very successful, and culminated in the organization of London Vedanta Society. The Society did not survive for long, however, and it was not until 1934 that a permanent center was established in England.

Vivekananda sailed for England in April, 1896, whence he toured Europe before returning to India, where he arrived in early 1897. He was welcomed home like the conquering hero that most Indians apparently thought he was. In Colombo, Madras and Calcutta he was given a tumultuous reception, and heard the most astonishing news of his success in the West. "The Swami boasts
of having converted nearly 4000 persons to Hinduism in the States", The Indian Mirror informed him (July 18, 1896); and later, the same newspaper declared "... the Hindu mission to the West was crowned with a greater and more glorious success than what has ever been vouchsafed to Christian mission in the East". (January 21, 1897) Everywhere he was given a royal reception, greeted by Rajas, praised by the highest government officials, and lauded to heaven by the newspapers. As he travelled he gave numerous speeches, some of them harshly critical of Theosophy and the Brahmo Samaj, others outlining his future plans for the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Arriving at Calcutta on February 28, 1897, he settled down to organize the Ramakrishna movement based there.

Vivekananda was, in fact, unable to work for very long in Calcutta, before he was taken seriously ill from the combined effects of asthma and diabetes, of which he was soon to die. He was forced to spend several months in the cool north convalescing, before attempting to renew his lectures in the Krishna and Punjab. Once more his health failed, and he was never again able to lecture in India.

It is worth noting here, that in his Indian lectures Vivekananda again is the Janus-headed, revivalist-reformer. On the one hand many of his declarations are surprisingly conservative, and contain a strong note of anti-Westernism. In his second lecture after returning he actually broke off in
mid-point to berate some of the listeners for turning up in Western dress, warning them of the evils of slavish imitation of the Europeans. 52

"There are two obstacles on our path in India, the Scylla of old orthodoxy, and the Charybdis of modern European civilization. Of these two I vote for the old orthodoxy, and not for the Europeanized system; for the old orthodox man may be ignorant, he may be crude, but he is a man, he has faith, he has strength, he stands on his own feet; while the Europeanized man has no backbone, he is a mass of heterogeneous ideas picked up from every source." 53

On the other hand, while in the United States and Europe Vivekananda's message had been the universal Vedanta and nothing more, in India he added the emphasis on social regeneration for which the Ramakrishna Mission is now so famous. This element of social reformism is a fairly radical break with traditional Hindu monasticism, and aroused considerable opposition and accusations of Western influence. Western influence there certainly was, but what Vivekananda had in fact set out to do, and, in large measure, with success, was to square social reformism with Vedantic philosophy. I have set out his basic philosophical arguments and the religious teachings which underlie the Vedanta movement in a subsequent section, and in somewhat greater detail in the appendix.

The most important accomplishment of this period Vivekananda spent in India was the organization of the Indian base of the Ramakrishna movement. His first task was to convince his brother
monks that commitment to personal salvation, and hard work to better the social conditions of Indian society, were not contradictory, nor opposed to the spirit of Ramakrishna's teachings. In this he succeeded with some difficulty. Since 1894 he had been writing letters to India encouraging the monks to organize, to form a society, to make arrangements taking care of the financial and practical needs of a society of monks: but to no avail. Nothing was done before his return. Now he was anxious to get the society organized on a firm and formal footing while he was still able to work. In this he was helped, especially financially, by a number of Western disciples who had either accompanied or followed him to India. Among them were Mrs. Ole Bull, Miss Henrietta Muller, Miss Josephine MacLeod, Miss Noble, Goodwin and others.

On May 1st 1897 Vivekananda called a meeting of "all the monks and devotees" at which a new organization was inaugurated by unanimous decision, and a few days later a statement of "aims and objects" was adopted. Among them the following:

[to work for] ". . . the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of an undying Eternal Religion. Its Methods of Action are:

a) to train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses;
b) to provide and encourage arts and industries; and
c) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedantic and other religious ideas in
the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Indian Work Department:

The activities of the mission should be directed to the establishment of Maths and Ashramas in different parts of India for the training of Sannyasins and such of the householders as may be willing to devote their lives to educate others, and to the finding of the means by which they would be enabled to educate the people, by going about from one province to another.

Its work in the Foreign Department should be to send trained members of the Order to countries outside India to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and foreign countries."55

Soon centers were established at Calcutta, Madras, and Mayavati in the Himalayas. This last center, the Advaita Ashrama, was built with the western disciples especially in mind; Vivekananda consistently maintained a close connection between the Western and Indian work, and did not allow his Indian followers to forget it. "You must not forget", he insisted, "that my interests are international and not India alone..."56

The new society was called the Ramakrishna Mission Association, and was to have two departments, one for Indian, one for foreign work. The Association was never very efficient, and in 1909, seven years after the death of Vivekananda, was replace by two, formally separated but associated organs, the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, which remain the basic units of the movement. The division of functions between the two is fairly clear-cut, the Math (Monastery) being mainly concerned with the lives of monastic renunciates in India, the Mission with social
and missionary work in India and abroad. However, the authority in practice remains monolithic, resting entirely in the hands of the president and senior monks of the Math at Belur, who are not only the directors of the Math, but also the Board of Trustees of the Mission. Controlled by the elder monks of the Math, the leadership has been and remains conservative.

Very soon after its establishment the new Society had three organs being published regularly—all of them depending almost entirely on Western financial contributions. The *Brahmavadin* was the oldest, having been published in Madras since 1895; the *Prabuddha Bharata* was founded in 1896, also in Madras, but was later transferred to the Advaita Ashrama; the third was the *Udbodhan*, established in Calcutta in 1899 and published in Bengali—the others being in English. At the same time a deal of social work was swiftly set afoot, including famine relief, medical dispensaries, and a school for girls. By mid-1899 Vivekananda, satisfied that the Ramakrishna movement was firmly established and unlikely to melt away in his absence, decided to return to America. It was to be his last trip abroad.

It is probable that Vivekananda always intended to return to the U.S.A.—he said as much before he left New York—and also he felt that perhaps his failing health would be improved by the trip. He also hoped to find more money for the Indian operations, which were in constantly poor financial straits. With several followers he left Calcutta on June 20th 1899,
stopping off in England for a few weeks but not working there, and arriving in New York in August. The Swami spent a few months in the eastern states, renewing old contacts and delivering a few lectures, but he was reluctant to interfere with the work of Swami Abhedananda, whom he had made Indian Swami-in-charge of the New York Vedanta Society, and in November he left for the West Coast with the idea of establishing a new branch of the movement there.

He spent six months on the Pacific coast, dividing his time between Los Angeles and San Francisco where once again he lectured mainly to audiences attracted to the New Thought movement. He also delivered lectures before a local congress of religions in a Christian church in San Francisco and succeeded in attracting some supporters to continue the work after he left. The chief of these were the three Mead sisters, whose brother was a well-known banker in Los Angeles. One of the sisters, Mrs. Carrie Wykhoff, later donated her home to the Vedanta Society in Hollywood. This short visit to the U.S. was anti-climactic after the unique successes of his first stay, and although a few classes were set up, and a gift of 160 acres in Santa Clara County from Miss Minnie C. Broock provided the basis for a permanent center, it was to be many years before the West Coast became the important center of operations it is today.57

Meanwhile Vivékananda received bad news from other quarters. The London work, never very firmly established, was languishing;
Francis Leggett had resigned his presidency of the New York center, having fallen out with Abhedananda, and Vivekananda's health was not improving as he had hoped. He returned to the east coast, and after tarrying briefly with old friends in Chicago and Detroit, and having despatched a companion, Swami Turiyananda, to San Francisco, he left for Europe. In Europe he spent most of his time with a curious bunch of people, including the magnificent Sarah Bernhardt, Madame Calvé the prima donna, Hiram Maxim inventor of the Maxim Gun, and Père Hyacinthe the celebrated heretic.

Subsequently he toured Europe and Egypt, but at the height of this tour, possibly due to failing health, he suddenly decided to return home to India, and arrived there in December, 1900. This time there was no fanfare of welcome--The Indian Mirror quietly remarked, "We note that Swami Vivekananda has returned to India". Nineteen months of life remained to him, and he spent them quietly, out of the limelight. He had relinquished formal leadership, handing over to Swami Brahmananda, and occupied himself in teaching and training his gurubhais, and preparing himself for death. His followers believe that as a fully realized soul he himself chose the moment of his death—of mahasamadhi. If this is true it is perhaps a compliment to the country in which he worked so hard, and achieved so much, that he chose the fourth of July, 1902. He was thirty-nine years old.
The Ramakrishna - Vedanta Movement
in the Twentieth Century
--An Overview

In the space of this work it is only possible to give a summary outline of the history of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in the more than seventy years since the death of Vivekananda. Particular attention has been paid to the few most important centers, therefore, since these provided the model for the rest--especially as regards organization.

Quite a number of Swamis followed the first two Gurubhais of Vivekananda, Saradananda and Abhedananda, but few remained in the West for long. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission in India was a new movement with some fairly original, rather Western features; but it was recognizably, in some respects aggressively Indian, and it thrived like a hot-house plant. In the West, however, after the allotted nine days of wonder traditionally accorded to such events as the Parliament of Religions, eked out by the hard work and "cyclonic" personality of Vivekananda, what was it, after all, but a foreign sect propagated by aliens who were merely "darkies". The kinds of adaptation required of the first
sannyasis to labor in the American mission field were beyond the capacity of most of them, and they soon returned to India, often sick, often disillusioned. There were three major exceptions, and the firm establishment of the Vedanta Society in North America owes most to these three. The first was Swami Abhedananda, who worked hard and successfully for a number of years, before finally breaking with the movement. The second, Swami Trigunatita, whose successful career was cut short by an assassin's bomb; the third, perhaps the most successful of all the Ramakrishna Swamis, was Swami Paramananda.

The first Swami to head the New York work after Vivekananda's departure was Saradananda. He spent a year and a half in quiet, unspectacular work, lecturing and giving classes on Vedanta and yoga. A logical choice for the position, he had been educated in Calcutta at St. Xavier's Catholic College, had a good grasp of English and a sympathetic understanding of Christianity. Although he was helped by the influential friends which Vivekananda had made in the eastern states, Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn) chronicler of the early American work in Indian journals, judged that his nature was "too indulgent" for the task of consolidation.

"The Swami attempted no organized work in America. He lived about in various private homes . . . He delivered many lectures . . . he held many classes; he met many people; but he never sought to crystalize or coordinate his effort. The
organizational work would fall to Saradananda's successor, Swami Abhedananda.\textsuperscript{58}

Whatever the reason for Saradananda's failure to organize the New York Society it could hardly have been lack of ability, for on his return to India he became one of the most important organizers of the Math and Mission there, and is rightly considered among the chief founder members. Whatever the reason, he left America in February 1898 having accomplished nothing substantial, and was replaced by Abhedananda, who had been working in England for a year.

Swami Abhedananda was born Kali Prasad Chandra in 1866, the son of an English teacher in the Oriental seminary in Calcutta. Born and raised in Calcutta, he was educated at the Oriental seminary where his father taught, and so was brought into contact with the English language from his babyhood. His interests were strikingly similar to Vivekananda's. An early interest in Philosophy was sustained throughout his life, and in Calcutta he read the works of John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Hegel with enthusiasm. For a period he was sympathetic to the Brahmo Samaj movement, and at the same time regularly attended the Sunday sermons, where the missionaries, expounded varieties of Christianity.\textsuperscript{59} His deepest philosophical interest was in Hinduism, and his search for a guru led him to Ramakrishna in 1883, whereupon he became one of the inner core of the great mystic's disciples. A rather cool and aloof personality, he was
not given to playfulness, nor to displays of affection as was Vivekananda. One of his early American disciples, Cornelius Heyblom, (later Swami Atulananda) has this to say:

"He (Abhedananda) liked us, he loved us, but yet there was something in him that kept him a little aloof. He was always steeped in his own thoughts. He was kind and would answer any of our questions and remove any of our difficulties--but intimacy, he would have none."

Noted for the order and clarity of his ideas, he was a precise though not inspiring speaker, always displaying a sure grasp of his subject matter, which carried conviction to his listeners. In conjunction with his tremendous energy and notable administrative ability, this was his greatest asset.

Arriving in New York in August 1897 he set to work at once. By September he was delivering three lectures a week in Mott Memorial Hall, and by April he had given 86 lectures to increasingly large and favorably impressed audiences. His lectures were followed by question periods, which proved very popular. On Sunday, when attendance was greatest, the audience was rarely less than two hundred. As well as these three weekly lectures the Swami held classes in meditation and breathing exercises, gave private instruction to some students, wrote articles, took numerous public speaking engagements and travelled. There was certainly more of the active than the contemplative monk in him.
It was mainly the Summer months, from June to September inclusive, that were reserved for travel and public lectures—a pattern which has been maintained by many Swamis since. As the New York work was more firmly consolidated Abhedananda's travels became wider—in 1902, 1903 and 1904, and on a tour from Alaska to Mexico in 1905. In 1906 he returned to India for a few months, presumably to make a report in person and recharge spiritual batteries at the Belur Math.

While Abhedananda's extensive lecturing gained him and the Society considerable public attention, it was the work of organization which was more vital. In October 1898 the New York Vedanta Society was incorporated under New York laws, and a larger hall rented for the 1898-99 lecture season. In October 1898 some office space was rented for use as a library and meeting place for members, and in 1900 an entire house was rented eliminating the need for separate lecture hall, library and living quarters. Finally, in 1907, a way was found to buy a permanent home at 105 West 8th street. This was done in true American fashion through the issue of ten year bonds at 3½ %, to raise the money for a deposit on the new headquarters. The bonds were purchased primarily by members and their friends who were assured that "as these bonds would be secured by first class Real Estate in New York City they would offer as safe and secure an investment as railroads and could be second only to Government bonds". Not only safe, indeed, but profitable, for "A location
will be selected where property will increase in value, and the securities will therefore become more desireable as time goes on".63 This important step was made possible by the reorganization of the governing arrangements of the Society—the most important step taken thus far, and one essential to the society's survival. The original structure had placed total authority in the hands of the leading Swami (originally Vivekananda himself), who delegated authority to deal with mundane necessities such as financial matters, travel arrangements, and the booking of speaking engagements, hotel rooms, etc. to a handful of core supporters. These were organized into committees to carry on necessary business, and the membership of these committees—i.e. all those actually engaged in work of some kind—were the only members incorporated into the Society. In March 1900 the first move to change this was the invitation to all students attending Abhedananda's classes, and anyone interested in the society, to become members. These members elected by vote a board of trustees containing six people, and the board served as executive committee with responsibility for all practical concerns (thus leaving the Swami free for spiritual affairs). An annual general meeting was instituted, at which new officers were to be elected, the past year reviewed and the next year planned. There was a written constitution also, but unfortunately this has been lost.
The crucial question, of course, was financial. That no money would be forthcoming from India was (and is) a hard and fast rule; nor was the Swami to be concerned with such matters. When Abhedananda first arrived there was an executive committee in existence, which had assumed the whole burden of financial responsibility. This committee undertook to provide a place for lectures and classes, and for the Swami to live, and also guaranteed him food, shelter and clothing, in return for his free services. This was all very well for a time, and each lecture could be paid for by taking collections and relying on wealthy supporters for the rest. But as the organization grew, and work expanded, so costs rose beyond the means of the few committed members or collection receipts. A firm financial base was required, and a Ways and Means committee was appointed to look into it. In 1900 a subscription of $12.00 per annum was introduced for all members, $250.00 would buy a life membership; and for non-members a charge of 25 cents was made for attending the Tuesday lecture. 1905 saw the establishment of an Associate Membership, whereby for a fee of $5.00 those who lived outside New York could receive the Society's journal, would have the right to consult the Swami on Spiritual matters, and might use the library when in the city. (The hope was that the Associate Members would grow at last into branch centers and, carefully nurtured by visits from the Swami, would gain strength enough to support their own Swami and become independent.) On the whole
these changes in the financial arrangements were successful, and one of the most important preconditions for survival had been met.64

Another major step was the establishment of an official organ in April 1905—the Vedanta Monthly Bulletin. This journal published articles on Hinduism and Vedanta, Abhedananda's lectures and reports of Vedanta work in America. It was a reasonably successful venture, and the flow of books and pamphlets steadily increased—a total of 50,000 being reported by 1906.65 Within five months the bulletin reported: "From Texas to the Northern most borders of Canada, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, there is not a state or province from which the society has not received orders for its literature. . .66 At the same time classes were growing, attendance at lectures increasing and paying membership higher all the time. Encouraged by his success, attempts were made by Abhedananda, and a number of assistant Swamis (who came and went) to establish new centers—notably by Swami Nirmalananda at Brooklyn and Abhedananda in Washington, D.C. The experiments failed for various reasons, and though centers were established they were short lived. Nevertheless, the years up to 1906 were resoundingly successful for Abhedananda, and when he returned to India in May of that year to give his report, it must have been with considerable personal satisfaction. So much so, indeed, that he rather allowed himself to be carried away, and bragged
outrageously to an audience in Bangalore, telling them "I have started centers in many of the cities of Canada, Alaska, the United States and Mexico, and I want a hundred workers who can teach the Gospel of Vedanta." Given all these apparent grounds for optimism, it is odd that by the end of 1910 the journal was defunct, the work of the society at a dead stop, and Abhedananda had severed all connection with the New York center.

The causes of this breakdown remain somewhat obscure. The official history by Gambhirananda makes no real attempt to analyse the collapse, referring to it as a "rather delicate episode of our history," and saying very little about it. Part of the reason no doubt, was the prolonged absences of Abhedananda, and his assistant of the time, Paramananda. By 1908 the society first begins to show signs of financial strain, consequent to some extent on a financial panic which occurred in 1907. The September 1908 issue of Vedanta Monthly Bulletin was the last: it folded due to lack of funds. In 1909 it revived briefly in modified form as Vedantic Magazine, but in 1910 it became extinct.

Probably a more basic cause of the trouble than the Swami's absence, and the minor market slump, was Abhedananda's inability to get along with the society's major New York supporters. It seems that the wealthiest, or at least, the most committed members of the Society, were accustomed to a close, personal and affectionate relationship with their Swami—Vivekananda at first,
then Saradananda. But Abhedananda was temperamentally unsuited to such relationships, and moreover was committed to spreading Vedanta as far and as wide as he could—which meant public lectures, written articles, and a more impersonal approach. Thus a rift developed between the core membership of the Society and its Swami which was exacerbated by the brief visit of Swami Turiyananda who was closer to the members' ideal Swami, and the arrival of Paramananda as Abhedananda's assistant for the same reason. Paramananda, presumably in all innocence, became the idol of the disaffected, and at a crisis in the January meeting of 1908, Swami Abhedananda offered to resign in favor of Swami Paramananda. The votes went in favor of Abhedananda, but not by too large a margin, and during his continued prolonged observances in Europe (where he founded two short-lived centers in Paris and London) the troubles, both financial and personal, worsened. To recognize some of the financial debts the society had to sell one of its properties, and Abhedananda bought it from the profits on his books, which were published independently. He offered to buy the society's headquarters, but the offer was refused. In 1910 Abhedananda left the Society building in which he was staying, and never returned, thus severing his connection with the Vedanta Society. He presumably gave notice to the Ramakrishna Math and Mission Board of Trustees in Belur that he intended to remain in the United States, and as a result his name was struck off the list of trustees.
"he having made himself ineligible to be a Trustee according to the rules laid down in the Deed of Trust of the Belur Math, by settling himself permanently out of British India." 69

The Society's corpse was offered for revival to Swami Paramananda in Boston in May 1910, but he declined it, and it remained in this state until 1912 when Swami Bodhananda was sent by the Order to take care of the work once more.

This incident was a fairly serious setback for the movement, illustrating the tensions that then existed between the Swamis and the Governing Body in Belur, and between the Swami and the members. However, despite these conflicts and the resulting collapse of the New York branch, the setback was only temporary, and the organization developed under Abhedananda provided a blueprint for future success in New York and elsewhere.

While the work of Abhedananda and others on the east coast rose and declined to its uncomfortable conclusion, quite separate and independent affairs were going forward on the Pacific side. In 1900 Swami Vivekananda had promised his new followers in San Francisco a replacement Swami, and had dispatched Swami Turiyananda from New York in fulfillment of this promise. Turiyananda was not at all like Abhedananda nor like Vivekananda. Heyblom, the most important chronicler of these times, described him as a quiet rather contemplative little man.

"'Fresh from India' was a fit term for the Swami. The Indian atmosphere still seemed to hover about
him. He was far from being Americanized. He represented India as the old students [of New York, that is] pictured her,—the land of simplicity, of meditation and of spirituality.

Turiyananda arrived in the Los Angeles area in July 1900, and spent a few weeks lecturing there, and visiting Vivekananda's contacts, before moving north to San Francisco, where he joined the group to whom he had been promised by Vivekananda. A member of this group, Ida Ansell (later Sister Ujjvala) remembers that:

"There was considerable discussion as to which part of the work was of more importance, the building up of the society in the city where many would be helped, or the establishment of an Ashrama for the benefit of a few. Swami listened attentively to all the arguments and his decision was: 'We shall go to the ashrama first. Mother [Kali] is propitious.'"

Not a surprising decision for Turiyananda. And so the Shanti Ashrama—the Peace Retreat—was begun. The land set aside for the purpose was the 160 acres donated by Miss Minne C. Broock, an isolated spot a few miles from the Lick Observatory in the San Antone Valley. The nearest potable water was six miles away, and only a ramshackle one-room cabin stood on the land. Twelve students, ten of them women, joined the monk in establishing the Ashrama. Most of them were members of the Alameda Home of Truth, a group affiliated with the New Thought Movement in San Francisco. At first they lived in tents, while a meditation cabin, and then gradually other buildings, were constructed—a job made easier by the fact that one of the two male students was a carpenter by trade. The Swami disliked organization, and kept
matters informal—not difficult under the circumstances. There were three periods of group meditation, and an hour of reading and discussion: for the rest the students followed individual spiritual practices under Turiyananda's supervision. Typically, such things as long solitary walks, periods of fasting, a vow of silence taken for a day and a night, a night passed in prayer, or two or three days isolation, were the disciplines practiced. Occasionally some over-zealous student would go too far in fasting or isolation, and once the Swami discovered some of them taking midnight dips in the icy creek to mortify the wayward flesh: such exaggerated practices were stopped.\(^72\)

Turiyananda fell ill in 1901 and in 1902 returned to India, his main achievement being the establishment of the Shanti Ashrama. In many respects this Ashrama was typical of the retreat centers which, sooner or later, all the Vedanta Society centers have tried to establish. Mainly they are designed to serve the more advanced student and also disciples by providing a place for prolonged and concentrated spiritual instruction, where the relationship of deep spiritual intimacy, traditional between Guru and disciple in Hinduism, may be free to develop. In India this relationship is central to religious practice; all who wish to advance spiritually, must seek a guru—even a Ramakrishna. The ashrama is a common and familiar institution in India; it is one of the more traditional Hindu institutions imported by the Ramakrishna Movement into the West.
On the departure of Swami Turiyananda a request was made for a replacement Swami, and in January 1903 Swami Trigunatitananda, (whose name was shortened to Trigunatita at Vivekananda's suggestion) arrived from India. To the Indian disciples of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, Trigunatita was known to be among the most energetic of the young monks in the new movement, having been active in famine and plague relief work, and being also the founder and first editor of the Bengali Journal Udbodhan. He had a penchant for detail and order that bordered on mania, at one time festooning the walls of the San Francisco Temple with clocks, and ordering one of his students to maintain them in perfect synchronization with the Lick Observatory. It was not only clocks which decorated his walls, but also numerous exhortatory mottoes, which he had hung about the walls of every building. "Live like a hermit but work like a horse", or more peremptorily "Do it", and, apparently his favorite, "Do or die, but you will not die". His driving energy was remarkable, and those who knew him remember his ceaseless activity. He was the first to wake and the last to sleep, he cooked every meal for those who lived in the Society rooms, and he maintained a full schedule of lectures and classes. At the same time his character had its lighter side, balancing the severity of the discipline and the amount of sheer hard work he demanded of his students.
Trigunatita appears to have considered the ashrama to be of secondary importance, and he spent the first few years working hard to establish the San Francisco center before venturing out to the retreat with a few disciples. Within a year of his arrival membership had swelled to the point where it was necessary to buy a permanent home for the Society. Rather than buy a house, the members decided to have a new building constructed, and so "the first Hindu temple in the whole western world" was raised.\(^{75}\) It is a rather eccentric building which was designed by the Swami, who crammed into the design a bit of every architectural style he had seen and liked. The resulting cluster of domes, turrets, and pinnacles, is odd, but attractive, combining, the Swami declared, components of the Taj Mahal, a Banaras temple, a modern temple of Shiva, the garden-temple of Dakshineswar, and a number of European castles. This eclectic pile was advertised as a Hindu temple, a Christian church, a Moslem mosque, a Hindu monastery, and an American residence—the very symbol of universal Vedanta.\(^{76}\) The new building was very fortunate to survive the fires caused by the disastrous earthquake of 1906—several of the surrounding structures did not. (Naturally enough a miracle was claimed.)\(^{77}\)

The internal organization of the Society was very sound, based entirely on that of the New York center under Abhedananda. The only difference of importance seems to have been the Swami's insistence on the separation of the sexes in the temple, males on
one side and females on the other, much as was traditional in Roman Catholic Churches a generation ago. This was not a popular innovation in San Francisco, but was eventually accepted. Another of Swami Trigunatita's innovations was more popular, he introduced the use of music, both vocal and instrumental, into the Society's meetings. The active officers of the center were elected annually, as at New York, and they included a president, vice-president, recording secretary, financial secretary, treasurer, auditor and librarian. They were all eligible for re-election each year. Membership dues were fixed at $18.00 a year, and were described as "tuition fees". For an additional $18.00 p.a. private lessons for "unfolding the Inner Self" were available ($24.00 by correspondence). For advanced students special lessons were arranged—lessons for "Adepts and Esoterics". In 1909 a new journal, The Voice of Freedom, replaced the defunct Pacific Vedantist, and was produced on a Society press which also turned out occasional pamphlets and books.

As the Society grew, and the work with it, assistants arrived from India to help Swami Trigunatita, but none remained for more than a few years. There were a number of attempts to open new branches, especially in Los Angeles, but such centers as were begun did not survive very long. Trigunatita's forte was clearly the organization of a local society which he could personally control in all its details, and he did this so well
that the San Francisco branch has remained stable and secure to this day. He was unusually conscious of political matters (unusual, that is, for a Ramakrishna monk) and in 1914 he argued in favor of participation in the European war, declaring that much good would come of fighting in a righteous cause. He claimed to be a Vedantic Socialist, and was invited to speak at the San Francisco headquarters of the Socialist Party, where he delivered a lecture entitled "Every Man and Woman is a Born Socialist". The official policy of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, from the time of Vivekananda onwards, has been to eschew all political involvement, so that even Swami Trigunatita's minor excursions into the political field have been exceptional.

As soon as the San Francisco center was satisfactorily established, Trigunatita renewed the work of the Shanti Ashrama. Every year he took a group out to the retreat center, and for one month supervised intensive spiritual training. Usually the group would be ten to fifteen strong, but occasionally numbered as many as thirty. Later, more ceremonial aspects of Hinduism were introduced, such as an annual Dhuni fire, involving an all-night session of chantings, readings, and the fire purification ceremony, performed in the open (and rather chilly) air, on a hill by the camp. A picturesque and exotic event, it became very popular.

After the completion of the temple in 1906 Swami Trigunatita decided that a part of the building could be used as a monastery
for aspiring western disciples, and he set about organizing this at once. Soon he had ten young men living there, and following a semi-monastic program (though supporting themselves with work in the city). The monastery was closed in 1915 after Trigunatita's death, and so the experiment failed, but it was an interesting first attempt. Even more original was the opening of a nunnery as soon as the monastery was established. A house for women was rented near the temple, and a monastic routine designed for aspirant nuns. Like the men, these women supported themselves through outside work, and like the monastery (even earlier in fact) the venture failed.

Another of Trigunatita's interesting failures was a Vedantic Community he established on 200 acres of land purchased by the Society in Contra Costa County, just outside San Francisco. His idea was to retain 25 acres in the Society's hands, and distribute the balance among members willing to settle down and work the land in a Utopian community based on Vedantic principles. His plans were remarkably ambitious, and could probably never have succeeded. A number of members did gather on the land, and wells were sunk, crops planted and some buildings raised. But the Swami drew up plans for a large Vedanta temple, with a library attached for storing a comprehensive collection of Vedanta literature, a hospital, an orphanage, an old folks home, etc. All this was to be financed from the profits made by farming the land. Swami Trigunatita made weekly trips to the
site, to conduct services and oversee the construction. However, the plan was never given a chance to succeed for on December 27, 1914, when Trigunatita was giving a lecture on "The Divine Peace", a young man got up at the front of the auditorium, and dropped a home-made bomb on the platform. The explosion blew out the back of the temple, killing the youth instantly, and fatally injuring the Swami, who died on January 14, 1915. 80

The sudden death of Trigunatita put an end to the more ambitious plans, such as the Concord Colony, but the San Francisco center continued healthily enough under his former assistant, Swami Prakashananda, and is thriving still.

While the work of Trigunatita was going ahead so well on the Pacific coast, the affair of Abhedananda in New York had set the Society back somewhat on the Atlantic side. However, Abhedananda's successor as director of operations was Swami Paramananda, perhaps the most able monk to come from India in Vivekananda's footsteps. Swami Abhedananda met with Paramananda in India in 1906, and was sufficiently impressed to ask that he be sent as assistant to the New York work. So it was arranged, and in December 1906 Paramananda arrived in the United States, and remained there for more than 30 years. The young Swami was an attractive, easy going youth from a rich land-owning background, who made friends easily with all kinds of people, from University professors, to women's club leaders, from rich businessmen to train conductors.
Paramananda worked hard as Abhedananda's assistant, taking over most of the New York lectures and classes, allowing Abhedananda freedom to continue his outside lecturing and European work. At the time of the trouble in New York Paramananda was spending most of his time in Boston, where he devoted himself to establishing a solid organization. He began by lecturing before the classes of a lady Swedenborgian, and was so successful that he soon had more offers of speaking engagements than he could possibly accept. He rented a hall for lectures, and began regular classes and instruction in yoga and meditation, for which a loyal group of regular members was soon established. This group, indeed, was too keen by half, and immediately after the series of classes ended, when Paramananda was temporarily out of the city, they got together and set about making all the arrangements for a permanent center, electing officers, arranging finances, renting a hall and classrooms, and setting up working committees. Apparently they intended to give Paramananda a pleasant surprise, but he found it an unpleasant shock. Too much organization, too fast, was his opinion, though in fact the center did well enough for a time. However, in 1909 his health gave way, and he was forced to abandon Boston for a time to convalesce. A second attempt to work in Boston was also abandoned for the same reason, and he was advised to work in a milder climate. He went to Washington, D.C., where he soon had an enthusiastic following and was able to found a new center. As
his health improved, he handed over this work to one of his chief western disciples, Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn), and returned to Boston yet again, in April 1910. During the next two years he organized a pattern of work with Devamata whereby they rotated their activities between the two centers in Boston and Washington.

In August 1911 Paramananda returned to India for a few months following the death of his guru, Ramakrishnananda, and on his return in December he decided to concentrate almost entirely on Boston. New accommodation for the work was rented, including a large chapel and twenty rooms for classes and living space. In May 1914 the Society was able to buy a big house, and thus establish a permanent headquarters at 1 Queensbury Street. The Society journal, Message of the East, commenced publication in January 1912, and a number of books, including a popular translation of the Gita, were produced by Paramananda in the following years. As time went on, and the Boston operations became smoother, the Swami increasingly accepted outside speaking engagements, giving hundreds of lectures all over the country, and doing much to increase America's awareness of the Vedantic message and its exotic propagators. During the Summer months he travelled in Europe, establishing centers in Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, but the outbreak of war in 1914 permanently severed communication with these groups, and Paramananda directed his restless energies to the West.
In the summer of 1915 Swami Paramananda set off on a long lecture tour, which took him to such centers of booming cultural life as Milwaukee, Detroit, Seattle, San Francisco and Los Angeles. At the last of these he found enormous interest, and was thus stimulated to return the following Summer, and spend several months lecturing to large audiences. So successful was his work there, that instead of returning to Boston as he had intended, he stayed on in Los Angeles, and organized a second series of lectures and classes, establishing a new Society there. The old rotation system he and Sister Devamata had used between Boston and Washington, now came into operation across the continent. While he was in Los Angeles, Devamata maintained the Boston work, together with a second important disciple of the Swami's, Miss Katherine Sherwood. When Paramananda was in Boston, they, in turn, kept the wheels in motion in Los Angeles. Soon the center in Los Angeles grew to absorb as much time as Boston, and still Paramananda was not satisfied. Between 1918 and 1920 he developed a technique of "whistle-stop evangelism", stopping off to lecture and hold classes at various points on his trans-continental journeys, and soon establishing regular study groups in Seattle, Washington, Louisville, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio. In the area around Los Angeles, at Santa Barbara, Long Beach, and Pasadena, more study groups were organized. These groups were significant in aiding later Swamis to establish permanent centers in the same cities.
As this evangelical work of Paramananda's bloomed and flourished, Sister Devamata and Katherine Sherwood were brought into even greater prominence, becoming a most essential element in the whole enterprise, since, during the Swamis increasingly prolonged absences, the maintenance of normal routine work depended almost entirely on them. For women to have such major responsibility in the work of the mission is rare in the West; in India it has never occurred.

From its small beginnings in Boston in 1908, Swami Paramananda's organization had grown by 1920 into a Continental network of societies and study groups—and its momentum showed no signs of slackening. Soon after motor cars were introduced he became a motor fanatic, driving with skill, and overhauling and maintaining his own car. Later he took to travelling by aeroplane just as readily. It was entirely in character that these necessary adjuncts to his work should become enthusiasms; he was a man of enthusiasms. He indulged a taste for the most stylish western dress, which, no doubt, amused some of his followers; he took to kite-flying with gusto, played tennis heartily, and was moved to write a poem to ice cream. Undoubtedly Swami Paramananda's ebullient personality was one reason for his outstanding success in the United States. Another reason was his recognition that the tradition of Hinduism is entirely foreign to Westerners, and he was keen to adapt it for the West. He carefully avoided the preaching of dogma or
theology, and emphasized that Vedanta philosophy was life affirming rather than life denying. He declared that since Vedanta is Universal, transcending any particular culture, it can infuse and illumine the disciples' daily lives anywhere, and must become the underlying basis for all practical, even mundane, activity in the world. Furthermore, he would have nothing to do with the occult, or anything that smacked of the "mysteries of the East".

"Oriental ideas cannot suddenly be transposed and imposed on the man of the West so that he will think and act like an oriental. There has to be the right adjustment." The teachings of Hinduism must be presented in a "simple, direct way, leaving aside all elements that might seem occult or mystifying." 84

By 1921 the house in Boston had been extended to almost double its original size, and a set of equipment for printing and binding had been installed. For a time the monthly magazine, *Message of the East* was printed and bound there, as were various booklets, announcement circulars, and cards with the Swami's poems. This evidence of stability and relative prosperity was perhaps the reason for the increased public acceptance of the Vedanta Society by the Boston public. Various ministers—especially Unitarians—became friendly with Paramananda, and he received numerous invitations to speak at their churches. Sister Davamata commented on this change: "The Center was no longer an alien; it became one of the accepted religious organizations of
Boston. Businessmen talked in their offices openly and enthusiastically of their connection with it, and people came to it as they went to other churches. Prejudice melted away.86 However, rather than continue the expansion of the Boston Center, Swami Paramananda turned his attention to California, where very soon the membership had considerably outgrown the Boston branch. In 1923, by a stroke of luck, the Vedanta Society was able to purchase a piece of land at La Crescenta in the Santa Ana Mountains about sixteen miles south of Los Angeles. By 1926 many permanent buildings were already established, including cottages, barns and garages, and extensive plans drawn up for a publication department, auditorium, library, and workshops for arts and crafts. The most important of the early buildings were "a Cloister for the Sisters and consecrated women workers and a Community House for more transient workers".87 Soon the printing and binding machinery was transferred from Boston, (and a number of members too, to help with the work) and the enlarged house in Boston was sold, smaller quarters being purchased. The Centers at Los Angeles and Ananda Ashrama were now the hub of the Vedanta organization of Swami Paramananda. A "Temple of the Universal Spirit" was build in 1928, where people of all religious persuasions might worship, and the Ashrama became the center of operations for the Swami's lecture tours. The department of arts and crafts was an interesting addition to the center, eventually turning out a variety of products, such as
incense, leather goods, hand-woven clothes, illuminated cards and bookmarks, and honey from Vedantic bees—all for sale to visitors. Visitors to La Crescenta have always been frequent, largely because of the natural beauty of the place, and later because of the vogue it enjoyed among such celebrities as Leopold Stokowski, and Greta Garbo.

Swami Paramananda maintained his busy schedule on both sides of the continent, dashing backwards and forwards, and holding classes at various stops on the way. In 1929 he opened a retreat center for the Boston members at Cohasset, Mass., and branch centers at Cincinnati, Dayton, St. Louis, and Louisville were maintained. As the number of centers, and the corresponding amount of travel and work, grew, Swami Paramananda was forced to establish a systematic pattern to his movements, and moreover, to delegate more responsibility to his chief disciples. These were all women. Viz. Sister Devamata, Katherine Sherwood, Sister Daya and Gayatri Devi (his niece). In 1926 Sister Devamata computed: "Since 1915 he (Paramananda) has travelled over 150,000 miles by train, and nearly 100,000 by motor, an average of 25,000 a year." In his later years he made numerous trips to India, partly as vacations, partly to make reports, and partly to visit a branch center of Avanda Ashrama founded on his authority by his niece in 1931 at Dacca, East Bengal. This was founded for the improvement of Indian Women, and directed by Charvshila Devi, who had worked in the United States for several years in the 1920's.
It was largely supported by American money. In 1939, Swami Paramananda took to commuting across the continent by aeroplane, spending two weeks on each side. This terrifically strenuous programme must have exacted a heavy physical toll, and in June 1940, while working on an article for Message of the East, Swami Paramananda had a heart attack and died. At this time the two main centers of his work, at Boston and La Crescenta, were among the most soundly established and financially secure in the country--and were still growing. Numbers of lesser centers, with semi-permanent membership, were also flourishing.

Swami Paramananda was certainly the dominant, most influential and widely known leader of the of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in the Western States of America, and also a very important one in the east. In one sense, however, his career, and the organizations he established can only be considered as a footnote to the history of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement proper. This is because his very reliance on his female assistants, led them, after his death, to claim a measure of organizational autonomy for themselves, supported by most of his members in their centers, who believed that Paramananda had trained his niece, sannyasini Gayatri Devi, and the Sisterhood, to carry on the work themselves. In October, 1940 Gayatri Devi wrote a lengthy letter to the Board of Trustees at the Belur Math, the gist of which was a petition
that you give us sanction to carry on Swami Paramananda's entire work as a Sisterhood. Your recognition of us ordained sisters, authorized to spread the gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, [which] would solve our problem.

Gayatri Devi recognized that the male monastics at Belur had never given much thought to the possible emergence of a Sisterhood, and feared the schismatic effects of losing control of the appointment of Indian Swamis--this despite the fact that allowance is made in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission constitution for the future independence of Sisterhoods formed within the movement, if the Governing Body consider it appropriate in a given case, but with reference to the fear of schism, Gayatri Devi declared,

"that in this case it would be the imposition of a [male] Swami upon the work, equipped to carry on its own responsibilities, which would divide and even dissolve the community, most of whom are free-thinking Americans."

The Board of Trustees at Belur flatly refused the request of the "free-thinking American members", and insisted that if they wished to remain within the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, they must submit to the direction of a Belur appointed Swami. As a result the La Crescenta and Boston Society, with most of its members, broke with the Ramakrishna movement. However, as is typical with schismatic groups in this movement, friendly relations are maintained to date, and Gayatri Devi has been invited to visit the Belur Math and other Indian centers, where
she has spoken on Vedanta and the West. At the same time she is explicitly refused authorization by the monks of Belur as a teacher of Vedanta—authorization which the Sisters of the Sri Sarada Math in India were granted with their independence in 1954.

While the work of Paramananda was successfully going ahead, other Swamis were working busily elsewhere in the United States. In 1925 Swami Prabhavananda founded the Portland, Oregon, Society, which flourishes to this day. In 1926-27, a series of lecture tours he made, led to the establishment of small centers in Tacoma, Washington and St. Louis. In 1929, turning the Portland work temporarily over to Swami Vividishananda, Prabhavananda began working to establish a center at Hollywood. Failing health led Swami Vividishananda to suspend activities in Portland, so Prabhavananda returned for a time, before leaving it in the hands of Swami Devatmananda. In 1934 a permanent establishment was bought, and named the Vedic Temple: in 1936 a retreat was added—the Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama. The 1936 Religious Census reports a membership of 100—a very respectable number.

Under the guidance of Swami Akhilananda, who had first come to the United States in 1926 as assistant to Paramananda in Boston, a center was established in Providence, R.I., and in 1931 a gift of $40,000 from two students of the center bought a temple, and the branch was legally incorporated that same year.
Another society was started in 1930 in Chicago, by a rather musical monk, Swami Jnaneshwarananda. From the first this was a fairly successful center, and by 1931 large new quarters were needed; by 1936 the membership had grown to about 105. Among other things Jnaneshwarananda introduced classes in Oriental music, and held concerts of traditional Hindu music. A small press was in operation, publishing a number of slim works on Vedanta. In 1937 the center lapsed for a while, following Swami Jnaneshwarananda's death from a heart attack, but in 1938 Swami Vishwananda arrived from India to take up the work again.

In Southern California Swami Prabhavananda had the good luck to meet one of Vivekananda's students from the time of his visit to Los Angeles. Mrs Carrie Mead Wyckoff had been an enthusiastic supporter of Vivekananda's classes in the 1890's, and on making the acquaintance of Prabhavananda she offered her home and savings to him for a Hollywood center. Despite this auspicious beginning things did not go so well at first, for the public lectures and advertising by the Swami attracted what he called "mystery-mongers" and "metaphysical shoppers". However, perseverance paid off, and about 1936 the centre began to expand, and the concommitant financial growth enabled the members to build a Hindu temple in 1938. In 1939 the success of this center was assured when it attracted a group of famous writers, who assisted the work there. Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and John Van Druten all made written and
editorial contributions, as well as monetary ones, and perhaps did more than anyone to bring Vedanta before a wide Western public.

The two decades of the 1920's and 1930's were a time of rapid expansion and great success for the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in North America. The Sixth General Report of the Ramakrishna Mission (1928-1930), published in October 1931, lists eleven centers in the United States, and the reports of the Ramakrishna Birth Centenary meeting of North American leaders in 1936, shows them still flourishing. The figures published by the United States Government Census of Religious Bodies that same year, are as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1906</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1926</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Churches</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Members</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>628</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage increase</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-44.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>214.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>no report</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York City (two centers)</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington D.C.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California (San Francisco &amp; Los Angeles)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ratio of males to females was reported by Providence, New York, Washington, Chicago, Portland, Los Angeles and San Francisco. In all cases there was a heavy preponderance of women—a ratio of more than two to one (365 females to 163 males).

It is also worth noting that the figures for membership do not reflect the numbers regularly attending the Society's functions; these have always been considerably higher.

The period of relatively rapid expansion was brought to an end by the second world war. For a start communications with India were broken off, and the essential supply of Swamis from the Belur headquarters was interrupted. In the Far East the Ramakrishna Math and Mission faced a number of serious problems, which must have overshadowed the difficulties faced by American centers. The Rangoon Center was bombed by the Japanese, who also commandeered the Society's buildings in Colombo, Ceylon. Several other Far Eastern Centers were abandoned, as indeed were some European centers, in Paris and Switzerland.

In the United States the introduction of petrol rationing cut down on the lecture tours which typified the missionary techniques of most Swamis. The retreat centers, which were established in isolated spots, were mainly closed down for the duration of the war, and even attendance at lectures and services in the major cities fell drastically. Society functions were
reduced to a minimum and all attempts at expansion were abandoned.

Since the war the movement has concentrated rather on the development of existing centers than on breaking new ground. New and larger temples have been built, accommodation for monks and nuns purchased, and more retreat centers, or ashramas, have been established. The regular influx of new Swamis from India was resumed without further interruption, young monks being sent out as assistants to the older men, before taking on the responsibilities of a Swami-in-charge. This practice, together with the advanced modern education which is required of Ramakrishna monks in India, (i.e. a bachelor's degree) has made their adjustment to the American culture much easier than it was for many of the first, pioneering Swamis. Given the paramount importance of the Indian Swamis to the Western devotees, this had obvious implications for the stability of the movement.

The general pattern since the mid-1940's, has been the consolidation and expansion of existing centers, increasing stability and maturity, and a discernible, albeit very slow, increase in membership. A brief survey of the progress of the main individual centers will make this clear.

On the east coast the main Vedanta centers are in New York, Boston and Providence. The Vedanta Society of New York is the oldest center in the country, dating (with brief interruptions) from the 1890's. In 1950 Swami Bodhananda died, having served as
Swami-in-charge since 1912. He was succeeded by Swami Pavitrananda, formerly head of the Advaita Ashrama in the Himalayas, and editor, of Prabuddha Bharata. Pavitrananda has suffered from poor health for some years, but continues to run the center quietly and conservatively.

In 1931 Swami Nikhilananda arrived from India to assist Akhilananda in Providence, but within two years he had opened a new center in New York, known as the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York. A lively and energetic man, Nikhilananda has made this second New York center the most important on the east coast with a membership greater than the older New York center by about 130 to 100. Emphasizing the cultural as well as the religious aspect of the Ramakrishna Society's mission, this center has become a focus for Indian affairs in the U.S.A., holding receptions for important visitors such as Prime Minister Nehru, and the Indian ambassadors to the United States and the United Nations.

The most significant addition to this center since the war has been the establishment of a retreat centre at Thousand Island Park, where Vivekananda stayed in 1895. The house has been restored as nearly as possible to its condition when "Swamiji" (Vivekananda) was there, and is now called 'Vivekananda Cottage'. It is an important Summer retreat, where Swamis from all over the continent gather, and advanced students are trained for sannyasa.
As already indicated the Vedanta Society of Providence was founded in 1928 by Swami Akhilananda, who had briefly worked as assistant to Paramananda in Boston. Growing swiftly to financial stability in the 1930's the members of this center, at Akhilananda's instigation, undertook the expense of constructing a large temple to Ramakrishna at Belur, which was dedicated in 1938.

The loss of the Boston and La Crescenta Society following the death of Paramananda in 1940 was a severe blow, and Akhilananda was concerned to repair the damage, if he could. Working from Providence, Akhilananda quickly established a new Vedanta center in Boston; his speedy success probably being due to members transferring from the defecting group. He continued to serve both centers until his death in 1968, whereupon Swami Sarvagatánanda undertook the same work, and maintains it today. Once again the principal addition to the Society has been a retreat center, the Sarada Ashrama, established in 1950, some thirty miles south of Boston. It serves regularly as a place of spiritual retreat for members of the Boston and Providence Society.

The only two new centers established in recent decades are also on the east coast of the continent. In the late 1960's Swami Ranganathananda engaged in a series of extended lecture tours throughout North America, and a visit to Toronto in 1969 led to the establishment of the first Canadian Vedanta Center.
This center is unusual in that most of the members are Indian immigrants, mainly in the professions. They meet regularly in the Friends Meeting House near the University of Toronto, but as yet have no Swami in residence. At the moment the President is Swami Bhashyananda of Chicago, who visits this small society of some thirty members as often as he can. Another group was formed by Ranganathananda during the same tour, at Washington, D.C. Previous attempts to establish a center in Washington have failed: it is too early to say whether this small society will survive.

The centers in the Middle West are at Chicago and St. Louis. Both have established themselves more securely since the war, purchasing buildings which were previously rented, and dedicating temples. In Chicago a new temple was dedicated in 1966, and regular services and lectures were instituted to commemorate the Parliament of Religions of 1893. Representatives of various religions are invited to attend and speak each year, and the event has become a regular and popular observance. By the early 1970's a group of eight or nine brahmacharis, and six brahmacharinis were being trained for sannyasa. Most of them have work in the city, but live in the monastic houses and are progressing steadily towards their final vows.

The St. Louis temple was dedicated in 1952, and is set among a group of Christian Churches in the fashionable west-end quarter. Weekly meetings are attended by up to two hundred
people, and from there a study group has been established in Kansas City.

On the Pacific coast Swami Vividishananda founded a permanent center in Seattle, Washington, in 1938, and by 1942 was able to dedicate a temple there. Membership in Seattle has never been very large, but on the other hand it has remained stable, rarely falling below forty core disciples. During the war a soldier stationed in Seattle became a disciple of Vividishananda, and in 1950, after touring the holy places in India he settled in Hawaii. There, with the help of Vividishananda, he founded a new center at Honolulu, which is still associated with the Seattle Society. In recent years the Swami's health has failed, and he is currently in a semi-coma from which he is not expected to recover. Although he remains President, therefore, the work of running the Society is done by Swami Bhaskarananda, who is at present engaged in setting up a Center in Tokyo similar to the one in Honolulu. There is also a study group in Vancouver, B.C., which is attached to the Seattle center, and attends temple services there. This center, and the study group in Vancouver, share with Toronto an unusually high proportion of Indian immigrants in the membership.

The Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon, was re-established in 1932, after having lapsed since 1929. By 1934 the Society was able to purchase its own buildings. Originally founded and revived by Swami Prabhavananda, and developed by his successor...
Swami Devatmananda, the Portland Society has flourished. In 1943 a building was constructed to specifications, partly by the members themselves, and the establishment of a retreat center was being planned. This was completed in 1954, together with a large octagonal temple dedicated the same year. Devatmananda, whose health was declining, returned to India in 1955, and was replaced by Swami Aseshananda, who is the current Swami-in-charge.

Finally, there are the two Californian Societies—perhaps the most dynamic in America.

Under the leadership of Swami Ashokananda, from 1932-39, the Northern California Vedanta Society had grown impressively, and continued expanding constantly in the post-war period up until the late 1960's. An auxiliary center was opened in 1939—the East Bay Center—and placed in the charge of an assistant Swami. In 1946 some two thousand acres of wooded hills in Olema, Marin County, were bought and established as a second retreat center, in addition to the older Shanti Ashrama retreat, which is still in operation. Further auxiliary centers were founded in Berkeley and Sacramento, and a third retreat at Lake Tahoe was added in the late 1950's. By 1958 a large and impressive new temple was dedicated a few blocks from the old one, which by then was far too small.

The number of American monastics has grown rapidly in San Francisco, and new buildings have been purchased to house them. In March, 1977, there were some nineteen brahmacharinis and
seventeen brahmacharis living in the Northern California Society's community. Several monks from San Francisco have been initiated into Sannyasa at Belur Math, one of them, Swami Chidrupananda, having worked as an administrator in San Francisco since 1930. It is significant that despite his seniority Swami Chidrupananda because he is an American, not an Indian Swami, has held no greater position of authority, and has been allowed to do no more than monthly lectures and worship ceremonies, principally at Berkeley. Since the death of Ashokananda in 1969 the auxiliary centers at Berkeley and Sacramento have become more autonomous, each now having its own Indian Swami-in-charge. The current head of the San Francisco society is Swami Prabuddhananda, and he has two assistant Swamis.

The Vedanta Society of Southern California is the biggest, and probably the most important of the American Vedanta Societies. The first building, it will be recalled, was offered by Mrs. Carrie Mead Wyckoff to Vivekananda in 1901, but the offer was not taken up until 1930 when Swami Prabhavananda founded the Hollywood Center. The Society was incorporated in 1934, and work on the construction of a temple was begun four years later.

This society, more than any of the others, has been the subject of wide, popular attention, principally through its association with various literary and film celebrities. The chief of these were Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, Gerald
Heard and John Van Druten, all of whom spent some time as disciples of Prabhavananda, and have written for Society journals at one time or another.

Since the second world war the Society has grown rapidly, both in lay and monastic endeavors. In 1947 the Sarada Convent for nuns was established in Santa Barbara, the first such center in the entire Ramakrishna Math and Mission (It was 1954 before the Sri Sarada Math was opened in India). In 1941 Gerald Heard, using the advice, inter alia, of Swami Prabhavananda, had commissioned the building of a residential college for religious experimentation, retreat, and the study of the "Perennial Philosophy". It was constructed high in the Santa Ana Mountains, about sixty miles south of Los Angeles, in a place called Trabuco Canyon. The experiment was not a complete success, and in 1949 Heard deeded the land, the buildings and their contents, to the Vedanta Society. Since then there have always been a group of monastics in residence, leading a secluded life of work, study, and meditation. In August, 1977 there were eight residents there, and various visitors.

1956 saw the opening of a branch center in Santa Barbara, and a beautiful temple was dedicated there in February of that year. It was there that the first female renunciates, or sannyasinis, were initiated, with the approval of the Belur Math, in 1959. Also, in 1956, a house in Pasadena which Vivekananda had stayed at in 1900, was purchased and made into a museum to
This rapid expansion made demands both of money and manpower: the former were met by large gifts from wealthy friends of the Society, and the latter by a series of assistant Swamis from India, and a constantly growing number of American aspirants to Vedantic monasticism.

The Society also maintains the Vedanta Press, which has produced a large number of works on Vedic literature, Hindu philosophy and related subjects, which are distributed wholesale as well as retailed through the Society bookstore. From 1938 to 1970 a journal called Vedanta and the West was published bi-monthly, with Heard, Huxley, Isherwood and Van Druten contributing as writers or editors from time to time. In 1970 the journal was discontinued because of the lack of skilled personnel, and of writers of a sufficient standard.

Since the death of Swami Prabhavananda in 1970 a number of changes have occurred in the administrative arrangements of this Society. The nuns, centered in Santa Barbara, and the monks in Hollywood are now far more autonomous, and have far less contact than was the case when Prabhavananda was in charge. The nuns have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including a Sunday School, temple upkeep and worship, and a mail order catalogue; the monks retain most of the Society's administrative responsibilities, and ultimate authority rests with the Indian Swami-in-charge. This was a matter of policy, decided in India by
the Board of Trustees at Belur, and it is discussed at greater length in a subsequent section.

Unfortunately the United States government census of religious bodies was discontinued after 1936, and no comparable data are available for the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in more recent decades. However, the consensus among west coast Swamis puts the combined lay and monastic membership of the thirteen North American Centers, at some two thousand to two thousand five hundred.
Religious Beliefs

Vivekananda sought to introduce Hinduism to the West--more specifically his own interpretation, in the light of Ramakrishna's life and doctrines, of advaitist (or impersonal monist) Vedantism, adapted by him to suit the needs of modern, Western Society. In his voluminous writings and many lectures, he offered an introduction to the broadest cosmological features of Hindu Vedantic philosophy, and at the same time presented the more practical, this-worldly matters, which must concern anyone who seeks salvation (mukti) in the Vedantic sense. In this section the concern is solely with those religious teachings which form the basis of the lives of the Western membership, both lay and monastic.95

For Vivekananda, as a relatively orthodox Hindu intellectual, the only true Reality is Brahman, and in the realization of that Reality all manifestation ceases. There is no I or Thou, no one to work, no work to do, no universe in which to work.

"The highest men cannot work, for in them there is no attachment. Those who have become ever associated with the Self, for them there is no work." 96

Mukti is not in this world, and therefore those who seek it have nothing to do with mundane reality--with maya. If this is so, the question then arises as to the use of Vedanta for the mass of mankind, and how it can be of help in solving the problems of
this life—in showing men what is to be done. Vivekananda's answer was couched in terms of what he called practical Vedanta.

"As I have told you, theory is very good indeed, but how are we to carry it into practice? If it be absolutely impracticable, no theory is of any value whatever, except as intellectual gymnastics. The Vedanta, therefore, as a religion must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this, the fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish, for the Vedanta teaches oneness—one life throughout. The ideals of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts, and more and more into practice."97

Karma is activity which produces effects, and as such is a bar to realization—Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the highest "superconscious" state of realization, requires the cessation of Karma. Karma is a function of nimitta, causation, and therefore implies duality, while from the pure advaitist position espoused by Vivekananda there can be no duality, there is only Brahman. This contradiction puzzled one of his disciples, who asked:

"Sri, you said just now that knowledge and work are contradictory, that in the supreme knowledge there is no room at all for work, or in other words, that by means of work the realization of Brahman cannot be attained. Why then do you now and then speak words calculated to awaken great Rajas (activity)? You were telling me the other day, 'Work, work, work--there is no other way'."98

Vivekananda's reply was to draw a distinction between true spirituality and inactivity.
people of this country [India] are immersed in great Tamas (inactivity), compared with people of other countries. On the outside there is a simulation of the Sattvika (calm and balanced) state, but inside, downright inertness like that of stocks and stones--what work will be done in the world by such people?"

First it is necessary to,

"... rouse up the Rajas within them--make them fit for the struggle for existence, and then speak to them about salvation. First make the people of the country stand on their legs by rousing their inner power, first let them learn to have good food and clothes and plenty of enjoyment--then tell them how to be free from this bondage of enjoyment." 99

So Vivekananda taught that the true Vedantist must work in the world, must help to alleviate the misery of the people (of India), must rouse them out of their centuries old lethargy to shake off the burden of intolerable social conditions. But if nirvikalpa samadhi is the goal, the possibility of work in the world is not an obviously apparent one.

Vivekananda's answer to this problem was his interpretation of the Vedantic schools of dvaita (dualism), vishishtadvaita (qualified monism), and advaita (pure monism). His mission in life, he claimed, was "... to show that the Vedantic schools are not contradictory, that they all necessitate each other, all fulfill each other, and one, as it were, is the stepping stone to the other, until the goal, the Advaita, the Tat Tvam Asi, is reached." 100 From the viewpoint of this goal, the highest stage, there is no doer and no deed, but this is an eschatological
ideal; the jiva lives in the manifested world, however, and in this world he must act. Thus, although "The highest Advaitism cannot be brought down to practical life, [yet] Advaitism made practical works from the plane of Vishishtadvaitism." To be true religion, and not just abstract theory, Vedantism must provide a blueprint for action in the world, since the jiva is in the world and must act. Moreover it must be a blueprint suited to the nature of the age. Vivekananda declared that this is the age of Kali Yuga, the age of suffering and misery, and the needs of this age must be met by action in terms of Vedantic teachings. Seen from the level of vishishtadvaita action is real, and programs can be designed for the good of all living beings. But as activity is inevitable, how is realization possible? Karma, which binds the jiva, is made, said Vivekananda, by actions which have an effect—an effect, that is, on the jiva. As long as the effects of action are viewed by the jiva as his effects, they bind him to the wheel of life by impressions made on the mind (samsara). But the Bhagavad Gita, "the best commentary we have on the Vedanta philosophy" tells us that the jiva is only bound to the effects of action (i.e. makes Karma) if it is attached to them by desire or egoism (ahamkara). Therefore, Vivekananda taught, renunciation of all desire, total relinquishment of the fruits of actions, will free the jiva from all binding effects. The jiva must seek perfect non-attachment, must work without motive.
"Those who work thus never do anything for themselves . . . those who work without any consciousness of their lower ego are not affected with evil, for they work for the good of the world. To work without motive, to work unattached, brings the highest bliss and freedom."

This is work for the Self (Atman), not for the self (jiva). Atman is All-beings, so to work for the good of all is to work for God. Such work, Vivekananda stated, is free from Karma, from desa-kala-nimitta, time-space-causation, and may lead, therefore, to mukti—final liberation from the cycle of rebirths. In this way Vedanta is made practical, and provides the means of salvation by free activity in this age of kali-yuga. The task of all Ramakrishna members, therefore, is to perform the duties of their station in life with total selflessness, seeking to act unselfishly for others (family, friends, employees, etc.) and never attached to the results of these actions, be they good or bad.

According to Vivekananda it is the nature of the age which demands that liberation be sought through action in the world. Vedanta provides the eternal principles for liberation in all ages, but it must be interpreted in any given age, and any given place or culture, to provide the jiva with the appropriate plan of action for his specific needs. It is necessary to "introduce additions and alterations in them [Vedic laws] to suit the needs of the times, codify them, and hold them up as a new model to society."
Vivekananda's assessment of the needs of the times were based on his observations of conditions in India and the West during his years of travel. What he saw in India was execrable. The principle cause he found to be the corruption of the true Vedas. In ancient times, when the Vedas were properly understood and applied, India was great, and so were her people.

"... in those days every sound that came from these books, [the Vedas] every pulsation, was out of a strong steady and sincere heart; every note was true. After that came degradation in art, in science, in religion, in everything, national degradation."105

The priests, he declared, have transformed knowledge into privilege to further selfish interest, and so corrupted that Vedic knowledge into senseless rules and doctrines. "The Brahmins, in fact, took a course of gross immorality and oppression. Through selfishness they introduced a large number of strange, non-Vedic, immoral, and unreasonable doctrines--simply to keep intact their own prestige."106 The result is a perversion of the truth, which Vivekananda calls "Don't touchism", whereby the real concern is only with protection of caste privileges, even these based on a false notion of caste. To maintain these privileges the Brahmins teach such doctrines as that Locacharas (customs of the people) and Deshacharas (customs of the region) must be strictly kept--these customs, of course, redounding entirely to the benefit of the priests. "Throw away such texts as "tathapi lokacarah, [which
yet the customs of the people have to be followed. Nonsense! The result of this sort of compromise is that the grand truths are soon buried under heaps of rubbish." The teachings of the priests have degenerated into idiot wrangling, said Vivekananda.

Think of the last 600 or 700 years of degradation when grown up men by hundreds have been discussing for years whether we should drink a glass of water with the right hand or the left, whether the hand should be washed 3 times or 4 times, whether we should gargle five times or six times. What can you expect from men who pass their lives in discussing such momentous questions as these and writing most learned philosophies on them! There is a danger of our religion getting into the kitchen. We are neither Vedantists, most of us now, nor Hauranics, nor Tantrics. We are just "Don't Touchists." Our religion is in the kitchen. Our God is the cooking-pot, and our religion is, "Don't touch me, I am holy". If this goes on for another century, every one of us will be in a lunatic asylum.

In Vivekananda's opinion the Vedas were corrupted into a mere mass of customs and regulations, the worst of all these being the false varna-dharma (caste rules), which held back the mass of the people from any possibility of social progress. The tyranny of priestcraft has resulted in a loss of spirituality, ushering in the Kali-yuga with its degradation of caste, abuse of women, increase of physical and intellectual weakness, neglect of the people, lack of organization, technological and social underdevelopment, and general moral bankruptcy.
If conditions in India were appalling, Vivekananda believed the case of the West was worse, because the cultures of the West are founded on materialism. Such a situation is ripe for trouble, for it is based on "competition and merciless cruelty."

"Everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost" is the motto of the day.114

"The political systems that we are struggling for in India have been in Europe for ages, have been tried for centuries, and have been found wanting. One after another the institutions, systems, and everything connected with political government have been condemned as useless, and Europe is restless, does not know where to turn. The material tyranny is tremendous. The wealth and power of a country are in the hands of a few men who do not work but manipulate the work of millions of human beings. By this power they can deluge the whole earth with blood. Religion and all things are under their feet; they rule and stand supreme. The Western world is governed by a handful of Skylocks. All those things that you hear about—constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and parliaments—are but jokes."115

Much of what India lacks, in science and technology, in material wealth and business organization, the West has in abundance. But the true wealth of India, its strength and pride, is its spirituality—and this the West lacks. Without it all is lost. "And the world would be destroyed had not spirituality come to the rescue . . ."116 India is the guru of the world and it is the role of India to save the materialistic West from the consequences of its own materialism.
"Europe, the center of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within 50 years if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life. And what will save Europe is the religion of the Upanishads."\textsuperscript{117}

Clearly Vivekananda regarded his own mission in these terms, believing himself to be the bearer of this message of Vedantic spirituality which would save the western world from the horrors of excessive materialism.

It was the belief of Vivekananda that in this age of Kali-yuga the whole world is in misery. "The West is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks, and the East is groaning under the tyranny of the priests."\textsuperscript{118} The remedy calls for action in the world, and the Vedanta gives the program for such action. The realization of Brahman, brought down to the stage of vishishtadvaita, provides the principle for practical action in the limited manifestation of desa-dala-nimitta. Essential unity underlies the apparent diversity of nama-rupa, (name and form) and it is the eschatological teaching of Vedanta (supported, Vivekananda believed, by modern science, that multiplicity ends inevitably in unity. This unity is already in every jiva, an in all jivas. Knowledge of one's true identity is the source of strength, for the One is the true source of all power. Thus, whatever makes for unity is good, what makes for diversity is bad. In loving and working for all, the jiva is loving and working for One, and is therefore free from the fruits of action
(Karma) and able to achieve mukti. This principle is embodied in the prospectus of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas, written in a letter in March, 1899.

In whom is the Universe, who is in the Universe; in whom is Soul, who is in the Soul, who is the Soul of Man; knowing Him—and therefore the Universe—as our Self, alone extinguishes all fear, brings an end to misery and leads to infinite Freedom. Wherever there has been expansion in love or progress in well-being, of individuals of numbers, it has been through the preception, realization, and the practicalization of the Eternal Truth—The Oneness of all beings.\textsuperscript{119}

The Advaita Ashrama was, above all the Ramakrishna Mission institutes, to be the embodiment of pure advaitism. "Here it is hoped to keep advaita free from all superstitions and weakening contaminations."\textsuperscript{120} It is even forbidden to engage in the worship of Sri Ramakrishna there. Given this aim it is most significant that the prospectus quoted above, is written from the viewpoint of Vishishtadvaita, and not of pure advaita, indicating that even there it is recognized that the jiva must act in the world.

Any plan of action based on Vedanta must involve all living beings, from the "lowest worm" to the "highest man".\textsuperscript{121}

Since Vedanta cosmology gives a true conception of all reality, it is able to produce programs for total reform, "that can change the whole tendency of the world."\textsuperscript{122} Vivekananda declared "To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little
bits. I want root-and-branch reforms."  
It is true, he declared, that in India many of the needed reforms are social, political, and economic, but these reforms must be made through religion. This is true not only in India. "I have seen that I cannot preach even religion to Americans without showing them its practical effect on social life. I could not preach religion in England without showing the wonderful political changes the Vedanta would bring." How much more true of India, then, with its centuries of Karma made in a society based on spirituality.

"So every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas."  

Vivekananda believed that there are two fundamental types or bases of social life and culture. One type is based upon religion, the other on social necessity, "The one was founded upon spirituality, the other upon materialism; the one upon transcendentalism, the other upon realism." Both in time fall victim to the tyranny of the few over the many, either through the expropriation of religious privileges (priestcraft) or through the concentration of material wealth and power in the hands of a few. The result of abuse at either extreme is a reaction towards the other.

As a rule spirituality brings a class of men who lay exclusive claim to the special powers of the world the immediate effect of this is a reaction towards materialism . . . If you look at India, our
motherland, you will see that the same thing is going on now. . . . Materialism has come to the rescue of India in a certain sense by throwing open the doors of life to everyone, by destroying the exclusive privileges of caste, by opening to discussion the inestimable treasures which were hidden away in the hands of a very few who have even lost the use of them.  

On the other hand, in the West "The material tyranny is tremendous". The Vedanta teaches a zero-sum concept of universal nature.  

"In this creation of the impartial Lord, he has made equal every particle in the universe. The worst, most demonical man has some virtues which the greatest saint has not; and the lowest worm may have certain things which the highest man has not."  

India, therefore, must not think that in her spirituality she has a monopoly of the good and true. "We can teach the world, a good many things, and we can learn a good many things from it too." The aim must be to achieve a state of balance and harmony between the two. What the West has to offer India is new forms of organization, industry, communications such as roads and railways, telegraphs etc, and potentially, great material wealth and energy, and an end to starvation. What India has to offer in return is spirituality, the Vedanta, the truth—all that the West lacks.  

"As Western ideas of organization and external civilization are penetrating and pouring into our country, whether we will have them or not, so Indian spirituality and philosophy are
deluging the lands of the West. None can resist some sort of material civilization from the West. A little of it, perhaps, is good for us, and a little spiritualization is good for the West; thus the balance will be preserved. 131

Vivekananda believed that in planning the new society an essential thing is to avoid fanaticism, which is often bred by the revival of religious fervor. "The history of the world teaches us that wherever there have been fantical reforms, the only result has been that they have defeated their own ends." 132 A tyrannical few, with whatever good intentions, can only do harm by imposing reforms from above, and attempting to force compliance. Vivekananda considered the American civil war to be an example of what to avoid. As he stated to his American audiences, the intention to abolish slavery was good, but the means employed were bad:

"And what has been its result? The slaves are a hundred times worse off today than they were before the abolition . . . and that is the effect of such violent taking away of evil by law or by fanaticism. Such is the testimony of history against every fanatical movement, even for doing good." 133

These attempts merely provide circumstances for new and greater evils to arise. Evil, in fact, is not a reality in itself, it is merely the limitation of the manifestation of the Good. There is no true evil, there is only less good. Evil is caused by the limitation of the true Self, and no legislation by fanatical
priests or power hungry rulers can effectively make radical reforms for good.

"0 tyrants, attempting to think that you can do anything for anyone! Hands off! The Divine will look after all. Who are you to assume that you know everything? How dare you think, O blasphemers, that you have the right over God? For don't you know that every soul is the Soul of God? . . . Your nation may put you upon a pedestal, your society may cheer you up to the skies, and fools may praise you; but He sleeps not, and retribution will be sure to follow, here or hereafter."134

Reform imposed externally from above is worse than useless. Evil is limitation of the unlimited, therefore "Liberty is the first condition of growth."135 In conformity with this teaching Vedantists do not seek to impose a set of moral or social rules, but to awaken the self to knowledge of the true Self within. "The Vedanta recognizes no sin, it only recognizes error."136 True reform, therefore, must begin with education. All the people must be educated to know their true nature, and the nature of the universe in which they are manifest. And this means not only "religious" education so-called, for the whole universe, including maya, is but a manifestation of Atman. Scientific knowledge therefore, is truly religious;

"... to reach a real basis of morality and ethics you must have the highest philosophical and scientific conceptions. Human knowledge is not antagonistic to human well-being. On the contrary, it is knowledge alone that will save us in every department of life—in knowledge is worship. The more we know, the better for us."137
Mass education, then, is the only way to radical reform: education for all, irrespective of (false) caste or sex. Infinite God is within each jiva, and once this is realized reform will follow as effect follows cause.

"The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their last individuality. (Vivekananda's emphasis) That is the great task between our people and princes. Up to now nothing has been done in that direction. Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings. They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them; and then they will work out their own salvation. Every nation, every man, and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect." 138

At the level of social reform the same applies. It is true that social reform implies legislative action, but this must spring from the people, not from the "few tyrants". The government;

"has to fashion its ways according to the growth of public opinion. It takes time, quite a long time, to make a healthy, strong, public opinion which will solve its own problems... The whole problem of Social reform, therefore, resolves itself into this: where are those who want reform? Make them first... First educate the nation, create your legislative body, and then the law will be forthcoming. First create the power, the sanction from which the law will spring... the new power of the people... Therefore, even for social reform, the first duty is to educate the people." 139
Education, the removal of ignorance, will bring great strength to the people, will wake them from their lethargy and stir up great "Rajas" in them. Through education their material welfare must be improved so that their physical strength is sufficient for great tasks. It is useless to attempt to force religion on people with empty bellies. The renounced life of the sannyasin is not possible for everyone.

"Hitherto the great fault of our Indian religion has lain in its knowing only two words: renunciation and Mukti. Only Mukti here! Nothing for the householder! But these are the very people whom I want to help. For are not all souls of the same quality?"

And so strength must come to the nation through education. First the hungry must be fed; and more than merely fed, they must have some small luxuries and material enjoyment.

"...find out, first of all, the ways and means by which men may get enough to eat and have enough luxuries to enable them to enjoy life a little; and then, gradually, true Vairagya (dispassion) will come, and they will be fit and ready to realize religion in life."

For this India must turn to the West, "to gain a little in material knowledge, in the power of organization, in the ability to handle powers, organizing powers, in bringing the best results out of the smallest of causes." But on the other hand, the West is perhaps more desperately in need of India's spirituality than India needs Western materialism, and so a mutual exchange will be for the good of all humanity. Education for the masses
in India, then, will be designed to awaken knowledge of the truth within, through this will come great strength and Rajasika (activity). Learning the sciences, arts and technology of the West, combined with the newly awakened spirit of the people will enable India to solve all her problems—material, social and religious. In the West the problem is different. Material power, knowledge and prosperity is already in over-abundance, and the Rajas spirit of Westerners is a wonder to the world. But true spirituality is a rare flower in that materialistic desert, and without it nothing can survive. Education in the West, therefore, must be spiritual and culture only. In this way a state of balance and harmony, may increasingly manifest that unity, that Oneness which is what they really are.

The claim of Vivekananda and his followers is that Advaita Vedanta provides a universal moral foundation, irrespective of time or place. It is true that customs and norms vary from culture to culture, and are different in various historical periods—nor is this necessarily wrong. Indeed it is the duty of religious leaders and teachers to interpret the needs of the times, and work in terms of these needs. A good example, perhaps, is the question of meat eating. Vivekananda stated:

"About vegetarian diet I have this to say—first my Master was a vegetarian but if he was given meat offered to the Goddess, he used to hold it up to his head. The taking of life is undoubtedly sinful;
but so long as vegetable food is not made suitable to the human system, through progress in chemistry, there is no other alternative but meat-eating. So long as man shall have to live a Rajasika (active) life under circumstances like the present, there is no other way except through meat eating . . . Taking the life of a few goats as against the inability to protect the honor of one's wife and daughter, and to save the morsels for one's children from robbing hands—which of these is more sinful? . . . the forcing of vegetarianism upon those who have to earn their bread by laboring day and night is one of the causes of the loss of our national freedom. 146

Much of what is expressed in society as religious duty will necessarily change with social conditions. But at the same time "The principles of religion that are in the Vedanta are unchangeable. Why? Because they are all built upon the eternal principles that are in man and nature; they can never change."147 These eternal principles are laid down in the Upanishads, "the gist, the goal of the Vedas",148 the Vedanta. Next to the Vedanta come the Smritis, but for Vivekananda these are of lesser authority and should anything in them be found to contradict the Vedanta it must be rejected. Much of the Smriti is concerned with social customs and is therefore variable.

"But those religious practices which are based entirely upon our social position and correlation must change with the changes in society . . . climate and other things changed, various other circumstance required to be met, so the Smriti changed the food and other things. Thus it naturally follows that if in modern times our society requires changes to be made they must be met, and sages will come and show us the way to meet them."149
But the principles of Vedanta, concerning the nature and fate of the soul, will remain forever intact, and it is upon these principles that a universal morality can be predicated. Based on the concept of the Oneness of man the lessons and their implications for life, are simple.

The lessons of mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, and brotherhood, everyone may learn, whether man, woman, or child, learned or unlearned, without respect of race, caste, or creed. "They call Thee by various names; Thou are One." It is not only Vedanta which contains this truth, Vivekananda taught, but in fact all religions point toward this foundation. But only Vedanta provides the rational answers that human reason requires.

"Taoists, Confucianists, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Mohammedans, Christians, and Zoroastrains, all preached the golden rule and in almost the same words; but only the Hindus give the rationale, because they saw the reason: Man must love others because those others are himself. There is but One."

Advaita teaches not merely the brotherhood of man, but the unity of all life, and only this principle provides a universally satisfactory foundation for morality.

". . . Advaita and Advaita alone explains morality. Every religion preaches that the essence of all morality is to do good to others. And why? . . . Some God has said it? He is not for me. Some texts have declared it? Let them; that is nothing to me . . . What is the reason that I should be moral? You cannot explain it except when you come to know the
truth as given in the Gita: "He who sees everyone in himself, and himself in everyone, thus seeing the same God living in all, he, the sage, no more kills the Self by the self."152

Vivekananda taught, therefore, that the cardinal principle of spiritual progress, and the key to human betterment, is unselfishness.

This universal principle of unselfishness is best put into practice in the world through Vairagya--renunciation of the world. However, this does not imply, or even necessarily involve material poverty. It is rather a state of mind.

"The two motive powers of our actions are (1) what we see ourselves, (2) the experience of others. These two forces throw the mind, the lake, into various waves. Renunciation is the power of battling against these forces and holding the mind in check . . . Again, the experience of the worldly-minded teaches us that sense enjoyments are the highest ideal. These are tremendous temptations. To deny them and not allow the mind to come to a wave form with regard to them is renunciation . . . This sort of mental strength is called renunciation. Vairagya is the only way to freedom.153

Vivekananda emphasized at the same time that this not "dry, suicidal advice," what it really means is,

"deification of the world--giving up the world as we think of it, as we know it, as it appears to us--and to know what it really is. Deify it; it is God alone." 154

Always under the golden rule of unselfishness, Vairagya--especially in this age of Kali-yuga,--leads naturally to a second principle of action in the world. Jivanseva is
service to all beings, and in Vairagya it means working for others without any desire for or attachment to the fruits of that work. "Love for love's sake, duty for duty's sake, work for work's sake" service, should be entirely without motive to be perfect. "Doing good to others out of compassion is good, but the Seva (service) of all beings in the spirit of the Lord is better." At the lower levels of Bhakti it should be done as service to the Isvara, the personal god, but preferably recognising that the man that you serve is that God. "Look upon every man, woman, and everyone as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord himself if you have the privilege."

In this way, through Vairagya and jivanseva, it is possible to achieve mukti in this life. This is to become a living saint, a, realised soul dwelling on earth. Such a person is called a Jivanmukta, a man who has seen God, and who "sees the Self in all beings and in that consciousness devotes himself to service, so that any Karma that was yet to be worked out through the body may exhaust itself. It is this state which has been described by the authors of the Shastras (scriptures) as Jivanmukti, "Freedom while living." The service that is given by such a soul cannot be for his own benefit, it is therefore best that it be for the benefit of others. The offering of this service is called dana, a gift, and necessarily some danas are worth more than other danas. The highest of gifts is the giving of
spiritual knowledge, the next is the giving of secular knowledge, and the next is the saving of life, the last is giving food and drink.

The giving of knowledge, both sacred and secular, ranks high among danas,

"and far below these rank all other gifts, even the saving of life. Therefore it is necessary that you learn this and note that all other kinds of work are of much less value than that of imparting spiritual knowledge."

At the same time all this emphasis must not lead one to ignore that the ultimate eschatological ideal is the purest Advaita, in the realization of which the mind itself stops, and all work is arrested. Practical activity in the world is not possible at the highest levels of Advaita, but only at the lower level, or stage, of Visistadvaita. The ideal is the aim of all, but is attainable only by perfected souls, and mainly in the purer ages (yugas) rather than this evil age of Kali-yuga. In this age it is the Karma-yoga, the way of service in the world, that best suits the nature of the times.

To sum all this up, Vivekananda taught that the practical principles on which human life should be based are most clearly discernible in Vedantic scriptures. They are founded on unselfishness, which must be expressed in personal conduct as Vairagya and seva. By working for the highest good of all others impartially (seva), and renouncing all thought of reward, even
the consciousness of virtue, (vairagya), the Ramakrishna Vedanta member believes that it is possible to achieve the real experience of oneness with God (nirvikalpa samadhi), here and now. It is the duty of each member to try to live up to these principles according to his capacity, which is determined to a large degree by the Karma stored up in previous lives. The individual's temperament, and the social and cultural conditions into which he is born, are the outcome of Karma, but they do not remove free will. Whatever conditions a person finds himself in, it is his duty to struggle to free himself from earthly ties (maya) by the application of the Vedantic principles outlined by Vivekananda.

These teachings were originally enunciated in an Indian context, and, as indicated above, Vivekananda felt that the West is less spiritually advanced than India, being held back by the accumulated, Karma of centuries of materialism. In striving to transcend the disadvantages of this Karmic background, therefore, a lesser path is appropriate for the Western disciples: the heights of spirituality reached by such men as Ramakrishna, and the extremes of asceticism practiced by Indian holy men, are not possible for Westerners. Nevertheless, the ultimate virtues of Vedanta must be striven for by all members, everywhere.

In reality, therefore, a few points are especially emphasized in the Western context of the Ramakrishna Vedanta mission. The first of these is the general acceptability of most
lifestyles. While it may be better for some to take vows of renunciation, it is neither necessary nor even possible for all. Salvation can be sought while living as a teacher, or businessman, just as appropriately as it is sought by monks. Secondly, it is strongly emphasized that all religious paths lead to God, and that the Vedanta movement is not seeking to convert anyone from Christianity, but to make better Christians. Nevertheless, the dominant tenor of the movement's teachings is that the Hindu path is in effect the most efficient, and the member who worships Christ does so in the Hindu manner. Finally, it is recognized that the degree of commitment depends upon the individual's karma, and it is the task of the guru (Swami-in-charge) not to push the member past his or her spiritual capacity. In practice this allows for wide variation in the degree of involvement of the membership, and ensures a broad basis of support for the relatively few, fully committed, Western monastics.
The Ramakrishna Order of monks was established under the direction of Swami Vivekananda in 1897, and the following year a large tract of land on the Ganga at Belur was purchased to provide a permanent home. By 1898 a monastery was constructed on the site, and from January 1st, 1899 this place, now known as the Belur Math, became the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Order. On January 30th, 1901, an Indenture of Trust established the legal status of the monastery, and a board of trustees was appointed. Following the death of Swami Vivekananda in 1902 the Society was reorganized into two separate but associated parts, known as the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. These institutions are in fact legally distinct, but very closely tied together in that the Board of Trustees of the Math is also the Governing Body of the Mission, and the Belur Math is registered as joint headquarters of them both. This arrangement was given legal force in May, 1909, under Act XXI of 1860 of the Governor-General of India in Council.

Although there is a clear division of function between the two, the Math remaining almost entirely a monastic home for sannyasis leading a life of renunciation and relatively secluded
piety, while the Mission is concerned with missionary and social work in India and abroad, the authority is undivided, resting entirely in the hands of the President and Trustees of the Math. These have always been the senior monks at Belur, and expectedly, they have been and remain conservative. This conservatism is characteristic of the Society even in the West, for the Swamis who come to direct the centers in North America and in Europe, are appointed by the monks of Belur, usually after years of training by them.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in the West comprises a number of independent societies, tied together only by their link with India and the basic identity of the philosophy they teach. There is no centralized authority outside India, no official publication representative of the whole movement in any country, no central pool of resources on which all centers could draw; each local Society is under the authoritative direction of a Swami appointed from India, and is expected to be financially and administratively independent.

Should a local Society encounter financial or other serious difficulties, it will typically disband rather than be maintained by help from another center. This indeed has happened several times, as is clear from the history outlined above. India is a long way away, and the senior monks of Belur usually have but little idea of the general situation immediately confronting the Swamis in the West, let alone any grasp of the details. As a
result a fair degree of variation exists in the organization of
the societies in Canada and the United States since the
establishment of the first Vedanta Society in fin de siècle New
York.

In each Society absolute authority (under Belur) is held by
one Swami, who is always Indian, trained and appointed through
Belur Math. Depending on the size of the local Society, its
financial situation, and the number of its members and
activities, there may be one or several more monks from India,
sent to act as assistants to the senior Swami. Although the head
Swami retains final authority in all matters concerning the
Society under him, the more mundane aspects of day to day routine
tend to be left to others if this is possible. In a young
Society with few members, obviously much of the organizing work
of booking halls, making travel arrangements and keeping
accounts, may have to be done by the Swami himself. But today,
the Indian Swamis concentrate almost exclusively on spiritual
matters.

The local societies are separately incorporated as religious
charities, and a board of governors is elected annually by the
members. To become a member one must be acceptable to the Swami
(the criteria vary) and pay a subscription. The subscriptions
vary a great deal.\textsuperscript{160}

The members of the boards of governors are all volunteers,
and are not remunerated for their often considerable work.
Usually the membership varies little from year to year, the same board being routinely re-elected, with minor changes as necessary. Occasionally petty jealousies or disputes as to policy may lead to internal dissensions and "politicicking"; the Swamis always try to avoid this kind of thing. Complicated organization and political wrangling are felt to be quite opposed to the spirit of Vedanta, and this has been the teaching of the mission from Vivekananda to date. This is one reason why the Swamis insist upon retaining absolute authority, even in such matters of business as do not normally concern them. In case of a dispute the Swami may arbitrarily settle it by his independent decision, as Swami Prabuddhananda of San Francisco did recently.161

In all centers organization is de-emphasized as much as possible, but naturally the larger societies require a considerable amount of routine administrative work. Most of this is voluntary, but occasionally the board will employ professional help from outside. For example, the Treasurer of The Northern California Vedanta Society (headquarters in San Francisco) keeps the books and financial records straight with the help of a secretary, but once a year a professional auditor is employed to check them.

As a general rule there are no Indian Swamis on the board, though the Swami may attend some or all board meetings. This varies from Society to Society: in Seattle Swami Bhaskarananda
(acting head Swami) is concerned in most board decisions; in Southern California Swami Prabavananda (former head Swami) laid down the rule that the President and the Vice-President of the board should always be lay members, while the treasurer is usually an American, Swami, and the rest vary. The composition of the Southern California board of governors is usually about half lay, half monastic, but the monks are always American, never Indian Swamis. As a rule Swamis Swahananda (head) and Chetananda have nothing to do with routine board affairs.

Occasionally a special committee is formed for some specific purpose and afterwards dissolved. For example, at the Annual Business Meeting of the Vedanta Society of Greater Washington, December 1975, a committee was established to report on the feasibility of buying new property for the Society Headquarters. It was found to be too costly a project, and the committee was disbanded. Again, volunteers are occasionally asked for to carry through some specific project, or to maintain some permanent activity such as a Sunday School, and a committee will be formed to organize the matter.

Each Society sends a periodic (usually monthly) bulletin to its subscribers. In most cases the list of subscribers is the same as the membership list, but many societies keep a separate mailing list (e.g. Northern California).

This bulletin usually includes a list of coming lecture topics, with dates and times, and a little routine information.
such as addresses of temples and bookshops, how to become a member, daily services at temples, how to contact the Swami, etc. There is usually little "inside" information on these bulletins; they are clearly intended for public consumption. Most are cheaply produced, though New York's is rather more expensively printed. Each Society receives the bulletins of all the others, and these are usually displayed in reading rooms and libraries.

Every Society establishes a library as soon as possible and many have very extensive libraries. The monastery at Trabuco has a really fine library of books on mysticism, founded originally by Gerald Heard, and given by him to the Society together with the monastery buildings and land. These libraries are not confined to religious subjects, but deal with history, geography, philosophy, art, sociology, anthropology, etc. However, fiction and the natural sciences are very little represented in the libraries I have examined. These libraries are often open to visitors as reading rooms, and members as lending libraries, and some volunteer member acts as librarian—often a job requiring special skill as well as much time.

Some centers have a monastery and/or nunnery in addition to the more public "lay" buildings. These are organized and run separately by the monks and nuns themselves, although still subject to the authority of the Swami, of course. A retreat center is also considered a highly desirable addition to any Society, and many of the larger centers have succeeded in opening
one. These centers are generally for the use of "members and other sincere religious seekers". Special programmes of meditation and Hindu ceremonies may be organized, depending on the approval of the particular Swami. The Vedanta Society of Northern California retreat at Olema is frequently used by Buddhist monks, who are allowed to follow their own programmes there; similarly Catholic priests and a Catholic nun occasionally turn up to take advantage of the "spiritual atmosphere" and the peace and quiet.

Not only monks and nuns, but a number of lay members live in the temple buildings in most centers. These members are nearly always women, and usually in middle or late middle age, sometimes quite old. They are generally single or widowed, and as a rule they devote all their time (and money if any) to Vedanta Society affairs. The mens' and womens' quarters in the Society buildings are very strictly separated.

Social Composition

None of the local societies keep records of such data as income, occupation, family background etc., on their members. However, the assessments of Swamis long familiar with most members, and the opinions of other long-term members, are confirmed by my observation of temple congregations, and conversations with many individual members. It is also
significant that the Society buildings are nearly always in solidly middle class residential districts, and considerations such as the respectability and quietness of the neighbourhood play a part in decisions to purchase.

By far the majority of members are of middle or upper middle class economic status. The professions are well represented—doctors, dentists, lawyers, and university professors are common among the membership. In Seattle Swami Bhaskarananda stressed the intellectual status of membership, implying that university professors, lawyers, doctors and the like, who "use their intellect," are best qualified to appreciate the merits of Vedantism. The secretary of the Northern California Society (San Francisco) gave the following as typical occupations of members: "Doctors, teachers, lawyers, a couple of film makers—one is making a film for us—a sculptor, and some skilled workers." The skilled workers on further enquiry turned out to be a cabinet maker, a locksmith, a carpenter and an interior decorator and designer. The locksmith and the decorator owned their own businesses. In Southern California (Hollywood) the situation was similar. Here a Swami I interviewed volunteered that the membership was "80% middle class", and said that many successful businessmen find Vedanta an attractive antidote to the materialistic life which they had to lead to achieve success. The impression he gave was of prosperous, middle-aged businessmen, their spirits fagged by years of high pressure, ulcer-making toil at the office,
turning at last to Vedanta as to the peaceful spiritual home of their later years. I suspect that the image was somewhat overdrawn, and may have owed something to the Hindu tradition of ashramas, or life stages, outlined elsewhere in this analysis. But the prosperity of most of the congregations I saw is beyond doubt.

Although each of the Swamis interviewed emphasized that Vedanta was for everyone, irrespective of age, class, creed or education, all were of the opinion when asked, that middle-class persons formed a disproportionately high percentage of the membership. Usually this was felt to be rather the result of correspondingly high level of education and intelligence, rather than the way in which the mission spreads its message. At the same time I did encounter high school dropouts from low income families at San Francisco, and this was considered in no way unusual by other members, nor did they appear to feel uncomfortable or out of place. Nevertheless, scanty though the evidence necessarily is, it all indicates a vast preponderance of high-income business and professional backgrounds among the membership; in short, they are mostly middle class.

The minimum age acceptable for membership at most centers is 18 years. An exception might be made in the case of one who, although not yet 18, is already financially independent. However, so far as I know, such a case has not yet presented itself. Except for the occasional attendance of the teenage
children of members, one rarely sees such young adults at the centers. In Seattle, a Brahmachari supposed that Vedanta was "not flamboyant enough for most kids" it requires patience and long application, he said, which are qualities it takes time to acquire. He was 29 years old, and believed himself to be one of the youngest "real devotees you see around here." In Northern California the youngest member is "nearly 28", and the oldest is 96, and spry as a cricket. The secretary of the Northern California Vedanta Society is herself a middle aged lady, probably in her late fifties, a widow who has been an active member of the Society for more than 30 years: she told me that all members were of "independent age, accustomed to earning their own living." Swami Amohananda, an American Swami and member of the board of governors of the Southern California Vedanta Society, assured me that new members are generally in their thirties or forties, and the average age of the membership he put in the mid-forties. Again, this was borne out by my observation of congregations. The Sunday service was the best attended everywhere, and this was the only occasion on which teenagers were in evidence, and here only accompanied by parents. Meditation sessions were less well attended, as were worship service and arati; on these occasions the youngest people I saw were clearly in their twenties, and most were a decade or so older than that.
Most of the members are women. This is true of the general membership—i.e. those who pay the fees regularly,—and even more so of the core members who devote much or all of their spare time to work for the Societies. The Swami at Seattle, when asked, said that there were "probably more women" than men among the membership. In San Francisco I received the same reply, but here Swami Prabuddhananda told me that there are some members who, although they live outside the temple, and do not take vows, nevertheless devote themselves entirely to the Vedanta Society, giving all the money and all the time they possibly can. There are fifty of these devotees, and all are women, either single or widowed. Also there are some ten lay devotees who do live in the temple buildings, and these also are nearly all women, and "mostly quite old."

Attendance at the weekday worship ceremonies and meditation sessions is also revealing in this connexion, being almost entirely of women. For example, at the San Francisco temple attendance at evening meditation on five consecutive days was as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The session was from about 6 o'clock till about 7 o'clock, and one was not necessarily expected to remain for the entire hour, so the greater likelihood of men being prevented from attending by having to work does not entirely explain the preponderance of women. Perhaps a better example is the Sunday afternoon worship and food offering ceremony at Hollywood. It occurs about one hour after the end of the Sunday lecture, which is attended by almost as many men as women—frequently whole families. A few remain behind to attend the worship; on the occasion I was there the only other men were monks or Bramacharis.

Of the regular fee-paying membership of Southern California, approximately 70% are women. Only a very few lay members devote a high proportion of their time to working for the Society—about 20 in fact—and these are "mostly female." Evidence of deep commitment to Vedanta is provided by those lay members who remain single expressly in order to pursue a spiritual life in the world. In San Francisco the secretary was answering some questions I had been asking about what most members do about Vedanta in their ordinary lives outside the temple. "Many women stay single," she said. "Celibacy is best for reaching the highest spiritual states." What about men, I asked. "No, its mainly women. About half the real members in San Francisco lead a celibate life for spiritual reasons. Some of them are widows, of course, like me. There are more single people than
householders in Vedanta." The estimate of a half may be exageration, or course, but the implication is that most members, and nearly all fully committed members, are women.

Again, there are about fifty members who can be called upon regularly for work when needed, and most are women: there are ten members who work full time (eg. librarian, secretary, typist) and these are all women. At the Hollywood center I asked the Society Treasurer how many members did not marry for spiritual reasons. "About ten percent," he replied "a lot of them men, but mostly women."165

As far as the fee-paying membership goes (i.e. the lay membership) the majority are women, and the higher the level of commitment the greater the proportion of women. There is also a preponderance of women among the monastic members, which at times has given rise to problems of authority, since the Belur Monks refuse to deal with nuns (Pravrajikas) if it can be avoided. However, that will be dealt with under a separate heading.

Not all centers have monastic communities, but many do, and others have room at least for brahmacharis or brahmacharinis who can be sent to monastic communities at other centers to further their training. At Seattle, for example, there are two brahmacharis but no facilities for brahmacharinis who would have to be housed quite separately. For the Northern California Vedanta Society, comprising the New Temple with a nunnery, the Old Temple with a monastery, and a retreat center at Olema set in
some 2,000 acres of land, the monastic membership is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Indian Swami</td>
<td>3 Pravrajikas (nuns)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 U.S. Swamis</td>
<td>4 Bramacharinis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Brahmacharis</td>
<td>9 Probationers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Probationers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Vedanta Society of Southern California comprises a temple and monastery in Hollywood (headquarters), a temple and convent in Santa Barbara, and a monastery at Trabuco Canyon. The couplement of monastics is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Indian Swamis</td>
<td>10 Pravrajikas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 U.S. Swamis</td>
<td>4 Bramacharinis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Brahmacharis</td>
<td>9 Probationers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Probationers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Vedanta Societies claim that the philosophy they teach is not designed to transform people into Hindus, or to make them change their religion in any way. A Christian would become a
better Christian by following Vedantic teaching. However, in practice most Christian denominations teach doctrines and dogmas which the Vedantists condemn as sectarian, and so it is not surprising that nearly all the members were not committed to a particular form of Christianity at the time they joined the Vedanta Society. Most had been Christian at some time, but had left their Church or sect before their interest in Vedanta. A few people committed to other religious societies used the temples or attended lectures and meditation classes on a regular basis: these were principally Roman Catholics (including a number of priests and nuns) and Buddhists. However, these were not members of the Vedanta Society, nor did they pay fees.

The only ethnically distinct group to appear in Vedanta congregations were Indian immigrant families. In most centers they are not a significant part of the membership, preferring simply to use the temple as a convenient means of continuing to worship in an accustomed fashion. Again in most centers, where Indian families live sufficiently close by, the Indian Swamis will occasionally perform the minor rituals of rites of passage, such as the first rice ceremony, or the ceremony for the first born son, for which the immigrants would have turned to their local temples if still in India. The Swamis would not perform marriage or funeral services, but insisted that "culturally normal means" be used; they would, however, conduct a memorial service after funerals, or give blessings after weddings.
At the same time, where Vedanta Society shops sold incense, ceremonial bells, pictures of Hindu Saints, etc., Indian families would go from time to time to shop, or browse among the books. This meant that at times Indians were far more visible than the proportion of Indian members might lead one to expect. In fact they were only a tiny proportion of the membership in most centers. There are exceptions to this: Seattle has a fairly large percentage of Indian members, and Toronto has an even larger and increasing percentage. However, without doing a special study of these particular centers I cannot say why this should be so.

Economy

Each Vedanta Society is autonomous and independent of all the others. There has never been any financial support from India—the policy of the Ramakrishna Mission has been against that from the first. Nor is there any central pool of financial resources either nationally or internationally outside India. However, certain ways of meeting economic needs are used by all the Societies in the West, and others are only slightly less universal. The individual Ramakrishna Vedanta societies are financed by a combination of membership fees, donations both of money and labor, investments, minor commercial enterprises, and the labor of the monastic members.
Since the organization of the first Vedanta Society in New York all centers have charged membership fees as a basic source of regular income. The amount charged is never high, though it varies considerably from Society to Society. In Seattle the fee is $2.50 per month; in San Francisco it is the same; The Vedanta Society of Southern California asks members to pledge a regular contribution which they feel they can afford, and some of the wealthier members pledged "pretty large sums"; in Toronto fees were recently raised to $10.00 per annum, and in Washington D.C. also a single member pays $10.00 yearly, while a whole family pays $15.00 jointly. With occasional exceptions then (such as Southern California), membership fees vary between about $10.00 and $30.00 per annum. The number of members recorded in the "dues book" usually exceeds the number actively involved in Society affairs: indeed, for some members, regular payment of fees seems to be almost their only connection with the Society. The larger the Society, of course, the truer this becomes. In Southern California, for example, the membership is about 700; of these some two to three hundred attend lectures, services and classes regularly; about twenty are actively involved in work for the Society; and perhaps a hundred, who are rarely seen otherwise, use the library, ask the Swami for advice on personal matters occasionally, and attend the larger Vedanta festivals. These figures overlap, of course, and certainly not much more than half the membership can be represented. The rest, one
imagines, pay their fees, receive the monthly bulletins, and otherwise remain anonymous after their first introduction. It is this group which has the highest proportion of males, and among which the greatest turnover of membership occurs.

The fees paid are recorded in a "dues book" together with names and addresses of members. If fees are not paid for a time by some member, a letter is sent reminding him or her of fees due, and attempting to revive a possibly flagging interest in Vedanta. If no reply comes, or one which indicates no further interest in Vedanta, the relevant name is struck out of the dues book. According to one Swami, the "true purpose" of the dues book, is to enable the Society to keep track of those members who show signs of drifting away, and offer some timely encouragement. I suppose this is one of its functions, but only to the extent that consistent payment of fees is considered a satisfactory indication of interest and commitment to Vedanta.

Donations are an important resource, and they take several forms. The first is typical of Sunday services in most Christian Churches and Chapels—the collection plate. Not every Vedanta Society passes the plate around after the Sunday lecture but it is certainly not considered contrary to the spirit of Vedanta to do so, and most West coast centers follow the practice. It may not be a major source of income for the mission, but it is far from inconsiderable. The collections I saw included many $5.00
and $10.00 bills and several $20.00 bills; only the children put coins into the collection.

Straightforward gifts of money are not uncommon, especially since such gifts are tax deductible, and a number of members are well-to-do businessmen. Often these gifts are related to some specific need made known to the members, perhaps by a committee formed to canvass for money. For example, if buildings have to be extended or new ones bought, or if land is needed, perhaps for a retreat center, then usually a committee is formed to seek ways of getting money or land and labor, to provide for this need. Circulars are sent to members asking for donations of money, and volunteer work, or even donations of land. Often these are forthcoming. The Vedanta Society of Southern California, for example, owns very extensive properties in various parts of Los Angeles and the surrounding area; these were almost all direct gifts. The Retreat Center at Olema was bought with money donated by members for the purpose, and the buildings and gardens constructed largely with free labor. The new Temple buildings in San Francisco were wired throughout by a professional electrician member for no charge, the altar was built by a sculptor member, and the interiors finished by a company owned by a member, as a gift. Much of the necessary maintenance of Society buildings and land is provided free by the members, who either do the work themselves, or pay to have it done. Also, work to maintain the places in which they live is considered part
of the discipline of community life for monastic members. These combined gifts of money, time, labor, skill and property, are almost routine for the core membership, and are at once an economic mainstay of the societies, and a form of satisfying commitment and involvement for the members, providing, especially in the case of free labor, a sense of belonging and community.

Donations of land and buildings (houses, barns, etc.) have obvious importance beyond their use value. In Hollywood, for instance, an original gift of a house made about the turn of the century, has since been supplemented by many more such gifts, as the street names around the Temple testify. (eg. Vedanta Place, Vedanta Crescent, Vedanta Terrace). The Southern California Society owns most of the houses in the same area around the Temple, most of them given, some of them bought. These are rented out, mainly, though not necessarily nor exclusively, to members, and income from these rents makes up 25% of the total income for the Society. Also, some of the donations of property were made many years ago, and the extraordinary rise in property values in some places has been of great benefit to the societies: a number of properties have been sold, and considerable profit realized. Perhaps the most important gift of property which the Southern California Society received was the monastery at Trabuco Canyon, set high in the Santa Ana Mountains, about sixty miles south of Los Angeles. The property originally included about
three hundred acres, not all of it of much practical use, and none of it very fertile.

Since it was deeded to the Society by Gerald Heard in 1949, various attempts have been made to utilize the land profitably, but with little lasting success (e.g. a poultry/egg producing business; raising rabbits; vegetable gardening). Today vegetables are still grown, and grape vines have been added; flowers are grown for the temple, and a great variety of trees, some fruit bearing, are carefully cultivated. But about half the land has had to be sold, ironically to pay county taxes on capital accumulation from the rising value of land, which, because it was not "used for religious purposes" was not tax exempt. This problem has been cleverly solved in recent years. A long, winding path meanders over the remaining, uncultivated land, and beside it at intervals of twenty to fifty yards, are small shrines dedicated to the major great religions: the crescent moon and star of Islam over one small altar; a statue of Gautama under a shady tree, with meditation seats; a representation of Calvary; there is even a mound with ceremonially painted wands and tied feathers, symbolizing the religious beliefs of local American Indians (the Swamis I asked did not know which tribe). This path is a favorite walk for the Trabuco monks, and the shrines are places of meditation and quiet thought; also the land is thus used for religious purposes and is not taxable.
However, although the ownership of property provides a considerable income (in rents, etc.) for some of the bigger societies such as Hollywood, or New York, most of the Vedanta Societies own no more property than they are actually using. Swamis in charge of societies, with few members have even turned down offers of gifts of land, on the grounds that the finances and organization required to maintain such property would interfere with the true purpose of the Vedanta Society. This is likely to be the case where the Society is so small that the Indian Swami is occupied in organizational matters; as soon as possible such business is left to Western members.

A final, common type of donation to sustain the societies is legacies, which are often of land or houses as well as money. Since lay members are frequently unmarried, and often have no family, or maintain little contact with it, the Vedanta Societies, perhaps the most important and meaningful groups to which they are attached in later life, are fairly obvious legatees.

It is as legacies that stocks, bonds and securities are generally given to societies, though occasionally these are simply donated by living members. Sometimes they are sold when ready cash is needed for a particular project, but more often they "just sit".

All societies of any size have some income from investments. This is always conservative—stock market speculation is
considered irresponsible. Generally speaking investments are handled by professionals—brokers or financial lawyers—though not necessarily. In Southern California the treasurer tried several professionals, but was dissatisfied with them all; he kept a record of their efforts, and a record of what he would have done himself, decided he was better than they were, and now handles all finances himself. That is unusual, however; in Northern California a broker is employed, "who handles investments for a lot of religious groups and knows what is required—nothing adventurous, just solid, respectable investment in stocks and bonds." 168

Occasionally members who themselves invest quite heavily might offer advice, or even, do a little private business on behalf of the Society, by way of a donation. Although most societies have investments of one form or another, they are nowhere a very high proportion of the regular income. This was stressed by everyone who mentioned the matter, and I suspect that making money from investment on the stock market is considered a trifle too much like "big business organization" to fit comfortably with the Vedanta Society's self image, though they have absolutely no moral objection to it in secular life.

Most societies, whatever their size, have a bookshop—or, more accurately, sell books. The smaller centers, such as Seattle, may have little more than a table displaying a few volumes of Vedantic Scripture and the works of Vivekananda in
cheap editions. Larger centers are correspondingly more ambitious, and some have large, well-organized bookselling businesses. New York has a sizeable store, as does Chicago, but the Hollywood center undoubtedly has the biggest. This is well patronized not only by members, but by a considerable casual trade, who seem to consider the temple and bookshop a minor cultural or tourist attraction.

The volumes available deal with aspects of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other major religions, the lives of saints, works of philosophy and mysticism, and religious poetry: there are books in Hindi and Bengali; there are even coloring books with pictures of Jesus and Krishna for children. This same store also sells a variety of imported goods from India, such as incense-burners, religious prints and statues, and Indian silk scarves. This store is a part of the complex of buildings set around the Temple of Hollywood, which comprise the monastic headquarters for the Southern California Vedanta Society; it is run by American brahmachari monks, under the supervision of an American Swami.

In addition to this thriving retail business, the bookshop also has a wholesale trade, and even exports wholesale to Europe. This is the chief sales outlet for the publishing business of the Society—the Vedanta Press. Until 1970 the Vedanta Press published a bi-monthly magazine, Vedanta in the West, but this was abandoned principally because of the difficulty of finding
suitable material, and the lack of skilled personnel. (Sooner or later--later in this case, as the magazines ran from 1938-1970—all the Societies' magazines in North America have folded, usually for financial reasons.)

The Vedanta Press has a small publishing list of about 20 hardcover books, the most popular being a translation of the Bhagavad Gita (some 800,000 copies sold) and a book by Swami Prabhavananda, the former head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, entitled How to Know God. (9,000 copies sold last year). The Press used to publish a larger list of paper—back books, but this trade has been taken over by the New American Library—though the treasurer was not inclined to elaborate on the circumstances of the take—over. The wholesale part of the business is rather more profitable than the retail: all the Vedanta societies in the English speaking world provide a ready market to begin with, and the proliferation of Indian, Hindu and Eastern sectarian interest in recent years has greatly expanded sales. Wholesale orders are occasionally placed by such organizations as The Maharishi Mahesh Yogi's Transcendental Meditation Center in Italy. Altogether, the bookshop and publishing business in Southern California account for approximately 25% of the Society's income.

In other places the picture is very different, and bookshops are maintained by some smaller societies more for their use as a means of proselytizing than for profit (though no Society would,
I think, subsidize a store that made a loss.)

Ideally monks and nuns, even at the novice stage, should be free from the need to work, in order to devote all their time and energies to spiritual advancement. However, not many societies are wealthy enough to maintain any number of monastics or aspirants who have no income, and in most cases they hold jobs in the "outside world" and earn a regular income. This is nearly always the case with brahmacharya monastics and probationers, more rarely with Swamis and Pravrajikas who have vowed renunciation for life; but even the latter have jobs when necessary. Most of the money earned is turned over to the Society, though in the case of each individual it is a matter for himself, his guru and his conscience.

These jobs are usually chosen to conflict as little as possible with the routines of monastic life, and not on the basis of high salary or career prospects. As a result they are often poorly paid, or part-time, but close to the temple and with convenient hours. Few restrictions are placed on the choice of occupation, though some types of employment are considered unsuitable (eg. the job of masseuse was considered inappropriate for a nun). The income from this source is not usually great, though it perhaps does a little more than cover the upkeep and maintenance of the monastic quarters, and of course, feed and clothe the inhabitants.
All centers thus have a basic income from membership fees, and donations of various kinds from members and well-wishers; all are supported in an economically very important way by free work, whether cleaning, building, repairing, gardening, or maintenance, etc. Donations and Members' labor contributions are the most typical and universal means of economic support. Most centers also own property, which may be used as security for mortgage or loans, and most have a bookshop making some profit, though not always very much. Some centers have investments, income from rents, retail and wholesale businesses, even publishing concerns, but these are rarer sources of means. Each Society is independant of the others, and all are independant of India in matters of finance.

Worship

Forms of worship, ritual, and ceremonial vary considerably from center to center, largely following traditions established by earlier Swamis. In San Francisco, for example, Swami Ashokananda kept ritual to a minimum, arguing that it too easily becomes empty ritual, and attracts seekers after the strange and exotic rather than the serious pursuers of Truth. His successor, Swami Prabuddhananda, continues in the same style. In Southern California on the other hand, Swami Prabhavananda always placed considerable importance on ritual, which he believed concentrated
and focussed the attention on the Supreme Reality. In his turn, the current Swami-in-charge, Swami Swahananda, takes the same line.

There are, however, a number of observances, ceremonies and techniques which are common to all, or nearly all, Vedanta centers in the West. These are meditation, the formal "worship ceremony", arati, initiation, and a number of festivals, minor rituals and occasional ceremonies, which may be observed in any Ramakrishna Vedanta community.

The term "meditation" is used in two senses by the Vedanta teachers. Technically the word refers to a state known as dhyana (the Japanese derivative is Zen), which is most often expressed in the simile of Shankara, quoted by numerous Swamis.

"Meditation is a constant remembrance of the Infinite One, flowing like an unbroken stream of oil poured from one vessel to another. When this kind of remembrance has been attained, all bondages break." 169

Meditation in this sense is not something one does, it is a stage of spiritual life to be achieved. As Prabhavananda put it,

"Meditation, that is, an unceasing flow of thought toward God, when we constantly 'live, move, and have our being in Him', is a stage in spiritual growth to be attained by the practice of concentration." 170

This "practice of concentration" is what is more usually meant by the term "meditate", rather than the state of dhyana,
and it is in this everyday sense that the word is used in the following section, unless otherwise explicitly stated.

Meditation is essentially a private practice, and all members are told to meditate as often as possible, preferably in some place set aside for it.

Monastic members have meditation rooms in addition to the temple, and lay members are advised to reserve in their homes either a whole room, or at least some corner of a room, for that purpose. It is recommended that here they set up a shrine, preferably to their Chosen Ideal, or Ishta, (eg Ramakrishna, Buddha or Jesus), and use that place for worship and meditation, and nothing else.

Over a period the consistent use of one place for meditation is believed to create an atmosphere ever more conducive to quiet contemplation of the divine. However, meditation can be done anywhere, and the aim should be to do it everywhere. All centers have periods set aside for meditation; usually there are three each day, sometimes an hour long. The first session generally starts the day off, being the hour or so between rising and breakfast. The exact time varies a little from center to center; 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. is fairly typical. The second period of meditation is about noon, forming part of the "worship ceremony" which includes the offering of food from the kitchen. The final period is in the evening before supper, and again in some centers it follows an evening ritual, or vesper service.
There is little ritual attached to group meditation. First the devotees take up an appropriate posture--known as Asana. Hindu scriptures and traditions have a great deal to say about asana, and many different positions are described in which the devotee is recommended to meditate for various purposes (eg Lotus position). As a rule the Swamis do not consider all this to be of much importance; devotees are told to sit upright in a comfortable posture, on a hard chair or a pew. In San Francisco Swami Ashokananda would not allow those attending meditation and worship ceremonies to take up the yoga positions, seated cross-legged on the floor, but insisted that everyone sat upright in the pews in the temple. More recently Swami Prabuddhananda has removed that rule, and today a few people can be seen sitting upright on the floor before the altar, in lotus or half-lotus position, during meditation. However, any comfortable, but not lounging or somnolent posture, is quite adequate. All the same, the Indian Swamis all take up a position on the podium immediately before the altar, sitting cross-legged on the floor, bolt upright, with the legs quite concealed by the gerua. They are capable of maintaining this position, apparently as still as marble, for hours at a stretch--always for the whole meditation period. This is a small but impressive feat of asceticism to many Western devotees, who are often reduced to sticking out one or other leg to rest aching knee joints, or squirming about on tired and itchy buttocks.
Meditation begins with the chanting of a mantra, a verse of Sacred Hindu Scripture, and for the rest takes place in silence. To an outsider the atmosphere of group meditation session is at times almost strained; rather like the first moments of an important examination when the students read the questions with tense hope and breathless concentration. Swami Prabhavananda wrote:

"After assuming the proper posture, shut the doors to your senses. The idea is that you have to concentrate upon God within the temple of the body; you have to learn to worship God within yourself. Whatever may be your deity, you must learn to see Him as you Atman, dwelling within you. You do not have to pray to God to come to you from afar, but know that He is already dwelling within. Enter the chamber of your own heart and see the effulgent Lord. God is beneath your outer consciousness, shining within the lotus of your heart. See Him, Feel this presence, seem to see Him. Practice this again and again.

Enter alone into the chamber of your heart. Shut the doors and be alone with God. He is, and you are . . . chant the name of the Lord in His presence. If you have been given a mantra—the name of God—repeat it before Him. Practice this concentration every day regularly during the early hours of the morning and evening, at noon and at night. Keep up a regularity . . . form the habit of concentration." 172

Some members do literally "seem to see" occasionally, experiencing visions of "chosen ideals" such as Ramakrishna. However, this is rare, and members are not encouraged to discuss such things with anyone but the guru.
The temples are usually open to the public during meditation, but are poorly attended. Monastic members generally meditate in the monastery shrine, and only a Swami and a few lay members attend the session in the main temple. However, it is considered far more important that lay members meditate privately as often as they can, seeking the state of permanent God-consciousness. It is considered the most important religious practice taught by Vedanta. Meditation is the sine qua non of spiritual realization. "Daily practice of meditation is an essential prerequisite for a student of Vedanta." 173

After long practice, often many years, some devotees experience strange and disturbing symptoms. Vision may be seen, and disembodied voices sound upon the inner ear. These may be associated with occult powers or extra-sensory perception, but members are warned to beware of their fascination. They are distractions and will lead the unwary away from the path of enlightenment. A few members admitted to experiences of this kind; but refused to elaborate, saying that they were best ignored and forgotten. They are valued not for their own sake, but as an indication that some progress has been made. "Visions and voices and the supersensuous perception may be milestones on the road to realization . . .", but "it is best to ignore [them] and keep perpetual vigil until the goal is reached." 174 Such extraordinary experiences must provide powerful confirmation of
the rightness of Vedanta, and be a strong stimulus to renewed commitment.

The importance and elaborateness of the worship ceremony, like most other things, varies from society to society, depending on the inclinations of the Swamis concerned. As a rule the monks and nuns practice daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna, but the ceremony is not always a public one. Moreover, it is often abbreviated, or celebrated with such relative informality that a Brahminic Hindu of Orthodox persuasion would consider it disgustingly lax. In San Francisco there is no public worship ceremony at all, though some members may worship privately. On the other hand, the Vedanta Society of Southern California has a fairly elaborate daily ceremony at noon, and other centers such as Chicago, New York and Portland, have ceremonies varying in elaborateness.

The ceremony takes place in the shrineroom, which is a part of the temple, usually raised a few steps above floor level, in which a permanent altar is set. The altar always has a picture of Ramakrishna, and often others of Vivekananda, Sarada Devi, or even Jesus or Buddha. These shrinerooms have gates, or sliding partitions which are kept shut when the shrine is not in use. No one steps into the shrineroom with shoes on: it is sacred ground.

The purpose of worship ceremonies is to aid in concentrating the mind on God. Swami Brahmananda, (the first president of the
Ramakrishna Math and Mission is quoted as saying

"If an average man is asked to meditate on his union with the Absolute Brahman, he will not understand... However if that same man is asked to worship God with flowers, incense, and other accessories of worship, his mind will gradually be concentrated on God... 175

Most members are attracted to the ritual and it is fairly well attended in many centers, but others reject it, rigidly pursuing the path of absolute impersonalism. 176

The basic pattern of the worship ceremony is simple enough, though it may reach bewildering elaboration if many Hindu traditional rituals are incorporated. The pujari, the one who performs the worship may be any member, male or female, who has learnt the correct procedures. These include picking various flowers, mixing sandal paste, and cleaning and polishing the copper and bronze bowls, vessels and utensils, as well as the gestures, movements, offerings and discursive meditations which make up the actual ceremony. The others sit in silent meditation as the pujari performs. Symbolic hand gestures are made (mudras); flowers are smeared with the sandal paste and placed on the altar; water is poured repeatedly from one bronze jar to another, and some is sprinkled about the shrine and over the pujari himself. A little rice is scattered about; two or three candles or ghee lamps are lit and waved before the altar (arati) and the same is done with incense; for several minutes the pujari sits motionless in meditation, perhaps with a flower balanced on his
head; bells are rung—it is all very impressive, and mysterious to the uninitiated visitor.

Towards the end of the ceremony a tray is brought in from the kitchens, with samples of the day's meal on it and it is placed to one side of the shrine. The pujari scatters flower petals and sprinkles water over this food, making more hand gestures which indicate that it is being offered to the deity of the shrine, Ramakrishna. This tray is then returned to the kitchen, where the now sacred food is mixed with the rest, making it prasad, offered food, and therefore pure and spiritually beneficial to eat. The food offering is the last part of the ceremony.

Although the exact form of the ritual; the gestures, the water and rice, the number and shape of the vessels, etc., varies from center to center, the underlying meaning is always the same. It is a mixture of dualism and non-dualism. Many of the gestures mime the welcoming of Ramakrishna, the chosen deity, imagined to be physically present. He is revered as a visiting lord, an honored guest, and offered food and drink, flowers and incense: this is extreme dualism. At another point of the ceremony the pujari meditates (concentrates the mind) on the fact that he is Brahma worshiping Brahma, even while he is a devotee worshiping Ramakrishna: the flower offered to the deity is placed on his own head. Thus the conception of dualism (seeking the personal God) as a stage on the way to monism, and the link between bhakta
and jnana, is expressed in the ritual. This much would be recognized by any initiate whenever he happened to be present at a Vedanta center worship ceremony.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta Wordbook defines arati as "A ceremonial waving of lights before a deity or holy person." It is rarely performed publicly, but frequently is part of the daily routine of monastic life (though not for all monks and nuns at all centers). It is a short ritual in which the elements of the universe are offered to the God who is their source. Candles, lamps and incense are lit, and waved gently before the altar, and earth, water, fire, air and ether, are symbolically offered at the shrine. This may be followed by a brief chant in Sanskrit, or a hymn in English, or both, and a period of silent meditation. This ceremony always takes place in the evening, and so in some societies it is called vespers.

The ceremony of initiating a member (diksha) either into monastic life or lay dedication, again varies from place to place, though whatever particular rituals are used certain things are constant. Initiation is always by mantra (diksha mantri) whereby the guru whispers the mantra into the disciple's ear. Specific instructions as to the nature of spiritual life and appropriate spiritual practices are given with the mantra, and the disciple vows to follow his guru's instructions in the determination to achieve realization and enlightenment. No initiation takes place without some ritual, of course, but this may be abbreviated by
some Swamis, or take place relatively informally. Swami Atulananda (Cornelius Heyblom) wrote an account of initiation into Brahmachari, which despite its age, and unusual elaborateness, is worth summarising since it describes all the features of current ceremonies.

The ceremony took place in the meditation room in the home of a student of Vedanta. The room was well lit, and incense was burning before an altar, where a picture of Ramakrishna was placed. The altar was covered with a Gerua cloth and flowers. Offerings of fruit and flowers were placed on the altar, and some time was spent in meditation before the Homa fire was lit by the Swami. The Homa is an ancient Vedic ritual, whereby a fire is built according to scriptural injunctions, the fire being a sacred symbol, or visible manifestation of the deity. Oblations are offered into the fire, often representing the elements of the universe. When the fire was burning, the Swami read a number of Slokas (verses of Scripture) he had selected for the occasion, and chanted a few Sanskrit verses in honor of Ramakrishna.

Then, speaking to Heyblom and others who were initiated at the same time, the Swami emphasized the serious nature of initiation, warning that it was not to be undertaken lightly.

"As Bramacharis we had to try, with all our might, to conquer and control our passions, not only lust, but also anger and jealousy, hatred and greed; we should try to realize the divinity in everyone, and to love all beings equally; we should try to follow the idea of non-killing, non-injuring others and
truthfulness; we had to be chaste in word, thought and deed and always to remember the sexless Spirit; we were to renounce marriage and to avoid temptations, and not to run after sense-pleasures; we should always keep in mind that we were Spirit divine. And remember, the Swami said, you are consecrating your life for the good of all and for the service of God.

"The Swami then asked the other Brahmacharis who were present, whether there was any objection to us entering the order . . . Then, one by one, we were asked to approach the sacred fire, and to repeat the vows after the Swami, with the customary invocation and oblation of clarified butter into the fire.

"This part of the ceremony over, the Swami touched our foreheads with sacred ashes. We received a piece of gerua (ochre) cloth and then with the sprinkling of holy water the Swami gave us our spiritual names (Hindu names) . . . The meaning of the names was explained . . . The ceremony was over."178

Certain festivals are celebrated by every Vedanta society, though not necessarily in the same way, others are marked by some Societies, not by others; some days are celebrated by only one center (eg. its founder's anniversary). There are four major festivals: Ramakrishna's birthday, Vivekananda's birthday, Sarada Devi's birthday and Durga Puja. In addition Christmas is celebrated in every center, at the expressed wish of Vivekananda, though not everywhere with same solemnity.

These major feasts involve a special lecture and ceremony, usually well advertised in the press, followed by a large communal meal in which as many members and friends as care to may take part. The worship ceremony of the day is dedicated
appropriately, and the offerings are made before the image of
the right deity, specially placed on the altar and bedecked with
flowers. Sometimes the festival may be marked by an especially
elaborate ritual. For example Swami Prabuddhananda told me that
Christmas Eve, five years ago, was celebrated in San Francisco by
sacrifice to Homa—a most unusual departure for this Society,
where ritual is largely avoided.

Apart from the spiritual benefit these feasts are believed
to impart, they have the obvious social effect of reinforcing the
sense of community, shared religious beliefs, and shared
emotions. Communal meals are among the few occasions when a
large number of members meet socially outside the lecture/Sunday
worship context, and here they can discuss problems of family and
daily life in terms of their commitment to Vedanta. Thus it is a
time not only for reaffirming membership in the religious
community of the Society, but also, through conversation with
fellow members, for drawing all aspects of mundane life into the
context of Vedanta. In other words they meet not only as Vedanta
members but as Vedanta mothers and fathers, Vedanta workers,
Vedanta citizens and Vedanta friends.

There are minor celebrations also. In many centers some
convenient feast is made the subject of a special worship
ceremony once a month.

A few minor rituals are part of the daily routine of
monastic members, and often also of lay members. For example a
form of grace before meals is either chanted, or said silently to oneself, as follows:

Brahman is the ritual
Brahman is the offering
Brahman is he who offers
To the fire that is Brahman
If a man sees Brahman
In every action
He will find Brahman.

Various other chants are used on occasion, as members feel is appropriate. A few words before and after doing a job such as dishwashing, may offer the work and its fruits to Brahman. Japa, the private chanting of a mantra, often the personal one given to them at initiation, may be done at any convenient time, with or without the rosary of beads for counting.

There are a few special ceremonies which may be used for the dedication of new land or buildings, or the consecration of a new temple. These of course, are comparatively rare, and like almost every aspect of Vedanta ritual they vary from place to place. They may be no more than a brief chant, or a few hymns, or they may be elaborate ceremonies going on for days. When the New Temple in San Francisco was completed in 1954, Swami Prabuddhananda decided that it would be dedicated with a formal and complete Hindu ceremonial, according to scripture. Many members were actively involved in both preparation and performance of the complicated and difficult rituals. Throughout the final 48 hours of the dedication, Swami Prabuddhananda sat
motionless in the lotus position in the newly opened shrine, which deeply impressed those present. Such feats of ascetisism do much to validate the unique authority of the Indian Swamis: it is believed that no Westerner can match them.

There are other ceremonies performed by the Indian Swamis of a more Brahminically orthodox kind, which are not necessarily attended by members at all. These are the rites of passage (eg. for the first born son, first rice eating ceremony, etc.) at which the Swamis officiate on behalf of Indian families living in the district. In India it is customary to use the services of the local temple Swamis for the rites that mark the progress of life's passage, and, although they consider it marginal to their real purpose in the West, the Indian Swamis of the Vedanta society make themselves available for these observances on occasion. They will not however, conduct marriage or funerary rites, but insist that these follow the norms of the indigenous culture: they will add a blessing afterwards in each case. As a rule the Swamis will not conduct religious functions outside their temples, arguing that the years of dedication, sacred ceremonial, profound prayer and meditation, create an atmosphere of deep spirituality, which is not to be found anywhere outside—not, at least, in this frantic society.

In the Vedanta Societies of the West there are no set rules of worship, no fixed practices in which all members engage, with the exception of meditation, which any member who is seriously
committed to spiritual life is expected to practise daily. A few members are determined advaitins (Monist impersonalists) and will have nothing to do with images or rituals, but the vast majority follow the cult of some great avatar, the most popular being Ramakrishna. Jesus and Buddha are also worshipped by many, which does not mean that these members are Christians or Buddhists. They remain Vedantist in that they place no absolute importance on their cult; it is merely their preference, and has no more intrinsic validity than any other. However, the central importance of the cult of Ramakrishna is reinforced by the daily worship ceremonies performed at his shrine in almost every Vedanta Center.

The festivals celebrated by the societies are chiefly those of the founders of the Order--Ramakrishna himself, his wife Sarada Devi, and his "St. Paul"--Vivekananda. Durga Puja, the feast of Durga, a principal manifestation of the Supreme as Mother, and the Ishtadeva (Chosen Ideal Goddess) of Ramakrishna, is also universally observed in the movement. Generally of less importance are the anniversaries of Buddha's birth and Jesus' birth, though they are marked by some event in every Vedanta Society. Major festivals are often occasions for communal meals or garden parties, and sometimes provide an opportunity for display of arcane knowledge of Hindu ritual and Sanskrit and the aforementioned feats of asceticism by the Indian Swamis, which greatly strengthen their religious authority.
The monastic members, monks and nuns separately, live in a religious community. There they are subject to dual authority. First, and absolute, is that of the guru, who is generally the Swami-in-charge of the center. Utter faith and trust in, and absolute obedience to, the guru, are prerequisites for spiritual advance, as is typical of the Hindu tradition. Indeed, in India this is frequently expressed as guru-worship, and it is common for the devotees of a highly revered guru to consider him an avatar, particularly after his death.

However, the Vedanta Swamis consider that guru-worship of this kind savors of fanaticism, and far from claiming avatarship, the Swamis I asked acknowledged that they had not yet attained samadhi. Nevertheless, the true aspirant cannot be set on the road to spiritual enlightenment except by the grace of the guru, and to accept a guru therefore, is to place one's soul in his care. The aspirant may not always understand the reasons for the guru's instructions, but he trusts his teacher's wisdom and obeys.

This authority is made absolute by vows taken at initiation, which include a vow of obedience to superiors in the Ramakrishna Order. Although the duty to the guru is supposedly based on no more than desire for enlightenment, and trust that he can lead one to it, in practice the guru in the West is always the Swami
in charge of the Society, and each authority reinforces the other. (This is not true for non-initiated members, of course.) Formally this authority is exercised through the rules of daily life in the community, and the timetable of events. These, of course, vary from center to center, but all include time set aside for worship and meditation. In very small centers, such as Seattle, where there are only two Brahmacaris, the Swami lives in constant, intimate association with his few aspirant monks, and here the exercise of authority will be largely an informal process of maintaining these intimate relations. In larger centers, in addition to the personal and intimate guru-relationship with each aspirant, the Swami usually holds more formal meetings, at which he may teach or lecture as to a class, or hold formal discussions. In these meetings the Swami explains the nature of religious community life, and deals with specific problems of concern to the group as a whole.

Mutual criticism among members, either privately or at meetings, is actively discouraged. The guru is the only one qualified to make judgments, and he does so on an individual basis. What is right and just for one member is not necessarily so for others. The following, quoted from the account of one of Swami Paramananda's followers, is a good illustration:

"One morning I received a reprimand from the Swami for something I had seen another do with impunity day after day right before his eyes. I went to him a little later and expressed myself with some
bitterness... "I realize," he said, "that the person you mention does offend in this way constantly. The reason I do not correct her is because the fault is so ingrained that it would do little good to mention it. It may take her several lifetimes to overcome it. In your case, however, that is not true. This particular fault is not native to you and you can very easily get rid of it. These few words from me may be all that is needful to inspire you to do so."179

Judgments of this kind can only be made by the guru, and often will appear unjust and incomprehensible to others. Western Swamis generally believe that only Indian Swamis have the necessary spiritual sensitivity to discern the precise needs of each aspirant in this way.

Clearly it takes time to develop this ideal of total trust in the guru, and many Swamis allow immense latitude in the behavior of their followers. Swami Prabuddhananda in San Francisco, for example wants this trust to develop naturally. Ultimately the individual cannot abrogate responsibility for his own Karma, so the Swami is fond of saying "reflect on what I had to say and do as you will."180 However, as the Swami is the sole judge of devotees' spiritual progress, and he decides when the aspirant is prepared for sannyas, it is no doubt clear enough that if "doing as you will" conflicts often with the guru's suggestions, there is not much chance of a rapid rise to swamihood. Expulsion is the ultimate sanction, and is very rarely used: usually a disaffected member will leave of his or her own accord.
Every member of the religious community, from probationers to Swami, has a share of the routine daily tasks, such as cooking, shopping, cleaning and washing dishes, etc. Sometimes even the Indian Swami-in-charge will take a hand, and perhaps cook a traditional Hindu meal for everyone. Minor handiwork about the society buildings such as changing locks, repairing windows or mending broken furniture, is undertaken by anyone who feels competent. Some monastics have full-time jobs working on society business: in Hollywood two Brahmacharis run the bookstore, and the Treasurer, an American Swami, has a busy life handling all the financial affairs of the Southern California Society. Doing the routine work necessary for the Society's continuance, some monastics may have authority over others for practical purposes, but behind it lies the authority of the Indian Swami.

As a rule male and female monastics are separated as much as possible. When the Northern California Society was building the retreat at Olema, much of the work was done by members, both lay and monastic. But men and women never worked together: sometimes matters were fixed so that they worked on different days, sometimes on the same day but in different places. In theory the Vedantists believe in equality between the sexes, teaching that male and female are merely different manifestations of sexless jivas. The female is not considered a lower manifestation, nor are men believed to have any natural authority over women. The
constitution of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission specifically allows for the future independence of organizations of nuns, founded and developed within the Society. In 1954 some nuns of the Order, running a convent, girls' school, and clinic, were organized independently as the Sarada Math, with the blessing and assistance of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission of India.

The division of labor between the sexes is said to be appropriate when it corresponds to the individuals' capabilities and needs, and when it conforms to the customs of the host society (eg. U.S.A.); if these are not corrupt by Vedanta standards. In a number of places, particularly the older Vedanta Societies such as Hollywood, there was a time in the early days when almost all members were women and perhaps all monastic members. In those cases all the organization, and the direction the mission has been given, is the work of women, though admittedly under the ultimate authority of an (always male) Indian Swami. In the history of Vedanta in the West, therefore, women have been of the first importance, as chief organizers and administrators of many centers.

Nevertheless, it has equally been true that as the number of male monastics has grown, they have tended increasingly to exercise the authority of the highest administrative positions in the local Societies. In Southern California for example, the Vedanta Society was first established as a convent, and almost all lay members were women; of course, the entire organization
was then run by women. Later, the number of male monastics and American Swamis grew, but still it was the nuns who ran the administration. The Indian Board at Belur were unhappy with this arrangement since it meant that they had to deal mainly with women. When asked whether the development of independent women's society, such as the Sarada Math, were likely in the West, Swami Amohananda's immediate reply was, "That's a controversial subject. Here the nuns are definitely part of the Order, the Sarada Math is independent." He went on to explain that the "early nuns ran everything, and the Swamis were not involved much. But India decided they wanted Swamis to administer the Society, and not deal consistently with women." This situation was resolved when Swami Prabhavananda died. His successor, Swami Swahananda, was instructed to reorganize the administration and alter the structure of the Society. The administration of the Southern California Vedanta Society was to be done by Swamis at the Hollywood headquarters. The nuns were established quite separately at Santa Barbara, where, in addition to the Convent and Temple there, they have retained control of the Mail Order Catalogue, through which books, devotional articles such as pictures and beads, and Indian bric-a-brac including gilt statuettes of Siva and incense-burners are sold. More recently they have set up a Sunday School for children which is thriving, and their public worship ceremony is well attended. Swami Amohananda estimated that they were becoming more independent,
and may well continue to do so; but for the moment they are a part of the Southern California Vedanta Society and subject to the authority of the Hollywood headquarters. In effect then, the society split into two, the monks taking control of the major centers, shop, press, and administration, the nuns retaining the Mail Order Catalogue, and the Santa Barbara Convent and Temple. Monks and nuns are now formally separated, each having their own areas of responsibility and control, with the highest authoritative position going to the monks. To quote Swami Amohananda again: "Swami Prabhavananda was able to keep the monks and nuns together, working. After he left (died) it just wasn't possible--everyone realized this." It is not the inequality but the separation of the sexes which is insisted on: since the Order is primarily one of monks, naturally control of the centers is retained in male hands, and the highest positions of authority and responsibility can only be achieved by women within independant and officially distinct organizations, such as the Sarada Math. Whether this will happen in the West remains to be seen, but until some female equivalent to the male, Indian Swami/guru can be found, I think it unlikely.

In this connection it is worth looking again at the Society founded by the energetic Swami Paramananda, in Boston and California. Again most of the pioneer members were women, most of the monastics nuns. The Californian center at La Crescenta, the Ananda Ashrama, was founded in 1923, and by the time of
Paramananda's death in 1940 was a flourishing religious community. In the opinion of his followers it was his niece, Gayatri Devi, who was the natural successor as Society Leader, and not a new Swami appointed by the Belur Math authorities. In the official reports of the incident, and its outcome in the secession of the society (or "defection," as Gambhirananda calls it) it is simply stated that the members of the society refused a Swami from Indian headquarters and thus ceased to be part of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Gayatri Devi became the new head of an independent society, later styled the "Order of Ramakrishna Brahmavadin." She was a full sannyasini, trained and initiated by her uncle/guru Paramananda, who in turn was initiated by Vivekananda himself. Had it been a question of a nephew, fully initiated as a swami, I suspect the reaction of Belur would have been different, and the society allowed to retain its Swami. However, Gayatri Devi took over as Srimata ("Reverend Mother"), and for some fifteen years, from 1941-1955, the Society in California and Boston was run by female monastics. The Californian branch was generally led by Sister Daya (for many years Paramananda's chief assistant) and Gayatri Devi spent most of each year in Boston. Every year these two exchanged places for a month or so, following a pattern established by Swami Paramananda.

During the fifties, as the old nuns died off (Sister Daya died 1955), a new community took shape, of which men began to
make up an increasing proportion, though not as monastics necessarily. In 1952 the Boston Center was combined with the Cohasset Retreat, and the Boston property sold; in the early 1960's Message of the East ceased publication, and in 1964 Jackson saw evidence of retrenchment, and a possibility of the "schismatic centers" breaking up. What has happened, however, is that the structure of the community has changed. At Ananda Ashrama the number of separate dwellings on the land has increased, allowing for a greater number of householder families to form part of the community. These are families with young children, and, apart from employment in jobs outside, they participate fully in community life. The same applies to a number of single, working people, men and women, who live in the Community House as lay devotees. One young couple with two infant children live in a cottage on the Ashrama, and work full-time for the society; another couple live in one of the cabins, working in the town outside but sharing meals and most daily duties with the monastic group. In other words it is a religious community which comprises householders with children, single lay members of both sexes who work outside but live in community, and monastic members of both sexes who follow the regimen of monastic life. The mission to the wider world is maintained through the Sunday services of worship and lecture, which are well attended, and through visitors to the Temple and bookshop, who are generally welcome at any time. But the sense
of Mission is much less in evidence here than at most centers of Vedanta movement; the main emphasis is on self-perfection through community life, and the Ananda Ashrama is seen as a haven of peace and purity in a mad world. Gayatri Devi successfully took on the role of guru and spiritual director from her uncle, but from time to time (especially since Sister Daya's death) has needed assistants, and has turned to India for them. At the moment there is no Indian Sannyasi or Sannyasini, who is in a position to succeed Gayatri Devi should she die. Whether a western monastic could take on this task and succeed in winning and retaining the trust of sufficient members remains to be seen, but it is doubtful.

The locus of authority and discipline in the monastic community then, is the guru relationship of individual members and Indian Swami which is learned and developed over a period of many years. The member who wishes to become sannyasin begins as a probationer, until the guru decides he or she is prepared to take the first vows. This is usually a matter of 6 months to a year, at the guru's discretion. The aspirant is then initiated into brahmacharya, which is the condition of celibate spiritual novitiate, lived under temporary vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. The initiation is always mantri, but the degree of elaborateness and formality in the ceremony varies greatly from place to place. During the period of brahmacharya, absolute chastity is essential. Some Swamis will not accept for monastic
life even widows and widowers, insisting that aspirants should never have been married (eg. Seattle); others have accepted even divorced people or married couples as aspirants. (eg. Hollywood). The brahmacharis' life is one of purity and spiritual learning, the latter being seen as largely dependant upon the former. The slightest attachment to "women and gold" (i.e. to fleshly or material pleasures and pains), is like a great weight holding back the jiva from spiritual growth.

It is the guru who decides when the brahmachari is ready for final vows; it might be anything from five to thirty years, though usually nine to fifteen. It is the guru who devises the routines of daily monastic life; rise at a given time; chant, meditate, breakfast, work, etc, in due order. The guru assesses the spiritual needs of each aspirant, and determines the spiritual exercises appropriate and whether the right yoga is being pursued. In mundane matters the guru's voice is seldom heard, but when it is, it is final; in spiritual matters his is the only voice which must be listened to. He is the source of wisdom and of spiritual power: he is the object of reverence and holy love. Everything centers in the guru; he is the man who has the answer that all are seeking. The stability and effectiveness of the monastic community, indeed its very existence, depends upon the Swami's ability to create and maintain this guru-relationship with his followers. He must convince them of his true vision, his discernment of their soul's needs and the
means of meeting those needs. To the extent that he succeeds in doing so, in the setting of a monastic religious community, the unity and integration of the group are powerful and assured. But on the other hand, the death or departure of the Swami may lead to dissention and even the dissolution of a society.

Lay Members

The business of becoming sannyasa is a long and difficult process, so commitment to it is evidence of deep commitment to the Vedanta Society. The same is not true of all lay members. Some do little more than pay the fees, and perhaps attend a service once in a long while; others rearrange their whole way of life and commit themselves completely to Vedanta and spiritual life; and there are degrees of commitment in between. The majority of members on the fee-paying roll tend toward the first attitude. For a householder member with a job and a family, the doctrines of Vedanta make few demands. The doctrine of Karma requires that such a person fulfill the duties of his or her station in life, honestly and well, not cheat or steal in business, love and provide for spouse and children, and thus work off the Karma, good and bad, which led to such a life in the first place. Only to the extent that one feels drawn to devotional practices need one pursue them, and the monastic life is out of the question. The teachings of Vedanta provide a
satisfactory rationale for a life of material prosperity and comfort, without instilling feelings of guilt or making outrageous demands. Such members maintain friendly relations with the Swami, and usually profess a deep admiration and respect for him. Often he is consulted on a wide variety of matters, from buying a new house, or moving to a new town, to adopting a child. This is as close as most lay members get to the guru-relationship: he is a wise man, a philosopher, a mystic—therefore a dispenser of wisdom and comfort. To these members the Swami gives advice but not commands, and the society has little noticeable effect on their way of life. Visible commitment amounts to no more than a few dollars a month, occasional attendance at lectures, and a friendly chat with the Swami and other members. These people are likely to have many friends who are not Vedantists, and their social life does not revolve around the Society and its affairs.

However, there are many members who are a great deal more committed than this. The principal criterion of wholehearted commitment for the lay membership is initiation. This is the formal establishment of the guru-relationship; the soul is placed in his hands, he has a right to command, the devotee has a duty to obey. A few such members are householders, nearly all are women. These people pursue a spiritual path determined by the guru (with their co-operation of course—it is rarely arbitrary), spend part of every day in meditation, attend lectures
and classes as often as possible, and usually have a shrine to Ramakrishna or even a meditation room in their homes. Some are allowed to perform the arati ceremony in the temple; all are encouraged to participate in worship ceremonies, and to make offerings.

A major discipline for the householder initiate in pursuit of spiritual realization is the need to "sublimate and channel the sex urge." Frequent sexual intercourse even with one's spouse is a barrier to higher realization (with anyone else it is abhorrent—the worst Karma). If spiritual advance is the serious goal of the householder member then prolonged abstinence is a necessity—"for as long as he can". Sexual abstinence as a prerequisite for high spiritual achievement is stressed everywhere. Most initiated lay members are unmarried, being either widows, or spinsters as a rule, and some have remained unmarried for the expressed reason of maintaining a high level of spirituality. Clearly this represents a great deal of commitment to Vedanta, and a deep trust in the guru. A number of lay initiates thus committed, devote all their free time and much of their money to the Society; some of them live in the Society houses and follow much of the routine of monastic life. The reason why most of these fully involved members will never be monastics is their age; they tend to be middle-aged or elderly. Occasionally an exception is made, but generally a brahmachari is
expected to be not much over thirty. (In India thirty is the absolute maximum.)

Naturally the social life of these members is largely centered on the Society, and even outside society activities such members generally spend their free time together: they go to concerts together, to theatre and opera together, and have few or no friends outside the Vedanta Society. This is almost inevitable as was pointed out by several Swamis. Interest in Vedanta becomes the central concern of their lives, and they naturally seek the company of others of like mind. Sometimes there is trouble with the committed member's family, who may disapprove of foreign pagans, and thus family ties are broken. For those who are utterly committed to the spiritual life, I was told in San Francisco, the society of worldly people can become quite painful. It is only the truly realized soul, such as Vivekananda, who can easily bear the company of worldly and sinful people, remaining unaffected by it. Although this is not made an explicit rule it is quite clear that the guru would be duty bound to warn his disciples of unsuitable friendships and attachments. Despite the general informality, the distrust of "organization" and lack of many written rules, therefore, the core members of the societies form tightly-knit groups, every aspect of whose lives falls under the authority of the guru; and the discipline of religious community life extends beyond the monastics to encompass even those who live outside the temple
dwellings, but within the spiritual communion of the guru-relationship, and the commitment to mystic enlightenment as life's only goal.

**Relations with External Society**

The essential position of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, dedicated to the gradual infusion of Vedantic philosophy and spiritual ideals into the materialistic western culture, and attracting predominantly a somewhat intellectually inclined, and no longer young, middle class membership, implies that its stance in regard to social issues, political concerns and other, potentially competing, religious bodies, is quietist, non-interventionist, and, whenever possible, accommodative. As far as the mission to the West is concerned, this policy was established with the first New York centre by Vivekananda, once he had experienced the futility of engaging in disputes over social and political issues—particularly with representatives of other (Christian) religious groups.

In the age of Kali-yuga, aggressive and corrupt politicians, though deplored, are to be expected; most other religious movements offer a glimmering of truth, but not the highest Truth; and in the West, following, again, from Vivekananda's original teaching, social reform is of lower priority than personal, spiritual regeneration. In consequence, any discussion of the
Ramakrishna Vedanta movement's relations with the wider society is bound to be set in a minor key. There have been no clashes with constituted legal authorities in the West; the movement in general has attracted little attention, the individual members quietly pursuing their own spiritual perfection, and, to this end, the societies seek to maintain an atmosphere of calm, even profound, spiritual peace.

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission eschews any and all formal political involvement, and has done so from the very first. Indeed, one of Vivekananda's first western disciples, an Irish woman who took the name Sister Nivedita, broke with the movement in 1902 so that she could freely speak her mind on a range of social and political issues. This prohibition of political involvement was reinforced during the period of Gandhi's struggle for Indian independence, when the directors of the Belur Math felt that the security of the order itself was threatened by the political beliefs of some of the members, and by the fact that police raids on the houses of revolutionaries discovered, among other things, various writings of Vivekananda which emphasized the need for a strong India. The Governing body at Belur made no bones about its position in this respect, expelling members where necessary, and repeatedly publishing declarations of political neutrality.

More recently, though still in the early period of the American mission, Swami Trigunatita spoke on a number of themes
that may appear at first to have political overtones—eg. "Vedanta and Socialism." But in fact the political aspect of his writings is extremely vague; he was rather concerned to make a spiritual point, emphasized by occasional phrases of a political flavor. In 1907, the Voice of Freedom published an article in which Trigunatita claimed to be a socialist—but, of course, a Vedantic one. "Yes but I am a great Vedantist too ... Both are the practical philosophies of self-culture. Simply: the one is from without, [Socialism] and the other is from within." (Vedantism) On one occasion he was invited to speak before the Socialist Party of San Francisco, where he lectured on the subject, "Every man and Woman is a born Socialist." But predictably, it was Vedantism rather than Socialism, on which he spoke.

More recently still, in 1969, the editorial of the Prabuddha Bharata, entitled "Toward Peace for a Meaningful Future" made a few general remarks which are an example of how close to specifically political concerns the order is prepared to come. The editor began by criticizing the international stockpiling of weaponry, not mentioning any country by name. The religious fanaticism of the "early state of man's history" he declared, has given place to "the fiercer fanaticism of nationalism". In a nuclear world the cessation of war is essential for the survival of mankind, and world leaders therefore need "at least a commonsense working world view, if not
a philosophical world view . . . If wars begin in the minds of men, they have also to end there. Mind is the source of war as well as peace . . . The wisdom of Vedanta holds the key not only to personal peace, but also to world peace and necessarily a more meaningful future for the entire mankind."

Indian Swamis working in the missions outside India remain Indian nationals— it is against the rules of the Order for them to take up permanent residence outside India. They cannot therefore, vote in any of the elections in the United States or Canada. This, of course, does not apply to the few Americans (no Canadians) who have taken sannyasa in the order on this continent. However, having taken vows of renunciation, they do not exercise voting rights, nor engage in any political activities. This, of course, does not prevent them from holding opinions, and giving expression to them in private, but it would be considered a violation of the spirit of Vairagya if they were to use their influence as Swamis to effect political aims.

The ordinary members are in no way discouraged from taking an interest in politics—indeed, they are indirectly encouraged to do so as part of the heightened awareness of cultural matters generally which Vedanta Societies seek to bring about. Following from the Vedantic ideals of unity, tolerance etc, and in the tradition of Swami Vivekananda's (and Swami Trigunatita's) leanings towards a sort of "Vedantic Socialism", most of the members probably tend to the liberal end of the political
spectrum. This is the estimate of all the members spoken to on
the subject, though some of them pointed out that there are
probably a number of conservatives among them. There is
certainly nothing in the teachings of the Order absolutely
incompatible with political conservatism, but there is much which
make it less likely than political liberalism. However, the
political beliefs and activities of householder members are
considered to be entirely their own, private, affair, with which
the society wants nothing to do.

The evangelical activities of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Swamis
are modest, and devoid of any sensationalistic, or dramatically
exotic, aspect. Their chief means of reaching the public outside
the society is through lecturing, and the society publications.
The Swamis will, whenever possible, accept all outside lecturing
requests they receive. This, of course, is limited by time, and
by the prior consideration due to the more immediate needs of the
members and the Society. However, most Swamis will lecture at
public halls, churches, schools and universities whenever invited
to do so.

At the same time visitors—either singly or in
parties—are always made welcome at the temples. Occasionally,
parties of senior high school children attend a lecture, and may
also attend the morning ceremony if they wish to. Sometimes a
group of people from the congregation of a local church might do
the same. In San Francisco relations with the Roman Catholic
Church are particularly good; a local Jesuit has presented lectures at the Temple there, and at least one nun has taken extensive instruction from Swami Prabuddhananda on meditation and Eastern spiritual exercises.

Many of the activities of the centers are advertised in the local newspapers. All the major festivals, the lectures, and daily worship and meditation sessions are listed there, and all and sundry are invited to attend. Some of the meetings—those which involve more advanced spiritual instruction—are really only for adepts, or those few who have made serious commitment to spiritual life, and are under the special guidance of the Swami. Even those, however, are not rigidly private, though curiosity-seekers are barred, and those who are new to Vedanta are discouraged from attending. To some extent this readiness to accept the attention of a wide public has been affected by the "counter-cultural" growth of interest in the East during the 1960's. For example, in San Francisco, Swami Ashokananda—who died in 1970, was at first inclined to be very conservative in his views as to who was acceptable in the Temple. No man was allowed in without a tie, nor women in mini-skirts and skimpy tops. In the Temple room where meditation and worship are practiced, everyone was required to sit "Western-style" in the chairs provided, and sitting cross-legged, whether on chairs or floor, was forbidden. On the whole the Swami wanted to see a congregation of people conservatively dressed in jacket and tie,
or knee-length frocks as appropriate, sitting quietly on chairs and listening, chanting, or meditating—as conservatively respectable a congregation as might be seen in any Episcopalian Church. The Vedanta Society had always discouraged mystery-mongers and seekers for the exotic and occult, even to the extent of withdrawing advertisements in times and places where such people were attracted. During the period of the 1960's, when young, unconventionally dressed people in great numbers, were absorbing quantities of psychotropic drugs, and expressing intense interest in Eastern mysticism, it was rather to the newer Hindu movements that they turned, such as the Hare Krishnas, Divine Light Mission and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. At the same time, for all its quiet conservatism, the Vedanta Society is an Indian movement, and it does have Temples and Swamis, so a certain number of the counter-culturally inclined were bound to turn up. Among those who appeared at this time were some who clearly had a mistaken impression of Vedanta, were perhaps heavily intoxicated, noisy and disruptive. These were removed. However, there were, of course, others, who although they were not amenable to jackets and ties, or short hair (nor, according to some members, daily bathing) were nevertheless sincerely interested in the Vedantic message. These were allowed to attend as frequently as they wished, and a few became members.

It would not be true to say that the wave of interest in Eastern religions associated with the counter-culture has swelled
the numbers of Vedanta society members. It is even possible that the contrary is true, since, prior to 1960, to satisfy such an interest one could turn to Zen Buddhism, or Vedanta, and not much else, whereas by 1970 the choice, and therefore the competition, was enormous. Nevertheless the counter-culture did have its effect; the rules about clothing (short of indecency) have gone, as have the rules about sitting on chairs or crosslegged, or in some favored yogic position. Although the vast majority of the members are as staid and conservative as ever, the actual core of the membership has never accurately reflected the influence of the movement, for many attend lectures and worship who never actually pay the fees and become members. It is not so unusual now to see jeans-clad men and women sitting cross-legged on the floor for meditation, though they are never more than one or two in a congregation of, perhaps, thirty. It is not so much the membership which is changing, as the relationship of the Society to the public at large. That is to say, although the members appear to be drawn from the same age, social, and sex groups as ever, the numerous casual contacts with those who attend some lectures, and some services and ceremonies without joining the movement, are made across a wider social spectrum than prior to the late 1960's.

There are few formal or continuous links between Vedanta societies and other religious groups. Those centers which have large bookshops, such as New York and Hollywood, attract members
of other Eastern religions movements, some of which use the books sold in these shops in their courses of religious study. In Portland Swami Aseshananda occasionally exchanges with a local Protestant minister, the minister preaching in the temple, the swami in the church. Swami Swahananda in Hollywood is a member of the Interreligious Council, a group made up of local representatives of Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Sufism, and Islam, who meet once a month to discuss "problems of religion, and social problems." The San Francisco society was described by its secretary as "aloof from Christian groups". Parties from the local churches sometimes come to the temple to listen and talk, but there are "no joint efforts" (such as joint celebration of Christmas) "and no church preaching" (by Swamis). Tibetan Buddhists, however, regularly use the retreat center of the Northern California Vedanta Society and are very highly thought of. In 1976 the Karmapa of these Buddhists paid a formal visit to the San Francisco center, and a solemn Buddhist ceremonial was performed jointly with Swami Prabuddhananda. A very few members of Vedanta Societies regularly attend other church services—most especially the Catholic Church's—but this is rare. Nearly all are ex-Christians, and so describe themselves. When the Swamis and the literature declare that it is possible to become a Vedantist and remain a Christian, they mean that as a Vedantist one may still worship Christ. But most Christian religious groups hold firm beliefs which radically
conflict with the teachings of the Vedantists, making it all but impossible for members to be Christian in any institutional sense.

In summary, as indicated at the beginning of this section, the Ramakrishna Vedanta societies aim to keep a low profile, and are generally successful in this. Certainly the media, television and the press, rarely record their doings, or even comment on their existence. The societies are not newsworthy; they do not have the colorful, dramatic, and very public qualities of such recently established 'exotic' religious groups as the Hare Krishnas, or 3HO. Other than the occasional short paragraph covering the opening of a new temple, or the sale of some buildings or land, (courtesies the local press routinely accords to regular advertisers) they are generally ignored by the press. This is the way they want it. The popular press is thought cynical and profane, altogether unlikely to understand or accurately convey the nature and message of Vedanta. It is convenient for advertising meetings and services, and for making announcements; otherwise it is of little value. Press notoriety is absolutely to be avoided. Indeed, notoriety, or the desire for public acclaim, is inimical to the essentially mystical, spiritual, and gradualistic aims of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, and would not be welcomed by their typically sedate, bourgeois membership.
FOOTNOTES (Section 1)

1. The principle sources for this section are the following:
   Anonymous (official biography) The Life of Sri Ramakrishna:
   Compiled from Various Authentic Sources, Advaita Ashrama,
   Calcutta, 1955. [The Life: Compiled] Solange Lemaitre,
   Ramakrishna and the Vitality of Hinduism, Translated by
   'M' (Mahendranath Gupta) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri
   Rolland, Prophets of the New India, Cassell and Co., London,
   1930. Swami Tejasananda, A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna,

2. Lemaitre, op. cit., p. 46.

3. Tejasananda, op. cit., p. 15.


5. At an instant when, in despair, he decided on suicide, see
   The Life: Compiled, p. 71.

6. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

7. Nor did Ramakrishna confine himself to kali-worship. In one
   experiment he sought, and obtained, a vision of Sita, by
   identifying himself with the monkey God, Hanuman. He lived
   on fruit and nuts, and even altered his gait in imitation of
   a monkey. Naturally this caused great consternation among
   his friends, but the experiment concluded when he saw a
   vision of Sita, a Goddess whose life had centered on Rama.
   Ibid., pp. 82-83.

8. Ibid., pp. 88-89.

9. Tantra refers to a religious philosophy according to which
   Shakti, God as Mother of the Universe, the Female Principle
   of Godhead, is the main deity worshipped, and reality, or
   the existing universe, is regarded as the divine play of
   Shakti and Shiva (the Male principle). The word Tantra also
   applies to those scriptures identified with Shakti worship.
   The aim of these practices is liberation from ignorance and
   rebirth through the direct knowledge that the individual
   soul (jiva) and the Godhead (Siva-Sakti) are one. In
   addition to Shakti Tantras, which are the commonest, there
are Vaisnava Tantras, Buddhist Tantras, and Vamachara Tantras (those of the "left hand" path).

10. Ramakrishna agreed to take vows on condition that his mother was not informed, since the step would finally dash her hopes of prosperity for her son. However, another reason for concealing the event may have been his marriage to Sarada Devi, for it is usually required that one be unmarried, or have grown-up sons, before taking sannyasa. Possibly Ramakrishna considered his marriage unimportant at the time; certainly he never had a normal married life, and his union with Sarada Devi was never consummated.

11. Tejasananda, op. cit., p. 54.


13. Ibid., p. 208.


15. "I had to practice each religion for a time — Hinduism, Islam, Christianity. Furthermore, I followed the path of the Saktas, Vaisnavas and Vedantists. I realized that there is only one God toward whom all are travelling; but the paths are different." The Gospel, p. 57.


17. C.f., A.R. Desai; Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1946. Writing just before independence, Desai, perhaps underestimating the religious significance of the movement, says:

"The Brahmo Samaj was the pioneer of the nationalist movement, which, by the workings of history, began as a religio-reform movement aiming at liberating the individual from the dead weight of an authoritarian religion which strangulated their initiative and stultified both the individual and collective mind. The Brahmo Samaj inaugurated a new era for the Indian people by proclaiming the principles of individual freedom, national unity, solidarity and collaboration, and the democratization of all social institutions and social relations. It was the first
organized expression of their national awakening." p. 290.

18. See The Gospel, especially chapters V, VI and passim. On one occasion he remarked to some Brahmo Samajists and his disciples, "The Hindu religion alone is the Sanatana Dharma. The various creeds you hear of nowadays have come into existence through the will of God and will disappear again through this will. They will not last forever. Therefore I say, 'I bow down at the feet of even the modern devotees.' (i.e. The Brahmo Samajists) The Hindu religion has always existed and will always exist." p. 610


21. The Life: Compiled, p. 332. This account of their meeting is given in many sources with minor variations. Vivekananda spoke of it often with his brother monks in India, but not with his Western followers.

22. Ibid., pp. 333-334.

23. Ibid., p. 356.


25. Ramakrishna considered Sarada Devi to be a manifestation of the Goddess Kali, and on one occasion performed the rare Tantric ceremony of Shorhashi Puja, or Worship of The Woman, in which she was placed on the throne of the Goddess and received worship, offerings of food and flowers, and the dedication of Ramakrishna's life and sadhanas. This was the last formal spiritual practice he performed.

26. The exact nature of the ceremony is unknown; presumably it involved Ramakrishna's hearing the vows of his disciples. The twelve were the first monks of the Ramakrishna Order. These are the names by which they eventually became known; Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Yogananda, Swami

27. Tejasananda, op. cit., p. 111.


30. Before leaving he said to a friend in Varanasi: "I am going away, but I shall never come back until I can burst upon society like a bomb and make it follow me like a dog". This curiously mixed simile bespeaks a fervent, though unfocussed, sense of mission, Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1963, p. 66.


33. Majumdar, op. cit., p. 33.

34. These speaking engagements were arranged through Mr. Benjamin Franklin Sanborn, cousin of Miss Kate Sanborn whom Vivekananda had befriended on a train journey to Boston. Benjamin Sanborn was a writer and philanthropist, and the founder of the Concord Summer School of Philosophy, and he obtained an invitation from Professor Wright for Vivekananda to spend a weekend as his guest. Wright was impressed with Vivekananda, as Sanborn hoped he would be, and wrote a hyperbolic letter of introduction to the Delegate's Committee at the Parliament of Religions, which ultimately secured Vivekananda's credentials and accomodation.

Among those present was the imagist poet Harriet Monroe, who gave this account in her autobiography:

"It was the last of these, Swami Vivekananda the magnificent, who stole the whole show and captured the town... the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic; his voice, rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervor of his feelings; the beauty of his message to the Western World he was facing for the first time -- these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch."


38. C.f. Barrows, op. cit., passim. Also Open Court, October 12, 1893, pp. 46-52.

39. In a letter to India Vivekananda quotes from The Critic, November 11, 1893--presumably a sign that he found it accurate.

"His original purpose in coming to this country was to interest Americans in the starting of new industries among the Hindus, but he has abandoned this for the present because he finds that, as "the Americans are the most charitable people in the world, every man with a purpose comes here for assistance in carrying it out."

But in a letter to Professor Wright he explained that he had not given up his project.

"But I have thought better, and have given up speaking about my project entirely--because I am sure now--the heathen draws more than his project. So I want to go to work earnestly for my own project, only keeping the project in the background and working like any other lecturer."


41. Vivekananda believed P.C. Mazoomdar, the Brahmo Samaj delegate to the Parliament, to be responsible for these rumours. On March 16th, 1894, he wrote to Miss Mary Hale of a letter he had received from his supporters in Calcutta. "The letter says that M (presumably Mazoomdah) has gone back to Calcutta and is preaching that Vivekananda is committing every sin under the sun in America." Whether in fact Mazoomdar was responsible for the charges or not Vivekananda believe that he was, and never forgave him. Vivekananda, The Complete Works, Vol. VIII, p. 311.

42. The debate is discussed in the Homiletic Review, Vol. XXVIII, November, 1894, pp. 400 ff.


44. C.F. Mysore N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 77-78.

45. E.g. Burke feels that this was his original intention, but that he changed his mind and dedicated himself to his spiritual mission. Burke, op. cit., pp. 565 ff. A contrary view is expressed in Sailendra Nath Dhar, A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda, Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, Madras, 1975. Dhar concludes that Vivekananda's spiritual mission to the West was always the main object of his stay, pp. 508-519.

46. For a fairly detailed account of the affair see Dhar, op. cit., pp. 680-695. This account is heavily biased in Vivekananda's favor, of course. Equally biased, though more complete, is Burke's account, to which the whole of Chapter 12 is devoted, Burke, op. cit., pp. 467-536.


54. c.f. Gambhirananda, History of The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, pp. 117-119, and 123-124. Also Eastern and Western Disciples, The Life, p. 494, which records:

"Of the Swami's numerous triumphs one of the greatest was the conversion of his Gurubhais from the individualistic to the national idea of religious life in which public spirit and service to fellow-men occupied a prominent place. Up to this time the ideal of the monks of the Math was to strive for personal Mukti and realization of the Supreme Atman by severe penance and meditation, remaining as much as possible aloof from the world and its cares, according to the prevailing Hindu idea . . ."

55. Gambhirananda, op. cit., pp. 119-120.


57. For a brief, almost contemporary, history of the West Coast operation, see "Vedanta Philosophy in America, Section II: Vivekananda on the Pacific Coast". Pacific Vedantist, Vol. 1, March, 1902, pp. 20-23. For a more exhaustive account see Marie Louise Burke, Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West New Discoveries, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1973.
FOOTNOTES: (Section 2)


64. For financial reports see Brahmavadin, Vol. VI, December, 1900, pp. 136-137.


68. Gambhirananda, op. cit., p. 179.


70. A Brahmacarin [Cornelius Heyblom], "With the Swamis in America," loc. cit., p. 278.


72. Ansell, loc. cit.
The young bomber's name was Louis J. Vama, a Bohemian machinist and printer. He had once been a student in the temple monastery, and later had joined a group called the Christian Yogis in Oakland. He was known to his acquaintances to have been mentally unstable, it was testified. See the San Francisco Chronicle, December, 28 and 29, 1914.

Despite his aversion to the occult Paramananda practiced faith healing quite successfully for a while, but declared it to be a natural gift, and nothing to do with religion or mysticism. Eventually, feeling that people misunderstood the practice, he stopped.


89. *Srimata Gayatri Devi, One Life's Pilgrimage, Addresses, Letters and Articles by the First Woman to Teach Vedanta in the West*. Vedanta Center, Cohasset, Mass.; Ananda Ashrama, La Crescenta, Califorina, 1977, pp. 115-120.

90. Ibid., p. 119.


FOOTNOTES (Section 3)

95. Vivekananda's religious cosmology is set out in greater detail in the appendix.


99. Ibid., p. 182.

100. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 324, 'Tat Tvam Asi' literally means 'Thou Art That.'

101. Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 122.


108. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 167. Of course Vivekananda's opinions on priestcraft were common currency among the intellectuals of such new religious movements as the Brahma Samaj, but Vivekananda was unusual in the thoroughness with which he supported his opinions by references to traditional Hindu scripture, without resorting to doctrinal borrowing from Christianity.

109. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 224


113. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 156.
115. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 158.
117. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 159.
118. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 158.
120. Ibid., p. 436.
121. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 158.
122. Ibid., p. 159.
123. Ibid., p. 213.
124. Ibid., pp. 220-221.
125. Ibid., p. 221.
126. Ibid., p. 156.
127. Ibid., p. 157.
128. Ibid., p. 158.
129. Ibid., p. 158.
130. Ibid., p. 159; see also ibid., p. 214, "... a wave in the ocean must be at the cost of a hollow elsewhere."
131. Ibid., p. 171.
132. Ibid., p. 214.-
133. Ibid., p. 214.
134. Ibid., p. 246.
136. Ibid., p. 295.
137. Ibid., p. 355.
"First of all our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita." Ibid., Vol. III, p. 242.

"The people of England and America, how full of Ragas they are!" Ibid., Vol. V, p. 353.
Subscriptions San Francisco and Seattle-$2.50 per month, Toronto-$10.00 per annum (recently increased from $8.00), Hollywood-whatever the member wishes to pledge (often a lot—generally more than could reasonably be required), Washington-$15.00 per annum for family $12.00 per annum for single member.

The Swami gave no details. He was explaining that his retention of final authority over all aspects of society affairs was a matter of spiritual necessity, as it enabled him to prevent petty disputes from getting out of hand, and becoming spiritually dangerous, and "in order to prevent too much concentration on these matters (organizational) from interfering with our real business—spiritual life." From an interview, March 1977.

"Vedanta Society of Northern California, San Francisco 94123, Swami Prabuddhananda, in charge, Swami Chidrupananda, assistant, Retreat of Olema, telephone 663-1258. The Society maintains a retreat in Marin County where members and other sincere religious seekers are welcomed for periods of meditation, prayer, and study away from the disturbances of the city. The retreat is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. In addition to provisions for meditation, a reading room containing books on religion and philosophy is provided. Further information concerning Vedanta is available through appointments made in advance with Swami Prabuddhananda. The Swami is available on Tuesdays at the retreat and on other says in San Francisco. He can be reached by phone at 922-2322."

She certainly was. This old lady used to rattle her stick on the floor and snap irritably at the Swami to speak up when he was preaching.

Swami Amohananda gave me this figure, based on the record of fees paid.

Swami Amohananda was fond of quoting figures and percentages. How often they were exactly accurate is questionable, though usually they were based on approximately accurate knowledge. eg. He refered to the "dues book" which recorded fees paid, the records of books and things they sold, temple accounts, and his business diary when appropriate. As treasurer of the Southern California Society he had all the business and financial
responsibility, which he clearly enjoyed and dealt with very efficiently.

166. This was originally justified on the grounds that the Vedanta Society was an educational institution, though perhaps few Swamis remember that now.

167. This was the phrase used by the society's treasurer, who refused to be more specific.

168. From a conversation with The Vedanta Society Secretary, San Francisco.


170. Ibid., p. 127.

171. At Hollywood meditation is from 7.00 to 8.00 a.m.; At Trabuco monastery from 6.30 to 7.30 a.m.; at Portland it begins at 7.30 a.m. This is about the range of variation.


174. Ibid., p. 295.

175. Vedanta In the West, No. 120, July-August, 1956, p. 25.

176. One monk at Trabuco Monastery was nicknamed "the atheist" because he refused to have anything to do with any form of ritual worship.


181. Gambhirananda, op. cit., p. 357. See also Srimata Gayatri Devi One Life Pilgrimage: Addresses, Letters, and Articles by the First Indian Woman to Teach Vedanta in the West. Vedanta Center, Cohasset, 1977, pp. 115-120.


184. Brahmacharini: Usha. A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook, Vedanta Press 1962 "Initiation: The ceremony (diksha, in Sanskrit) which symbolizes the beginning of a spiritual life. During initiation the Guru gives his disciple specific instructions in spiritual practices--more particularly a Mantra. The usual form of diksha is mantri--with the guru whispering the mantra into the ear of the disciple. Two other forms of diksha, shambhave and shakti, are effected by the mere wish, look, or touch of the guru and produce immediate illumination in disciple. Shambbavi and Shekti initiation can only be given by Avatars or Ishvarakotis. Initiation may also refer to ceremonies of acceptance into monastic life--either Brahmachary or Sannyas." pp. 36-37.

185. Conversation with Swami Bhaskarananda.

186. This quoted from another conversation with a Hollywood Swami.

187. The sublimation of sexuality through mystical adoration of a chose manifestation of Atman, a personal Ishtadeva such as Krishna, is a recognized path to enlightenment, and is discussed in th Bhagavad-gita. The works of St. Therese de Lisieux, St. Catherine, St. Theresa d'Avila, John of the Cross, and other mystic lovers of God are much in evidence in Society libraries.

188. Conversation with a spinster, initiated as a lay devotee some 12 years ago.


190. Ibid., Vol. III, November, 1911, pp. 151-152.

192. This is Swami Swahananda's description.

193. Karmapa, or Karm-pa, referred to those Tibetan Buddhists from the Thirteenth century, who selected their monastic superiors from among children who showed signs of being reincarnations of previous abbots or head lamas. Today Karmapa can mean a head lama selected in this way.
The International Society For Krishna Consciousness was founded in a small store in New York City in 1966 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhu. Although this date marks the beginning of Bhaktivedanta's mission in the West, and no organization of the name existed before, the members of ISKCON (the society's acronym), and Bhaktivedanta himself, trace its origins back to Caitanya, a Vaisnavite mystic from Bengal born in the late 15th century, and through him back to Krishna himself. Bhaktivedanta's claim to be the spiritual heir of Caitanya rests principally upon the theory of disciplic succession, which holds that the knowledge revealed by God (i.e. Krishna) to man, as represented by Arjuna in the Bhagavata-gita, has been passed down through an unbroken series of spiritual masters, and only from such a spiritual master is it possible to learn the truth. Thus Bhaktivedanta traces his succession through his own guru to the master of Gaudiya Mission, and through them to Caitanya himself, a plenary avatar of Krishna. I shall begin, then with a short account of the origins and history of the Vaisnavism taught by Bhaktivedanta, and propagated by his followers in ISKCON.
brief account of the broad philosophy of Vaisnavism is included in the appendix.)

Origins and History

Visvambhara, who was later to take the name Caitanya, was born of brahmin parents in Nadia, Bengal, in 1486. He received a Sanskrit education, and was eventually married to the daughter of a brahmin, girl called Laksmi, who unfortunately soon died of snakebite. A subsequent marriage was a brief affair, Visvambhara soon leaving his wife for good—though it is impossible to know why. His conjugal experiences then, were not altogether happy. Meanwhile, with the help of his first father-in-law, he opened and ran a Sanskrit school, with significant success, but with no signs of extreme piety or of any leanings towards mysticism.

However, at the age of about twenty-one Visvambhara joined a pilgrimage to Gaya, and it was on this journey that he met a celebrated religious ascetic called Isvara Puri. Puri became his guru, and as he was a Vaisnavite devotee he gave Visvambhara a Krishna mantra to chant, as was and is, commonly the practice. The pilgrimage, the guru, and the mantra changed Visvambhara utterly: he underwent a conversion which transformed both his personality and his life. He left his village a perhaps unhappy and thoughtful, but otherwise normal young "schoolmaster"; he
returned a mystic bhakta, mad with devotion to Krishna. He disregarded his personal appearance, becoming dirty and dishevelled, he neglected his school, which he was no longer capable of administering in any case; he went into prolonged trance states, shouted the names of Krishna and raved madly, chanting the mantra for hours at a stretch, and sometimes fainting dead away. The school closed down, naturally enough, and Visvambhara began his religious mission. He organized sankirtans and nagara-sankirtans, which consisted of numbers of musicians and people playing, singing and dancing in the streets, --singing that is, the holy names of Krishna. He preached universal love, and devotion to Visnu as Krishna, and sometimes took part in yatras, which are dramatic performances re-enacting incidents from the life of Krishna at Vrindavan, as described in Vyasadeva's Srimad-Bhagavatam.

This is not the place to attempt an explanation of the immediate success of Visvambhara's religious work, but a few comments are perhaps in order. First, this kind of dramatic and intense devotional behaviour was (and is) well-recognized in India, and is quite within the Hindu tradition. This does not explain its ready acceptance in this case, but might at least have ensured against its immediate rejection. Also Vaisnavism was already a well-established movement in Bengal, not perhaps with huge numbers of devotees, but certainly sufficient to be readily recognized, familiar and acceptable. At the same time
Bengal was under alien rule, and the oppression by Muslim invaders was matched by the domination of the brahmins, who, concerned to maintain their dominant social position, did what they could to support the rigid social order, their caste supremacy and religious superiority. It was into this situation that Visvambhara introduced the ecstatic release of his bhakti, utilizing its dramatic potentialities to the full. The sankirtans are calculated to produce an experience of ecstatic emotional fulfillment in devotion to Krishna. The chanting begins at low volume and increases to a pitch of frenzy; it is joined by drums, bells, finger cymbals and flutes, all maintaining a steadily quickening beat and rhythm, to which the devotees dance, whirl and leap until an ecstatic stupor, and finally exhaustion ensues.

Local reactions were mixed. Appeals were made to the Muslim authorities, especially by the brahmins, to condemn these demonstrations as a public nuisance and have them stopped, but Visvambhara's answer was to hold a mass sankirtan of such dimensions and enthusiasm that the magistrate decided to recognize it as a true religious manifestation, and even joined in himself. Following this victory, and presumably to increase the validity of his claims as a religious leader, Visvambhara was initiated into the Bharati Order as a sannyasi, a monk-like ascetic, and took the name by which he is known to all Vaisnavites, Sri Krishna Caitanya. He then left Bengal and went
to Puri in Orissa, where he worshipped in the temple of Jagannatha. He did not spend long in Puri, but made remarkably good use of his time there by converting Sarvabhauma, a celebrated Vedantist and this impressive success put the seal of approval, as it were, on his teachings. As a result he gained the approval, and more importantly the support, of the king of Orissa, virtually ensuring the success of Caitanyism at least in that region.

After several years travelling, preaching, leading sankirtans, and successfully increasing his following, Caitanya finally settled in Puri, where the famous Jagannatha Car Festival is a yearly event. Caitanya left Puri only twice more, and for the rest he spent his time with a handful of specially chosen devotees in rapt devotion to Krishna. He liked to plan pilgrimages, but usually did not make them. It was during this period that he made two converts, Rupa and Santana, who were to be vital for Caitanyism as the acknowledged interpreters of his teachings after his death. Caitanya sent these two to Vridavan to make it a center for Vaisnavism, and a year later he set off himself to join them, taking just one companion with him. His behavior on the journey was typically that of the "mad mystic". When they reached the Jumna River, for example, he rushed into it like Kipling's holy man in *Kim*, and had to be rescued from drowning. The sound of a flute put him in a trance, the sight of cows and cowherds drove him to a frenzy of devotion.
In 1534 Caitanya disappeared, though where and why remain matters of dispute. Some think he drowned in the sea during a trance. Others think that a foot injury became infected and the resulting fever killed him. Whatever the actual cause of his death, his devotees believe that he vanished into the deities worshipped at the great Gopinattha Temple at Puri.

Caitanya lived as a religious ascetic and mystic, in holy poverty, with few clothes and simple vegetarian food. As is the tradition of Krishna/Radha devotion, especially as expressed in the literature of bhakti (eg. The Mahabharata, especially the Bhagavad-gita), Caitanya's teachings were couched largely in terms of sexual imagery—but the love he was speaking of was transcendental. This must not be confused with the left-hand path of tantric saktism, as practised by the Vamacharlis, whose actual observances are foul beyond description, always involving promiscuity, and often incest" as that Christian gentleman Mr. Farquhar succinctly remarks. Caitanya rigidly avoided contact with women, and after leaving Bengal he saw neither his wife nor his mother again. He demanded the same attitude of his followers, and even went so far as to dismiss one of his disciples for begging from an old woman.

Caitanya left no written formulation of his teachings; this task was left to two of his successors, Advaitacharya and more importantly Nityananda. Of these two men, both greatly revered in their time, Nityananda, the younger of the two, is the
one most revered today by ISKCON, for He is believed to be an avatar of Caitanya. As is a well-established tradition among saintly founders of Hindu sects, Caitanya made strict injunction to consider all men spiritually equal, and admitted many low caste persons into the movement. This teaching was closely followed by Nityananda, but not by Advaitacharya, who, as is an equally well-established tradition, disputed this teaching.

The earliest Bengali biography of Caitanya was written by Vrindavan Dasa, supposedly at the request of Nityananda, about fifteen years after Caitanya's disappearance, and this document is, of course, squarely in support of Nityananda. In any case the problem is a non-starter, since Nityananda's status as an avatar of Caitanya precludes any possibility of error on his part.

Nityananda lived just north of Calcutta at Kardaha, where he gathered a group of twelve disciples to help in spreading the faith. A further six disciples undertook the task of writing a thorough exposition of the teachings of Caitanya, and some of their ideas are re-elaborated by Bhaktivedanta in his *Teachings of Lord Caitanya*.

Although the popularity and effervescence of Caitanyism waned after his death, it was an important period of doctrinal consolidation, and establishment of lines of descent—clearly a vital matter in a tradition of avatars and disciplic succession. Nityananda and Advaitacharya were the Goswamis who passed their
titles and privileges on to their descendants, and there are therefore two lines of Goswamis maintained in Bengal today. There are other lines of descent which were begun since, and other Vaisnavite groups not associated with Caitanya, but these two are the main Caitanyite lines, and are the ones to which ISKCON traces itself.

For a number of reasons, but notably due to the social position, wealth and energy of three men, the Caitanya movement underwent a resurgence in the 17th century. These three men were Srinivasa Acharya, Narattama Datta and Syamannada Das, and they all studied at Vrindavan under one of Caitanya's disciples, and were learned and devout Vaisnavites. Srinivasa succeeded in converting one Vira Hamvira, a raja of great wealth and influence, who was--sic raja, sic populi--a great help in spreading the movement. Narottama Datta was the son of another raja in Kheturi, and he left the bejewelled fleshpots of his palace home, and his inheritance, to become a Caitanyite ascetic, learned, holy and very influential. Khetur, presumable because of Narottama's influence, became an important Vaisnavite center, a place from which much missionary work was done, chiefly by disciples of Narottama. The third important guru of this period, Symananda Das, had immense success in renewing the spread of the movement in Orissa. He had studied under Jiva Goswami at Vrindavan, but returned on a mission to Orissa, where he succeeded by the same intelligent means of converting the local
raja, Raskika Murani, who was pursuaded to use his considerable wealth and power in renewing the proclamation of Caitanya's bhakti throughout the province. Numerous songs and poems about these three men survive from this period, and it is largely because of the merit and popularity of these that the three are so celebrated and revered today by all Vaisnavites, including ISKCON devotees.17

There followed a period of decline lasting almost two hundred years. Such decline does not mean the disappearance or extinction of Vaisnavism or Caitanyism, but rather the decline of its public aspect. The major sectarian movements in India, superficially at least, have many of the same features as Sanskritic orthodoxy, but there are significant differences. Among these differences is the very important one that the rituals and ceremonies which link the Vaisnavite to his deity can be performed only by a Vaisnavite guru, who need not be of brahmin caste. The rituals of Sanskritic orthodoxy, on the other hand, must be performed by a Brahmin priest (vaidika Brahmins, as opposed to laukika, or secular, Brahmins.) On the other hand the personal, family worship of a Hindu, sectarian or otherwise, does not always necessarily require the intervention of a priest. In a period of widespread religious excitation aroused by the rise of a new saint, the sectarian rituals of temple, matha (monastery), and home will commonly be performed by sectarian religious officials with great public ceremony and
display, rivalling that of the parallel rituals of Brahmin orthodoxy; but in periods of decline, it is this public aspect which falls off, leaving only a vistige of the former pomp and circumstance, and the continuing personal and family worship of sectarian deities. This personal worship is ever present, and keeps alive the embers of devotion until such time as a great saint such as Caitanya or Narottama should arise and fan the embers into a flame. The relative importance of any particular sectarian saint lies in the new impetus, new teaching and new philosophy which may add to the age-old tradition of his sect. In the case of Caitanya, for example, it was his qualified monism, his belief in Krishna as the Personal One, subsuming the monistic quality of impersonal, unknowable Brahman under the knowable Supreme Personality of Godhead which is Krishna, the unity in diversity of Brahma with Attributes. This will be explained more fully below; for the moment I simply wish to make the point that a decline in Caitanyism does not mean its eradication merely its fading somewhat from the public scene.

This period of decline ended about the middle of the 19th century. Almost the whole of that century was marked by the immense stimulus which Hinduism, both religious and secular, received. This has been called, quite justly, the Hindu Renaissance, and was characterized by the formation of innumerable new sectarian movements, caste association, and
massive reforms, as well as a great upsurge of interest, self respect and self confidence among the orthodox. It is not my task here to explain or elaborate on the Hindu Renaissance, but it is necessary to see how the history of Vaisnavite Caitanyism was immediately affected by it. One aspect of the general increase of sectarianism in this period was the renewed interest in, and use of bhakti. One of the most popular and influential sects of the 19th century in India was the Brahmo Samaj, and as was indicated before, one of its more important leaders was Keshub Chandra Sen. In 1866, at a time when the movement was already widespread and popular, a split divided the membership. The larger part broke away and followed Keshub in the formation of the all-India Brahmo Samaj, leaving a rump with the previous leader Debendranath Tagore. Freed from the restraints of the old leadership Keshub introduced new practices to revivify the religious life of the membership.

"The sources of his new methods were the Vishnuism of Caitanya, which was traditional in his own family, and Christianity, which was now influencing him so deeply. He began to use the old Vishnavite word bhakti ... One of his missionaries, Bijay Krishna Goswami, was a lineal descendant of one of the companions of Caitanya. Keshub commissioned him to introduce the instruments used in the old sect, and began sankirtana ... Caitanya had also taught his followers to move in procession through the streets of a town, dancing and singing praise to God, with flags flying and drums beating. The nagarkirtana, town-praise, was adopted and used in Calcutta with much success."
Bijay Krishna Goswami left the Samaj in 1886 and created a modernized Caitanyism, preaching in Bengal with some success. At this time also the Bhagavad-gita was widely accepted as a great work of religious literature throughout Europe and America, achieving a recognition in circles much wider than the narrow scholastic ones which had earlier accorded it some attention. Another follower of Caitanya, Surendrana Mukerji of Calcutta, becoming a sannyasi took the name Premananada Bharati, and in 1902 went to New York and lectured on Krishna and Vaisnavism with great success. Thus encouraged he travelled to Boston, and then to Los Angeles where he founded a Hindu temple. In 1907 he returned to India and opened a Vaisnava mission in Calcutta, but ran out of money and returned to the United States. In 1910 he chaired a convention of Vaisnavas of Orissa and Northern Telugu, and in 1911 the four chief Vaisnava sects, the Sri Vaisnavas, the Madhvas, the Vallabhas and the Nimbarkas, took part in the United Vaisnava Conference at Allahabad. It is clear from these few examples, therefore, that Vaisnavism generally, and Caitanyism in particular, were well represented in the Hindu Renaissance. Which brings us to the specific outgrowth of this general movement which forms part of the history of ISKCON.

In 1886, when the renewed interest in Hindu religion was strong, and the richness and worth of the Indian religious tradition was being reasserted after its partial eclipse by the Muslim occupation, and more especially by the British Raj, the
Gaudiya Vaisnava Mission was established by Srila Bhaktivinode Thakura, under the formal title Sri Visva Vaisnava Raj Sabha. This society, which claims descent from Jiva Goswami, is concerned to spread the practices and philosophy of Caitanya. It is significant that as early as 1885 Bhaktivinode published an article in his monthly journal Sajjana-tosani in which he declared that the teachings of Caitanya would spread over the world. He quoted Caitanya's declaration that "In every town, country and village, My name will be sung". This prophecy, Bhaktivinode said, will unquestionably be fulfilled.

"Very soon the unparalleled path of hari-nama-sankirtana will be propagated all over the world ... Already many Christians have tasted the nectar of divine love of the holy name and are dancing with karatalas and mrindagas ... Even the Salvation Army ... has its own forms of kirtana ... Oh for that day when the fortunate English, French, Russian, German and American people will take up banners, mrindangas and kartalas and raise kirtana through their streets and towns. When will that day come?" 26

Already the intention to spread the faith in the West is clearly formed.

Bhaktivinode was city magistrate in Puri, Orissa, and also superintendent of the Jagannatha Temple. He was therefore an educated man, with an English as well as Sanskrit background, and in 1896 he published a book in English called Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu—His Life and Precepts, which he sent to England and America. He spent some time searching for the birthplace of
Caitanya with his spiritual master Babaji, and on their success a shrine was erected there.

The Gaudiya Mission was well-enough established, but Bhaktivinode needed to find a successor. Fortunately a series of omens following the birth of his son on February 6, 1874\(^2\) made it clear to him that this was the one ordained to succeed him. The child was eventually to take the name Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura. Bhaktisiddhanta was an able scholar from his youth, and studied mathematics, history, philosophy and Vedic astrology. He edited a couple of magazines and taught astronomy, and was even offered, but declined, a chair at Calcutta University. A devout Vaisnavite, he worked constantly with his father at the Mission, and in 1901 surrendered himself to a celebrated (though illiterate) ascetic, Gaurakisora dasa Babaji Maharaja, and was accepted as his disciple,\(^2\) eventually becoming a sannyasi. Succeeding his father as head of the Mission, Bhaktisiddhanta established his headquarters in Calcutta and from there extended his preaching throughout India. By 1936 there were sixty-four mission centers established and functioning, but his dream, like his father's, was to spread Caitanyism throughout the world. In 1922 he passed on this task to another—Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

Bhaktivedanta's given name was Abhay Charan De, and he was born in Calcutta in 1896. He graduated from the University of Calcutta, majoring in English, Philosophy and Economics, and got
a job as manager of a chemical factory where he worked until his retirement in 1954. A friend who had listened to Bhaktisiddhanta's teaching took Abhay Charan De to meet him, and so, on a rooftop in Calcutta, Abhay presented himself to his future guru.

"Immediately Bhaktisiddhanta gave Srila Prabhupada what was to be his life's mission: "Preach the message of Lord Caitanya, especially in the English language. You will benefit, and everyone you preach to will benefit."29

Bhaktivedanta was impressed and returned many times, being initiated formally in 1933. It was at this initiation, he claims that Bhaktisiddhanta gave him an explicit command to teach Krishna Consciousness in the West, which is the basis of his authority in the disciplic succession. Three years later Bhaktisiddhanta died.

For the next 23 years Bhaktivedanta lived as a grihastha, a householder devotee, working at the chemical factory, and even being active for a time in Gandhi's growing independence movement. He remembered his guru's instruction but was too busy with householder affairs to consider travelling to the West, and in any case doubted whether anyone in the West would listen to the preaching of an Indian. However, he attended worship regularly at the Gaudiya Mission, and in 1947 took the religious name Bhaktivedanta. In 1956, shortly after his retirement,
following the traditional stages of life known as the ashramas, he took the vows of sannyasa and became a monk.

Following the death of Bhaktisiddhanta in 1936 a dispute had arisen among the disciples as to the line of succession, and therefore the legal ownership of the society's properties. The resulting legal battle was to continue unresolved for some thirty years. While not personally involved in the legal aspect, Bhaktivedanta felt that his own claim to the disciplic succession was validly based on Bhaktisiddhanta's earlier command for him to teach Krishna Consciousness in the West. Even as a householder he had been active in the movement, helping establish new centers, and working as editor-in-chief of the Gaudiya magazine Back to Godhead, which commenced publication in 1944 and was transferred to America by Bhaktivedanta when he established ISKCON there. He had some experience, then, both as a preacher and a writer. Now that the vows of sannyasa had freed him of all family obligations, he began to travel and preach in north India, successfully starting his own society in Delhi, called The League of Devotees in Vrindavana. Bhaktivedanta did not break all ties with the Gaudiya Mission, but believed that the mission to the Western world, so dear to his guru and his father's guru, was being neglected by the members, whose energies were dissipated by materialistic disputes. Accordingly, he decided to go to America on his own responsibility.
A wealthy Vaisnavite woman, Srimata Sumhati Morarzi, paid for Bhaktivedanta's journey to New York, where he arrived in the summer of 1965. He had seven dollars in his pocket, a letter of introduction to an Indian family in Pennsylvania, and a suitcase packed with volumes of Vedic scriptures. Of his first year in New York little is known. Living in cheap lodgings in the Bowery on money obtained from friends, from begging, and from the sale of his books, he spent most of his time in the East Village, sitting in Tomkins Square, chanting the Hare Krishna mantra, and preaching to any who would listen. While he had no difficulty attracting followers, few of them had much money, being mainly young East Village "hippies", "freaks", or drop-outs.

After about a year he got a friend to donate the first month's rent on a small storefront with an apartment in the back, which became the first ISKCON center. Having a permanent center in which to construct a temple shrine and perform the ecstatic rituals of Krishna worship greatly enhanced his success, and he was soon able to initiate a dozen or so permanent devotees, establishing the New York center on a firm footing. From this basis, Bhaktivedanta established a number of other centers in quick succession: in 1967 in Montreal, Boston and San Francisco, where he spent several very successful months. The following year saw new centers opened in Los Angeles, Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago, and the publication of the first two books by
Bhaktivedanta, Bhagavad-gita As It Is and The Teachings of Lord Caitanya.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness today has some 80 centers around the world, more than 30 in the United States, including temples, farms, schools, factories, and publishing companies. The size of the membership is difficult to estimate because ISKCON keeps no record of initiates, or those whom it considers to be members. Their own estimate puts the figure at about 3,000 on the North American continent, 2,500 being United States citizens, the rest Canadians.

ISKCON, then, is a Vaisnavite sect, following the teachings of Caitanya and tracing its history back to his life in 16th century India. To millions of Indians the main tenets of Vaisnavism are as familiar as those of Brahminic orthodoxy, but to westerners both are mysterious and alien. The members of ISKCON, while a considerable proportion of them had some small knowledge of Eastern religion, were on the whole ignorant of Vaisnavite theology at the time of their first involvement with the movement. The daily study sessions in which the devotees engage enable them to acquire progressively a fair grasp of the main features of Vaisnavite philosophy and cosmology, but it presents itself to them as strange and wonderful in a way that it does not to an Indian born and bred in the tradition. The duties enjoined by the practice of bhakti-yoga, the devotional service of Krishna, are ultimately fitted by the devotees into this complex
and vivid new universe, populated by demigods and demons. This has obvious significance for the maintenance of social cohesion and intellectual conviction in the movement, and the main components of the Vaisnavite cosmos are therefore outlined briefly in an appendix. In a dissertation, of this length, however, the main focus must necessarily be confined to the obligations and prohibitions which determine the lifestyle and behaviour of the Hare Krishnas in their search for liberation, or salvation. The question to be answered, then, is how do the ISKCON devotees in the West actually live out their lives in this struggle for Krishna Consciousness in the mundane world of maya. First of all, what are the duties and social relationships enjoined upon those who would successfully live in the Vaisnavite universe, and achieve salvation by following the laws of sacred scripture as interpreted by the spiritual master, Bhaktivedanta?

The prime cause of mankind's misery, both physical and spiritual, is ignorance; once a true appreciation of reality is gained it becomes clear how one must act to compass liberation. This is the knowledge that Bhaktivedanta offers. As one of the devotees, put it: "it's like we're all stumbling around in the dark, and then Prabhupad comes along and turns on the light. Then you see what everything is, where the obstacles are, so you know right away what to do."
Man's Social Duties

The Hare Krishnas see the world of fallen man as a place of misery and enslavement from which they seek to free themselves. To do this they must achieve a state of Krishna Consciousness. In this material, conditioned state man has certain duties to perform; these are set out by Krishna in the Bhagavad-gita, and accord largely with the traditional Hindu social system. They are called varnasrama-dharma—that is the law of the varnas and the asramas. Now the vaisnavism of Caitanya, in common with very many other Hindu sectarian movements, rejected the varnas, or castes, as a rigid, birth-ascribed division, and despite some disputation, especially in the early history of Gaudiya vaisnavism, both the Gaudiya and ISKCON Vaisnavites follow Caitanya in this. According to Bhaktivedanta

"... the institution dividing society into four divisions or castes is not meant to divide human society according to birth. Such divisions are in terms of educational qualifications. They are to keep society in a state of peace and prosperity." 30

A man's duties in varna terms are thus decided by his natural inclinations and abilities, which in a perfect society would be trained and education to enable each to play his proper role.

"There are four varnas, namely, the brahmanas (priests and intellectuals), the ksatriyas (warriors
The varnas are related to the modes of material nature and allow men to work according to their situation in these modes: brahmanas in the mode of goodness, ksatriyas in the mode of passion, vaisyas between the modes of passion and and ignorance, and sudras in the mode of ignorance. But anyone at all who is Krishna conscious is above these divisions. In other words this social order is given by Krishna as the perfect way of ordering our material lives, and thus there is merit and good sense in following it and by doing so one advances in spiritual life. But this is not the highest principle for spiritual advancement.32

"... the prescribed forms of varna and asrama are ritualistic ceremonies of religion (sic) intended for economic development, sense gratification or for salvation. All of these things are recommended for persons who have not developed Krishna consciousness; in fact, all such activities are recommended in the revealed scriptures only to bring one to the point of Krishna consciousness. But one who has already developed spontaneous attachment for Krishna does not require (sic) to execute the duties prescribed in the scriptures."32

The varnas, then, according to Bhaktivedanta, are primarily a scientific set of rules for the proper administration of political economy.33 For spiritual advancement, he says, it is best to abide by the asramas, or life stages, of the Hindu tradition. In other words the varnas are the social orders, the
asramas are the spiritual orders.

Of course this is not sufficient in itself. While living through the four stages of life the devotee must remain in the awareness of Krishna: this is the first and overriding principle. For this to be possible there are moral rules to be followed and sinful actions which must be avoided, for without these pre-conditions karma would make realization impossible. Such virtues as charity, truthfulness, cleanliness, tolerance, gentleness, modesty are enjoined, and lust, deceitfulness, vanity, greed, arrogance, anger, pride etc. must be striven against. As the devotee grows in knowledge he learns many more offences to be avoided and virtues to be practised, together with the means of doing so, all of which are set out in great detail in various scriptures. Part of the education and study of the devotees living in the ISKCON centers involves learning and discussing these texts.

All these injunctions have the aim of leading the devotee to Krishna consciousness, but there is another aspect of service to Krishna which follows naturally from the first: that is the spread of Krishna consciousness throughout the world. Krishna is the soul of every living entity and service to Krishna therefore means service and love for all living beings, especially His devotees. The form which this universal love and service takes, however, is different from that social welfare activism which has been so characteristic of many of the liberal Christian
denominations. The physical part of the universe, including the disease, starvation and poverty of the masses in India for example, are only temporary, and in any case are the result of maya and karma—ignorance and sin. The vital concern of ISKCON Vaisnavites is to help the real, inner selves of people to attain the permanent good of Krishna Consciousness, rather than to simply ameliorate the temporary condition of bodies in one incarnation. One physical incarnation, however miserable it may be, is no more than the blink of an eyelid in the long journey through eternal time. To concentrate on alleviating the physical distress of one lifetime, (which may, in any case, be ten times worse in the next incarnation) is quite literally irrelevant. Furthermore, physical welfare work is unhelpful in that it panders to the mistaken belief in the "false ego", the identification of the self with the body. The point is to raise the consciousness of people to a level where they might achieve liberation, or at least be assured of rebirth in a form more likely to achieve it. Thus Bhaktivedanta says:

"... it is clear that a devotee of the Lord in Krishna consciousness should not be simply satisfied by his own advancement in devotional service; he must be willing to work for the welfare of all others ... That is the greatest of all humanitarian activities."36

The aims of ISKCON devotees are therefore twofold, first to achieve personal salvation in Krishna consciousness, and second
to spread Krishna consciousness around the world as an act of transcendental love for Krishna.

**Social Composition**

One of the more immediately striking characteristics of the ISKCON devotees is their youth. Very few are much over the age of thirty, many are under twenty-five; the vast majority fall between the ages of twenty and thirty. They are not typically high-school leavers, therefore, but have usually spent a few years either working or at college—or, in some cases living in secular or other communes. A very few devotees of high school age do come to live in the temples, but must first obtain the permission of their parents or guardians, and must leave if this permission is withdrawn.

The ratio of males to females is impossible to ascertain with any certainty: it is the opinion of sannyasis I have talked to that there is a considerable preponderance of males, and this is borne out by observation at least of West Coast centers. There are a number of very young children to be found in any temple community, but few over the age of six years. This is partly because of the youth of the married devotees, and partly due to the practice of sending children to ISKCON's schools, called "gurukulas", at the age of five or six.
Broadly speaking the social class background of the members appears to be middle class, parents being in business or the professions: but again this is difficult to confirm. Research done in California by Johnson (1969-1970) and Judah (1972-1973) confirms the middle class estimate, but from my own more recent, (though admittedly much more limited) observations in West coast centers, this may well be changing. A high proportion of neophytes and partially converted visitors to the temples were found to be the children of blue collar workers or manual laborors—rather more, in fact, than were from higher class backgrounds. At the same time, the longer established members who could be persuaded to speak about their "karma" (worldly) families, usually were squarely middle class. Whether this is a distorted view arising from a too narrow sample or ISKCON members, or whether it reflects a genuine shift in the society's recruitment sources, remains a matter for further empirical research.

The ethnic composition of the membership is predominantly white European, though very recently (since August, 1978) efforts were begun in Vancouver to establish links with the Indian Communities in the urban area around the temple. A mailing list was compiled of Indian families, and a circular sent out inviting those who were interested to attend the traditional Hindu worship ceremonies at the temple, and to partake of prasadam (consecrated food). The response was encouraging and a Hari-Nama Newsletter
is now circulated about once a month to all those on the list, mainly Indian families and temple visitors persuaded to leave their names and addresses. It is clear from the content of the Newsletter, with references to "the whole community of Hindus", that it is addressed to the Indian residents of the city. The result has been a great increase in the numbers of visitors to the temple, from about thirty or fifty each week, almost none of them Indian, to approximately a hundred each week, some half of these being Indian. On the other hand, the Indian visitors to the temple, while happy to join in the worship and even to make monetary donations, show little inclination to move into the temple and take initiation as devotees. They are mainly householder families, who attend the temple as a family outing. Their main significance for the temple community is economic, for they are proving a valuable source of donations. Less important, but of some value, is the air of authenticity lent to Hindu ceremonies by the presence of so many Indian visitors each week.

Formal Organization

The formal organizational structure of ISKCON is a clear hierarchy. The Supreme Head is Bhaktivedanta and his authority is absolute in every respect. All other positions of authority are appointive—there is nothing democratic about ISKCON. In
1970, because of his advanced age and poor health, (he had already suffered one stroke) Bhaktivedanta appointed twelve male devotees to a Governing Body Commission (G.B.C.). A letter was sent to each temple president informing them of the G.B.C.'s establishment, and this letter was not shown to the rank and file devotees. Each of the members of the G.B.C. is responsible for a particular zone of the world mission; six zones are in the United States and Canada, six in Europe and Asia. More specific details are not obtainable. According to the president of the Vancouver temple, the members of the G.B.C. will be the personal representatives of Bhaktivedanta until he leaves (dies). Afterwards they will be known as his executors, and will continue to administer the society, but will be subject to re-election every three years by an electorate composed of all the temple presidents. Provision is made for the meeting of all temple presidents once a year, or more often in emergencies, though no such meeting has taken place as yet. The zone commissioner is responsible for all major decisions in his area, such as the opening or closing of temples, the operation of business enterprises and their financial arrangements, and the appointment of temple presidents.

Immediately below the G.B.C. in the hierarchy is the temple president. It is his task to maintain a high standard of work and discipline among the devotees in his care. Everything connected with the temple is the president's responsibility, from
the operation of business enterprises such as farms or incense retail, to the delegation of responsible positions and the expulsion of unsuitable or disruptive members. Even the small change of daily life in the temple is his concern; women devotees must have his permission to leave the temple even for a few minutes, and someone with a headache needs his permission to take an aspirin. The president is at once the general manager and father confessor of his temple community.

Although technically the presidents are appointed by Bhaktivedanta or the G.B.C., in practice a retiring president may choose his successor. Also, an advanced devotee may seek permission to start a new temple, over which he will preside if he succeeds.

If he needs assistance in the management of temple affairs the president will appoint a temple commander. The commander's job is to make sure the devotees get up at the proper time, take the required baths, attend the ceremonies, and, as one devotee put it, "keep the vibrations cool". He is not just an administrator, more of a working foreman. He also assigns the daily duties, such as keeping the temple clean (pristine, in fact, since it is the house of Krishna) and doing "street work", which means public sankirtans, begging, selling incense, magazines, flowers and books.

Most temples also have a secretary and a treasurer. In large temples, such as the one in Los Angeles, there is a
sankirtan leader in charge of a number of men forming a skilled party of holy musicians, a person in charge of the deity worship who is called a pujari and has several assistants, and a head cook who supervises the preparation of prasadam (food offered first to Krishna--the only food devotees eat) observing all the calendric and ritual requirements. In smaller temples, such as the one at Vancouver, these duties are assigned daily or weekly, and female devotees are allowed to act as pujaris and see to the washing and dressing of the deities, and the arrangement of the altar. Otherwise no woman has any responsible position or authority, for they are considered to be unsuited for it by nature. The authority of any official is traced back to the Supreme Spiritual Master, and obedience is therefore a spiritual requirement and is rendered unquestioningly.

The sannyasis of ISKCON are a special category, not connected with any specific temple. Sannyasis are monk-like ascetics, who have taken permanent vows of renunciation (sannyas), breaking all earthly ties and attaching them to a life of pure spirituality. They are considered to be very advanced spiritually, and practice special austerities. Their twin duties are the study and preaching of sacred scripture, and they therefore travel constantly, especially visiting newly founded temple communities. They are subject to no-one other than Bhaktivedanta himself, though they work in co-operation with the G.B.C. When a sannyasi visits a temple the devotees are greatly
enlivened in their work and devotions, and one or two of them will undertake to act as his personal servants during his stay. The temple president treats sannyasis with all the respect due to higher authority, and all devotees are eager to give service to them. They are always provided with a personal room, and are offered obeisances by the devotees each morning. Any sannyasi has the authority to accept as a student or chela (student-servant) anyone he considers seriously interested in Krishna consciousness.

Worship and Bhakti-yoga

Bhakti-yoga, the yoga of "loving devotional service of Krishna", is believed to be the ultimate goal of all living beings. Bhakti is a state of permanent, active devotion and worship of the deity, in which every action is consciously performed for his sake, and the mind never wavers in its contemplation of the name, form and pastimes of Krishna. The formal arrangements for worship in ISKCON temples, are designed to bring about this condition in the devotees. Thus, although there are set rituals and ceremonies to be performed at certain times of the day and year, ritual forms spill over into daily life, and the true devotee is engaged in worship no matter what he is doing.
This is the age of Kali-yuga, an age of evil and degradation, and Caitanya taught that in this period the best means for achieving spiritual realization is to chant the holy names of God—the Mahamantra, or great Mantra.

Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna, Krishna, Hare, Hare
Hare Rama, Hare Rama,
Rama, Rama, Hare, Hare.

This is the most important chant of all, for it is the Holy Names of Krishna and fixes the mind in Krishna Consciousness—it is the first and most important step to liberation. When a mantra is chanted softly to oneself it is called japa, when it is chanted loudly it is called kirtana. Japa is to be performed by every devotee daily, for sixteen rounds on his prayer beads, a bead-roll of 108 beads, which is kept in a bag suspended from the neck by a strap. There is time set aside each day for this practice, but it is recommended that the devotee use any idle moment for japa. On my first visit to the Krishna temple in Vancouver I was startled by a devotee who, lost for a word in mid-sentence, suddenly broke into the mahamantra, and then finished the sentence. The beads are a symbol of the 108 gopis of Vrindavan, with one large bead representing Krishna. On reaching the large bead one reverses and counts back the other way, never passing over that bead.

Certain ceremonies are performed daily in every temple, centering around the worship of the deities. About two feet in
height, richly dressed in jewel encrusted robes, and made exactly to the prescriptions of tradition, the deities have the appearance of Krishna in one or more of his "expansions". These doll-like figures are not idols, for as long as they conform to traditional requirements it is believed that Krishna incarnates into the images and is physically present, but because of our imperfect, materially conditioned senses we are unable to see him. Representations of Radha and Krishna are perhaps the most popular, but almost equally common are the Jagannatha figures such as were worshiped by Caitanya at Puri, which always include Krishna with his brother Balarama and his sister Subhadra.

The ceremony of deity worship is called aratrika, usually abbreviated to arati by the ISKCON devotees, and it is ideally performed six times a day, though in smaller temples, such as Vancouver's, it is only performed four times daily as a rule. It takes place in the temple room where an altar, usually of marble, richly ornamented and decked out with flowers, is kept curtained off when not in use. The deities are placed on the altar for arati, but at various other times of the day they are bathed, dressed, undressed, and bedded down for siesta or a night's sleep, being generally served as living people. This is the duty, or privilege, of the pujari, who is often a woman devotee; it is the only position of responsibility commonly held by women. Also on the altar is a picture of Bhaktivedanta, and usually
pictures of Caitanya, and other saints in the disciplic succession. There is a permanent heavy scent of incense and flowers. Opposite the altar is the vyasasana, the throne of the spiritual master, and no-one else may sit there. A large, framed picture of Bhaktivedanta stands permanently on the cushions of the vyasasana, which is kept in readiness should the master visit the temple.

**Aratrika**

The ceremony begins with the pujari making obeisance to the deities, ringing a little bell and chanting prayers. The deities meanwhile are on the altar behind drawn curtains. After this brief chant the devotees enter the temple room, the curtains are withdrawn, and all prostrate themselves, reciting prayers. Food is now brought into the room on a silver tray, completely covered so that it cannot be seen or smelled before the deities have "partaken". It is offered with obeisance by the pujari, and placed to one side of the altar, whereupon the curtains are drawn once more, and the covers removed from the food. The pujari steps out through the curtains, rings the bell once more, and chants a prayer offering the food to Bhaktivedanta. He must act as mediator, for the devotees are too lowly, and materially polluted to approach Krishna directly. At the noon arati the food is left uncovered behind the curtains for an hour, at other
times for fifteen minutes; after which the pujari checks behind the curtains, rings the bell again, and draws back the curtains.

The ceremony proper now begins. A number of sweet smelling things are burned in order to please the senses of the deities. Incense first, followed by camphor and ghee, which are first offered to the deities and then passed among the devotees who purify themselves by passing their fingers through the flame. Meanwhile water is poured into a conch shell and placed near the deities so that they may rinse their hands and mouths after taking prasadam, and flowers are offered while the pujari waves a fan, preferably a yaks tail, to keep the deities comfortably cool and free from insects. All these actions are performed with a practised grace and reverence, after which a conch shell is sounded three times, and one devotee leads a chant of obeisance and respect, the others responding. This chanting always begins with respects to Bhaktivedanta and his Vaisnavite predecessors in the disciplic succession, then to Radha and Krishna, and then perhaps to other deities (expansions of Krishna), sacred places such as Vrindavan, and even sacred plants such as the tulasi. Finally respects are offered to the devotees present at the time.

The very first chant of the arati is always

\[
\text{name em visnu-padaya Krishna-presthaya bhutale srimate bhaktivedanta-svamin iti name}
\]

which Bhaktivedanta translates as:
I offer my respectful obeisances to His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, who is very dear to Lord Krishna, having taken shelter at His lotus-feet.

This follows from Bhaktivedanta's teaching that the only approach to Krishna is through the true spiritual master. The teaching of the master is the teaching of Krishna, surrender to him is surrender to Krishna. Thus, in The Nectar of Devotion, Bhaktivedanta quotes the Srimad-Bhagavatam: "... the spiritual master must be accepted not only as My representative but as My very self". Before the next essential invocation a variety of chants are performed at the discretion of the chant leader, who intones his selection alone to be followed by the rest in chorus, repeating the mantra at the same pitch and with the same tune. The number of repetitions of each mantra also depends on the leader.

The second key invocation is:

Bhaja Sri Krishna Caitanya
Prabhu Nityananda
Sri Advaita Gadadhara
Srivasadi Gaura-bhakta-vrinda.

which is translated as:

I offer my obeisances to Sri Krishna Caitanya, Nityananda Prabhu, Sri Advaita, Gadadhara, Srivasa, and all the followers of Lord Caitanya.

This is repeated a number of times, often interspersed with other popular mantras.

Finally the mahamantra itself is chanted. "Hare" is said by Bhaktivedanta to represent Radha, and thus Krishna's loving
expansion is referred to first before Krishna himself. The order of these chants means that the devotee and Krishna. "Rama" is another word for Krishna, another plenary expansion. The performance of the mahamantra is considered to be ecstatic by the devotees, lifting them beyond the material plane and into the transcendental presence of Krishna who is actually present in the deities. It is a most purifying experience, and can nullify the effects of sinfulness.

"If a person is born in a family of dog-eaters it means that his past activities are all sinful. But if such a person takes to the path of devotional service and begins to chant the holy names of the Lord... he is at once fit to perform the ritualistic ceremonies. This means that his sinful reactions have immediately become neutralized."

This chant begins at a slow and measured tempo set by the leader, who is usually the one to beat time with the mridanga, a drum suspended from the shoulders by a strap. The tempo gradually speeds up, and the drumming is joined by the sound of finger-cymbals (kirtalas), bells, hand-clapping, stamping feet and the occasional ecstatic yell. As the noise reaches a crescendo the devotees "bliss out", leaping high in the air and waving their arms, stamping their feet hard on the floor and whirling like dervishes, carried away in communal, ecstatic devotion to Krishna. The climax comes with three loud blasts on the conch shell, at which all the devotees prostrate themselves before the deities and murmur a quiet prayer in dramatic contrast
to the commotion of a second before. The enthusiasm of these young men and women (and also the very young children), is contagious, and most of the visitors to the temple find themselves at least clapping and swaying to the rhythm of the chant. It generates very powerful feelings of joyful release, and transcendental union with Krishna. After the prayer the curtains are once more drawn around the shrine.

In the morning arati finishes at this point, and the devotees go off to do japa for an hour, but in the evening one of the renounced devotees, a sannyasi that is, spends about fifteen or so minutes explaining the meaning and significance of a particular sloka, or a verse, or sacred scripture. This is followed by more chanting, the curtains are withdrawn again, and a final ecstatic round of the mahamantra brings the ceremony to a close, when the shrine is curtained off for the night, and the deities put to bed.

Arati is celebrated either once or twice in the morning, once at noon, once or twice in the afternoon, and once in the evening. The only differences are in the mantras chanted, the food eaten, and the scriptural exegesis in the evening. In each case the ceremony is followed by the eating of prasadam, which itself is a holy and purifying activity. Any guests present are encouraged to eat their fill, for this purifying food increases the likelihood of their becoming devotees and joining the movement. In some places (e.g. India and Africa) large amounts of
food are prepared and after arati are taken out and distributed to the hungry—not as an act of meaningless social charity, but as spiritual charity.

Another important observance for devotees is Ekadasi, which is not a ritual but a fast. This is observed "twice a month on the 11th day of the moon both waxing and waning". Devotees fast from midnight to midday and then eat only moderate amounts of vegetables and warm milk, refraining from beans, cereals and grains. Meat eating is, of course, an abomination at any time. "The real reason for observing fasting on Ekadasi is to minimize the demands of the body and to engage our time in the service of the Lord."43

The water with which the deities were washed before the ceremony is mixed with yogurt or sour cream. This is called caranamrtam, and has great spiritual power. It is usually kept in a prominent place in a large bowl, to be used by devotees to purify their hands and mouths during the day, by taking a small amount onto the fingers and lips.

**Prasadam — sacred food**

Prasadam is any food which has been offered to Krishna; this is the only food eaten by Hare Krishna devotees. Particularly auspicious foods are any products of the cow (which is sacred), such as milk, butter and especially ghee, which is clarified
Different foods are offered at different times of the day. In the morning it is fruits and milk; at noon it is mainly dahl (a thick lentil soup), vegetables, rice, chapatis and milk; in the afternoon devotees make offerings of more vegetables and also sweetmeats and rice pudding. The evening prasadam is similar to the afternoon, though usually more plentiful. On Sundays there is a public feast since more visitors are present than during the week, and the offerings are correspondingly richer, more plentiful and varied. The culinary standards are remarkably high, at least in Vancouver, and I have been offered vegetarian foods of gourmet perfection. Curried beans of various kinds, with several chutneys, curried fruit, rice, burfly and sweet pastries are common fare. There is no furniture in ISKCON temples, the devotees sit on the floor and eat off paper plates with their fingers.

Prasadam is sacred food, prepared for and offered to Krishna.

"Such spiritualized food increases one's duration of life, purifies one's existence, and gives strength, health, happiness and satisfaction. Moreover it nourishes one's transcendental realization."

Its preparation therefore is a spiritual act of devotion, as holy and purifying as the arati, and so the kitchen, in accordance with Hindu tradition, is a sacred place subject to rules of pollution and purification. Accordingly, those who prepare the food in the temple kitchens have had special training. All food must be fresh; canned, store-frozen or
left-over foods are never used, and certain vegetables such as onions, garlic and mushrooms are also forbidden. Since the food is for Krishna first, and only after he has finished for the devotees, no one must taste, or is even supposed to smell it beforehand.

The kitchens are to be kept absolutely clean, all pots and pans are scoured thoroughly after cooking, the floor is mopped, and the walls and cupboards are often scrubbed down. All kitchen work is carried out with the minimum of conversation required to do it properly, and indeed prasadam should be eaten in silence. However, since there are nearly always nondevotees present for prasadam, devotees are permitted to talk with them, but they must confine the conversation to the subject of Krishna consciousness.

As evidence of the efficacy of eating prasadam one female devotee told me:

"There was this guy used to come here just for prasadam. He came late to miss the talk and all that stuff he didn't want laid on him. Then he'd just eat and go. Now he's a brahmachari in Toronto."

**Tulasi Worship**

The tulasi is a tree, indigenous to India and other parts of Asia, and it is believed by many Hindus, not only Vaisnavites, to be sacred. The ISKCON devotees refer to the plant as Tulasi Devi ("devi" means goddess) and always use the personal pronoun "she". The Tulasi is believed to be a fully conscious, living
goddess, a spiritual being in the form of a plant, and by worshipping, touching or eating the leaves of the Tulasi, all sickness both physical and spiritual, may be vanquished. Krishna himself is said to have been fond of eating Tulasi leaves and buds. Usually one devotee is detailed to undertake the responsibility of caring for the plant, an important duty because a thriving Tulasi is said to be a sign of the spiritual state of the devotees in that temple. The Canadian climate is unsuited to the cultivation of the Tulasi tree and a room is set aside where light and humidity are carefully controlled.

Twice a day, at the end of arati ceremonies, the plant is carried into the temple room and placed on an elaborate stand. Devotees make obeisance, and walk or dance gently in a circle around the Tulasi, while the one with responsibility for its care rings a small bell continuously. It is a relatively quiet, calm ceremony, with none of the wild dancing of the arati.

Hare Krishna Festivals

The Krishna devotees follow a spiritual calendar that divides the year into twelve months, each named for a different form of Krishna. Every month has a lot of minor festivals, such as the birth or death (appearance or disappearance day) of a Vaisnavite saint, but although these are sometimes remembered in the choice of mantra chanted that day they are not otherwise
celebrated, at least in the West. On the other hand there are a large number of major feasts, many of which are celebrated though not all equally extravagantly, and not all in one place.

Hare Krishna festivals are colorful, musical and lively, and make a good means of attracting new converts. All the same, large-scale celebrations are expensive, and so are confined to places with large temples and many devotees, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, London, Paris and so forth, with more occasional and smaller-scale celebrations in, for example, Toronto. "Practically speaking", Bhaktivedanta said, "there is a big festival every two months", but I shall not attempt to describe all of these. Here are the four most important ones.

The first day of each year in the Vaisnava calendar is the birthday of Caitanya, and this is celebrated when possible with nagara-sankirtans, parades in which the figure of Caitanya may be carried, public arati and often yatras, which are dramatizations of some of Krishna's pastimes at Vrindavan. And of course prasadam is given to all-comers. In June of each year the Jagannatha bathing festival is held. This involves the removal of the deity, Lord Jagannatha, from his shrine by chanting devotees who then circle around him and, privatim et seriatim, pour a spoonful of water over him and then prostrate themselves in worship. This is followed by a great feast of prasadam, during which an announcement is made to the effect that the Lord
has caught a bad cold, (presumably as the result of open-air bathing).

By July Jagannatha has recovered from his illness, and this is celebrated in the Ratha-yatra Festival, during which the three Jagannatha deities, Jagannatha, Balarama and Subhadra, are placed amid great banks of flowers upon three huge carts and, covered with garlands, are drawn through the city streets by devotees. This festival is celebrated yearly in San Francisco, the ceremony in most respects a duplicate of the famous Jagannatha Car Festival in Puri, Orissa, at which for decades it was mistakenly supposed by Europeans that devotees would frantically throw themselves beneath the wheels of the "Juggernaut". Most of the celebrations are the same as those on Caitanya's birthday, including, of course, the inevitable feast of prasadam.

In August the appearance of Krishna himself, Janmastami, is celebrated "the most important holiday in the Vedic calendar" according to Back to Godhead. The festivities include the familiar sankirtans, arati and prolonged mahamantra chanting, and also a ceremony called abhiseka which involves bathing the deities Krishna and Radha in yogurt, milk, rosewater ghee and honey.

Other major feasts include Gaura-purnima, Govardhana-puja and Rasa-lila, "so let there be many ... wonderful programs, and let everyone come and see the blissful life of Krishna Consciousness." Although, probably for economic reasons, not
all those festivals are publicly celebrated, each of the temples holds a special service and invites all and sundry to attend and at least partake of prasadam.

The Temple Schedule

Not every temple has exactly the same timetable, and in a given temple the schedule is subject to alteration—to suit the hours of daylight, for instance. Nor can every devotee be strictly required to adhere to the same program; for practical reasons many devotees have individual timetables, especially if they work on farms, or for ISKCON press. What follows, then, is a typical daily timetable of events in an ISKCON temple, based mainly on the timetable of the Vancouver Radha-Krishna Temple. All devotees who are able must follow this schedule, and most have clearly defined duties which conform to it; devotees who fail to stick to the prescribed times and activities without the excuse of special duties, are taken aside and reprimanded by the temple commander or president, or even by fellow devotees.

3:30 a.m.

The devotees rise to the sound of the Mahamantra, take showers and apply their Tilaka. The hours before dawn are believed to be especially potent for spiritual
advancement, more specifically one hour and thirty-six minutes before the sun rises. The pujari may rise a half hour earlier to waken the deities and prepare them for arati. The cooks immediately begin preparation of the prasada for the deities' breakfast at the first arati of the day, while others work on flower garlands, or sew, or do japa.

5:00 a.m.
Aratrika. The first arati of the day is called Mansala-aratrika, and everyone must attend. It lasts for about one hour.

6:00 a.m.
Study session. This involves the study of sacred scripture as translated by Bhaktivedanta and generally include the learning of Sanskrit passages, translations, and even the "purports" (or commentary) by heart.

7:00 a.m.
Routine daily chores about the temple; cleaning, polishing, repair work and maintainance are allotted to various devotees. Any spare time is to be spent doing japa.
8:30 A.M.

Breakfast. Following the breakfast prasada, the devotees go about their main work tasks of the day, such as farm work, printing press work, making incense, sewing, painting, building, cooking, deity care, and care of sacred utensils, bookkeeping, or preaching.

11:00 a.m.

A sankirtana group is usually dispatched to a part of the city, complete with drums, (mridanga's) and other instruments. At the same time copies of Back to Godhead, and perhaps incense and flowers are taken along to be peddled to passersby during the kirtan, while Brahmacharis beg for donations. Sometimes the sankirtana party sets off on foot, sometimes in the temple vehicle. Occasionally they perform at considerable distances from the temple and may stay out all day, returning at six for showers and prasada. In these cases they take food with them.

12:00 noon

Food is offered to the deities. The devotees return to the temple, bringing any interested visitors with them.
1:00 p.m.

Aratrika (called Bnor-aratrika): and after this prasada is taken and offered to visitors. Some devotees may remain to discuss Krishna Consciousness with potential converts, others return to work or set out on Sankirtana once again. At 1:30 the pujari puts the deities to bed for siesta and from then until 3:45 the temple must be kept as quiet as possible.

6.00 p.m.

Most devotees return to the temple, shower and apply tilaka. A study session follows, usually more learning and exegesis of the Bhagavad-gita or the Nectar of Devotion.

7:00 p.m.

Aratrika (sunda-aratrika). After arati the evening prasada is taken and this is followed by more study of sacred scriptures. During this study session those attending, devotees and visitors, are encouraged to ask questions and a general discussion often takes place. However, the denial of the truth of scriptures is not allowed, and the interpretation of the teacher, who may be the temple president, or a visiting sannyasi, is rarely questioned.
9:30 p.m.

Rest. The devotees unroll sleeping bags and sleep on the floor, men in one part of the building, women and children in another. Bhaktivedanta allows his devotees a maximum of six hours sleep.

The study sessions are extremely important, for as devotees learn more and more of the vast and complicated philosophy and ethical system of Vaisnavism they are given clear and encouraging evidence of spiritual progress. Since sinfulness is due to ignorance, true knowledge is spiritual progress. There is an element of gnosticism here, reinforced by the rote learning of sanskrit verses or slokas which give the impression of arcane and powerful knowledge. The repetition of these slokas, even without understanding, is believed to be greatly purifying and meritorious. Furthermore, as the innumerable rules and regulations for true devotional service are learned progressively greater areas of the lives and thoughts of the devotees are brought under the control, albeit indirectly, of the Supreme Spiritual Master.

This is sustained by the much discussed concepts of service and surrender. Bhaktivedanta teaches that the inevitable nature of human life is service: husband serves wife, servant serves master, worker serves employer, employer serves his business and so on. These are false services based on the belief "I am this
true service is service to Krishna. This simply involves doing the same things, but in Krishna consciousness, for love of Krishna. The activities, to be truly devotional, must be done in an attitude of surrender; surrender to Krishna means first of all surrender to a true spiritual master, which in turn means surrender to his representatives. Obedience, therefore, must be unquestioning. In other words, the rules of devotional service are to be learned from a spiritual master or his representative and applied meticulously, but never questioned for they are revealed truths. In this spirit the reading of books other than sacred scripture is frowned upon, and conversation which does not concern service to Krishna (such as temple work) or Krishna consciousness, is frivolous, and frivolity is expressly to be avoided.

Detachment is heavily stressed: the devotee is expected to be unaffected by either loss or gain. Friendships outside ISKCON are not entirely forbidden, but are very seriously discouraged. Fellowship and community with ISKCON brothers and sisters is conducive to spiritual advancement and association with renounced souls--i.e. sannyasis--is especially so. As many devotees as possible are therefore encouraged to live in the ISKCON centres, though there is provision for grihasthas--householders--to live and work outside. Even these, however, are expressed if possible, to perform private arati and japa before shrines in their own homes. In this way every householder members are to some extent under the
eyes of the temple priests, who can thus restrain worldliness and encourage spirituality. The rule of detachment from external influences applies even to the immediate family. Many devotees come from Protestant, Catholic or other Christian families and their parents consider the Hare Krishna movement to be downright paganism. These devotees practice detachment from the parental family and thus gain spiritual merit. The same rule applies to husbands, wives, and children. Bhaktivedanta puts it like this:

"As for detachment from children, wife and home, it is not meant one should have no feeling for these. They are natural objects of affection, but when they are not favorable to spiritual progress, then one should not be attached to them. The best process for making the home pleasant is Krishna consciousness . . . But if it is not congenial, not favorable for spiritual advancement, then family life should be abandoned."

The devotee must also be detached from material things. On entering the society, the neophyte is encouraged to hand over all his possessions to the temple community, or at least, to distribute them among his friends. ISKCON devotees own nothing. The accumulation of material possessions for personal use—"sense-gratification"—is an expression of maya. In themselves the products of Western technology are considered to be value-neutral, but attachment to them, in the words of one devotee, "is like you're attached to this great weight,--it drags you down". Radios, airplanes, motor cars, televisions and expensive speaker systems are all used by ISKCON, but only in
devotional service to Krishna, to spread Krishna Consciousness. Those devotees who live and work in the centers, therefore, depend entirely on ISKCON for material necessities, and those grhasthas who work outside turn over all the money they do not absolutely need to the society, for to possess more than you need is sinful, since everything really belongs to Krishna. There is a general air of trustful confidence as regards material needs, a belief that "Krishna will provide", which is part of the attitude of surrender proper for all devotees. This dependence on ISKCON for material security has the obvious effect of binding the devotees more tightly to the temple community.

The disciplined regulation of ISKCON life aims at all pervasive social control and ultimately control of consciousness itself. This is achieved by the proliferation of rules of physical and mental behaviour, learned in study sessions and at Gurukula in accordance with sacred scriptures as interpreted by Bhaktivedanta. It is maintained and reinforced by emphasis on the concepts of service, surrender and detachment and by the practice of bhakti-yoga, especially the powerful "collective effervescence" of the ecstatic arati ceremonies and the constant chanting of the mahamantra both japa and Kirtana.
Economy

Each temple is financially independent. A few ISKCON centres have particular sources of income, such as farms or retail stores, but most temples are supported by money from a variety of sources, the following being typical.

1) Every temple sells the ISKCON magazine, Back to Godhead and the translations of scripture and devotional handbooks by Bhaktivedanta. These are sold both in the temple and on the streets when sankirtans are performed. As a rule a donation of fifty cents or a dollar is requested for the magazine, but twenty-five cents is acceptable: "Every gentleman has a quarter", says Bhaktivedanta. The temples pay twenty-five cents a copy for Back to Godhead, which is distributed from New York and are allowed to keep some of the profits from its sale; the rest goes back into the book fund. The profit from the sale of books in the temples all goes to the book fund, but indirectly money from book sales often finds its way into the temple coffers. Frequently books are sold to devotees who take them out and resell them for a profit, returning part or all of this money to the temple. The profit from the original sale goes to the book fund, but not that from the re-sale. Most temples also retail incense from the ISKCON factory in Los Angeles and many sell wholesale to local stores, boutiques and "head shops" which are run by young, long-haired "freaks".
Similarly, individual householder members make their livings by retailing ISKCON products. For example, volumes of Srimad-Bhagavata can be bought in the temple for seven or eight dollars, which is very cheap for well-produced and well illustrated books of that size. On re-selling these volumes devotees may receive as much as ten or fifteen dollars for each one and are entitled to keep the profits either to support themselves and their families or to save the fare to India. Anything more than is needed for these purposes should be turned over to the temple treasurer. Incense and flowers are similarly retailed, the money either supporting householders or going to the temple.

2) Begging is also a major source of financial support. Devotees who beg on the street during sankirtans do not, as a rule acquire much money. More money comes from the efforts of the temple president and treasurer who spend some time telephoning friends, well-wishers, businessmen (especially Indians) and prominent citizens asking for donations to support the temple. Newsletters and circulars asking for financial aid for particular projects are another successful means of raising money, and large sums have been made available through the arrangement of loans on the credit of devotees, well-wishers, or members' relatives. "You take out the loan, we will make the payments. Other temples have raised over $100,000 this way," one newsletter reads. Devotees who have maintained relations
with their families usually ask or regular contributions and any visitors to the temple are requested to contribute a dollar, or as much as possible.

3) Devotees are strongly discouraged from taking jobs outside ISKCON, but on occasions; when financial crises arise, members may teach, or do social work, or even factory work, until enough has been made to resolve the crisis. This is done to achieve specific ends in emergencies; when the goal is achieved the member ceases his "Karmi" work immediately. Women never do such work, being more prone to contamination by maya. On the other hand the women of some temples have successfully produced confections of fruits and nuts, burfly, and "Krishna Kandy" for retail in health food stores, or even on the streets at sankirtanas.

4) Businessmen (who are "natural" Vaisyas in Bhaktivedanta's version of the Varnas or castes) are encouraged to become members of ISKCON by subscription if they will not actually move into the temple. A subscription of $1,111.00 gives them a "lifetime participation in ISKCON's world movement" without having to leave their businesses. There are a few lifetime subscribers, but they do not appear at temples very often. Others are persuaded to become "one-year participants" by donating $8.00, or to take out a lifetime subscription to Back to Godhead for $250.00.

Those are the principal financial resources of most ISKCON temples in urban areas, each of which must be economically
independent. The most important ones are donations and legacies from wealthy patrons and the wholesale of incense to retail outlets at double the cost of buying it from ISKCON's Los Angeles factory.

Quite apart from the support of each individual temple, the world mission of the movement requires a considerable economic base. The foundation of ISKCON's economic success is the Spiritual Sky Incense Company, which manufactures incense and distributes it wholesale. The company's yearly profits are now in excess of two and a half million dollars. The work is all done in Los Angeles by about forty full-time workers and a computer (which does japa when not in use by continuously printing out the mahamantra). The workers are all devotees and, of course, they work for love and not money, manufacturing incense sticks and cones, and preparing them for shipment. Other products such as soap, body oils, shampoos and similar toiletries are also sold by Spiritual Sky, but these are manufactured for them by Avon. Spiritual sky products are expensive (e.g. a packet of one dozen sticks of incense costs much as $1.50 to $2.00) and since overheads, especially labor costs, are low and no taxes are paid, the profits are immense.

Most of the products are sold to retailers outside ISKCON, often by professional salesmen working on commission for Spiritual Sky and competing with other companies in the same business. They are paid a suitable salary and supplied with a
motor car and insurance as well as an expense account and commission on sales. These "karmi salesmen" are the only non-devotees employed by ISKCON, the ostensible reason for employing them being to allow more time for devotees to practice their devotions. Another, unacknowledged, reason is probably that they are much more successful in gaining optimum sales for a given area than Hare Krishna salesmen. Less than half the products of Spiritual Sky are wholesaled to individual temples, which then sell to retailers at double the cost. One or two devotees selling in bulk to retailers may provide most of the financial needs of a small temple.

The backbone of the world mission to spread Krishna Consciousness is the ISKCON Press, run on a tiny profit margin which in any case is ploughed back into the company to produce more of Bhaktivedanta's books at low cost. It is a completely professional concern, with a qualified printing staff, photographers and a fully-equipped photographic laboratory, and a large staff of painters producing illustrations in the tradition of Indian religious art. There is also an editorial group who polish Bhaktivedanta's rather poor English into comprehensible and publishable form. The ISKCON Press operates in a converted warehouse near the New York temple and all the employees are devotees: it is a highly successful concern which keeps profits to a minimum in order to extend the literary evangelism of the mission to a maximum.51
Each Back to Godhead usually contains a list of "ISKCON Centers Around the World", which always lists the society's farms on each continent separately. A special importance is attributed to these farms by the movement because Bhaktivedanta believes that the ideal economic model for devotees, and for the world, is the "Vedic Village". This implies that each center should have a farm on which devotees will grow vegetables and keep a dairy. (Dairy farming is described as "cow protection"). Thus each center should be self-sufficient, the farm providing food for devotees, the surplus being used to trade for clothing, machinery and other necessities. This is tied into the traditional varnasrama system of Hindu social structure. The farm is to be run by householders (sudras and vaisyas) and used to support street workers, (sudras, who in any case make money selling Back to Godhead and begging, etc.) administrators (vasyas), and the renounced sannyasis (brahmins). In the past eight years eleven farms have been established and are operating with relative success in various parts of the world. Mechanization is not forbidden but it is felt to be inferior to "natural farming". "As far as possible", Bhaktivedanta says, "machines should be avoided because they provide an opportunity for idleness, gossiping and excessive sleep". Bulls are trained for work as ox-teams and hard manual labor replaces most other farm machinery.
In Kenya, for example, this model is seen as the perfect answer to the economic and social problems of the country. Chayarana Svami, chairman of ISKCON's African mission, describes the process:

"We are trying to present the idea of varnasrama on a small scale with an aim towards self-sufficiency. If a man can become self-sufficient in providing food for himself by proper use of the land and by keeping a few cows, then his primary problem is solved. Using the same land and the same simple process, he can also construct a small house and live very peacefully there with his family. Then he can begin to make cloth to provide clothing, and by following this system he will become completely freed from the unwanted things in society that simply cause agitation and disturbance. He will be in an ideal atmosphere for cultivating Krishna consciousness, the real purpose of life." 54

Much the same formula was given by Bhaktivedanta himself, on a visit to ISKON's farm near New Orleans.

"Srila Prabhupada then spoke to us for some time on how the natural way of life is superior to the artificial, mechanized life in the cities. He described how our farm could be modeled after village life in Vedic India: "The farm should be mainly run by householder couples. They can live in small cottages and take care of the cows, and till the fields. In the villages of India, where there are many cows, naturally there is also an abundant supply of milk. The residents don't turn all the milk into ghee (clarified butter) for sale. Rather every day each family puts their supply into one big pot with a fire under it, and takes out as much as they need for drinking and cooking that day. At night, whatever milk is left is converted into yogurt, stored and then churned into butter. The buttermilk is fed to the calves, and the butter is turned into ghee. In this way not a single drop of milk is wasted. So this is the formula for an
abundant life: some land, hard work, cow protection,
and doing everything for Lord Krishna.  

The Vedic Village, then, is the ideal economic model for ISKCON. But so far there are few farms owned by the society which can be run according to the Vedic ideal and remain economically viable. Several farms have had to be sold (including one owned by the Vancouver temple) and most are struggling concerns, demanding enormous labor and great austerity of the devotees who live on them. Nevertheless it is the acknowledged aim of the society to make the Vedic farm the typical and most common form of temple community, though there appears to be little chance of success in the foreseeable future. It is rather the city temples which are thriving, set in the midst of large conurbations, with ready access to retail outlets for incense and books, a numerous public from which to extract donations, and before which to perform the ecstatic sankirtanas; a setting moreover, which is a much more likely source of recruits than any rural district.

Relations Between The Sexes

Relations between the sexes are also regulated according to the injunctions of the scriptures as interpreted by Bhaktivedanta. Traditionally a Hindu brahmacari is a celibate student, but according to Bhaktivedanta this is not necessary in bhakti-yoga.
"One who, however, follows the rules and regulations of married life, having sexual relationship only with his wife (and that also under regulation), is also called brahmacari. Such a restrained householder brahmaçari may be accepted in the bhakti school, but the jnana and dhyana schools do not admit even householder brahmaçaris. They require complete abstinence without compromise. (This is) because the cult of bhakti-yoga is so powerful that one automatically loses sexual attraction, being engaged in the superior service of the Lord. Whereas others are forced to restrain themselves from sense-gratification, a devotee of the Lord automatically refrains because of superior taste. Other than the devotee no one has any information of the superior taste."

Men and women are viewed as naturally and essentially different in a way which is well within the Hindu tradition. Women require protection all their lives, for, like children, they are easily misled and prone to degradation. They are considered to be "not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy. So the different family traditions of religious activities should always engage them, in order to prevent reckless mixing of the sexes, leading to illicit sexual intercourse and unwanted children. All women who are not one's wife must be considered as one's mother. At the same time they must not be given complete freedom, but are like children and need protection.

"Actually a woman should be given protection at every stage of life. She should be given protection by the father in her younger days, by the husband in her youth, and by the grownup sons in her old age."
The ideas of women's liberation and equality (especially of freedom) between the sexes are considered to be demonic, and the moral condition of women in today's society to be very low.\[^{61}\]

Males and females, even married couples, who live in the temple, are strictly separated for sleeping and usually for working. The more responsible work of administration and maintenance and discipline is done exclusively by men, as is most heavy work such as building or farming. Women do most of the cleaning and some of the cooking (though not much); they do much of the street work, begging, selling magazines, flowers and incense and engaging in sankirtans. They also have responsibility for the care of children up to the age of five. It is the duty of men to protect and admonish the women; it is the duty of the women to serve the men and care for the children.

Conversation with devotees always assures the visitor that the women are very happy with this arrangement and consider it proper. Women's liberation is dismissed as foolish ignorance or demonic sinfulness. In reality, however, prolonged observation of temple life reveals that American and Canadian female devotees have great difficulty living up to the Vedic ideal of submissiveness and self-effacement, and it is a major source of friction, particularly between married couples. As a result ISKCON policy regarding marriage has undergone a substantial change.
Marriage

The marriage of two devotees was long regarded as entirely beneficial, both to the couple and to the temple, where it was thought it would increase harmony and stability. Devotees who had left their spouses in the "Karmi" world were encouraged to obtain legal divorces and perhaps to remarry inside ISKCON. While the dissolution of "Karmi" marriages is considered no bad thing, an ISKCON marriage is for life, and divorce is impossible. Marriages are generally arranged either by Bhaktivedanta himself or by the temple president, if it is thought suitable for particular devotees. A couple who wish to marry may ask permission of their temple president, but it is by no means always granted.

When an ISKCON marriage is arranged a civil ceremony is performed first, to obviate any possible legal difficulties, but it is the Vedic ceremony performed later which is considered the binding commitment. The wedding ceremony is meant to reflect the nature of marriage as denoting primarily a relationship of two people to Krishna, rather than to each other for it is believed that love must be spiritual to be real and therefore must be mediated through Krishna. First the couple dress in traditional Hindu wedding garments, (the bride having her face painted according to Vedic custom) and wear garlands of flowers which have touched the deities. The priest wears a similar
garland. A long period of chanting the mahamantra is followed by a homily on marriage from the priest, at the conclusion of which to the bride is given into the bridegroom's care by her father or godbrother. The bridegroom promises to "take charge" of his bride for the rest of their lives, and that he will never separate from her or divorce her: the bride promises to serve her husband faithfully, and help him to carry out his activities in Krishna Consciousness. The couple then exchange places and garlands, and the bridegroom smears vermillion on the parting in his bride's hair. Next the priest ties the man's dhoti to the woman's sari, which now covers her head; the knot remains tied for a week.

The priest now proceeds to build a sacred fire on a base of soil mixed with multicolored dies. He lights a stick dipped in ghee and piles more sticks on top, making a small blaze. Then he takes rice and sesame seeds, sticky with butter, and passes the mixture out to the congregated devotees, meanwhile chanting prayers. At the end of each prayer the priest says "svaha" (approximately "amen") and the devotees throw a few grains of rice and butter into the fire while the priest spoons on some ghee making a satisfyingly dramatic flare. After several chants, much throwing of rice and the addition of more wood to the fire, the husband and wife stand up each holding a banana between joined hands. The prayers continue for a while and then the bananas are placed in the fire. Everyone now chants the
mahamantra, and there is some dancing, while the priest takes ashes from the fire and makes a paste with the remains of the ghee. A mark of ash and ghee is placed on everyone's forehead, and the ceremony is now concluded. It is usually followed by a great feast of prasadam.

The sole purpose of marriage is to raise Krishna Conscious children for which purpose the general rule of celibacy is relaxed once a month on the day most auspicious for conception. To help maintain detachment, and thus have sexual intercourse only for Krishna's pleasure, the couple are required to chant japa for 50 rounds on their beads before any sexual activity.

At first most temples tried to make accommodation for married devotees to live together in the temple community, but in 1972 Bhaktivedanta altered the policy of ISKCON on cohabitation in temples. Now all men and women, whether married or not, live separately in the temple, and sleep separately at all times. The reason for this is that the specific problems of married couples, especially sexual problems, were too disruptive of temple harmony. In the temple there is no privacy—"there is nothing to hide, Krishna Consciousness is an open secret" the devotees say. Temple marriages in fact do not appear to work very well, conflict between the partners being common. It is not unusual for couples to split up, to live in different temples, in order not to fracture the desired harmony of temple life by ceaseless quarrels. One major source of this conflict is the difficulty
most western women experience in the attempt to live according to
the Vedic ideal of servile submissiveness and humility. A
married woman should ask her husband's permission to do
absolutely anything outside her temple duties. In the ashram,
the temple community, this rule must be strictly adhered to, and
in the context of an intimate, conjugal relationship leads to
constant recrimination and anger. Hence the policy that married
couples in the temples must live as any other devotees—separately.

However, in those places where there is entirely separate
accommodation for householders, such as New Vrindavana, a large
farm in West Virginia, or New York where ISKCON owns apartments,
the couples can live together in relative privacy, though much of
each day is spent in the temple. The Vancouver ISKCON devotees
are currently negotiating for new premises, including a low-rise
apartment block which they hope to rent out to householder
devotees. Such developments could greatly increase the stability
and the ultimate survival chances of the movement.

Children

The offspring of ISKCON marriages are given a spiritual
(Vedic) name at birth. For the first five years of life they are
"treated as demigods", seldom disciplined or even corrected and
allowed to do almost whatever they please. Babies are nursed
for as long as two years, and are never allowed to cry without being picked up and soothed. Normally a child is cared for by the mother up to the age of five, though sometimes all the children are cared for collectively by one or two women, leaving others free for work. Frequently even babies and very young children are seen in sankirtans, toddling rhythmically in time to the chanting and drums, or being swayed in the mother's arms. At the age of five, children are supposed, though not required, to be sent to ISKCON schools for special Krishna Consciousness education, according to Bhaktivedanta's interpretation of the Vedic tradition of gurukula. Parental visits to these schools are kept to a minimum, once a year being recommended as best.

In 1971 ISKCON opened its first gurukula, a primary school in Dallas, Texas, where the aim is to produce brahmins, trained in Krishna Consciousness. By 1977 there were about 130 children and fifty adults at the school. The cost of board and tuition is one hundred dollars a month, and this is paid by householder parents if they have the money, or by the temple or by other ISKCON enterprises where the parents cannot afford it. Other primary schools have been opened recently, but they are very small compared with the gurukula school in Dallas.

The curriculum conforms to the State laws for education and includes instruction in history, geography, mathematics, English and Sanskrit all of them being taught in the context of Krishna
Consciousness from specially prepared texts. The instructors who are selected by the headmaster are not qualified teachers, and Texas education authorities have no jurisdiction in the school, which is a private institution. The daily routine conforms as closely as practicable with the routine of temple life, including the celebration of arati and kirtanas. Teaching techniques tend to be old-fashioned with much rote learning by chanting and great emphasis on discipline.

Gurukula means "the place of the guru" and all the instructors are advanced intiates, prepared and qualified to train others in Krishna Consciousness. They see their task as that of training children to live perfectly in this age of Kali-yuga, being in not but of the material world, wholly engaged in devotional service and thus fulfilling all their needs and right desires in this life, and making good (or better yet, no) Karma for the next.

The state system of education is believed to produce "hippies, druggies and drop-outs" because it is designed to support and maintain the materially oriented culture of the West, a culture that "mass-produces misery and enslavement." The children at Gurukula are lucky to escape all that: a Krishna conscious education will, it is thought, produce adults at harmony with themselves and with society. Many devotees believe that their children are in their last incarnation, because being born to devotees of Krishna is a sure sign of good Karma. As the
mother of one chuckling infant devotee said, "they are just here to wipe out that last little bit of Karma before going to Krishna in Vrindavan."

Social Control--Conduct and Identity

As already indicated in the account of temple routine, the lives of ISKCON devotees are ordered and controlled in the minutest detail, the ultimate aim being the control of consciousness itself. The rules and disciplines of temple life are based on Bhaktivedanta's interpretation of the traditional prescriptions of Vedic scripture, following the interpretation of Caitanya and other Vaisnorate sages. By conquering inclinations towards sense gratification and following the rules for Krishna conscious living--the rules of temple life--the devotee will at last reach a state when the prescribed way of life will be wholly spontaneous, for the mind will be permanently fixed in Krishna consciousness and the aim of the devotees.

The formal political structure of the society and the temples has already been detailed. In addition to the rule of obedience and authority which is the guiding principle of temple life, there are four basic rules of conduct fundamental to the regulated life of devotional service.

1) No gambling. This in fact, means no frivolities of any kind. Anything frivolous, games, sports, and pastimes, must be
related to Krishna or they dissipate spiritual energies; books, music, conversation or pictures not concerned with Krishna are mental speculation and therefore maya.

2) No intoxicants. This implies no tea, coffee, alcohol, narcotics or tobacco—no medicinal drugs either, if it can possibly be avoided. "We are not this body" and chanting the holy names is a better remedy for physical ailments than drugs. Bhaktivedanta is occasionally treated by Ayurvedic doctors in India.

3) No illicit sex. Sexual relations are permitted once monthly between married devotees seeking to raise Krishna conscious children. There is no dating and no courtship; dalliance and flirting are strictly forbidden.

4) No meat eating. This prohibition includes fish and eggs. The only food that can be eaten by devotees is prasadam, as already described. Under unusual circumstances such as when travelling, fruit and milk which are easily offered and need no preparation are the recommended fare.

Breaking any of these rules, especially the last one, may lead to expulsion. Blasphemy of God or Bhaktivedanta, and contradicting holy scripture are also punishable by expulsion at the discretion of the temple president.

In addition to these basic rules, there are numerous regulations concerning all aspects of temple life, rules of cleanliness and personal hygiene, the manner of eating with the
fingers in the Hindu fashion, the kinds of clothing to be worn, the shaving of the head and the application of tilaka—all must be learned. As to clothing, men wear dhotis, a loose draped garment, in place of trousers, and an Indian shirt slit up the sides. Women wear saris with blouses or sweaters, or some other properly modest covering (the traditional sari alone is a rather revealing form of dress). The sari is worn draped over the head rather than the shoulders, and married women put red make-up into the parting of their hair as a mark of their status.

Jewelry is popular and pierced ears are a common sight; pierced noses with jewelled studs or rings are less frequently seen. All devotees wear strands of tulasi beads about the neck which are called Kunti-Mala and signify a lifelong commitment to Krishna. In the temple all devotees go barefoot, though socks are sometimes permitted if it gets very cold. No leather goods are used at all, shoes being usually canvas or plastic. Each devotee carries his japa beads in a canvas bag suspended from a sling around the neck. Married devotees wear bright yellow dhotis or saris, unmarried ones wear saffron colored clothes, and Brahmacharis wear white.

It is an ancient tradition that male devotees of Krishna should shave their heads, leaving only one lock at the back, call the sikha. If they fall into maya, the devotees say, Krishna will pull them out by their sikhas. Like the tilaka markings, it is a public declaration of commitment and has the effect of
strengthening the members' adherence to the community. Tilaka markings are made with a mixture of clay and water, the most visible being a double vertical line from the hairline to a point on the bridge of the nose. Marks are made in eleven other places on the body. 63

The potential devotee is given six months of gentle introduction to these aspects of ISKCON life before he is eligible for initiation. This rule used to be waived frequently if the would-be member seemed enthusiastic, but the number of "bloopers" (apostates) was so high that Bhaktivedanta now insists on the six months waiting period. If, after six months of increasingly regulated temple life, the new devotee still desires initiation, the temple president will write to Bhaktivedanta and ask him to initiate a new member. As a rule it is not possible for him to perform the ceremony personally, so he sends japa beads on which he has chanted one round, and a letter telling the temple president to perform the initiation himself, and informing him of the new devotee's spiritual name.

The ceremony of initiation is called harer-nama and involves the sacred fire ritual described as part of the ISKCON marriage ceremony. Once initiated the devotee can perform such duties as cooking—for an uninitiated person touching the stove would pollute the food. A further six months after the harer-nama ceremony the neophyte becomes eligible for his second initiation, whereby he becomes a brahmin by receiving the sacred thread, and
a secret mantra, the Gayatri-Mantra, which he must never utter aloud. Again the fire ceremony is performed, and the devotee is given the sacred thread, being touched on the chest with it by the celebrant. This thread is worn diagonally across the chest from the left shoulder. The gayatri-mantra is learned by listening to a tape with headphones. The initiate is now a priest of ISKCON, able to perform arati and fire ceremonies for marriages and other celebrations. Women do not receive the sacred thread.

These ceremonies and the months of preparation for them, combine to give the devotee a completely new identity; they are rites of passage cutting him off from all his old ties in the Karmi world and binding him into his new life as a devotee of Krishna in the temple community of ISKCON. Social control in the temple communities of the Hare Krishna movement then, is clearly intended to be all-pervasive. Thus not only the basic conduct of the devotees and their use of time (according to a strict temple schedule), but their symbols of identity, and ultimately their very thoughts are subject to regulation.

Relations with the External Society

Attitudes towards the external society are a kind of compassionate antipathy. It is necessary for the devotee to practice detachment, the more so in the case of most North
American devotees since they have nearly all had to sever relations with the parental family, and in some cases even with their wives or husbands and children. At the same time, in this age of Kali-yuga, most of the world is sunk in ignorance and degradation and all too easily are the devotees prone to material contamination if they are not detached. On the other hand the spiritual master teaches that Krishna consciousness must be spread with the hordes of worshipers of maya and the demons.

The establishment of a communal lifestyle in the ISKCON centers has provided most of the solution to this problem. It is the pure refuge from which errands of mercy can be made, and provides a sure haven for recharging spiritual batteries and sloughing off the contamination and impurities of the evil society outside. The ignorance of that society, especially its confusion of the material world with the real world, is also believed to be the major cause of bad relations with the public, the press, and occasionally the authorities. For example, an article in The Vancouver Sun, December 13, 1975, reported that ISKCON faced charges of fraud for collecting money as charity under false pretences, and not revealing how this money was spent.

The article stated that devotees were collecting money supposedly for relief work in the Third World, yet little or no money was actually leaving the Vancouver ISKCON center. Banvdak Dasa, the temple president in Vancouver, wrote a letter to the
editor which was published without comment on January 2, 1976. Bahudak's reply pointed out that the charges had been dropped, that ISKCON is a registered charity and therefore publishes how its funds are spent, and that leaflets are handed out to contributors containing this information. Meanwhile another lengthy article (two 16 inch columns) was published in The Vancouver Sun under the headline "Angry Ones Who Escaped Condemn Cult Leaders". This uncritically lumped together the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church and ISKCON, jointly accusing them of "brainwashing" young people, and fraudulently collecting money to "support the grand lifestyle of the cult leaders." A former devotee of Krishna is reported as saying,

"As far as I know in the three years I was in the Hare Krishna not one penny was sent to India or Bangladesh or to charity, the causes we said we were collecting for. I object to the way the public was ripped off."

According to ISKCON belief these reports are partly demonic in origin, and partly the result of ignorance. An ISKCON spokesman is reported in the same article as follows:

"A Hare Krishna spokesman in New York said his group has finance food distribution programs near the Bangladesh border, but that "the major aim of our mission work throughout the world is to relieve the mental and spiritual suffering of people." He said Hare Krishna was raising funds "to finance religious centers and distribute literature about our religion." (My emphasis)
It is this fundamental difference in belief about the nature of the universe, and therefore what constitutes welfare work and social responsibility, which is interpreted by outsiders as selfishness and by ISKCON as ignorance and demonic sinfulness. The magazine Back to Godhead frequently reports favorable remarks by public figures, such as city officials or senators who were complimentary about ISKCON, but never, so far as I can ascertain, does it report the bad press it very frequently gets. Since devotees are not supposed to read the public press, but only material on Krishna consciousness, it is possible that many members are unaware of the extent of press criticism. At the same time it is unlikely that they would care, since most of them had a low opinion of newspapers before they joined ISKCON and in any case they now have a ready explanation for this "persecution" in Vaisnavite philosophy.

Attitudes towards the state are also based on ISKCON's view of the world as degraded and sunk in ignorance. All the world's leaders are sudras instead of brahmins and vaisyas, and military leaders are sudras instead of kshatriyas. If Krishna consciousness were to spread to all the world, every problem, economic, political and social which confronts mankind, would immediately be solved. Wars, for example, "which are starting every few years in the West (sic) can be traced to karma from cow killing. It has very disastrous effects, the slaughterhouse."\textsuperscript{65}
Again, democracy is seen as the result of ignorance of the divine ordinance of Vedic law.

"The common man has no sense whom to elect; he proves this by electing an unqualified leader and later trying to change him or pull him down. Meanwhile, thousands of bureaucrats live off the taxes of the people, and spend their time planning how to keep themselves in power. The ideal government is that which is administered by a perfect, saintly person. We can see from the Vedic histories, a benevolent king is responsible to see that the citizens in his kingdom are well situated both materially and spiritually." 66

Obviously the only essential aspect of relations with the world is evangelism. Most of this has been covered already, but I would like to stress again the importance of publications in ISKCON. Bhaktivedanta's own spiritual master, Bhaktisiddhanta, instructed him to "print books".

"If one has money, instead of constructing costly temples, one should spend his money for the publication of authorized books in different languages for propagating the Krishna Consciousness movement." 67

Bhaktivedanta looks upon the vast amount of printed works, translations and exegesis, exhortation and instructions, which he has accomplished in his later life, as his legacy to ISKCON and the world.

"Sitting under the glare of T.V. lights in the large Berkeley temple room, Prabhupada was faced with the question, "What will happen to the movement when you die?" His answer came back immediately: "I will never die." All guests and devotees cheered and Prabhupada continued, "I live in my books." 68
The response of the movement to Bhatkivedanta's recent death, which occurred after the research for this thesis was completed, is discussed in the conclusions. However, his status is secure in the care of his devotees, who believe their spiritual master to be dwelling in the heavenly planet, Goloka-Vrindavana, in eternal bliss with Krishna.

The Hare Krishnas, then, do not see themselves as the external society sees them, for that society is blinded by ignorance and demonism. The broad features of the devotees' self image have been indicated above. They do not quite view themselves as God's elect—all living entities are a part of God—but as those who, through good karma acquired in previous incarnations, and through the unearned mercy of Krishna, have obtained, or better re-obtained, the ability to see things the way they really are. Bhaktivedanta Swami is the light by which they see, and bhakti-yoga is the technique used to circumnavigate the obstacles which this light reveals. Their principal raison d'être is to worship Krishna in loving devotional service, and to increase his transcendental bliss by bringing all living entities into the light of Krishna Consciousness. This is proclaimed by them through their "street work" activities and public devotions, and through the visible signs of faith they show to all the world in their shaved heads, tilaka, saffron robes and saris. Although to the ignorant (i.e. nearly everybody), they appear to be a Hindu sect, they see themselves rather in a cosmic setting. They
are neither Hindu nor Christian, American Canadian or Indian. They situate themselves in a cosmic universe including all the galaxies, planets, demigods, and goddesses at one end of the scale, and every plant and microbe at the other. The human body is simply one form of Krishna among an almost infinite number, but it is a particularly auspicious one, for it is the most suitable of all for attaining Krishna Consciousness. Demigods (and we have all been demigods in some incarnation) are too blissful to seek liberation wholeheartedly; animals and plants are sunk too low in maya and must go through many rebirths to achieve even the chance of Krishna Consciousness. Incarnation in human form thus offers the greatest chance for spiritual realization and to the Hare Krishnas the most insidious effect of the present age of Kali-yuga is that so many individuals miss this unique opportunity to attain blissful Krishna Consciousness.

Although final salvation comes only when one dies in Krishna Consciousness by constantly living with Krishna in mind, chanting his holy names, eating his holy prasadam, and working in service and surrender only to him, the true devotee achieves the bliss of salvation here and now. Full Krishna Consciousness is only achieved while living by the very rare soul who is a perfect devotee, such as Bhaktivedanta, but as an ideal, it is open to all and is the goal for which the devotee constantly strives.
1. All references to the Bhagavad-gita in this section will be to the edition Bhagavad-gita As It Is, translated by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Collier-Macmillan, Canada Ltd., 1972.


3. There are good historical reasons why Visvambhara would be converted to Vaisnavite bhakti—it was common and widespread in Bengal at the time. Perhaps also a certain psychological receptiveness may (tentatively) be inferred from his personal history. But an interesting additional point can be gleaned from Victor Turner's description of pilgrimage in his Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, where he describes the "communitas" of pilgrimage, the fellowship of devotion transcending distinctions even of caste, in a way which would be particularly inducive of experiences of conversion to bhakti-yoga, the path of joyful devotion to Krishna, Victor Turner, Dramas, Fields and Metaphors, 1974.


5. The sankirtan itself was also a traditional and well-established form of sectarian worship. As Zaehner puts it: "The ritual of various sects naturally varied, but the kirtan or rhythmical singing of hymns usually to the accompaniment of dance was characteristic of most of them. The object of the kirtan was to induce a state of ecstasy in the devotee in which he believed he had established direct contact with the divine", R.C. Zaehner, Hinduism, O.U.P. London 1962, p. 138.

6. Vedic rites could be performed only by Brahmins, and were one of the chief means by which their power and influence was maintained. The sankirtans of Visvambhara, therefore,

8. These names are given by Bhaktivedanta as part of the disciplic succession from which his teaching is drawn, *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, p. 29.


12. These two are mentioned in the list of disciplic succession, though in fact they are placed with Isvara Puri, before Caitanya himself, *Bhagavad-gītā*, p. 29.


14. The usual pattern is something along these lines -- caricatured, of course:

--- Founder teaches no caste/attenuated caste/even equality between the sexes sometimes.

--- Successors teach a little caste, e.g. men and women are not equal, and untouchables don't count.

--- Eventually the sect becomes an endogamous unit, i.e. local jat, or caste.

--- At last sectarian declare themselves to be a varna, eg. ksatriya, and intermarry with ksatriyas of other sects. See e.g. Mysore N. Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1970, p. 152 ff.

15. Bhaktivedanta, *Teachings of Lord Caitanya: A treatise on factual spiritual life*, New York, ISKCON, 1968. These six, who were know as the "six goswamis", were also responsible for the rediscovery and restoration of the sites of Krishna's dalliance with the gopis or female cowherds at
Virindavan and Mathura, which are important pilgrimage sites to this day. The two principal Goswamis were Rupa and Sanatana, the others were Jiva (their nephew, also famous for his writings), Gopal Bhatta, Ragannatha Das, and Ragannatha Bhatta. These men saw to the construction of the famous temples at Vrindavan, which became a great center of Vaisnavite learning, and, until the death of the six Goswamis, all written material on Caitanyism needed their imprimatur before being accepted as authentic. Kennedy believes that this supremacy was maintained until the 18th century, Kennedy op. cit., p. 64.

16. Bhaktivedanta does not consider this a schism in the Caitanya movement, and indeed lists both names in his table of disciplic succession, Bhagavad-gita As It Is, p. 29.

17. The poets of Orissa are known as the six Dasas. Their names were Acyutananda, Balarama, Jagannatha, Ananta, Yasovanta, and Caitanya.

18. These major sectarian movements are nearly all based on some form of worship of Visnu (Vaisnavism) or Siva (Saivism).


21. This wave of social and religious activity included many Christian and Muslim groups in India, as well as a number of secular associations. Indeed, the Renaissance is seen by some as an expression of awakening Indian nationalism, and as such involving all the religious and social groups of India at that time. See e.g. A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, Bombay, Popular Prakshan, 1948. Chapter XVII and passim.

22. Farquhar, op. cit., p. 47.

23. Ibid., pp. 294-295.

24. Ibid., pp. 295-299.
25. There is some lack of agreement about this date. I have given the date cited by Judah, op. cit., p. 40.

26. Quoted in Back To Godhead, no. 68, p. 7. It is now claimed, of course, that the day has arrived, and with the exception of Russia it has, Back To Godhead, Vol. 10, no. 12.

27. At the moment of birth, when the child was taken from his mother, the umbilical cord was draped around his neck and across his chest like the sacred thread of a Brahmana. Six months later the cart carrying the deity Jagannatha stuck outside Bhaktivinodas house, and his wife took out the child to touch the deity, at which point a garland fell from the neck of Jagannatha onto the neck of the child. This was taken as the clearest sign.

28. His choice of guru was made at his father's instigation, because his father recognised that, although illiterate, Gaurakisora was in the line of disciplic succession. He is therefore listed in Bhaktivedanta's disciplic line, Back To Godhead, no. 68, p. 9.


32. Ibid., p. 113.


35. For example, Chapter 8 of The Nectar of Devotion is entitled "Offences to be avoided", and lists all 71 such offences. Chapter 6 lists 64 items of devotional service which should be practice, and which "should include all of our activities of body, mind and speech", p. 57.


37. Although Bhaktivedanta believes that Krishna Consciousness is for everyone, irrespective of age or social status, he has a ready explanation for the preponderance of middle
class youth among his Western followers. His explanation is in accordance with the philosophy of Vaisnavism and the Hindu world view. For a start young people are more receptive to new ideas -- this is natural because youth is the time for brahmacari, the student stage of life when learning is the natural activity. This is not necessarily the case, one can be a brahmacari at any age, but it is more naturally so in youth. As to the class background of the devotees, this is explained by the concepts of karma and the varnas. Those who, in previous incarnations, avoided sinfulness, even though they did not achieve Krishna Consciousness did assure themselves of rebirth in an auspicious family; one, that is, which provides an education and the freedom to seek for God. Although in this age of kali-yuga, all of us are sudras, these with good karma have more brahminic qualities such as good intellect and receptivity to correct knowledge. Facilities for training the intellect and (economic) freedom to seek for knowledge are provided by middle class American families, though they are usually wasted. The middle class devotees are the few who are not wasting the opportunities they have gained in previous lives. Actually many of the devotees have been associated with other Eastern movements ranging from Zen to hatha-yoga exercises, (and many go on to other Eastern "trips" after leaving ISKCON). This 'seekership' is seen as the benefit of good karma, and the Hare Krishna movement is naturally seen as the goal of their search. Not all of the searching has been done in the sphere of religion, however; most of the members have been involved in the drug subculture to some extent, some in movements of political protest and secular communal experiments.

41. Ibid., p. 4.
42. Ibid., p. 214.
43. Ibid., p. 63.
44. Back to Godhead, No. 68, p. 16.
45. Back to Godhead, Vol. 10, No. 8, p. 11.
46. Judah describes this festival, held in Berkeley, March 24, 1970, op. cit., p. 96. Oddly enough he makes no mention of Janmastami, the feast of Krishna's birthday—a strange omission since it is obviously one of the more important festivals of the Vaisnavite calendar.


48. Bhaktivedánta in ibid., p. 11.

49. Bhagavad-gita As It Is, p. 633.


51. The Hari-Nama Newsletter, Vol. 1, No. 6, Nov. 21, 1977 declares the following:

TOTAL BOOKS PRINTED IN ALL LANGUAGES
Since March 6, 1977

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Copies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>43,450,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>2,947,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>2,125,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2,125,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1,670,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>835,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>593,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>448,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>315,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>305,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telugu</td>
<td>115,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swahili</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarati</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>55,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marathi</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yugoslavian</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriya</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungarian</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakian</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total                        55,314,000


56. Bhagavad-gita As It Is, p. 322.

57. See, for example, Aileen D. Ross, The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting, University of Toronto Press, 1961, pp. 236ff, and passim.

58. Bhagavad-gita As It Is, p. 64.

59. Ibid., p. 200.

60. Ibid., p. 732.

61. Ibid., pp. 732-3.

62. The Montreal Star, Nov. 16, 1974, printed an article entitled "Why a child was sent to Gurukula", by Bibhavati Dasi. It contains a number of revealing comments, among them a reported remark of Bhaktivendanta's to the mother of a newborn girl.

"He instructed me that I was to become like her servant, and to raise her with care, without spanking her. Our children are given extra attention and allowed to do what they want (within reasonable limits) for the first five years of life. Then they can be sent to their school where their real training will begin."

63. Tilaka marks are made on the forehead, throat, chest, right waist, abdomen, left waist, right shoulder, right forearm, left shoulder, left forearm, nape of the neck, and lower back.

64. The Vancouver Sun, December 22nd, 1975.

65. Back to Godhead, No. 68, p. 27.


CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

Theological Roots and Paths to Salvation

Both the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement and the Hare Krishnas represent ancient and well established strands of the Hindu tradition. The first of them grew out of the interpretation of Advaita Vedanta (non-dualist Vedanta) developed by Vivekananda under the inspiration of his avatar-guru, the renowned Bengali mystic Ramakrishna. As has been described, Vivekananda's teachings emphasized the unity of aim in all religions, and declared the various myths, doctrines, rituals and observances of the different faiths to be merely secondary details. These views were expressed in terms of the religious philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, modified with particular reference to Vishishtadvaita, which espouses a more realist position than pure Advaita. (See the appendix for a fuller account.) Vivekananda thus stressed religious humanism, and declared true religion to be "the manifestation of the Divinity that is already in man." This allowed the movement founded by him to be conceived as having a dual role, expressed in the dual structure of its organization as the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

The monastic side emphasizes the practice of meditative techniques in pursuit of personal salvation, which implies
realization of (absorption in) Brahman, and release from the endless cycle of rebirth (mukti). The other aspect of the movement is its charitable and teaching work, undertaken on a considerable scale in India and the Far East, and viewed as the service of Brahman in the form of all humanity.

Whereas in the East it is this second aspect of the movement which is stressed, and which occupies the lives and resources of the membership to the greatest extent, in the West it is only "spiritual and cultural work" which is done. This follows from Vivekananda's view of the advanced industrialized world as being overly materialistic, and in need of the spiritual expertise which he (and many others) considered to be the outstanding quality of Indian culture.

The Vandantists' declared aim in the West, then, is to disseminate various techniques or practices, especially meditation, which will deepen and extend the spirituality of those instructed, enabling them, it is believed, to achieve the state of true realization through the practice of these techniques within the framework of their own religious faith, be it Christian, Jewish, or anything else. For it is a fundamental tenet of the Ramakrishna Vedantists that all religions are but paths to the same goal of realization, while Hinduism (or Vivekananda's interpretation of it) has the single advantage of recognizing that fact, and having therefore developed explicit methods which may be universally applied. It must be emphasized,
however, that what the Vedanta neophytes actually do, is convert to a particular combination of religious practices recommended by the Swami-guru, which by any objective standards must be viewed as Hindu in origin.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness, on the other hand, falls squarely within the tradition of Hindu Bhakti, the emotional path of devotion to God, which has been one of the most important features of Hinduism since classical times, and finds its first main expression in the Bhagavad-gita. Bhaktivedanta, ISKCON'S Bengali founder, was a follower of the doctrines of Caitanya, the Vaisnavite bhakta, who organized a movement based on the devotional worship of Krishna. According to Caitanya's theology, Brahman (God) is a personal being who becomes manifest to mankind in the perfect form of Krishna, an avatar, or incarnation. Following Caitanya the Hare Krishna's, whose main theatre of activity is the West, believe that salvation is achieved through true devotional service to Krishna, involving the fervid ritual worship of this deity in temple communities, the constant chanting of his holy names, and spreading the message of Krishna worship around the world. The Vaisnavite theology of the Hare Krishnas is in strong opposition to the Advaitist belief in the identity of the individual soul (jiva) with God as Nirguna Brahman, since this latter belief obliterates at one stroke the conception of God as a personality and the individuality of the worshipper, making nonsense of God's
desire to save him.

Despite the wide differences between these movements, both in their theology and their organization, they are nevertheless recognisably following ancient and well-established Hindu traditions. At the same time there are, in each case, departures from, or additions to, the traditions which they represent. This does not mean that they are unorthodox sects in the Christian sense, and it would be a nonsense in any context to call them orthodox sects.

The elements common to all Hindu communities in India—All-India or Brahminic Hinduism in Srinivas' term—amount to no more than a few basic religious ideas and socio-religious institutions, such as caste, reincarnation, Karma, and a "pantheistic bias" which makes it easy to absorb tribal and low caste or village gods. What is more, even these ideas and institutions differ greatly in their actual manifestation from region to region, and indeed between neighboring communities. The merits, indeed the very possibility of defining a concept of All-India Hinduism, remains a matter of dispute, but it is certain that any such concept would necessarily include Vaisnavites such as the Hare Krishnas, and Vedantists such as the Ramakrishna monks and their disciples.

At the same time, although the concept of orthodoxy is barely meaningful in the Indian Hindu context, nevertheless many Indians certainly apply the term 'sectarian', faute de mieux, to
the Vaisnavite Hare Krishnas, as indeed to the "Christian" or "Brahmo Samajist" social reformism and rationally organized charitable activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In India this popular usage is acceptable, but only, it must be stressed, if it is not defined in opposition to a notion of orthodoxy ethnocentrically imported from a Christian context.

In the West, however, both movements are unquestionably sectarian; in theological terms in that they reject all varieties of (dogmatic) Christianity, in popular terms, as exotic representatives of alien religion and culture, and in sociological terms, as voluntaristic, ideologically oriented religious groups, maintaining a measure of separation from other religious bodies, and the world in general.

Salvation, however it may be defined, is of course the primary goal of all sects and of all sectarians, and in contemporary Western societies a tremendous range of sects offers a wide variety of paths to salvation, and in each case the particular theological conception of the means of obtaining salvation is translated into the concrete details of the members' lives, their relations with each other, and with persons external to the sect. In both of the groups which are the subject of this thesis, salvation is obtained in a personal experience of God, but there are fundamental differences in how that experience is conceived.
For the Ramakrishna Vedantists it is nirvikalpa samadhi, the "superconscious" state of absorption in Brahman, in which all distinctions of name and form (Nama-Rupa) disappear: in other words, not only does the perception of the material universe cease, but the most basic ontological opposition of self and other is lost to view. Total ego-loss, and the experience of identity with Absolute Reality, is what defines samadhi.

For a Vaisnavite, on the other hand, such a view is blasphemous. God, or Krishna, is perceived as a person, existing in the relationship of loving Creator and sustainer of mankind, eternally separate and distinct from the human community. The proper relations between men, therefore, are defined socially as a communal relationship with God. In nuce, when the Vedantist says "we are all one in God", he is speaking ontologically; when the Hare Krishna uses the same phrase, he is speaking of a social relationship--Krishna is deemed to dwell in the temple with his devotees.

Paradoxically, it follows from this that the Ramakrishna Vedantists, who believe that there is ultimately no distinction between self and other, are driven to seek salvation individually. This is a uniquely personal endeavor, depending for its success on the true perception by his guru of the individual's character, temperament, spiritual potentialities and needs, and the corresponding application of the correct spiritual techniques appropriate to each person.
For the Hare Krishnas, on the other hand, the pursuit of salvation is a communal affair, and will be successful to the extent that the members are able to recreate the fellowship of loving devotees of Krishna, which is believed to have existed at the time of his earthly incarnation, when the nature of such a community was described in detail to Arjuna and recorded in the sacred Bhagavad-gita.

In both cases a guru, a spiritual master, has a necessary role. For the Ramakrishna Vedantists his task is to discern the soul's needs of each disciple under his care, and to guide these disciples individually through the techniques of God realization appropriate in each separate case. The spiritual master of the Hare Krishnas, however, has the job of interpreting the divinely vouchsafed model of the perfect devotional community, which alone can provide a refuge in this evil age of Kali-yuga, and offers the chance of salvation here and now for those loving devotees who will forsake the world, and dwell within its pure confines.

For the members of ISKCON, then, only the pure devotee is worthy to dwell with the Lord, and this worthiness is obtained as the result of intensive individual and communal spiritual endeavors, allied to an unremitting vigilance lest the evils of the age contaminate the sacred atmosphere of temple life. The true devotee is characterized by humility and rigid self-discipline; he is essentially selfless, being absorbed in the fellowship of bhatki yoga, of communal loving service to
Krishna. The individual's struggle is with his very individuality, which must be broken down and remoulded to fit into Bhaktivedanta's model of perfect social life, which stands in opposition to the corrupted society outside, from which each member came.

The strictly maintained absence of privacy in the temple communities (which is, of course, a manifestation of the system of social control, which will be discussed in the next section) concretely expresses this desire to destroy self-regarding individualism. The very desire for privacy is condemned, and all activities, even the most personal, are performed communally—the only separation being between males and females. The showers, for example, are communal, and even the lavatories have no doors. "Krishna Consciousness is an open secret," the devotees reiterate, "we have nothing to hide."

All behavior is to be under the communal discipline of bhakti yoga, and specifically individual interests, tastes, pastimes, or even devotional practices, are prohibited. Whatever is conducive to the achievement of Krishna Consciousness is the concern of the whole community; whatever is not, is "mental speculation" or "frivolity," and as such has no place in temple life.

Such prohibitions have the effect of destroying the "Karmi self," and replacing it by a communal self, an internalised collective consciousness, which ideally will be Krishna
Consciousness. This collective consciousness is believed to reach its height in the ecstasy of the arati Kirtans, where the devotees experience what Durkheim called "collective effervescence," and find their beliefs vindicated by their communal bliss in the living presence of the Lord Krishna.

The way of bhakti has traditionally been considered "the easy way to ecstasy," to salvation in the bosom of Vishnu. For the followers of Bhaktivedanta it is "easy" in that the path is clear and squarely defined. Certain ways of behaving will "fix the mind in Krishna consciousness," and these behaviors are embodied in the ISKCON rules of temple life. But because this is an age of corruption, it is believed, our tendencies are all towards evil, and must be curbed. These evil tendencies are judged unnatural by the Hare Krishnas, in contrast with the good and natural life envisioned in the golden age of the mythical "Vedic Village," when Krishna sported with his playmates, the village boys and girls of Vrindavan.

If the rules for a true, "natural" spiritual life, the temple rules, are rigidly adhered to, then the golden age will be restored in miniature for all the temple dwellers; and as the purity of the devotees increases, and their level of Krishna Consciousness is raised, the rules which seemed so harsh and difficult to keep, will come to be seen for what they "really are"--the "natural," indeed the only truly human way to live.
According to Bhaktivedanta, then, the rules must be maintained at all costs, until they are "automatic and natural" for, quite simply, it is keeping the rules which leads to salvation for all. The temple communities, then, are organized with militaristic uniformity, the impersonal rules being applied uncompromisingly to all members and supported by essentially punitive sanctions. The members have a relatively unsophisticated notion of salvation as "eternal bliss", permanent ecstasy, to be experienced in communal—"Vedic Village-like"—fellowship with Krishna. The brief ecstasy aroused by chanting, dancing and deity worship, confirms the reality of this salvation for the members, who believe that the discipline of temple life will literally rule out the encrustations of original sin and the pollution of this age, and enable them to "Bliss out, and stay high forever", in loving fellowship with Krishna.

To the relatively sophisticated, liberal bourgeois disciples of the Vedanta societies, such rigid, unthinking, and impersonal discipline, imposed uniformly on all members irrespective of individual needs and temperament, would be considered highly offensive. In contrast, the Ramakrishna Vedantists emphasize the different and unique spiritual needs of each member, and even in the monastic communities, where logistic necessity reduces the degree of privacy allowable to individual monks and nuns, care is taken to ensure that there are times and places where the individual may commune alone with his soul and with Brahman.
At Trabuco Monastery, for example, the long meandering path with numerous shrines to all the major world religions, is a favorite place for the monastics to walk alone, and to sit or kneel in private meditation. It is significant that a monk who finds a fellow monastic meditating at one of these shrines, is careful to pass quietly by, and not to disturb the solitary thoughts of his "gurubhai." In a similar situation the Krishna devotee would assume that his godbrother was doing japa, and would join him to raise two voices in Kirtan, thus doubling the efficacy of the worship. Some of the Ramakrishna monks even spend weeks or months walking alone in the mountains of California, or upstate New York, in a way reminiscent of the wandering sannyasis of India, such as Vivekananda and the founding monks of the Vedanta Movement.

The individualism of contemporary bourgeois Western Society is thus reflected in and reinforces the teachings of the Vedantic Swamis. The particular path appropriate for a given disciple is decided by the guru and disciple together, based on an assessment of the individual's character. This assessment is made through the development of a close, affective relationship with the guru, which is experienced as personal and unique. The religious practices recommended by the guru in a given case, although they may well be the same practices as other members are following, are personalized with reference to a private, spiritual "self", which is revealed by the guru's insight into the character of his
disciple, and related to the appropriate path to salvation.

Social Control

The purpose of the various techniques of social control employed by religious groups over their members, is to maintain the adherence of those members to both the ideological and behavioural norms of the movement—to keep them on the straight and narrow path to salvation, however this may be defined. Clearly, then, the nature of these controls will vary with the norms they seek to preserve.

The Hare Krishnas see the world as a place of evil and danger, corrupt, degraded, and populated by demons. The true devotee of the Lord, seeking to "fix the mind in Krishna Consciousness" and thus achieve salvation, must be protected from contamination by this evil, and this is only possible within the pure confines of the sacred temple communities of ISKCON. Within these communities every action, word, or thought, is to be directed to one end—the loving service of Krishna. The new member, fresh from, and still contaminated by the "Karmi" world, must be purged and purified of his pollution. This is chronologically the first aim of the techniques of social control the movement employs.

The neophyte is systematically stripped of the "karmi" symbols of his former, unregenerate life—the very symbols of his
identity are radically altered. His clothes are changed, his hair is removed, his face is painted, even his language is progressively altered as he learns Vaisnava and Sanskrit phrases, and begins to speak in the argot of the Hare Krishnas. Finally, with the rite of passage of initiation, he casts off the last of his old identity with his name, and is reborn as a true devotee of Krishna into his new family, the godbrothers and godsisters of the temple community.

The boundaries so elaborately set up between the "Karmi" world outside and the pure temple community, are further reinforced by the minor rituals of purification performed daily by the devotees. Those involved in street work, or working in outside jobs, or even having contact with visitors and other people from the polluted world, are contaminated by this very contact, however pure their lives as devotees may be. After such contact it is required that showers be taken, and fresh tilaka applied, before any ritual performances, worship ceremony, or, most especially, cooking, may be done, lest pollution be spread in the temple home of Krishna.

In contrast, the Ramakrishna Vedantist view the world as neither evil nor good in itself. Everything is a manifestation of Brahman, and all that varies is the degree of clarity of that manifestation. Brahman is manifest clearly in the saintly person in the world, who religiously follows the duties of his or her station in life, which corresponds to the Karma acquired in
previous lives. The Ramakrishna Vedants believe that a few people are led by their Karma to be virtuosi practitioners of the techniques of god-realization, to take permanent vows of renunciation of mundane life, and to live in dedication to the single-minded pursuit of samadhi—"superconscious" absorption in Brahman. But for most people, the search for mukti takes place in the setting of worldly, social life, according to the prescriptions of the culture into which their Karma has precipitated them.

Whereas the Hare Krishnas have clearly defined, and strictly maintained boundaries between the corrupt world and the pure community, the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society do not maintain any such clear division. Rather the degree of commitment of the membership shades off from a centre of utterly dedicated monastics, living under vows in segregated communities of monks and nuns, to a periphery of members living and working in the world outside, and maintaining little more commitment to Vedantic ideology than is signified by the payment of small monthly sums, and occasional visits to the Vedanta Temple. The degree of social control exercised over the members of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Societies, therefore, varies with their distance from the renounced monastics at the "center".

As was made clear in the analytical section, it is the guru-disciple relationship which is the fundamental basis of social control in this movement, and while the guru is able to direct
almost every aspect of the lives of his fellow-monastic disciples and also maintains immense authority in the lives of his initiated lay disciples, those lay members who live with their families in the society outside may be persuaded or advised, but cannot be commanded.

As the aims and bases of social control are different in each of these groups, so are the sanctions, both positive and negative, which are applicable to their members. In both movements the sanctions, applied to errant members are primarily normative, in that they depend for their impact on the individual's continued acceptance of the group's belief system.

The power of such normative sanctions will clearly vary with the degree of commitment of the individual member. But whereas, for the Hare Krishnas, the clear distinction between member and non-member, is combined with the assumption of total commitment as the required basis of membership, the degree of commitment of the Ramakrishna Vedanta disciples, as outlined above, is recognized by the Swamis as varying with the distance from the monastic "center". For the Krishna temple president, then, sanctions are to be applied in the correction of wrongdoing, with full force and uniform impartiality. The role of the Vedanta Swami is very different.

In the case of lay householder members of the Vedanta movement, the non-payment of fees will automatically result in a polite letter of reminder and encouragement, but otherwise,
unless specifically requested, the Swamis would not "interfere" with such members' lives in any way. As regards initiated and monastic members the judgement of the guru as to when, and in what circumstances, some sanction might profitably be applied "for the good of a disciple" will vary in each case.

For monastics of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society as indeed for many lay members, the intellectual and emotional satisfactions provided by the sophisticated and esoteric philosophy and cosmology of Advaita Vedanta are immensely rewarding. Indeed, it has been suggested by a recent writer on Hinduism, in a perhaps overly cynical, but telling phrase, that in the west Swamis "ladle out Vedanta to the intellectually debilitated"; and this author cites Aldous Huxley as the best-known of such recipients of a Vedantic transfusion. 4

A further positive sanction is the enjoyment of the approval of fellow-monastics, most essentially that of the guru. Many monastic members of the Vedanta centers have made a tremendous emotional investment in the movement. All are unmarried of course, and if the final vows of sannyasa have been made then all family ties have been formally severed. The same applies with almost equal force to the unmarried lay initiates who live in the Vedanta center buildings, and devote their time and energies to working for the society. It has been pointed out that most of these are middle aged or elderly women, with few or no family connections or friends outside the movement, and the Vedanta
society, quite literally, is their only home. Were the question of expulsion to arise, fear of alienation and loneliness would provide an extremely powerful inducement to return to normative behaviour.

Finally, though certainly not least in importance, is the belief of these members in the possibility of sublime rewards in the achievement of the bliss of samadhi, reinforced by the experience of lesser psychic occurrences which provide evidence of spiritual progress.

In the case of the non-initiated, householder members, however, these sanctions lose most of their power. In their case a different, though still very important, positive sanction is in force. The Vedanta belief system, in addition to the intellectual satisfaction it undoubtedly supplies in many cases, also provides legitimation for the quiet, prosperous, bourgeois lifestyle most of the householders lead. Other than the general virtues of kindness to others, fairness in business etc., Vedanta makes few demands, and has even less capacity to enforce them, and while the possibility of mukti here and now is remote in the extreme, the risk of damnation is non-existent, and the chances of reincarnation in an auspicious form is the probable outcome in the next life.

For monastic and core lay members the ultimate punitive sanction of expulsion, as has been indicated, is a fearful prospect indeed but it is generally considered a remote
contingency, and in fact, according to the Swamis has never yet been applied in the West. A more immediately relevant negative sanction may be described as withdrawal of affection by the guru, which if sustained may well result in the member's leaving the movement—certainly a functional equivalent of expulsion. Indeed, in normal circumstances the necessary intimacy of the guru-disciple relationship is such that sharp words from the guru are keenly felt, and have on occasion reduced members to tearful repentance and renewed striving. A number of monastic members recall early experiences of this kind.

But again, for the more peripheral householder members, while the expressed disapproval of the guru is not without effect, it does not have the same emotional impact. Furthermore, even expulsion from the society would not necessarily imply loss of the cosmological and philosophical support provided by Vedanta, as is made explicit in the teachings of the movement. For obvious reasons therefore, it is among the peripheral membership that the greatest turnover occurs.

The case of the Hare Krishna movement is to some extent in sharp contrast, through many of the positive sanctions buttressing the maintenance of social control are similar. The approval of the temple community is highly rewarding, as are the sense of belonging to the pure fellowship of Krishna lovers in a world of demonic evils, and the hope of eternal bliss in the company of Krishna on the heavenly planet. Also, for many ISCKON
devotees, the temple community is experienced as their one chance for a true home. Many feel they have regained a sentimentally conceived experience of community, which, as "counter-cultural" drop-outs prior to joining the movement, they saw as belonging to a happier, pre-industrial past, destroyed by the impersonal mass culture of advanced industrial society. Their view is reinforced by Bhaktivedanta's somewhat romantic "Vedic Village" conception of perfect social relations, which has been outlined in the analytical chapters.

Perhaps an even more important reward for some of the members is the fact that the temple communities of ISCKON provide them with a viable lifestyle which they previously lacked. Many devotees have experimented at some point with a variety of "alternative" lifestyles,--alternative, that is, to the normative standards of the American middle classes from which they originate. Many are ex-drug users, or ex-"hippies", unwilling, or even unable, to keep a job and adequately feed, clothe and house themselves. The Hare Krishna movement provides an alternative lifestyle which equally rejects American middle-class norms, provides the experience of community and ecstasy, and at the same time takes care the physical and emotional well-being of its adherents.

The economic security provided by ISKCON for its members is, on the whole, perhaps a more important source of sanctioning power than is the case with the Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement. In
the temple communities of the Hare Krishnas the devotees own nothing. Upon joining the movement they are encouraged to turn over all they own to the Society, or at least to distribute it among friends. This must be accomplished before initiation, for the true devotee believes that in reality everything belongs to Krishna, so that to retain possessions while living in his temple is to cheat the Lord.

If the devotee is later expelled, he or she is thrust out into the terrible world of kali-yuga, with no more than a few clothes. Furthermore, expulsion is a far more frequent occurrence among the Hare Krishnas than the Vedantists, who in any case usually retain some private means if they are lay members. Lesser negative sanctions applied by ISKCON are usually effective in correcting minor infringements, such as tardiness, poorly performed work tasks, or such "frivolities" as quarrelling, or disturbing the Deities' siesta. Small faults may draw a quiet admonition from the temple president or commander, or criticism from a godbrother. Persistent bad behavior may lead to a public "dressing down", involving a degree of embarrassment and loss of face before the other devotees, and the imposition of the purificatory chanting of some japa rounds; or the errant member may be given the more irksome chores, or lose a responsible position such as pujari.

Continual squabbling, especially between married couples, often leads to the transfer of members to different temples,
where it is necessary to make new friends, and suffer separation from old ones—even a spouse. Very serious faults such as unregulated and self-indulgent sexual activity, repeated blasphemy, or meat-eating, will result in immediate expulsion. There are no exceptions, and there is no appeal.

In the case of the Hare Krishnas then, the temple president has great disciplinary powers, and is under strict obligation to use them, for the individual devotees must be protected from the dangerous emanations from the external, "Karmi" world. Indeed, their protection is deemed to be a necessary condition for the survival of the Hare Krishna communities in "this age of Kali-yuga."

In general, then, the personal, individual pursuit of a mystical experience of salvation in the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, implies the toleration of a wide variation in cognitive and behavioral norms, which are supported primarily by positive sanctions, backed by the potential for negative sanctions involved in the intimate and affective guru-disciple relationship. On the other hand, the demands of maintaining a pure devotional community in an evil and corrupted world, according to the detailed prescriptions for perfect social relationships with fellow devotees and with Krishna, require the maintenance of exacting and uniform cognitive and behavioral norms in the temple communities of ISCKON. While positive
sanctions are of the first importance, therefore, a large number of negative sanctions of varying severity are readily employed by Hare Krishna officials, and are universally accepted by the members as the necessary means of preserving the purity of the devotees' loving fellowship, which alone offers the chance of achieving Krishna Consciousness, and thus salvation, in this life.

The techniques of social control, and indeed the broader social tone of these two sects, at once correspond to and "reflect" their social composition, the nature of which has been examined in the analytical chapters. The Ramakrishna Vedantists are mainly middle class men and women, no longer young, having a degree of worldly experience, and frequently a history of material or social success. Many monastic and lay initiated members express disillusionment with the world, but it is the disillusion of those who have had experience of life and found it wanting. It is not (social) life itself which is rejected, but a view of that life which is found inadequate. These people are seeking a different view of life.

The Vedantists do not reject rationality per se, but only the focus of its application on material pursuits. Indeed, the experience of most members has brought them to a position of intellectual self-confidence based on rationality. It is true that the soteriological goal is beyond the bounds of human reason, but this very fact is believed to be expressive of the
human condition, a result of Karma and Maya not a proof of the inefficacy of rationality itself. For the Ramakrishna Vedantaist a basis of rational conviction is essential. They see themselves as intellectual sophisticates, exploring the "Perennial Philosophy" in search of ultimate Truth. The Swami is an adept, a guide in this exploration, and his task is to find the right path for each individual. He is teacher and guide, and indeed, the Vedantist use the techniques and style of educational institutions. They "teach" Vedanta, offer "courses" in yoga, give lectures and hold classes.

The Swami-disciple relationship, then, is essentially accommodative; the guru accepts the disciple for what he is (what his Karma has made him) and never seeks to "push" him past the limits of his entirely personal commitment. The sanctions employed are therefore essentially supportive, aimed at coaxing the disciple into as complete commitment, and as advanced attainment of spiritual realization as is possible in each individual case. The very term "sanctions" would be rejected by most Swamis, who prefer such terms as "encouragement", "advice", or "timely correction."

The Hare Krishnas, on the other hand, are young, and have relatively little worldly experience. The world which most of them rejected before their conversion to ISKCON, was a world of images drawn from the literature and sub-literature of the "counter-culture", reinforced by a lifestyle which confirmed the
evil nature of Western society by bringing them into conflict with the legal and other agencies supporting and propagating its norms.

The norms and values of Western society were therefore rejected, and with them the social structures in which it was felt people are placed by calculated competitiveness, and impersonal rationality. Thus rationality itself was rejected in favor of subjective emotionalism, and societal structures in favor of communal ones. But normless subjectivism does not provide a basis for viable community life. Many devotees have previously sought to base an alternative lifestyle on the subjective normlessness of drug-induced ecstasy, on the anti-structural anarchism of self-consciously normless secular communes, or romantically conceived "neo-tribalism." They have experienced failure, and without rationality have no basis for intellectual self-confidence; they suffer from deep-rooted insecurity.

It is ironic that the rigid boundaries of Krishna temple communities provide a context of security for the non-rational subjectivism of those who rejected the boundaries of the wider societal norms and structures. The material world, its logic and rationality are discounted--for what matters is the mind, which can be freed from "unnatural" limitations by the practice of Bhakti yoga, and thus reach the "natural" state of pure bliss.

The teachings of the spiritual master validate this view of
the world as evil and inimical, and support the value already placed by most neophytes on emotional euphoria as a basis for communal life. This is not the individual subjectivism of drug-use, but the communal subjectivism of communally induced, routinized ecstasy, and it is perceived as the viable alternative lifestyle, the "counter-cultural" goal. As such it must be defended at all costs from the corrosive contamination of the external world. The Hare Krishnas are security conscious.

Hence the elaborate rituals of decontamination, and de-individuation; the militaristic, rule-governed uniformity of temple life, supported by essentially punitive sanctions; the unsophisticated, uncritical and childlike acceptance of these rules, which is required by the ideology of ISKCON, and supported by the devotees' previous experience of failure to achieve salvation in individually subjective and normless ecstasy.

An additional, apparently paradoxical point, which follows directly from the Hare Krishnas rejection of rationality in favor of communal ecstasy, relates to the economic concerns of the two movements. The ISKCON devotees engage in the highly rationalized, computer-directed manufacture and wholesale distribution of incense and cosmetics. It is frequently a characteristic of sects which maintain a high level of self-isolation, or rigid separation from the wider society, that they conduct economic relationships with outsiders in a relentlessly calculating fashion, according to the highly
instrumental criteria of rational conduct, which, they believe, characterises the relationships of worldly people to each other.

The Western Ramakrishna Vedanta societies, on the other hand, which make insistent claims to "scientific" rationality, confine their economic activities to the profitable pursuit of literary evangelism, the collection of rents and fees, and conservative investment in stocks and bonds, which is usually in the hands of professionals. They would never engage in anything so vigorously entrepreneurial as large scale manufacturing, which would be considered unequivocally materialistic. However, it is not the high profitability of factory production which would be considered unwholesomely materialistic, it is rather the large amounts of time which members or Swamis would necessarily spend in demeaning materialistic work, to the detriment of their spiritual well-being.

It is the nature of the case with virtually all sectarian groups that the particular set of beliefs which the members espouse are translated into injunctions and ordinances which concern the most intimate, and, in the worldly sense, the most "private" of social relationships. Of course the capacity of the group to influence and control such matters will vary with the type of sect, but in the more tightly bounded and intensively rule-governed sects, the control exercised is likely to be actual rather than simply prescriptive.

In both of these movements relations between the sexes are a
source of potential and real conflict. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission is primarily an order of monks, with provision for convents of pravrajikas, or nuns, to remain under the direction of monks until such time as they are judged able to operate independently, with the blessing and authorisation of the Belur Governing Body. In India, the Sarada Math is an outcome of this provision, but, as has been described, a Vedanta Society at La Crescenta and Boston, composed primarily of women, who were not judged ready for independence, broke away from the movement. Today, although relatively close relations are maintained, this society does not have the authorisation of the Belur headquarters.

Moreover, in Southern California a formal separation of monks and nuns has been effected, the chief authority, and most of the administration remaining in the hands of the Swamis, whose opinion is that further independence for female monastics in the West, is a possibility only for the fairly distant future. Meanwhile a number of the nuns disapprove of the change, as they were long accustomed to holding posts of equal or greater responsibility than the American Swamis, and in any case the ideology of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement gives women absolute equality with men. Perhaps it is feared that if women are allowed too much authority, they might eventually refuse an Indian Swami, as the defecting group did. At any rate, this is likely to be a source of conflict in the Western movement for
some time to come.

In the ideology of the Hare Krishnas women are perceived differently: they are considered child-like, weak, ignorant, and prone to contamination, and therefore in need of male "protection" all their lives. Submissiveness and self-effacement is considered the correct attitude of women to men, which is an attitude many North American women members find hard to adopt. Particularly in the case of married devotees, but to some extent with many single female devotees, this gives rise to conflict and recrimination. The recent moves to provide separate accommodation for householder families within the local Krishna communities, should ease the tensions somewhat, but will not remove the source of conflict. However, in the course of time a process of "natural" selection for more submissive females, reinforced by judicious expulsions, will, perhaps, further ease the immediate pressures of temple life.

This raises the question of recruitment for future generations of Hare Krishnas. For the Ramakrishna Vedantist this is not really a problem, since they recruit from a stable pool of middle-class adults, but it is becoming a matter of vital concern to the Hare Krishnas, who have all but mopped the reserves of readily available, "counter-cultural" recruits.

Relations with the External Society
The eschatology of the Ramakrishna Vedantists describes salvation as the personal, or individual realization of God. As traditionally conceived in Hindu Advaitism this involves total withdrawal from the phenomenal world, ultimately, indeed, the refusal to recognize its existence. Vivekananda was concerned to show that this was not a necessary attitude to the world for Advaitins, but that activity in the world, conceived from the plane of Vishistadvaita, might equally lead to salvation. And, as has already been described, it is this teaching which legitimizes the extensive social welfare activities of the Order in India and the Far East. It is ironical that in the West, which perhaps indirectly provided some of the stimulus for this aspect of Vivekananda's theological interpretation, it is the more traditional attitude of withdrawal which is the logical concomitant of the purely "religious and cultural" work of the Vedanta movement. Thus, while for the lay membership the pursuit of a normal occupation is in no way discouraged, for the core initiates and monastics a degree of withdrawal from the world is recommended—even expected.

It is considered unfortunate that so many monastics have to work, especially brahmacharya monastics, who often must take jobs outside the movement in order to support themselves and help maintain the monastery. To counteract the "draining of spiritual energies" this causes, monastic and lay initiates are encouraged to spend long periods at the retreat centers, separated from the
world, where spiritual sensitivity is heightened, and spiritual strength and experience increased. For the brahmachari preparing for his final vows a period of total devotion to spiritual life is considered most desirable, and some Swamis insist upon a long sojourn in India before sannyasa. (Brahmacharis from Chicago spend as long as a year at the Belur Math before final vows are taken.)

In line with this traditional Vedantic approach the Ramakrishna movement in the West is quietistic, shunning publicity, and often even keeping the communal celebration of ritual practices to a minimum while emphasizing silent meditation and personal prayer. External society, even the materialistic society of the West, is not condemned as evil, as it is by the Hare Krishnas, but is thought to be a lower manifestation of Brahman, and may act as a distraction from the higher, spiritual manifestation which is realized in samadhi. This is considered especially likely where that society is strongly oriented to materialism.

It is the avowed aim of the Vedanta societies of the West to increase the overall spirituality of Western cultures, which are believed to be too materialistic. This being so a degree of aloofness from that materialism is necessary, and must be inculcated in the membership, who should seek "to be in, but not of" the mundane world. Thus, any practices which draw the unwanted attention of that world, and embroil the societies in
public disputes or lead to public notoriety and display in the media, are carefully avoided. As a rule, therefore, even the Indian Swamis wear ordinary Western dress in public, and festivals which in India are celebrated publicly with great pomp and circumstance, are observed quietly in the temples or retreat centers of the West.

The Hare Krishnas present a somewhat paradoxical contrast to this. As has been indicated at some length, the Krishna devotees believe the world, in this age especially, to be a place of consummate evil and erect strict barriers to protect the temple communities from pollution by it. Yet at the same time they constantly seek the attention of that world. The exotic form of dress, the shaved heads and painted faces, the daily street sankirtans, and frequent dramatic and large scale festivals publicly celebrated, combine to attract the widest public attention. Nor is any attempt made to minimize that attention; on the contrary, when Bhaktivedanta visited major North American cities, the media representatives were always invited to interview him, and today the press always receive invitations to festivals, where they are provided with facilities for photographic and film recording of the events.

Their attitude to external society has both manifest and latent functions. The recognized and admitted purpose of this public display is to further the mission of ISKCON to bring Krishna Consciousness to the whole world. The sight of Krishna
devotees and the sound of their worship, most especially the mahamantra, are believed to be purifying and spiritually beneficial for everyone, even the demonic. Even more beneficial is the sheer physical presence of Bhaktivedanta, which is known as Darshan. These benefits are transmitted automatically, and do not depend on a "correct" attitude in the recipients.

At the same time it is these very contacts with the "Karmi" world which give rise to conflict, and "persecution" of the Krishna devotees. This has the latent function of validating and reinforcing the beliefs of the ISKCON members as to the degraded and evil character of that world, and helps to maintain their self image as the embattled few, keeping the light of Krishna Consciousness burning in a dark and ignorant age.

This may account to some degree for the comparative lack of success which ISKCON has experienced in India, where the public activities of the devotees are not in such conflict with the norms and values of the wider society, and do not attract the same public vilification, nor run foul of the legal authorities to anything like the same extent.

India's chief importance to most devotees is that they believe it to be their spiritual home, and in many cases their mental image of India owes more to Bhaktivedanta's vision of a Vedic golden age than to contemporary reality. Most devotees, perhaps all, who have not been to India, intend some day to go, if only as a brief pilgrimage; and many of those who have been
are saving money to return. Bhaktivedanta has asked his Western devotees to help in the construction of a grandiose temple-university complex, made self-supporting by agriculture and cottage industry, which it is planned to make the eventual world headquarters of ISKCON, at Mayapur in West Bengal.

Several hundred devotees have already responded, and work on the site has begun. Apparently some of these devotees intend to remain there permanently, if their health will permit, others have already been forced to return to the West, overcome with sickness or fatigue. It is unlikely that ISKCON will be able to rely entirely on the West for devotees and workers in India; ultimately it will be the society's success in gaining native Hindu adherents which will determine the outcome of its grandiose experiment at Mayapur, and so far its success has been minimal.

Eastern Sects and Western Typologies

In the introductory chapter, the nature of sectarianism was discussed in relation to Wilson's seven-fold typology of possible "responses to the world"—the world being seen to contain at least some evil, from which it is believed that the sect's particular response will save its adherents. It was pointed out that it is not necessary to define the sect in terms of a rejection of orthodoxy, as Wilson suggests, but rather it may be viewed as selecting some, and rejecting other possible responses
to a given culture, in which, perhaps, one particular response predominates. This is less apparent in Christian cultures, where the term "orthodoxy" can be seen to have a clear referent, than it is in India, where the term has a much more attenuated meaning.

The case of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement is particularly instructive in this regard. Religious sectarians use the phrase "the world" (usually perjoratively), not to refer to the natural world of earth, water, fire and air, which is usually seen as God's good creation, but rather with reference to the social, man-made world of human society—culture, in its broadest sense. Response to the world, then, refers to this, the social or cultural world, and the selection of an appropriate response will obviously depend to a large degree on how this world is perceived.

The founder of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, Vivekananda, saw India and the East as imbalanced in one respect, and the advanced Western cultures as leaning too far in the opposite direction. The social evils of India were caused, he felt, by the neglect of the material welfare of the people, especially women and the untouchables, attendant upon a distorted emphasis on religion, expressed in his word, as "priestcraft". In the West, on the other hand, the contrary was the case; here Vivekananda saw an overemphasis on the material, to the neglect of the spiritual and religious. Following from this assessment, Vivekananda quite consciously selected what he considered
appropriate responses, which differed in each case.

In India and the Far East the doctrines and activities of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission stress the need for social reform, in the light of divinely revealed truths about the proper organization of the social world. The people—and indeed all creatures—are a manifestation of God, and to neglect their welfare is to turn away from God, to insult and abuse Him. In the West, however, it is the material welfare of the people which has been overemphasized, to the neglect of their even more important spiritual welfare. What is needed here, therefore, is spiritual reform—to spread an awareness of the spiritual nature of man, and his ultimate goal of absorption in Brahman.

There is in their movement, therefore, a significant element of what Wilson has called the reformist response, whereby

"evil . . . may be dealt with according to supernaturally given insights about the ways in which social organization should be amended."

But this is not the chief defining characteristic of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, which teaches that it is ignorance of the true nature of reality as a manifestation of God, which gives rise to evil in the world, and a recognition of the true, universal principles concerning the world's and man's nature, is the sole necessary precondition for defeating that evil. This is a gnostic response to the world.

In his most recent account of the seven ideal-types of
sectarian response to the world, Wilson does not include the gnostic, but, as described in the introduction to this thesis, speaks rather of the manipulationist type. The manipulationist response, it will be recalled, is described as seeking a "transformed method of coping with evil", whereby "salvation is possible in the world, and evil might be overcome if men learn the right means, improved techniques, to deal with their problems."6

But Wilson goes on,

"this conception of salvation is neither other-worldly, nor transcendental. It is the secure goods of this world—health, wealth, longevity, happiness, success and high status,—which constitute the saved condition."7

This, however, does not entirely apply to the Vedantists, for whereas in India these things are sought, and, it is believed, will be gained by properly applying the techniques which follow from Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta, in the West it is assumed that they are already possessed in abundance. It is rather spiritual benefits which will there accrue from the altered perception of the world which Vedanta offers: in effect emotional and intellectual satisfactions and security, and the experience of progress towards God-realization as a psychological state of "superconsciousness". Subjective orientation is radically altered, but not necessarily in order to manipulate the objective world; satisfaction is gained from the reorientation itself, and the objective world is seen as increasingly
irrelevant.

The gnostic sect, in other words, is not necessarily manipulationist. In an important article written in 1959, Wilson uses the term gnostic to refer to one of the ideal types of sect which he describes there. The description he offers however, is manipulationist, and I would suggest rather that the term gnostic be retained, and the manipulationist sect be seen as a possible—perhaps even the most common—sub-type of the general, ideal-typical, gnostic sect.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta movement, then, is a gnostic sect both in India and in the West, but only in India is it properly manipulationist. No empirical example, however, will fit exactly into an ideal-type—or at least, it will do so very rarely. In the case of the Vedantists there are elements of other responses to the world than the gnostic, though it must be emphasized that they are of relatively minor significance. The perception of the West as sunk in materialism, and the corresponding need to redress the balance in favor of spiritual life, requires of the virtuosi practitioners of the Vedantic techniques in those cultures, a degree of introversionism, of withdrawal from the world. It is not a truly introversionist response, for it does not lead to the formation of a separated community, preoccupied with its insulation from the wider society. But a certain degree of insulation is institutionally provided by the Ramakrishna Vedanta centers, in their retreats
and their monastic communities, which is a distinctly introversionist characteristic.

At the same time there is perhaps, a small measure of conversionism in the striving for samadhi, a profoundly felt transformation of the individual consciousness. But again, it is not a truly conversionist response, for the world is not seen as evil or corrupt, nor is it thought that the transformation of individual selves through conversion, will result in a transformation of the world. And finally, as indicated above, in India there is a degree of reformism in the application of Vedantic techniques to social change, in that it is not simply the acquisition of this-worldly benefits for the members which is sought, but the reform of the whole society. Once again, however, it is not a truly reformist type of religious movement, in that the amendment of the social world is not the essential orientation, but the transformation of men's means of coping with evil, which, it is believed, possibly can (though not necessarily will) bring about these social reforms.

The Hare Krishnas believe that we are living in a corrupt age, when all the institutions of society partake of that corruption. All those born into this age are also corrupt, with the sole exception of the spiritual master, who has the gift of grace (charisma) to lead others from corruption to purity. By following the injunctions of this spiritual master, the disciplines of bhatki-yoga, it is believed that the true devotee
can effect a profound transformation of himself, a conversion, which is verified by the ecstatic experience of union with the beloved Krishna, achieved through the chanting and dancing of the worship ceremonies in the Krishna temples. Thus it is a subjective experience which is sought, the transformation of consciousness, and given that no other knowledge is needed, nor even desirable, for only the consciousness of Krishna matters.

However, the vital aspect of this conversion from worldly corruption to pure Krishna Consciousness, is that it is only in the temple communities of ISKCON that it can occur. The temple community represents a totally different world from that of the outside, and imparts a quite alien experience to the newcomer. The music, chanting and dancing, the bright exotic pictures, lights, and vivid colors, the sweet-smelling incense, camphor, and ghee, and the use of Sanskrit, combine to present a powerful and encompassing experience of complete removal from the familiar and mundane world outside. To become part of this wholly-other world the convert is stripped of all the symbols of his old, corrupt self, and dons a new symbolic identity, as the basis for a transformation of the self, and resocialization into the norms of the community. This community is explicitly the source of salvation, and only those who belong to it may be numbered among the saved.

The temple communities of ISKCON are essentially concerned with the purity of their fellowship, and its defense against
pollution by the "Karmi" world of the wider society, and the boundary between the sacred community and the world, as has been indicated in the analytical section, is supported by numerous symbols and rituals of purification. The experience of salvation, of ecstatic union with Krishna, is personal and subjective, it is true, but the pursuit of that ecstasy is routinized in the groups' chanting and dancing, and it is only the context of the temple community which defines the nature of the experience.

Moreover, the members of the group are de-individuated, drilled and disciplined into uniformity by the prohibition of idiosyncratic personal appearance, the communal practices of bhakti yoga, and a corresponding identity of dress and behavior. Individual attachments, even within marriage, are subject to restraint, and the conjugal family within the community is a much attenuated and temporary arrangement, children being separated from their parents at an early age, leaving the father free, if he so desires, to seek the higher spiritual office of celibate sannyasa. These are the hallmarks of the introversionist sect, as will be recalled from the description in the introductory chapter.

At the same time, the mission of the Hare Krishnas to spread the message of Krishna consciousness prevents the total withdrawal from an evil world which typifies the wholly introverted sect. Thus, a high degree of social contact with the
wider society is necessarily maintained, and cannot be reduced to the merely formal and impersonal economic exchanges which characterize some introversionist sects, such as theExclusive Brethren. The dangers to the Hare Krishnas' self-image attendant on this ambiguity in relationships with the wider society, are presently mitigated by the reinforcing effect of the conflicts with that society, which result from its contact with a group that rejects its norms and values. As already pointed out, such conflict validates the Krishna Community's view of the world as corrupt, and its self conception as a persecuted minority of pure devotees in a corrupt age.

However, the reaction of external society to the Krishna worshipers is bound to change, and soften, as the "Karmi" world becomes accustomed to what, after all, is but one more exotic and colorful religion among many in today's society. Furthermore, the appeal of this ecstatic, "counter-cultural" religious movement, was primarily to the young, world-rejecting, drug-using, "hippie" generation of the late 1960's and early 1970's, and this is a recruitment pool which is becoming shallower as the latter-day hippies grow older, and become enmeshed in the social structure which they formerly rejected.

In this light, the recent moves to provide a more relaxed environment than the enclosed temple community for householder members with families, and the increasing provision for raising and educating their children within the movement, may represent a
shift towards a more stable introversionism, in which relations with an increasingly accepting, or indifferent, wider society, will be reduced to routine public performances of sankirtan and festival, and the necessary economic exchanges. For the moment, however, such suggestions can be no more than speculative.

The example of the Hare Krishnas, then, suggests that the isolation of the introversionist sect need not be total, nor its wider social contacts strictly confined to impersonal economic relations. In so far as its interaction with the wider society for the purposes of proselytization is conflict-ridden, and therefore such as to maintain and reinforce its basic introversionist ideology, it may be safely maintained. But a shift in the attitude of that external society in the direction of acceptance or indifference, may well be felt as threatening the introversionist sect's definition of itself as an embattled minority in an evil and polluted world, and may lead to a lessening of proselytizing activity, and a move in the direction of a more thorough-going introversionist posture. The immediate future of ISKCON should provide valuable empirical data in this connection.

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness is still in the volatile first generation of sectarian development, and is considerably less stable than the Ramakrishna Vedanta organization. This is exacerbated by the fact that it is not tied into the wider social network of external society, as the
Vedanta societies are through their lay householder membership. One possible line of development for the movement has already been indicated, namely an increasing trend towards introversionism, involving a probable reduction in numbers, but a more stable structure.

The recent death of Bhaktivedanta, the charismatic founder and spiritual master of the Hare Krishnas, is unlikely to prove a serious blow to the movement. Provision has been made for the routinization of charisma in the officials of the organization, their authority being traced through Bhaktivedanta to Krishna, whose representatives they claim to be. The main practical locus of authority is the temple presidents, while the overall direction of ISKCON was passed to the Governing Body Commission some years ago, and no immediate readjustments are necessitated by Bhaktivedanta's demise. He explicitly denied avatarship, and is assumed by the devotees to be watching benignly from the heavenly planet of Goloka, where he now lives in eternally blissful Krishna Consciousness.

However, the ideology of ISKCON allows for the appearance of a successor in the disciplic line from Caitanya, who will "emerge" at some point, to renew the enthusiastic spirit of bhakti yoga. There is no clearly probable successor at the moment, and if a claim to the succession were made now it is possible that disputes, or even schism would result. But at present there is nothing to indicate that such a claim is likely.
At the same time, given the determined rejection of social integration in the wider society, which is a primary characteristic of this predominantly introversionist sect, and the concomitant necessity of recruiting from the minority of world-rejecting, actual and potential drop-outs from that society, much will depend on the future success of the growing number of gurukulas, the ISKCON schools to which the members' children are to be consigned at the age of five. It is largely the first generation of young adults from these schools, which will determine the life chances of the movement.

The Ramakrishna Vedanta organization may be described as a thoroughly established gnostic sect, the separate centers in the West being generally small, but stable, with a slowly growing membership; and little attempt is being made to increase the number of centers at the present. Efforts are rather being concentrated on expanding the societies which are already established, and increasing facilities for spiritual activities by adding retreat centers. This stability and slow growth, combined with the basically quietistic orientation of the movement, and the conservatism of the Belur Monks, makes the prospect of any immediate change unlikely.

Both of the sects described and analyzed in this thesis draw upon particular established and recognized strands of the Hindu
tradition, but the aspects of Hinduism which they represent are widely different, and thus appeal to social groups which are quite distinct in socio-economic terms, and in terms of life experience. Indeed, perhaps the only truly common ground between the adherents of ISKCON and the Ramakrishna Vedantists is their rejection of the presumed materialism of Western societies. Even this rejection differs in degree, in intellectual sophistication, and in its effects on the structure of the individual sects, and their relations with the external society.

The corollary of this rejection of Western materialism is the thorough attempt by both movements to infuse the West with the presumed advanced spirituality of India. The members of these sects may in a sense be conceived as missionaries who (actually or metaphorically) have crossed the "Black Water" from India--the harbor of spiritual enlightenment--to the "dark continent" of the benighted West. They recognize that this "journey" is perilous, and that they themselves are exposed to vile pollution and insidious temptation, yet they labor at the gargantuan task of leading the cloddish inhabitants of Western societies to the spiritual haven of a Vedic Eden, or the mystical heights of selfless samadhi.
FOOTNOTES

1. Mysore N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Chapter 1, and passim.


3. Ibid., p. 226.


7. Ibid.

The sheer volume of sacred literature on Hinduism is staggering; not all of it, however, is generally accepted as being of equal status. It is usually divided into two main categories, namely Sruti and Smrti. The first of these (literally translated as "hearing") is the most sacred, the Veda itself, the eternal logos heard by the rishis of the dawn of time. It is believed to be "knowledge" and unquestionable truth. Smrti is not usually accorded the same sacred status as Sruti, which sacred texts are definitely included as Sruti is well-defined and widely accepted—in fact is not really considered a matter of dispute. The same is not true of Smrti, though there is fairly general agreement on the matter among most scholars.\(^1\)

**Sruti of the Veda:** (Veda literally means Knowledge)
This is divided into three strata.

- **Samhitas** - "collections" of hymns and formulas
- **Brahmanas** - Sacrificial texts
- **Aranyakas** - "forest treatises" culminating in the Upanishads.

With the Upanishads Sruti ends, and they are often referred to as Vedanta, meaning "end of the Vedas."

**Smrti:** (Pronounced Smriti)
This is most commonly believed to include
The Sutras - philosophical aphorisms

The Law Books - ie. books on dharma.

Puranas - long mythological works, concerned largely with the activities of various gods.

The Mahabharata - this work includes the Bhagavad-gita

The Ramayana

The orthodox Brahminic belief is that the authority of revelation ends with The Upanishads; this is known as Vedantism, and represents God as impersonal and unknowable Brahma. Therein lies one of the chief distinctions between the Advaita Vedantism of the Ramakrishna Movement, and Bhakti Vaisnavism of Caitanya and the Hare Krishnas, for the latter extend the authority of the Vedas to include the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, teaching that all these scriptures are revealed truth. These latter sources are the basis for the belief in God as personal, knowable and fully realized in Krishna, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

To the Hindu thinker philosophy is not merely an intellectual pursuit, but a darshana or vision of Truth revealed by a seer, and an experience realized and relived by the aspirant. Thus each school of thought within this multivariate tradition sets forth its own conception of the goal aimed at by the inquiry. All agree that the goal of the philosophical quest is liberation from the cycle of rebirth and death, and the attainment of everlasting bliss. In some cases this bliss is
simply believed to be release (mukti) from the transmigratory cycle (samsara), or the inevitable suffering of spirits (jivas) trapped in materiality: this is the vision of the Sankhya-yoga school. In the theistic school, of which the Hare Krishnas are an example, the *Summum Bonum* is conceived in terms of altered relationships to a personal God. In monistic Advaita, espoused by the Ramakrishna monks, the aspirant strives for realization of the unity of Self with Brahman.

**Vivekananda's Religious Cosmology—His Contribution to Advaita Vedanta**

Vivekananda, who placed great emphasis on the Sankhya and the writings of Sankara, certainly accepted the Smrti as valid Hindu religious scriptures, but was more conservatively Brahminic than Bhaktivedanta in according them lower status than the Vedas—especially *The Vedanta*. Thus, although he used Smrti scriptures in working out his religious beliefs, ultimately his theology was based on Sruti, and supported by Smrti. Vivekananda openly declared that Smrti was not immutable like Sruti, but, on the contrary, had traditionally been readjusted from time to time, to suit the social needs of the particular age.

Vivekananda's educational experience as a student of Western philosophy and laws based on principles of radical rationality, led him to reject the traditional starting points of Indian
metaphysics. He began with certain presuppositions.

a) The self-evident fact that the phenomenal world is in flux, constant change or process.

b) That change being limited and finite, implies weakness, suffering and misery.

c) That beyond change lies the Absolute, which can be known, and which gives meaning to the (apparent) chaos of the phenomenal world.

True knowledge, then, is changeless and absolute—it is "all knowingness" (Vijnana). The question arises, then, how can man come to know the changeless absolute, the pure and infinite reality?

Epistemology

Vivekananda began with the traditional Hindu bases of knowledge, and found them inadequate. These are the pramanas:

Pratyaksa - perception
Anumana - Vivekananda calls this "reason"
Sruti - revelation

Vivekananda found these unable of themselves to provide direct perception of the Absolute (Nirguna Brahman). If the goal is unity of knowledge (absolute) beyond all distinctions and all
change, then all foundation of this knowledge must lie beyond the binding complex of desa-Kala-Nimitta--i.e. time-space-causation.

Vivekananda was brought to this position by confronting the weaknesses in the traditional starting point of Hindu sages, weakness him by the application of "Western rationality". In 1898 he corresponded with Pramadadas Mitra, a renowned Sanskrit scholar of Varan asking him a series of searching questions about certain texts he was studying. Among them the following:

"Why has foundation for the authority of the Vedas been addressed in the Vedanta-Sutras? First it has been said that the Vedas are the authority for the existence of God, and then it has been argued that the authority of the Vedas is the text: 'It is the breath of God.' Now, is this statement not vitiated by what in Western logic is called an argument in a circle?"

And again:

"According to Nyaya, "Habda or Veda (the criterion of truth), is the word of those who have realized the highest." so the Rishis as such are omniscient. [But] . . . How can we accept their intelligence as the refuge to ferry us across the ocean of transmigratory existence, seeing that they speak of the earth as triangular, of the serpent Vasuki as the support of the earth, and so on?"

The principle focus of Vivekananda's attack here is on faith as the foundation of knowledge. He espouses radical doubt. If the Vedas are the proof of God, but must be taken on faith, then one is using the unproved as a basis of proof. What is more the Vedas contain patent errors, such as describing the earth as triangular. Beside, everything manifested in the phemoninal world of appearances is limited by Desa Kala Nimitta, so the
Vedas, as written works, are also thus limited.

"All philosophy, and scriptures have come from the plane of relative knowledge of subject and object. But no thought or languages of the human mind can fully express the Reality which lies beyond the plane of relative knowledge! Science, philosophy, etc., are only partial truths. So they can never be the adequate channels of expression for the transcendant Reality. Hence, viewed from the transcendant standpoint, everthing appears to be unreal--religious creeds, and works, I and thou, and the universe--everything is unreal! Then only it is perceived: "I am the only reality; I am the all-pervading Atman, and I am the proof of my own existence."  

This is not to say, however, that the evidence of the senses is in error and worthless. On the contrary, the sensate universe exists at a lower level of truth, and as such is true without being the Truth. These truths, or knowledge arrived at through sensate experience (including the mind), are a part of true knowledge (called Paramartha) and because they relate to the nature of man and the universe they point to Truth which is beyond them, absolute, simple, and infinite. In other words, such truths as may be arrived at through reason and the senses only indicate that there is a Truth which lies beyond their range.  

Vivekananda argues that the structure of the mind itself allows of direct experience of the absolute. There are three states of the mind; the subconscious, the conscious and the
"First is the conscious plane, in which all work is always accompanied by the feeling of ego. Next comes the unconscious plane, where the work is unaccompanied by the feeling of ego. . . . In higher animals, and in the highest of all animals, man, what is called conscious work prevails. But is does not end there. There is a still higher plane on which the mind can work. It can go beyond consciousness. Just as unconscious work is beneath consciousness, so there is another work which is above consciousness and which also is not accompanied by the feeling of ego. The feeling of ego is only on the middle plane. When the mind is above or below that line there is no feeling of 'I', and yet the mind works. When the mind goes beyond this line of self-consciousness it is called samadhi, or superconsciousness.

Knowledge, at the superconscious level is experienced, as is knowledge at the conscious level, but absolute knowledge is an inner experience, not based on anything outside the self. The self is so stimulated that direct perception of the absolute lies within; it is called aparoksanubhuti. The only way to verify the reality of this absolute is to experience it personally, since by definition it is neither accessible nor demonstrable externally. This experience is called samadhi, and the highest state of samadhi is called nirvikalpa samadhi, which is complete identity with the absolute. For Vivekananda, that this is more than mere speculation is shown by the fact that countless rishis and avatars have achieved the superconscious state and have recorded (often in a confused way) their experience. What is more such a man has existed in the present age, a perfect master whose aparoksanubhuti was total, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. As an
avatar Ramakrishna was able to retain memory of the ego whilst in nirvikalapa samadhi, and thus could return to mundane, though transformed consciousness, to help others with his knowledge.7

True knowledge is knowledge of the infinite, and the infinite is simple: it cannot be divided or multiple and remain infinite. Therefore transcendent knowledge sees absolute unity—of subject and object, of mind and matter—it is knowledge of unity, or ekam. "Nature is homogenous. Differentiation is in manifestation. The Sanskrit word for nature is prakriti, and means differentiation. All is one substance, but it is manifested variously."8 Science, according to Vivekananda is a process of progressive generalization, seeking a level which encompasses all phenomena. Science then, can only find its realization in religion; the two are not opposed, they are complementary. True science is religion: true religion is science. In science knowledge rests not on faith, but on experience, and the same is true in religion. "Experience is the only source of knowledge".9 Mundane science perceives diversity and seeks unity in it through progressive generalization: thus it is true in that it points to the highest generalization of all, the Oneness of the universe.

If the epistemological goal is knowledge of the unity underlying diversity, the one thing by which everything is realized, then the problem is to find a means of arriving at this knowledge. In other words what is the process of perception by
which knowledge is attained? To answer this question Vivekananda begins with the philosophy of Sankhya.

The system of the Sankhya philosophy is one of the most ancient in India, or in fact in the world. Its great exponent, Kapila, is the father of all Hindu psychology; and the ancient system that he taught is still the foundation of all accepted systems of philosophy in India today, which are known as Darshanas . . . The Vedanta, as the logical outcome of the Sankhya, pushes its conclusions yet further. While its cosmology agrees with that taught by Kapila, the Vedanta is not satisfied to end in dualism, but continues its search for the final unity which is alike the goal of science and religion. 10

Vivekananda's explanation of Sankhya philosophy puts him close to Kant, with whom Vivekananda was familiar.

"How are perceptions made? The wall opposite sends an impression to me, but I do not see the wall until my mind reacts, that is to say, the mind cannot know the wall by mere sight. The reaction that enables the mind to get a perception of the wall is an intellectual process. In this way the whole universe is seen through our 'eyes plus mind (or perception faculty); it is necessarily covered by our own individual tendencies. The real wall or the real universe, is outside the mind, and is unknown and unknowable. Call this universe X, and our statement is that the seen universe is X plus mind.

What is true of the external must also apply to the internal world. Mind also wants to know itself, but this Self can only be known through the medium of the mind and is, like the wall, unknown. This self we may call Y, and the statement would then be, Y plus mind is the inner self. 11

According to Sankhya, then, external nature transmits vibrations (light, sound, touch, etc.) to the mind (manas) through the medium of the relevant organs (eyes, ears, etc.) The
mind organizes these impressions and relays them to the intellect (buddhi) which is the faculty of discrimination or determination, and this in turn forms the impression held of the original object transmitting vibrations. The sense of selfhood (ahamkara) lies behind the intellect, and behind that again is mahat, intelligence, reason. For Sankhya subject and object are externally separate, and interact only partially and imperfectly through the process of perception. All manifestation, therefore, is prakriti, external matter or nature, which is ontologically separate and independent of spirit (purusa) and therefore external and self-sufficient. For Sankhya, perceived manifestation is simply the blows of prakriti on purusa; duality is real, there is no absolute.12

Vivekananda found this argument quite convincing, though, of course, he did not accept the ontological conclusions. Knowledge gained through the process of phenomenal perception was dependant and distorted. Given that true knowledge is eternal, one and absolute, then it could never be realized by sense perception. True knowledge cannot be gained by the senses, which are imperfect, nor reside in the mind, which is impermanent. Such knowledge can only exist where there is no change, no limitation. Since nothing in the process of perception has this characteristic, Vivekananda turned to the perceiver himself—the jiva. The Absolute cannot exist in one place and not another; it cannot be in external nature (prakriti) and not in the jiva also.
Because of the nature of the perceptual process what is apprehended is $X$ plus mind, and $X$, the thing-in-itself, cannot be reached. "Now as each individual can only see his own universe, that universe is created with his bondage and goes away with his liberation." The same applies to the perception of self, it also is limited and imperfect--$Y$ plus mind. "Internal and external nature mind and matter, are in time and space, and are bound by the law of causation."

The jiva, then, on the face of it, is unsuited to the achievement of true knowledge, for it is not capable of true perception: it is not truly the perceiver. True perception would involve consciousness (vijnana) which is described as existence, knowledge, and bliss--sat. cit. ananda.

"According to Vedanta the three fundamental factors of consciousness are, I exist, I know, I am blessed. The Idea that I have no want, that I am restful, peaceful, that nothing can disturb me, which comes from time to time, is the central fact of our being, the basic principle of our life; and when it becomes limited, and becomes compound, it manifests itself as existence phenomenal, knowledge phenomenal and love. Every man exists, and every man must know, and every man is mad for love... The Y, the internal thing-in-itself, which, combining with mind, manufactures existence, knowledge and love, is called by the Vedantist Existence Absolute, knowledge absolute, bliss absolute. That real existence is limitless, unmixed, uncombined, knows no change, is the free soul: when it gets mixed up, muddled up as it were, with the mind, it becomes what we call individual existence. It is plant life, animal life, human life..."

So all that is knowable on the phenomenal level is unreal; and the Real is unknowable on that level. This problem posed by
the Sankhya is, according to Vivekananda, solved by the Vedanta.

"All difference is due to time, space and causation. These are the constituent elements of the mind. No mentality is possible without them. You can never think without time, you can never imagine anything without space, and you can never have anything without causation. These are the forms of the mind. Take them away and the mind itself does not exist. All difference is, therefore, due to the mind. According to Vedanta it is the mind, its forms, that have limited X and Y apparently, and made them appear as external and internal worlds. But X and Y being both beyond the mind, are without difference and hence one. We cannot attribute any quality to the, because qualities are born of the mind. The That which is qualityless must be one; X is without qualities, it only takes qualities of the mind; so does Y; therefore these X and Y are one. The whole universe is one. There is only one Self in the universe, only One Existence, and that One Existence, when it passes through the forms of time, space and causation is called by different names, Buddhi, fine matter, gross matter, all mental and physical forms. Everything in the universe is that One, appearing in various forms."

In other words, Vivekananda concludes, behind the false perceptions of the apparent perceiver (jiva) lies the reality of true perception and true perceiver which are one. The true self, the real perceiver is called Atman, and in the state of aparoksanubhuti therefore, when subject and object are One, we do not speak of perception but of realization.

"Modern Science" and Vedanta

The apparent, or manifested multiplicity of perceivers, problematic in Sankhya is resolved by Vivekananda through his
analysis of Vedanta. The corrolary problem is that of the manifested multiplicity of prakriti, or external nature.\textsuperscript{17} Instead of beginning with the problem in Sankhya, Vivekananda this time turns to science—i.e. "modern science"—and finds there the questions he wishes to pursue. It is the laws of conservation of matter and energy that Vivekananda takes as his starting point. Here he felt was the scientific basis for a refutation of dualism in nature.

"For today, under the blasting light of modern science, when old and apparently strong and invulnerable beliefs have been shattered to their very foundations . . . here comes to the fore the philosophy of India . . . when the modern tremendous theories of evolution and conservation of energy and so forth are dealing death blows to all sorts of crude theologies, what can hold any more the allegiance of cultured humanity but the most wonderful, convincing, broadening, and ennobling ideas that can be found only in that most marvellous product of the soul of man, the wonderful voice of God, the Vedanta?"\textsuperscript{18}

The law of constant conservation, according to Vivekananda is simply a restatement in "modern scientific" terms of a truth already set out in the Vedanta. Kapila, "the great father of all philosophy," taught that the effect and the cause are essentially one.

"We have seen that the cause is the same as the effect, and the effect is only the cause in another form. Therefore this whole universe cannot be produced out of nothing. Nothing comes without a cause, and the cause is the effect in another form."\textsuperscript{19}
The commonly held Christian belief in creation *ex nihilo* is a risible superstition in the light of modern science. "Modern physics also has demonstrated that the sum total of the energies in the universe is the same throughout." 20 And elsewhere,

"The sum total of the energy remains the same, whatever the forms it may take. If you want a mass of energy at one end, you have got to put it in at the other end; it may be in another form, but the amount of energy that should be produced out of it must be the same." 21

In other words, according to Vivekananda, the Vedanta and modern scientific thought were not only not contradictory, but were seeking the same essential unity. The chief difference was that Vedanta has reached the understanding towards which science is as yet only beginning to stumble. According to the laws of constant conservation, then, causation is the transformation of matter or energy from one form to another, from cause to effect. In Sanskrit this is called parinama. (Sankhya) Obviously Vivekananda's conception of science was of great importance in supporting his interpretation of Vedantic cosmology. He argues it out in many of his writings and lectures, trying constantly to show how one is either an alternative way of stating the other, or how scientific 'fact' verifies the Vedas, and vice versa.

In addition to the laws of constant conservation, he considers another "scientific law" to be of supreme importance, and again he treats it as a modern restatement of ancient Vedic Knowledge: this is the "law" of evolution. Characteristically
his interpretation is sufficiently loose to accommodate any possible differences between the Vedic and scientific versions of what, he seeks to argue, is essentially the same statement.

"You have heard of the doctrine of physical evolution preached in the Western world by the German and the English Savants. It tells us that the bodies of the different animals are really one; the differences that we see are but different expressions of the same series; that from the lowest worm to the highest and most saintly man it is but one—the one changing into the other, and so on, going up and up, higher and higher, until it attains perfection."22 (Pace Darwin!)

The theory of evolution, combined with that of constant conservation is expressed by Vivekananda as the Vedantic laws of cyclical procession. Within the desa-kala-nimitta there is an eternal process occurring, called pralaya and parinama. Pralaya is translated by Vivekananda as involution or atavism, or sometimes, contraction; Parinama as evolution or expansion. Since the effect is the cause in another form Vivekananda reasoned, then it must have existed in the cause. The pralaya, the contracting of higher into lower forms, precedes the parinama which is expansion or evolution into higher forms.

"From what does this evolution come, is the question. What was the seed? It was the same as the tree. All the possibilities of a future tree are in that seed; all the possibilities of a future man are in that little baby; all the possibilities of any future life are in the germ. What is this? The ancient philosophers of India called it involution. We find then that every evolution presupposes an involution . . . Here again, modern science comes to our help. You know by mathematical reasoning that the sum total of energy displayed in the universe is
This process of pralaya-parinama takes place within the eternal
time (kala) of kalpas and yugas—the cosmic cycles and ages.
Each kalpa had four yugas: satya yuga, treta yuga, dvapara yuga
and kali yuga.

"So this cycle is the evolution out of the
involution of the previous cycle, and this cycle
will again be involved, getting finer and finer, and
out of that will come the next cycle . . . Thus we
find that there is no creation in the sense that
something is created out of nothing. To use a
better word 'there is manifestation, and God is the
manifesteer of the universe."24

Thus, Vivekananda argues, the endless process of nature by
pralaya-parinama through the cycle of kalpa-yuga is bound by
desa-kala-nimitta, and the jiva is tied to this process by the
laws of Karma and Samsara. The law of Karma introduces the
element of responsibility into the causal framework, which
otherwise might appear completely arbitrary. Through Karma the
individual soul (jiva) is able to influence and partially control
its own destiny. "Each one of us is the maker of his own
fate."25 This is not to say that Vivekananda taught a doctrine
of sin: on the contrary he vehemently denied the possibility of
sinfulness in man, who after all is God.26 Karma is the
operation of nimitta (causation) in the journey of the soul
towards liberation (moksa or mukti). The nature of this journey
is Samsara, the cycle or rebirths, which ends only in the realization of Godhead.

"... each one of us is the effect of the infinite past; the child is ushered into the world not as something flashing from the hands of nature, as poets delight so much to depict, but he has the burden of an infinite past; for good or evil he comes to work out his own past deeds. That makes the differentiation. This is the law of Karma." 27

The acts that the jiva performs in any birth are recorded on the mind as impressions called samskaras, and the sum of these impressions is what we call a person's "character."

"The character of a man is what he had created for himself; it is the result of the mental and physical actions that he had done in his life. The sum total of the samskaras is the force which gives a man direction after death. A man dies, the body falls away and goes back to the elements; but the samskaras remain, adhering to the mind which, being made of fine material, does not dissolve, because the finer the material the more persistent it is." 28

All karma binds the jiva to the cycle of rebirths—both good and bad. If the jiva has "stored up" good karma through a life of good actions, but has failed to achieve mukti (perhaps because these actions were performed for selfish reasons—even to attain mukti) then he will be reborn as a god (a deva) in one of the innumerable heavens. But this, of course, is all still within the realm of desa-kala-nimitta, and therefore finite. The jiva who becomes a god in heaven has not thereby achieved mukti. But as a deva one does not make karma, one works it off, so that after the allotted span spent in heavenly enjoyment the deva dies
and is reborn again as man to strive once more for realization, to make more karma.

Similarly the jiva who accumulated bad karma through a life or lives spent in evil doing and thinking (e.g. a torturer who enjoys cruelty) will be reborn as a lower, animal form of life. Here again no karma is made, but the bad karma "worked out" so that after death the jiva may be reborn as man. But this "falling" to a lower state is rare, more normally "the animal is a state of sojourn for the jiva evolving from lower forms. In course of time the animal becomes man." So, as a result of past actions performed in previous lives, a jiva evolves (or "involves") in an eternal cycle of births and rebirths (samsara) that is without beginning or end, within the realm of karma (karmabhumi). Only as man is there possibility of escape, of moksha, so "man is greater than the gods."

Karma, then, is not evolution; in fact it prevents the final evolutionary step. The modern theories of evolution are only partly correct, because

"The two causes of evolution advanced by the moderns, viz. sexual selection and survival of the fittest, are inadequate... the true secret of evolution is the manifestation of the perfection which is already in every being; that this perfection has been barred and the infinite tide behind is struggling to express itself. These struggles and competitions [i.e. survival of the fittest, etc.--modern evolutionary theory] are but the results of our ignorance."
Modern science sees evolution as the struggle for perfection, but this struggle is the result of ignorance of the true nature and purpose of the universe. The Truth we do not see: what we see is Maya.

Maya, says Vivekananda, is frequently taken to mean illusion, which is incorrect. Some Buddhists, for example, who do not attribute any reality at all to external nature, understand maya in this sense. "... in the hands of the Buddhists it became very much like what is called Idealism, and that is the meaning that is now generally given to the word Maya."32 There is some basis to this belief, says Vivekananda, and indeed the scriptures can be quoted to support it. "But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts--what we are and what we see around us."33 To say that Maya is illusion is to imply that it does not exist, which is untrue. At the same time it would be mistaken to attribute true existence to Maya. Maya is the ignorant way in which we perceive what is real, through the senses.

"What does the statement of the existence of the world men, then? 'This world has no existence.' What is meant by that? It means that it has no absolute existence. It exists only in relation to my mind, to your mind, and to the mind of everyone else. We see this world with the five senses, but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had yet another sense, it would appear as something still different. It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor
can it be called non-existence, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence.  

And elsewhere:

God is the material cause of this universe, but not really, only apparently, the celebrated illustration used is that of the rope and the snake, where the rope appeared to be the snake, but was not really so. The rope did not really change into the snake. Even so, this whole universe as it exists is that Being. It is unchange, and all the changes we see in it are only apparent. These changes are caused by Desha, Kala- and Nimitta (space, time and causation) or, according to a higher psychological generalization, by Nama and Rupa (name and form). It is by name and form that one thing is differentiated from another. The name and form alone cause the difference. In reality they are one and the same. Again, it is not, the Vedantists say, that there is something as phenomenon and something as noumenon. The rope is changed into the snake apparently only; and when the delusion ceases the snake vanishes. When one is in ignorance, he sees the phenomenon and does not see God. When he sees God, this universe vanishes entirely for him. Ignorance, or Maya, as it is called, is the cause of all this phenomenon—the Absolute, the Unchangeable, being taken as this manifested universe. This Maya is not absolute zero, nor non-existence. It is defined as neither existence nor non-existence. It is not existence because that can be said only of the Absolute, the Unchangeable, and in this sense Maya is non-existence. Again it cannot be said it is non-existence; for if it were, it could never produce the phenomenon. So it is something which is neither; and in the Vedanta philosophy it is called Anirvacanitiya or inexpressible. Maya then, is the real cause of this universe. Maya gives the name and form to what Brahman, or God gives the material; and the latter seems to have been transformed into all this. The Advaitists, then, have no place for the individual soul. They say individual souls are created by Maya. In reality they cannot exist. If there were only one existence throughout, how could it be that I am one, and you are one, and so forth? We are all one, and the cause of evil is the perception of duality.
True reality, then, is One, but the universe we live in is manifested multiplicity, bound by desa-kala-nimitta. The universe as a mere manifestation has no true existence. One may well ask, then, what is the cause of this contradiction, how is it that what is really One appears as many, as caused, as limited. Vivekananda argues that this is not a real question—it has no meaning, because it can only be asked in terms of Maya; the question itself is Maya. In a lecture delivered in London in 1896 Vivekananda chalked a diagram on a blackboard, and offered the following explanation.

(a) The Absolute
(c)
Time
Space
Causation
(b) The Universe

"How has the Infinite, the Absolute, become the finite? . . . Here is the Absolute (a), and this is the Universe (b). The Absolute has become the Universe. By this is not only meant the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world—heavens and earths, and in fact, everything that exists. Mind is the name of a change, and body the name of another change, and so on, and all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by coming through time, space, and causation (c). This is the central idea of Advaita. Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and where It is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe. Now at once we gather from this that in the Absolute there is neither time, space nor causation. The idea of time cannot be there, seeing that there is no mind, no thought. The idea of
space cannot be there, seeing that there is no external change. What you call motion and causation cannot exist where there is only One . . . What we call causation begins after . . . the degeneration of the Absolute into the phenomenal and not before."  

Thus Vivekananda argues that questions as to why the Absolute is seen as the limited are meaningless. The questions are maya, within desa-kala-nimitta; the answer is One and therefore cannot be expressed, it can only be realized. Only when the jiva has achieved Mukti, escape from maya, when all appearance has been rejected and only the Absolute, God or Brahman, remains, will the answer to all questions be reached. For then the jiva will no longer exist; it will be the answer.

**Realization**

For Vivekananda, and all Vedantists, Realization is the goal of all life: it is at once the desire and the inevitable fate of all beings, according to the law of (spiritual) evolution. This state has been achieved by countless rishis through the ages, who reached it by mighty strivings in many lives. But by applying what is learned from an examination of the steps taken by these great men, it is possible to achieve mukti here and now, in one lifetime.

"Samadhi is the property of every human being—nay, every animal. From the lowest animal to the highest angel, some time or other, each one will have to come to that state . . . Each one of the steps to
This realization of the Absolute is described by Vivekananda as possible at two levels. The first of these is called Saguna Brahman which is realization of the One (non-dual) with attributes (gunas). To begin with this realization is an achievement of the mind, but the mind is bound by desa-kala-nimitta, and at best can reach only the conception of a personal God with attributes.

"The idea of a Personal God is the highest idea which man can have. All the attributes attributed to God are true in the same sense as are the attributes of nature. Yet we must never forget that the Personal God is the very Absolute seen through Maya." 38

It is, therefore, a true realization of the Absolute. But one must be clear on what Vivekananda meant by 'personal'.

"I want you to understand this word personal a little more. This word personal does not mean that God has a body, sits on a throne somewhere, and rules this world, but means Saguna, with qualities."

Almost all Hindu sects, and certainly ISKCON, believe this much, but Advaitist (non-dualists) believe something more.

"They believe in a still higher phase of this Personal God, which is personal-impersonal. No adjective can illustrate where there is no qualification, and the Advaitist would not give him any qualities except the three--Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute." 39
Nevertheless, taught Vivekananda, true realization is possible without reaching this higher, impersonal level. In which case Brahman may be viewed as:

"... a person, an individual, the infinite Mother of this universe—the God of gods—the Lord of lords, omnipresent yet separate from the universe—the Soul of souls, yet separate from every soul—the Mother of this universe, because She has produce it—its Ruler, because She guides it with the greatest love and in the long run brings everything back to Herself... She is the power of all causation... Her will is the only law, and as She cannot make a mistake, nature's laws—Her will—can never be changed. She is the life of the Law of Karma or causation."

Thus is the Absolute Being, "manifested in Its highest as Isvara, or the Supreme Ruler, as the highest and omnipotent Life or Energy," realized as One, Unity, in the form of Mother, a person. Ramakrishna himself achieved realization in this way (among others), and Vivekananda has been mistakenly considered by some as a sectarian devotee of Sakti, the Divine Mother.

This realization, however, is not entirely non-dual—it is vishishtadvaita, or qualified non-dualism. Ultimately this realization of Brahman with qualities must itself be transcended, and perfect advaita, Nirguna Brahman—Brahman without qualities—be realized. But this is an eschatological ideal, and Vivekananda's teaching of realization in 'stages'—from dvaita (dualism) to vishishtadvaita (qualified monism) ultimately to advaita (monism)—has important implications for what he called "practical Vedanta", the practise of Vedanta in the mundane world.
of daily life.

A rigid concentration on the ideal of advaita realized as Nirguna Brahman would make activity in the world impossible, and the Ramakrishna Mission a bar to liberation. But at the level of vishishtadvaita the Mission is the means to mukti.

As Saguna Brahman the One is realized with qualities, though only with those three that, according to Vedanta, are the essence of the Absolute: Existence-Knowledge-Bliss--Sat-Chit-Ananda. But the realization of Nirguna Brahman goes beyond even that, to the ultimate point at which "nothing can be predicated of It [Absolute] except Neti, Neti, "Not this, Not this." At this stage it is known that sat-cid-ananda are not qualities (gunas) of the Absolute, they are Its essence, and they are One.

"That knowledge itself is Vijnana, neither intuition, nor reason, nor instinct. The nearest expression for it is all-knowingness. There is no limit to it, no combination in it . . . Absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge, and absolute Blessedness are not qualities of the soul. And the three are one; we see the one thing in three different aspects. They are beyond all relative knowledge."

Therefore it is possible to say Tattvamasi "That thou art." The Personal God with qualities is negated--Neti, Neti--and so, therefore, is personal man. "Man is only apparently a person, but in reality he is the Impersonal Being" ultimately, the Advaita Vedantists believe, Man is God.

"To every man, this is taught: Thou art one with this Universal Being, and, as such, every soul that
exists is your soul; and every body that exists is your body; and in hurting any one, you hurt yourself. For I am the universe; this universe is my body. I am the Infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes.\textsuperscript{46}

But the paradox of Vedantic doctrine is that all these formulations must ultimately be denied, for the Absolute is not accessible to language (even one as obscure as Sanskrit) nor to thinking. Nirguna Brahman therefore, is not sat-cid-ananda, not om tat sat, not tattvamasi—"Neti, Neti, is the essential definition."\textsuperscript{47}

The Vaisnavite Cosmology of the Hare Krishnas

The characteristic feature of Medieval Hinduism is the massive upsurge and spread of theistic devotional movements, which came to influence the whole of Indian philosophy in the direction of theism and which gave impetus to the tradition of Vaisnavite bhakti. Unquestionably the most important literary sources of this movement were the two epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Following these were the Puranas, which describe many incarnations, the most important for the Hare Krishnas being the Bhagavata Purana which contains the story of Krishna and the adoring gopis, or cowherd girls, said to symbolize perfect loving service to Krishna.

There is one part of the Mahabharata which is of central concern, for it is the text which validates the bhakti-yoga of
which the Hare Krishna movement is an example; that is, of course, the Bhagavad-gita. This, as Zaehner puts it, is

... the watershed that separates the pantheistic monism of the Upanishads from the fervent theism of the later popular cults ... It is the sacred fount from which the popular cults of rapt devotion to God (whether it be Vishnu or Siva) naturally flow. 48

In this tradition, including such saints as Madhva, Ramanuja, Sankara and Caitanya, the authority restricted to the Veda in the orthodox Brahminic tradition, is, as mentioned above, extended beyond the Upanishads to include the Puranas, Mahabharata and Ramayana. "All these schools were markedly theistic and practised fervent devotion to God in the form of Krishna, the Lover Supreme." 49 The belief in the revealed nature of these scriptures follows, in fact, quite naturally from the belief in Krishna's being the Supreme Personality of Godhead; 50 and Caitanya, being his avatar, is accorded equal status. 51

The overall tendency in Hinduism, however, is towards absorption of new elements, and the popularity of the Bhagavad-gita has led many scholars over the centuries to find a place for it in their interpretations of Brahminic Vedantism, so that even the advaitin Sankara accepted the validity of Krishna, though he relegated him to a lower position than the impersonal, qualityless Brahma. Thus it is possible for a Ramakrishna advaitin, or even a Brahmin advaitin to give devotion to Krishna or Visnu, or Siva or other deities. Vaisnavism, then, although
it is not Brahminic orthodoxy, is an ancient and widely accepted tradition in Hinduism, and cannot be understood in the same way as, for example, a protestant sect in the Christian tradition. There are no counter-reformations in Hinduism; on the contrary the reaction to (even radically) new departures is to find some means of absorbing rather than rejecting them.

Caitanya's Vaisnavism combines in one philosophy elements of monism and dualism. The Brahman of the Vedas (Upanishads) is simple reality. One, attributeless, absolute. Caitanya teaches that this is only one facet of Reality, the whole Reality being Brahman with Attributes, which is Krishna in its personal form; and Brahman is the aura, the halo of Krishna, which includes the whole of material existence, (and, as it appears to men, covered by illusion or sense-gratification, it is called maya.) Krishna-Brahman has an infinite number of powers (sakti) which are both separate from and the same as Krishna. Thus the Hare Krishnas believe that Krishna is the universe in the sense that the universe is a manifestation of his energy, yet he transcends it, is unaffected by it. The material universe is created by his inferior power (maya-sakti), living creatures by his marginal energy (jiva-sakti), and he resides in living nature as Supersoul, life principle. He has the power to appear as avatar at points in history. He even resides in images as the object of worship of his devotees. Krishna's original form is believed by the ISKCON devotees to be that of the cowherd deity of Vrindavan,
and it is chiefly through the scriptural account of his life and lilas (amusements, pastimes) at Vrindavan that his devotees may become intimate with him. Thus Bhaktivedanta taught, although he is in everything, he transcends everything, and although he transcends everything, he responds to every fleeting desire and thought of his devotees, dancing on every tongue that chants the mahamantra.

This ability to take any form allows Krishna to be seen in many different deities and avatars—ultimately to be identified with every "true" manifestation in Hindu scripture and history. He is at once creator (Brahman), preserver (Visnu) and destroyer (Siva) of all the universes. Since Krishna is All in All, the One, Vaisnavism is able to reconcile the dualism of Sankhya and the yogas, with the non-dualism of Vedantism, and considers them as merely steps on the way to true liberation, which is consciousness of holy, loving fellowship with Krishna. The bhakti-yoga, the "practice of devotion", is the means to achieving this goal of Krishna consciousness.

Krishna, therefore, incorporates elements of three traditional Hindu schools: first the Brahman of Sankara's non-dualism; second, Paramatman, the highest, transcendental self, the 'real' self as opposed to the illusory material body. This is the principle of life in every living entity. Third is the Personal Deity, characterized by love, beauty and wisdom. These three elements of Hindu religious tradition have three
corresponding attributes; sat, chit and ananda. Sat is the realization of impersonal being, chit the realization of his knowledge, and ananda is the realization of bliss, the "ocean of rasa" as the scriptures say. The last of these, ananda, in its true and complete form is believed to subsume the other two. The bliss of the completely realized soul is therefore oneness with Krishna, or Krishna consciousness. This principle of bliss is in all mankind, as Krishan is in all living things, but covered by illusion, maya, it appears as mere sensual pleasure, or sense experience—especially eroticism.

Each of these attributes has a corresponding power. Sandhini is the power to produce all existence, samvit is power over all spiritual relationships, all 'true' affections, and hladini, the most important, is the power to enjoy and to give joy. Hladini is manifested in the person of Krishna's consort Radha, who is the personalization of Krishna's love for himself.

As well as being manifest generally in creation the devotees believe, Krishna is manifest particularly in his expansions. There are great numbers of expansions of Krishna, and it is unnecessary to go into all of them here, but the nature of expansions in the Vaisnavite tradition must be briefly outlined. Krishna's total essence, his highest nature (sva-rupa), is apparent in three major forms. The first of these, svayam-rupa represents his selfhood or self-existence. The second, tadekatma-rupa, is the same in essence but different in
appearance; it is a hypostatic form. The third kind of expansion is called ahesa, which refers to Krishna's possession of a living entity. When Krishna was dancing with the gopis, he appeared individually to each of them, as if he were dancing with her alone: these expansions were an example of multiple svayam-rupa. Another example is his simultaneous marriage to 16,108 wives. Caitanya himself is an example of tadekatma-rupa, as is any other plenary avatar. The third type of expansion is exemplified by Visnu's inspiration of Vyasa to compose the sacred texts: he was an ahesa avatar.

Each of these divisions is subject to subdivision almost endlessly, a typical feature of this kind of Hindu theology. The ISKCON devotees hold the cowherd manifestation of Krishna in the highest veneration. In this form, tending cows and engaging in erotic games with Radha and the cowherdesses, or gopis, he is often called Govinda. They regard Caitanya as the embodiment of both Radha and Krishña, who are one but separated for Krishna's pleasure, and that being in order to understand himself as Krishna through Radha he united with her as Caitanya. However, Bhaktivedanta teaches that with all these numerous expansions of the original Krishna of Vrindavan there is no difference in reality between Krishna and the expansions, only a difference in form.

Krishna is believed to act in creation through three Purushas--translated by Bhaktivedanta as "Enjoyer, Male."
The highest Purusha is Visnu, the supersoul in all living entities, the Supreme Person—i.e., Krishna. These three Purushas are the three manifestations of Visnu, (Maha-visnu). The first Purusha (Karanodaksayi Visnu) is the uncaused Cause, and sits beyond the highest spiritual level in the cosmic ocean. In this form he is the creator of Mahat, the principle of intelligence, the senses, the elements, etc. He becomes the cause of the universe when his gaze is turned on maya, Krishna's inferior energy. Where he lies in the causal ocean, Maha-visnu breathes through every pore, and from each innumerable universes come to be. Every exhalation produces the Brahma (creator and god) of each universe, and every inhalation swallows them up again. The second Purusha (Garbodaksayi Visnu) lies in the middle ocean. A lotus flower springs from his navel, and out of this lotus comes Brahma who creates the world. The Purusha who creates (Visnu) also destroys in his capacity as Siva. The third Purusha (Kshirodaksayi Visnu) lies in the ocean of milk, and is the supersoul in all living beings.

At creation the Vaisnavites teach, a halo appears which is Siva, the masculine symbol of Visnu, the symbol of masculine potency in the creation of the world. The symbol of feminine productivity is maya, and the intercourse between these two produces the perverted faculty of cognition in creation, which is only a reflection of the creative desire of the Supreme Lord, Maya's productive organ is merely a shadow of Roma, the divine
energy of Visnu. Mankind, therefore, is said to exist in a "conditioned state," a perversion of the spiritual energy of Krishna. As the jivas--i.e. parts of the Oversoul--realize their true state as eternal servants of Krishna, they will cease to have any relationship with the mundane world, will be liberated. The world is only a manifestation (temporary) of Krishna's lower energy, and Nature, though true Reality, is covered by maya, and so all things which man may be aware of, the sensory and cognitive universe of man, are only maya. But they are also Krishna's energy and therefore reflections of his prakriti (nature), though of course perverted.53

In the Vaisnavite Cosmology Visnu exhales the creation, which lasts for four billion, three hundred million years, and then All is inhaled, all universes, Brahmas, living beings material worlds, etc. Then follows the night of Brahma54 which lasts for millions more years, until Visnu's next breath gives birth once more to the Brahmas and thus all creation. All ISKCON devotees, indeed all Vaisnavites, believe however, that those who had achieved Krishna Consciousness in the previous creation are not reborn but were transferred at the time of death to Goloka Vrindavan in Vaikuntha, which is eternal, and where they live in eternal bliss with the supreme Personality of Godhead.

Goloka is the supreme abode of Lord Krishna, an infinitely desirable residence. It has many palaces made of touchstone, trees called "desire trees" that supply any kind of food on
request, and cows known as surabhis which give a limitless supply of milk. In this place the Lord is served by hundreds of thousands of goddesses of fortune (Laksmis), and he is called Govinda, the primal Lord and the Cause of all causes. Krishna is portrayed as infinitely beautiful; he wears a "garland round his neck and a peacock feather in his hair." This abode is described as the "ultimate destination" and when one reaches it one never returns to the material world. "Krishna's supreme abode and Krishna are non-different, being the same quality."55

Goloka Vrindavana is a manifestation of Krishna's higher energy, while the material worlds are products of his lower energy. It is beyond the material planets, beyond even Brahma-loka, the home of the Brahma. If one does not attain Vaikuntha, the spiritual planetary system of which Goloka is the highest planet, then one's fate is rebirth, disease, old age and death--the lot of material life--no matter what planet one is born on, no matter what body one is born with: if, that is, one does not achieve Krishna Consciousness. The form and the place of reincarnation depend on Karma, that is on the acts performed in previous lives. Thus a man may be reborn as a man or a demigod, or a beast, insect, plant, microbe, etc. Where a person is reborn depends especially on the nature of his acts of worship. For example Bhaktivedanta translates chapter seven, text twenty-three of the Bhagavad-gita as follows:
Men of small intelligence worship the demigods, and their fruits are limited and temporary. These who worship the demigods go to the planets of the demigods, but My devotees ultimately reach My supreme planet.

Bhaktivedanta goes on to say that those who worship the sun go to the sun, those who worship the demigod of the moon go to the moon and so on. But of course all these will be inhaled by Visnu and will vanish, while Goloka is eternal.

The Bhagavad-gita

One of the most important, if not the most important, scriptural source for ISKCON is the Bhagavad-gita. Although there are numerous translations of this work available in English (and other languages) only one is acceptable to the ISKCON members, which is Bhaktivedanta's of course. He claims that other translations are not true translations at all, but products of philosophical speculation, or, "to fulfill someone's personal ambition." Thus he calls his version of the Bhagavad-gita, Bhagavad-gita As It Is. What follows is my attempt to present a brief summary of Bhaktivedanta's teaching from the gita. In doing this, of course, I am engaging in precisely that mental speculation which he condemns for I am far from being a realized soul; for a "true" understanding, then, you must read his book, and join his movement.
Bhaktivedanta stresses the importance of disciplic succession, claiming on the authority of the Bhagavad-gita itself that the gita can only be understood if interpreted by an authoritative source in direct line from Arjuna himself. The book is believed to be a vebatim report of a conversation between Krishna and his friend Arjuna which took place on the battlefield of Kuruksetra, just before battle was joined. Krishna tells Arjuna that this system of yoga, the Bhagavad-gita, was first spoken to the sun-god, who explained it to Manu, who in turn explained it to others, setting up a disciplic succession. But in course of time the succession was broken and the true knowledge lost: therefore the Lord in his mercy will speak it again to Arjuna. Arjuna is the recipient of this supreme secret because he is a true devotee of the Lord, and all who would learn this knowledge should be like Arjuna.

There are five ways in which one may relate to Krishna as a devotee.

1. One may be a devotee in a passive state.
2. One may be a devotee in an active state.
3. One may be a devotee as a friend.
4. One may be a devotee as a parent.
5. One may be a devotee as a conjugal lover.
Arjuna's relationship with Krishna was as a friend, but not merely in the mundane sense of friendship; this relationship was transcendental. So, says Bhaktivedanta in order to understand the gita it is necessary to approach it "in a spirit of devotion", considering Krishna to be "at least theoretically" the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and adopting "a submissive spirit", for without this attitude the great mystery of the Bhagavad-gita will never be understood.59

Krishna, his worshippers claim, is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the Supreme Controller of the universe; he is isvara. The living entities in the universe are described as controlled; they are called jivas, and their true nature is spiritual. Krishna controls everything, including material nature, or prakriti. Now the jivas are said to be accepted by Krishna as "His parts and parcels"—spiritual living beings with all the qualities of God in miniature. So we, who are jivas, try to be isvara, controllers of material nature, even space and the planets. "This tendency to control is there because it is in Krishna."60

Material nature is called inferior prakriti, while the living entities are superior prakriti. Prakriti, whether inferior or superior, is always controlled by the Lord; she is female, and is subject to the Lord as a wife to her husband. Prakriti is composed of three qualities, or has three modes (gunas): the mode of goodness, the mode of passion, the mode of
ignorance. Above these three modes is eternal time, and the combination of these modes of nature in time (i.e., subject to the restrictions of time) is the activity of history, or karma. These activities have been carried out since the beginning, and subject to karma we reap the benefits or sufferings they give rise to. Thus Bhaktivedanta sets out five major concepts:

The Supreme Lord, Controller (Isvara)
The living entities, controlled (jivas)
Nature, higher and lower (prakriti)
Eternal time
Activity (karma)

The first four of these are eternal Bhaktivedanta says. Prakriti, although covered with maya and therefore illusory, is only illusion in its manifestations, which are temporary. Bhaktivedanta likens it to a cloud that moves across the sky and is gone. It is temporary, but the "cycle is working eternally." In other words any particular manifestation of material nature is temporary and illusory, but nature itself, as an emanation of the Supreme Godhead, is as eternal as He is. Karma, however, is not eternal, for we can change the results of our Karma, depending on the perfection of our knowledge and our level of Krishna Consciousness.
Bhaktivedanta believed, in common with all Vaisnavites, that the whole of existence apart from Krishna is a part or product of his energy—prakriti. But material nature and the living entities are different, for while the latter are conscious the former is not. Jiva prakriti is thus considered superior to the rest, for the nature of the Godhead is Supreme Consciousness, and jivas as conscious beings partake of the divine nature, though of course supreme consciousness is impossible for them. The consciousness of the jiva is limited by his or her individual, bodily existence, while the consciousness of the Lord is unlimited in any way. As creator and maintainer, controller and enjoyer, he lives in every jiva, while the jiva, thinking he is free, decides to act this way or that way, becomes trapped and confused by karma, and enters body after body through reincarnation, as one would change old clothes. When the jiva is in the mode of goodness it is possible the devotees believe, to reach a level of understanding which will show him what activities to do to escape the wheel of rebirths; if he does so then he is freed from his karma.

Consciousness is transcendental, the Vaisnavites teach, both jiva and isvara, but that of jiva is contaminated by materiality. Were it uncontaminated and pure the actions of jivas would accord perfectly with isvara and bring immediate bliss. Contaminated by material forms our consciousness is conditioned. We perceive ourselves, says Bhaktivedanta, as a part of material
nature, -- "the bodily conception of life" -- and the purpose of the Bhagavad-gita is to liberate us from these misconceptions, to give us mukti. "Mukti means liberation from the contaminated consciousness of this material world and situation in pure consciousness." Pure consciousness means living according to the instructions of the Lord, but this is difficult because our consciousness is affected by the three modes of inferior nature. But Krishna is never affected and therein lies the difference between human consciousness and Supreme Consciousness.

The Supreme Consciousness is controller and enjoyer, and since man's consciousness is part of Supreme Consciousness man falsely sees himself as controller and enjoyer of material world. But the real position of man is as controlled and enjoyed, and man's role is to cooperate with the Lord for His enjoyment. Only in this cooperation can there be fulfillment for mankind.

"The central figure of creation and of enjoyment is the Supreme Lord, and the living entities are cooperators. By cooperation they enjoy. The relation is also like that of the master and the servant. If the master is fully satisfied then the servant is satisfied. Similarly the Supreme Lord should be satisfied, although the tendency to become the creator and the tendency to enjoy the material world are there also in the living entities because these tendencies are there in the Supreme Lord who has created the manifested cosmic world." Impersonal Brahman, considered by many Hindus to be the Absolute Godhead, is believed by Vaisnavites to be only a partial realization. The true Godhead is called "sac-cid-ananda-vigraha", which is broken down into:
Sat - Being (Impersonal Brahma)
Cit - Eternal Knowledge (Paramatma)
Ananda - Bliss
Vigraha - Form

According to Bhaktivedanta the true nature of man and all living entities is "servitors of Krishna," but because of entanglements through karma with the modes of passion and ignorance, man has forgotten his true nature. Thus, although Krishna continually gives instruction on how to act, material conditioning causes man to act sinfully; it is an obstacle to the grace of Krishna. Only through surrender to a true spiritual master in the disciplic succession can one remove these obstacles and achieve salvation. Salvation is achieved when one has obtained freedom from the cycle of rebirths, and entered the eternal realm of Krishna in the spiritual sky—the eternal planet of bliss, Krishnaloka in Vaikuntha. This is believed to occur when one's whole being is concentrated on Krishna at the time of material death, and this is only possible if the time of material life is devoted to that end. This, says Bhaktivedanta, is the purpose of Vedantic literature; it is the science of God, the description of true, transcendental reality, and the instructions for living a Krishna conscious life. This does not mean that normal activities in the world should be abandoned, but that they should be performed only as service for Krishna, in a state of Krishna Consciousness. The activities will appear the same as
ever to the ignorant, but will in fact be transformed by dedication to Krishna.68

Lord Caitanya, Bhaktivedanta points out, advised us to chant the names of Krishna, and this is what he meant. The names of Krishna are non-different from Krishna; to remember the holy names is to remember the Lord. Bhaktivedanta tells us we must be like a woman who loves a man who is not her husband. She will think of him all the time as she works, and will even be more efficient in her work so that he husband will not suspect. "Similarly we should always remember the Supreme Lover, Sri Krishna, and at the same time perform our material duties very nicely."69 Our real activities are in our consciousness, our bodily work simply follows from that. Thus if we are Krishna conscious then all our bodily activities will be automatically engaged in his service.

But "The senses are so strong and impetuous, O Arjuna, that they forcibly carry away the mind even of a man of discrimination who is endeavoring to control them."70 However we can learn to control the mind from one (a true guru) who has already succeeded—such a one as Bhaktivedanta himself. The mind can rest in the vibrations of the sound of the holy names, the mahamantra, and the guru is he who will show one how.

This is, according to Bhaktivedanta, the teaching of the Bhagavad-gita, and "the doors of the knowledge are open for everyone. No one is barred out. All classes of men can approach
the Lord by thinking of Him, for hearing and thinking of Him is possible for everyone." 71

The Vaisnavites teach that the true nature of man is spiritual; he is a living entity, a part of the Supersoul which is Krishna. But man is in a conditioned state for he has a material body, which although it is real is covered with illusion. As Supersoul in each living entity Krishna is the controller, directing man's actions for His own pleasure. But He allows a degree of freedom, He has given man free will to choose what mode of life he wishes. Each choice, however, has attendant results which are inevitable; this is the doctrine of karma. Man's soul is trapped in material existence, and materiality is viewed as having three modes or gunas, namely goodness, passion and ignorance, which are under the control of eternal time. The combination of these modes in time is said to cause activities, and the nature of the combination to determine the nature of the activities. The mode of goodness, for instance, is purest and gives rise to non-sinful activities, which make happiness and knowledge possible. But these in turn may be the trap which keeps one from liberation. The mode of passion leads to the frantic pursuit of material pleasures such as wealth, a wife and home, or fame among men. The mode of ignorance is the lowest and leads to madness and despair, with a good chance of rebirth in
"the hellish worlds and the animal kingdom."72

In this conditioned life, then, a man may be happy or miserable according to his karma, but always he is in bondage. However, in His mercy, the devotees declare, the Supersoul is continually giving instructions on how to act so as to be free, but deceived by maya and controlled by karma the living entity becomes confused, forgets the instructions and even his own decisions and so is frustrated. The wheel of incarnations spins on, the living entity moves through birth after birth, until a time arrives when, fast in the mode of goodness, he decides to end his bondage and takes the path of bhakti to eternal liberation. In the cosmology of the ISKCON devotees this is the nature and the fate of man.

According to the scriptures, but, it was not so in the beginning. Originally men lived in bliss on the heavenly planets of Vaikuntha, created there by Krishna as expansions of Himself (jivas) so that by loving Him they might increase His spiritual bliss. But to love Him they must have the will to love, in other words a measure of free will. Now free will says Bhaktivedanta, to be rightly used must be used with knowledge, and because of his meager power man was swayed by ignorance. As a result the love for Krishna was perverted into lust. In this state man forgot his original nature, thinks he is his material body, and also the controller and enjoyer of material reality. In the Vaisnava faith, then, man's fall was caused not by willful and
conscious rebellion as in Christianity, but by ignorance and forgetfulness. This situation urges man in two directions; to ultimate surrender at the lotus feet of Krishna, but also to independence, control and sense-gratification.

The grace to overcome the material urge and surrender to Krishna is believed to be constantly available in the person of a pure devotee of Krishna such as Caitanya or Bhaktivedanta. What is necessary is to overcome the obstacles to receiving the grace, to accept it and receive Krishna Consciousness. This done there will be no attachment to materiality; no need to associated with those people who have material ambitions; no need for more than the necessary minimum for physical life; no interest in wives, family or money; there will be peace, calm, universal love, and a true consciousness of reality—Krishna Consciousness, the original state of man. To reach this state however, the devotees believe that it is first necessary to surrender to a pure, bona fide spiritual master, such a one as Swami Bhaktivedanta. He will give the necessary guidance to lead one "back to Godhead", and if all efforts, thoughts and love are devoted to following his guidance and keeping his discipline, the devotees are sure they will become more and more purified, closer and closer to the original state of loving Krishna, as Krishna Consciousness is progressively realized.
FOOTNOTES


2. Letters of Swami Vivekananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, p. 11.

3. Ibid.


7. Vivekananda, The Complete Works, Vol. II, p. 140. "Sri Ramakrishna used to say that the Avataras alone can descend to the ordinary plane from that state of Samadhi, for the good of the world. Ordinary jivas do not; immersed in that state they remain alive for a period of 21 days; after that, their body drops like a sere leaf from the tree of Samsara (world)" [1898].


9. Ibid., p. 81.


16. Ibid., p. 461.

17. In the anonymous editorial preface to *The Science and Philosophy of Religion*, a brief publication of Vivekananda's lectures before a class in New York early in 1896, the editor explains why he has substituted the Sanskrit "Prakriti" for Vivekananda's "Nature". "In the editor's humble opinion there is no English equivalent for the Sanksrit word, and "Nature" can never be one. For the idea connoted by it is the finished result of what is connoted by the word Prakiti. Prakiti, therefore, can never mean Nature, but the primal elements, and forces which form the materials for the creation of the universe. Prakiti is the cause of which Nature is the effect, or out of which Nature is being produced. "Primal matter and energy held in equilibrium" or "the latent condition of primal matter and energy" expresses the idea aright". *Udbodham Office Calcutta*, 1964, pp. ii-iii.


24. Ibid., p. 427.


26. "Silly fools tell you that you are sinners, and you sit down in a corner and weep. It is foolishness, wickedness, downright rascality to say that you are sinners! You are all God." Ibid., Vol. II, p. 237.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p. 255.

29. In a conversation with Swami Bhaskarananda of the Seattle Center, he told me that it is possible for one who likes meat but cannot get enough--say a hunter in a primitive society--craves meat for much of his life, to be reborn as a meat-eating animal to work off the Karma of those cravings.
31. Ibid., p. 392.
32. Ibid., p. 89.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 91.
37. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 188.
38. Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 158.
41. Ibid., Vol. V, p. 437.
42. Vivekananda maintained that the Mother was his specially chosen deity, his Istadeva.
44. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 459.
47. Ibid., Vol. VIII, p. 362.
49. de Bary, op. cit., p. 302.
51. For a rebuttal of Bhaktivedanta's position see Agehananda Bharati, "Hare Krishna Vs. Shiva Shiva" in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 17, 1974.


56. Ibid., pp. 395-396.

57. Ibid., preface p. XII.


59. Ibid., p. 6.

60. Ibid., p. 8.

61. Ibid., p. 6.

62. Ibid., p. 11.

63. Ibid., p. 370.

64. Ibid., p. 12.

65. It is so considered in the tradition of Jnana-marga, the path of intellectual knowledge, in which the yogi strives to become one with the impersonal and absolute Brahman. In the Vaisnavite tradition this path is considered inferior to Bhakti-marga, the path of devotion, especially in this age of Kali-yuga.


67. Ibid., p. 130.


71. Ibid., p. 27.

This glossary may be compared with A Ramakrishna-Vedanta Wordbook, and the glossaries of many Hare Krishna publications, especially Bhaktivedanta's glossary to Bhagavad-gita As It Is. Some of the following terms have different meanings to the two groups concerned, in which cases two or more definitions are given, and those appropriate to only one group are indicated by the relevant initials in parenthesis at the end. i.e. (HK)-Hare Krishnas, (RM)-Ramakrishna Movement. Definitions which are acceptable to both are not initialled.

ACHARYA (ACARYA)
A spiritual teacher. Often, added to the name of a revered spiritual master. eg. Shankaracharya.

ANANDA
Pure, absolute, or transcendental bliss. Following the monastic order of Shankara, Ramakrishna Vedanta monks add this to the sannyasins' names. eg. Vivekananda.

ARATRIKA or ARATI
1. A ceremonial waving of lights before a deity or holy person.
2. The ceremonial worship of Krishna deities. (HK)
ASHRAMA, ASHRAM (ASRAMA)
1. A center of religious study, a retreat, heritage or monastery.
2. One of the four stages of life according to Vedic teachings: Brahmacharya, grihastha, Vanaprastha, sannyas.

ATMAN
The Spirit or Self, the immanent aspect of Godhead. (RK)
The Self (refers sometimes to the soul, sometimes to the body, and sometimes to the senses) (HK).

AVATAR, AVATARA
A divine incarnation. Born by free choice, not through Karma.
Has a mission for the spiritual benefit of mankind.

BABU
Mister, or esquire. Placed after the name. eg. Girish Babu.

BHAGAYAD-GITA, OR THE GITA
"Song of God". Dated between the 5th and 2nd Centuries B.C., the Gita, which comprises 18 chapters, is part of the Mahabharata. It is the principle scriptural source for the Hare Krishnas.

BHAKTA
A devotee of God.
BHAKTI
Devotion to God.

BHAKTI-YOGA
The path of devotion; the systematic cultivation of Bhakti. The cultivation of intense love for God in personal form, usually as a divine incarnation. For the Hare Krishnas, it refers only to worship of Krishna.

BRAHMA
God in the aspect of Creator of the universe. Usually represented with four faces and four arms, holding Vedic symbols.

BRAHMACHARI (fem. BRAHMACHARINI)
1. A spiritual aspirant who has taken the first monastic vows.
2. One devoted to celibacy and other religious practices in observance of the first stage of life according to Vedic teachings.

BRAHMACHARYA
1. [A vow of] strict abstinence from sexual indulgence.
2. First initiation into religious life; status of one so initiated.
3. The celibate student stage of life.
BRAHMAN
The Impersonal absolute Existence, or Godhead (RK). The all-pervading impersonal aspect of Krishna; the Supreme Personality of Godhead (HK).

CHELA
Disciple of a Guru, often also serving the Guru's material needs by begging on his behalf, etc.

DEVA (fem. DEVI)
A god, or semi-divine being. May be added to the name of a revered person to connote reverence or respect. eg. Caitanya Deva, Sarada Devi.

DHARMA
Lit., "that which holds your true nature." May denote merit, truth, morality, religious duty, or the way of life a man's nature imposes on him. (RK)
The capacity to render service which is the essential quality of a human being (HK).

DHOTI
A male Hindu's wearing-cloth; a long piece of material worn around the waist, and often drawn up between the legs to form baggy "trousers."
DIKSHA, DIKSA
Initiation of an aspirant into spiritual life by a guru.

DVAITA
The philosophy of dualism in which man (as creature) and God (as creator) are considered separate from each other. The Hare Krishnas are Dvaitists.

EKADASI (EKADASHI)
A day of fasting and special prayer, celebrated on the eleventh day of each new moon, both waxing and waning. Kept religiously by the Hare Krishnas.

GANGA
Sanskrit and Bengali word for the river Ganges, preferred by the Ramakrishna Movement and the Hare Krishnas to the usual English equivalent.

GERUA
1. The ochre color, symbol of renunciation.
2. The ochre robe of sannyasis and sannyasinis.

GHAT
A place, often with steps, where people descend to a river or lake, usually for bathing. Burning ghats are reserved for
cremation, the water being used for purification, and often for disposal of the ashes.

GOPA
A cowherd boy of Vrindavan. The gopas were playmates and devotees of Krishna.

GOPI
A milkmaid of Vrindavan. The gopis were companions and devotees of Krishna. Their erotic play was symbolic of the most intense divine love.

GAYATRI
1. The sacred Vedic mantra recited daily be every orthodox Hindu boy who has gone through the Upanaya ceremony. (RM)
2. A transcendental vibration chanted by the duly qualified twice-born classes for spiritual realization. This mantra is secret. (HK)

GOSWAMI
A vaisnava priest.

GURU
A spiritual teacher. A qualified guru is, ideally, an illumined soul, or well-advanced on the religious path. The guru is
responsible for the spiritual life of his disciples and leads them to salvation. (RK)
A spiritual master (HK).

GURUBHAI (fem. GURUBHAGINI)
BHAI means "brother", thus a brother-disciple, one initiated by the same Guru.

HOMA
Vedic ceremony in which oblations are offered into a fire made to scriptural injunctions. Fire is the visible manifestation of the deity worshiped. Homa is a ritual of inner purification. Often forms part of other ceremonials. eg. Marriage, initiation.

ISHTA
The aspect of the Godhead selected by a spiritual aspirant, or by his guru. Through meditation on the chosen Ideal the aspirant gradually attains concentration of the mind, and ultimately illumination. (RM)

JAPA
Practice of repeating one of God's names, usually one's own mantra, often counting on a rosary. (RM)
Soft chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra, counting on a rosary of 108 beads. (HK)
JIVA
The individual soul or human self; the atomic living entity.

JIVANMUHTI
The attainment of liberation and realization of God, while living in the body.

JNANA-YOGA
The path of Knowledge. By analysing and rejecting all transitory phenomena, the aspirant comes at last to Brahman, and realizes his union with Impersonal Godhead. (RM)

The predominantly empirical process of linking with the Supreme which is executed when one is still attached to mental speculation. (HK)

KALI YUGA
The age of quarrel, the fourth and last age in the cycle of a Maha-Yuga. This is the present age. It lasts 432,000 years, of which 5,000 have already passed. (HK)

Some people believe this is the present age. (RM)

KARMA
A mental or physical act; the consequences of such an act; the sum of the consequences of such acts in this and previous lives.
KARMA YOGA
The path of selfless work, every action and its results being offered to God as a sacrament. (RM)
Action in devotional service. Action performed by one who knows that the goal of life is Krishna, but is addicted to the fruits of his activities. (HK)

KIRTAN, KIRTANA
Devotional singing or chanting; glorification of the Supreme Lord.

MAHA
Prefix meaning "great".

MAHABHARATA
Hindu epic poem, about 110,000 couplets long, including the BHAGAVAD-GITA. Composed by Vyasa in approximately 5,000 B.C., describing the dynastic wars between King Bharata's successors.

MAHASAMADHI
"The great samadhi", or superconscious state. Nearly always refers to the final absorption in the Divine of an illumined soul when the body is given up at death.
MANTRA, MANTRAM

1. The particular name of God, corresponding to the Chosen Ideal of the disciple, with which he is initiated by his guru.

The mantra is one with God. (RM)

2. Sacred word, verse, or Vedic hymn.

3. Pure sound vibration to deliver the mind from its material inclinations.

MATH

A monastery.

MAYA

1. Power of Brahman; united, maya and Brahman constitute Ishvara, the Personal God, Creator.

2. Ignorance, Cosmic Illusion, whereby man perceives the manifold universe instead of one Reality. (RM)

3. Energy of Krishna's which deludes the living entity into forgetfulness of the Supreme Lord. (HK)

MOKSHA, MUHTI

Final liberation from Karma and rebirth; freedom from material consciousness.
MRIDANGA

Barrel-shaped Indian drum, about two or three feet long, with a drum skin on each end, both played simultaneously.

NAM, NAMA

Name, name of god.

NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI

Lit., "changeless samadhi." Supreme state of transcendental consciousness, in which the aspirant becomes completely absorbed in God, so that all sense of duality is obliterated. (RM)

ON, AUM, OMKARA

Sacred syllable representing the Impersonal Absolute as well as the Personal aspect of God. (RM)

Sacred syllable representing Krishna. (HK)

PANDIT, PUNDIT

Scholar, learned in the scriptures.

PRASAD, PRASADAM

Food, or other gift, ceremonially offered to God or saintly person; afterwards given to devotees. (RM)

Food offered to Krishna, which thus becomes spiritual and can purify the living entity. (HK)
PUJA
Hindu ritual worship.

PUJARI (fem. PUJARINI)
One who performs ritualistic worship. The western Hare Krishnas use the male form for both male and female directors of ceremony.

RAJA YOGA
Lit., "Royal Yoga". The path of formal meditation, a method of concentrating the mind one-pointedly on the ultimate Reality until complete absorption is achieved. (RM)

RAMA
Ramachandra-devine incarnation as king of Ayodhya, hero of the Ramayana.
Name of the Absolute Truth as the source of unlimited pleasure transcendent. (HK)

RAMANUJA
Celebrated philosopher-saint of South India, 1017-1137, the founder of Vishistadvaita.

RAMAYANA
Earliest Sanskrit Epic poem, written by the sage Valmiki. Estimated date about 500 B.C. Describes the life of Rama.
RISHI
A saint or seer.

SADHANA
The practice of spiritual disciplines, usually in accordance with specific scriptural injunctions.

SADHU
A holy man, especially a monk, or sannyasi.

SAMADHI
Superconscious state, trance, in which man experiences his identity with the ultimate Reality; absorption in consciousness of God. (RM)
Absorption in Consciousness of Krishna. (HK)

SANATANA
Eternal.

SANYAS, SANYASA
1. The monastic life dedicated to the practice of total renunciation of self and all earthly ties. The last of the four life stages—ASHRAMAS.
2. Initiation during which the monastic aspirant takes final vows of renunciation; status of one having taken such vows.
SANNYASI, SANNYASIN (fem. SANNYASINI)
One who has taken the final vows of renunciation.
In the Hare Krishna movement women are considered unsuited to
sannyasm and barred from it.

SHANTI
Peace.

SHLOKA, SLOKA
A verse of Sanskrit scripture—specifically a couplet.

SHRUTI, SRUTI
Scriptural teaching regarded by Hindus as directly revealed by
God to man, i.e. the Vedas.

SMRITI
Auxiliary scripture, explaining and elaborating the SHRUTI.
Delivered originally by MANU, Vajnavalkya and other inspired
legislators they are the body of traditional Hindu law. They
were later committed to writing from memory.

SHRI, SRI
Lit., "Revered" or "Holy"—used as a prefix to honor a deity, holy
person or sacred book Also Hindu equivalent of "Mr.".
SVABA, SWABA
Uttered after the offering of an oblation: it means "so be it," and is roughly equivalent to "Amen".

SVAMI, SWAMI
Lord, master, spiritual teacher; a title of the Hindu monk.
One who can control his mind and senses. (HK)

UPANAYANA
Investiture with the sacred thread and initiation in the Gayatri Mantra. This ceremony makes him a full participant in the Hindu faith, and thereafter he is permitted to perform ritual worship. In Bengal, only brahmin boys receive the sacred thread. (RM)
Investiture of the male devotee with the sacred thread, and initiation into the personal, secret Gayatri mantra. This ceremony make the qualified devotee a brahmin and priest of the Hare Krishna movement. (HK)

VRINDAVAN, BRINDAVAN
The site of Krishna's transcendental village pastimes, exhibited when he was present on earth about 5,000 years ago. (HK)
A town in Uttar Pradesh associated with the childhood of Shri Krishna. (RM)
YUGA

One of the four ages into which the duration of the world is divided according to Hindu mythology. They are satya (or Kritha), Treta, Dwapara, and Kali. In Satya yuga righteousness prevails, but in each succeeding age evil increases and virtue diminishes. After Kali yuga the whole cycle begins again.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Ramakrishna Math and Mission

Barrows, J.H. (ed.)

Basu, Sankari Prasad, and Aumil Bhari Ghosh

Burke, Marie Louise

Datta, Bhupendranath
Swami Vivekananda: Patriot Saint, A Study. Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta, 1954. The author is Vivekananda's younger brother, who is a committed Marxist, and tends to write of Vivekananda as if he were a Marxist also.

Daya, Sister [Georgina Jones Walton]

Devi, Srimata Gayatri
One Life's Pilgrimage: Addresses, Letters, and Articles by the First Indian Woman to Teach Vedanta in the West. Vedanta Center, Cohasset, Mass., 1977.

Eastern and Western Disciples

French, Harold W.

Gambhirananda, Swami

Houghton, Walter R. (ed.)
Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious
Congress at the World's Columbian Exposition. Alice B. Stockman, Chicago, 1893.

Isherwood, Christopher (ed.)

Jackson, Carl

Lemaitre, Solange
Ramakrishna and The Vitality of Hinduism. Translated by Charles Lorn Markmann, Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 1969.

'M' (Mahendranath Gupta)

Majumdar, R.C.

Mercer, L.P.

Muller, Friedrich Max
Ramakrishna; His Life and Sayings. Charles Scribners, New York, 1899.

Nivedita, Sister [Miss. Margaret E. Noble]

Prabhavananda, Swami

Rolland, Romain

Rolland, Romain

Schneiderman, Leo
"Ramakrishna: Personality and Social Factors in the Growth

Shivani, Sister [Mrs. Mary LePage]

Tejasananda, Swami
*A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna.* Advaita Ashrama, Delhi, 1968.
*The Ramakrishna Movement, Its Ideals and Activities.* The Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Howrah, 1954.

Thomas, Wendell

United States Bureau of the Census

United States Bureau of the Census

Usha, Brahmacharini

Vedanta Press Periodicals
*Vedanta and The West.* Los Angeles, Vols. 1-16 and Nos. 111-145, 1938-1960. Prior to January 1941 the journal was called *Voice of India.*
*Vedanta Darpana; or, Mirror of Vedanta.* New York, Vols. 1-3, 1931-1933.
*Vedanta Monthly Bulletin.* Vols. 1-5, 1905-1909. In January 1909 the name was altered to *Vedanta Magazine.*

Vivekananda, Swami
*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.* Advaita Ashrama,
Mayavati, 1969, 8 Vols.

Williams, George M.

Yale, John

International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Anonymous Ed.

Back to Godhead

Daner, Francine J.

Glock, Charles Y. and Robert N. Bellah

Judah, J. Stillson

Keniston, Kenneth

Needleman, Jacob

Prabhupada, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanata Swami


Roszak, Theodore


Yablonsky, Lewis


Zaretsky, Irving and Mark P. Leone (eds.)


Indian Background

Bharati, Agenananda


Dasgupta, S.N.

A History of Indian Philosophy. 5 Vols., Cambridge University Press, 1951-1955.

de Bary, William Theodore


Desai, A.R.


Dumont, Louis


Farquhar, J.N.

Mandelbaum, David G.

Ross, Aileen D.

Sharma, D.S.

Singer, Milton

Srinivas, Mysore N.
Caste in Modern India and Other Essays, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962.

Zaehner, R.C.

Other Works Consulted

Bhatt, Gauri Shankar

Braden, Charles S.

Clark, Elmer T.

James, William

Mann, William E.
Martin, David

Niebuhr, Richard H.

Pope, Liston

Whitworth, John McKelvie

Wilson, B.R.


Yinger, J. Milton

Yinger, J. Milton